Lutheran

Mission Matters

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Inside This Issue: Contextualization

God's mission matters for Lutherans who see Him opening doors for all His children to witness the message of salvation throughout the world, God at work transforming the lives of those who are touched by the Gospel. The Creator's Word, incarnate in Jesus Christ, brings life in its fullness to everyone who believes in Him as Savior and Lord. Today's Christians free themselves from their socio-cultural and political ghettos so they can interact boldly with a world threatened on every side by forces of evil and decay and can witness the power of God in Christ, who recreates them.

The world has contracted into a global village, not only in politics and business but even more so in the spheres of religion, family, and interpersonal relationships. Companies make international travel and tourism affordable for everyone who plans ahead for a time to relax and unwind. Not only from St. Louis to Chicago, but also from Thiruvananthapuram to Mumbai, business women and men commute to their daily work. About the Lord's business, however, Christian missionaries and Christian people cannot simply be tourists and commuters. Missional partnership is not a business-type deal. Missionaries *reside* in the mission field, keeping in step with the Lord who put on human flesh and *took His residence* among ordinary people with whom He lived, suffered, died, and rose again. Missionary life is costly and literally not-for-profit, but for the Gospel's sake.

Healthy missional conversations tackle issues and concerns relative to communicating the Gospel across cultures with honesty and integrity. Such engagement does not extricate indigenous communities from their natural environment, but gives them a place at the table where they are treated with integrity and respect. Each edition of *Lutheran Mission Matters* strives to address such settings with encouragement and support.

This issue presents a variety of points of view internationally and cross-culturally on the matter of contextualization. The authors include Lutheran missionaries who serve at the grassroots nationally and worldwide. These writers are well-experienced theological educators, mission executives, area directors, and mission historians. Rarely does a journal like this enjoy the privilege of presenting Lutheran theologians from Ethiopia, India, Japan, and Vietnam—all in one issue.

An added special feature in this issue is a rather lengthy article by President Emeritus Rev. Dr. Gerald B. Kieschnick who has written a critical reflection on the state of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. From his hands-on experience as a pastor, District President, and Synodical President, Kieschnick discusses the primary challenge facing Lutherans today, the transition from a heterodox Christian culture to a culture that is indifferent or even hostile to Christianity.

On this 500th anniversary of the Reformation, this journal presents Professor Enoch Wan's essay on "Quincentennial Celebration: The Paradigm Shift from Martin Luther Then to Ours Now." A non-Lutheran, Professor Wan is Director of the Intercultural Studies Program at Western Seminary in Portland. This is Part One of the essay Wan presented at Concordia Seminary's Ninth Multiethnic Symposium in January of this year. The second part will appear in the November issue. A response from Paul Mueller, a former Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod missionary and mission exec and professor of missions at Concordia University Portland, follows Wan's paper.

The Gospel transforms and empowers people of all cultures. *Lutheran Mission Matters* adds a Lutheran voice in celebration of that transformation.

Victor Raj
Editor
Lutheran Mission Matters

Articles

Missiology of Recontextualization

Victor Raj

Abstract: Gospel proclamation is a privilege God has invested in His Church. Missionaries, pastors, and evangelists must be competent communicators of the one true Gospel that makes all people wise unto salvation. Interconnectedness and interdependency have become normative in today's global culture. Mission agencies and mission partners cannot plead exemption to this norm as they serve as God's missionaries, together. Disengaging Christians from their traditional culture and requiring them to follow traditions and practices that are foreign to them in the name of theology is detrimental to their organic growth and self-sustainability. This essay argues that Christian witnessing is a joint endeavor that requires the speaker to interact with the listener with gentleness and respect. Thinking recontextualization facilitates this process for the good of the church and its service to the world.

Language has limits. That we today live in the "digital age" does not mean that we have given up on pencil and paper for communicating or on pinball and slot machines for entertaining. Changes do occur, generally (and normally) for the better. That today's performing artists use prerecorded accompaniments as they perform live onstage does not mean that pianists and percussionists will no longer have job security. Shopping online is already the norm for a significant cross section of the world's population. Yet, advertisers flood mailboxes and screen doors with reams of cleverly designed paper products, luring consumers into buying goods from retailers.

Tree lovers may groan and whine over the fact that new developments threaten natural resources as they potentially hamper and impede forests and debilitate wildlife. Environmentalists fear that "mother nature" is at the mercy of those who invade hills and valleys with vested interest. On the other hand, science and technology have made today's world a global village, and a mechanistic worldview

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measures human worth in terms of capacity, competence, and productivity, just as interpersonal relationships grow mechanistically through texting, tweeting, and Instagram. The new generation, however, desires to build organic relationships, connecting with others incarnationally in real-life situations. Many find, for example, that harvesting fruits and vegetables directly from a farm and even growing them in the backyard is more fulfilling than buying them from grocery stores.

God graphically designed His creation with humanity in view. God brought forth vegetation, trees, and animals and gave Adam and Eve dominion over everything He made. Biblical narratives of God's creating, redeeming, and preserving activities are set largely in nature and natural surroundings. God is the Gardener. A garden is where God built the first human community. Oaks and olives, orchards and vineyards, and farms, fields, and pastures show how God keeps His creation in tight reign and lets the crown of His creation keep and preserve it for His purposes.

Jesus was drawing lessons largely from nature to let His listeners understand His earthly mission. In Jesus, God's Kingdom had come to earth. His words and deeds further illustrated how God puts His signature on everything that takes place in ordinary lives. Jesus' parables show that God is the Gardener; He plants vineyards and gathers fruit, sows the seed and harvests the field, and shepherds the flock and loves and cares for each sheep (Jn 15:1–11; Mt 15:13; Mark 4:1–34). In Jesus, God manifests life in its fullness as His handiwork.

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In Jesus, God had brought His rule and reign down to earth, wherever He has given His people a locus to establish themselves as a church. The Book of Acts is testimony to how the word of the Lord spread among various peoples of the first century and how God's kingdom grew quickly throughout the Roman empire (e.g., Acts 19:20; 28:30; Rom 1:13). Paul saw the city of Corinth as God's field. The apostles were planting and watering, and actually God was growing Christian congregations, planting His Word (1 Cor 3:5–9). Christians understand that some Gospel seeds fall on rocks, others among thorns, and yet others on rich and productive soil.

The Christian church is a living organism and its activities are by nature organic. Where the seeds are scattered, they grow spontaneously and yield a good crop, surprising even those who scatter the seed. If mission is planting, the soil in which the planting takes place is the context. As the soil (and its quality) changes from place to place, contextualizing the Christian truths will be the ongoing joint mission

of Gospel proclaimers and those who take to heart that life-giving message. Each life is lived in a context. God's life-giving message speaks directly to each person's context and transforms peoples' lives in completely unprecedented ways.

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"Contextualization" entered the missional vocabulary about fifty years ago. Just as the context keeps changing wherever God calls Christians to engage in His mission, the best missiologists concur that it is impossible to define contextualization in any stereotypical way.[1] This essay builds on the idea that contextualization is "a way of Christian theological thinking and practice, where the gospel, its message and spirit, the church, its tradition and life, and the people, its culture and living conditions, are examined and *reinterpreted*."[2]

In today's world, neighborhoods change so rapidly and people in a hurry adapt to new innovations and make them germane to their life situations. Businesses reconfigure, corporations merge, buildings remodel, computers reboot, programs reconstitute, and societies and communities restructure, fundamentally, to address the new issues and challenges they face and to function more efficiently in the current context. Such changes in many ways challenge the status quo, often leading to fear of innovations that are perplexing and threatening to establishments. Gospel bearers in today's world wrestle with this challenge as they remain faithful to a message that was passed on to them through generations, yet being sensitive to the shifting contextual realities surrounding them.

Social scientists and anthropologists confirm that Western societies transform more frequently, and within a few decades rearrange themselves. Plenteous changes are occurring in this generation, especially in the areas of language development, culture, and communication. Flexibility reigns supreme in all walks of life. Far beyond prescriptive dictionary definitions, words and phrases assume new meanings from the context in which they are used. For effectively communicating any message, the speaker and the listener together negotiate and choose words that are context-specific. Needless to say, contextual communication is a natural, carefully-executed "sight translation exercise," fully respecting and honoring the context in which the exercise takes place.

The church by design is an integral part of the wider community in which it is situated. Inevitably then, Gospel proclaimers require a critical awareness of the changes that are taking place in the societies and communities where they serve as Christ's witnesses. The Gospel transforms people and communities regardless of the language in which it is presented and the culture and worldview that it penetrates.

As European immigrants established their new homes in America, they brought with them their respective religious traditions in an uncompromising way. Protestant

Christians preserved their socio-cultural and denominational identities meticulously as they were relocating in the new world. Alan Roxburgh has noted that the immigrants structured their local, national, and regional churches in their new home with intentionality, patterned after the "Eurotribal" traditions they inherited from their countries of origin. Roxburgh shows how for European Christians, a social system "structured people within its traditions," just as "their fundamental church heritage was also an ethnic heritage."[3]

Since the beginning of the modern era, Christian missionaries from Europe and America took the lead for evangelizing the Eastern[4] and Far Eastern regions of the world, on the frontline. Just as modern Euro-American cultures and worldviews have strong Christian underpinnings, non-Western cultures and philosophies generally are founded on non-Christian belief systems and worldviews. Religions and cultures are so entwined that non-Christians find it incredibly difficult to distinguish Christianity from Western culture and Christian mission from Euro-American imperialism and colonialism.[5] Through non-Christian eyes, Christianity is at best a heterogeneous mixture, a blending of the teachings of Jesus Christ with inherently European cultures, philosophies, and worldviews.[6]

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Religion and theology presuppose a context in which they are practiced and interpreted. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam preserve their core identities in consonance with their respective sacred texts. In non-Western cultures, at the grass-roots level, heads of households and community leaders persist as storehouses of religious knowledge, values, morals, and etiquette; and they pass these on to new generations primarily through oral tradition. In Hinduism, Buddhism and Confucianism, in-depth study of sacred texts and their interpretation has been the privilege of the elite. The community at large, however, trusts their elucidation and heeds their direction for daily living. In other words, practitioners on an average do not directly encounter the sacred texts as the primary source for decoding life's realities. Religion for them is more a shared experience, and members soak up religious values by immersing themselves in traditions, as if by osmosis.[7] Religion is more a lived reality than a classroom exercise.

Good teachers of religion interpret life's realities holistically. Experience teaches that competent Christian missionaries acquire a clear knowledge of other religions, their teachings and practices as they prepare to present Christ to those who do not yet belong in the household of faith. Ninian Smart has observed that religions

are actually worldviews, each one upholding their characteristically seasoned theology and practice. Smart proposed that rituals, myths, doctrines, ethics, social connections, and human experience are integral components of all religions. "Religion is a six-dimensional organism."[8]

Liturgies, worship, prayers, homilies, and offerings constitute the ritual dimension of religion. The stories from the past that show God's interaction with previous generations constitute the mythical dimension.[9] All religions maintain a coherent system of teachings and express them as a statement of faith that Smart calls their doctrine. Religions inspire members to lead moral and ethical lives as they love neighbors and show compassion for the sick and the weak. Religions bind people together as communities and give them a clear sense of belonging. A personal encounter with the Ultimate Realty (The Wholly Other) makes the experiential dimension of religion tangible and perceptible.

Smart's analysis further shows that most religions have in them the idea of a personal god. Pantheists and pan-en-theists[10] see god everywhere and in everything, yet keep an "I-Thou" relationship with god. Smart called this the "personalism" in religions. As a ritual, Native Americans say in unison, "We are all related," and personalize solidarity with God and nature in the words, "We live in the midst of the spirit."[11] People normally live in communities and continue to build *organic*

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relationships among themselves, contradicting the modern, popular, individualistic lifestyle. Contextually, the Christian missional challenge far exceeds the habitual "evangelism-as-we-have-always-done-it" way as Christ's witnesses interact with people of other faiths in an intelligent way.

Missionary anthropologist Paul Hiebert bemoans the fact that "The effect of the sharp distinction between nature and life has poisoned all philosophy. . . . There is no proper fusion of the two in most modern schools of thought. For some, nature is mere appearance and mind is the sole reality, and mind is an epiphenomenon."[12] This kind of detachment of humans from their natural surroundings is consequent on the ever-growing materialist culture that puts money over matter with people being treated as objects of "scientific" experiment. Human bodies are reduced to commodities to be shaped fit and trimmed, often ignoring the internal and spiritual worth of the individual. Few people resonate with the truth that they are "fearfully and wonderfully made." In these postmodern times, our perceptions of reality, Hiebert argues, "are determined by our particular situation and formed by non-rational factors such as culture, social positions, economic desires and drive for fame."[13]

Earlier, in 1982, Hiebert published a landmark essay on "The Flaw of the Excluded Middle,"[14] relative to this topic which became a reference point for missiologists who noticed its relevance in their own ministry and mission.

Hiebert detected that Christian missionaries from the West were trained to operate on the idea of a two-tiered universe, that of heaven and earth. Heaven was the realm of God, and the earth was where human activities and explorations were taking place.

From his own hands-on experience in India, Hiebert observed there was yet another realm in human experience that missionaries were not capable of handling with the kind of background and training they received from the West. Folk religions, especially in non-Western cultures, were invoking "unseen powers of this world" and connecting with ancestral spirits as sources of power, blessings, and curses. This, Hiebert found, was an anomaly that missionary trainers overlooked and did not have the foresight to include in the program. Thus the title of Hiebert's essay.

Although Christian missionaries *excluded* this element, this was exactly where daily life was happening for non-Westerners even after they became Christians: between heaven and earth. Eastern Christians, nevertheless, have developed liturgies for exorcising, blessing of the house and personal property, and for protecting people from the forces of evil. Christians of today have incorporated the "middle realm" with a view to leading a holistic Christian life.[15]

Especially since the 1970s, numerous models of contextualization have been proposed as helpful ways for presenting Jesus Christ to those who are not yet within his full embrace, especially to those who are strangers to Judeo-Christian cultures. Keeping a global perspective for mission, Stephen Bevans[16] proposed six models of contextualization, based primarily on the cultural identity and the theological orientation of the sending agencies, as well as those of the mission fields. Bevans named them as the translation, anthropological, praxis, synthetic, transcendental, and countercultural models. Lutheran mission agencies have been operating primarily on the translation model, and, perhaps to some extent, the countercultural model.

Putting side by side Ninian Smart's six-dimensional world view analysis and Stephen Bevans' six models of contextualization together better prepares today's Christians to confess Christ before the world. These new perspectives on mission might be helpful for missionaries to address the issues Paul Hiebert identified as the flaw of the excluded middle so they can with boldness present Jesus Christ to those without God and without hope in the world. Recontextualization must occur in all areas of ministry and mission.

Scott Moreau has surmised that contextualization is at the "mixing point" of the Gospel and culture. He further explains how important this is for Christian mission.

> Without contextualization, people will not connect to Christ in a way that moves their hearts. Faith will feel foreign, and people will lose what they have grown up cherishing. Churches will never feel rooted in their own culture, and people will not see the true winsomeness of the gospel.[17]

Mission must disengage its "foreignness" to any culture in order to celebrate the grace God lavished in Jesus Christ equally upon all people everywhere, and take deep root in indigenous soil. Protestant missionaries like the Leipzig Lutheran, Bartholomew Ziegenbalg, and the English Baptist, William Carey, cherished this vision as they were serving India. They planted Christian congregations in India and right from the start let them grow indigenously in the native soil. Early on, they prepared Indian Christians to grow Christian congregations that would be self-propagating, self-governing and self-supporting in all areas Christian life. There were no surprises for the national church and its leadership when the last of the foreign missionaries left the country. Indigenous leadership was already in place and ready to take up responsibilities.

Indigenous Christians find their collective identity in the culture in which they exist as Jesus followers. In this context, they identify their God-given vocations, and by determination actualize the potential God has invested in them for mutual edification and for rendering Christ-like service to the neighbors. They confess Christ publicly as the One who freely gave them life and salvation.

Confessing the faith is fundamentally a matter of the heart. What the heart confesses finds expression in the vernacular, that is, in words, concepts, music, and art forms that are native to the local culture. After all, it is said that the conscience speaks the mother tongue. Confessing the faith cannot be superimposed, but must be self-realized, enabling each person individually to own up to the faith. Disengaging people from their culture in the name of religion makes Gospel proclamation superfluous, depriving new Christians of the Gospel's transforming power. If this consideration is circumvented, missionaries will be speaking "over the head" of their intended audience.

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Each church as a community of the faithful is a living organism and deserves to be treated with gentleness and respect. Although mechanistic metaphors dominate the vocabulary of the institutional church and its structures, organic expressions display more clearly its vitality as the body of believers. Organic expressions entail exercising faith and feeling, and the sharing of joys and sufferings, together. St. Paul spoke of the church as the body that "grows with a growth that is from God" (Col

2:19). The apostle was in the anguish of childbirth until Christ was *formed* in the Christians of the Galatian region (Gal 4:19). As the Lutheran tradition clearly understands, where there is forgiveness, there is *life* and salvation. Sharing the Gospel in any culture will have repercussions. If the Christian faith is lived out as a shared experience, it will build solidarity among fellow believers who will stand together to resist the powers of evil that keep lurking in cultures that surround Christians and their families throughout the world.

To be sure, modernity paved the way for the world to become a global village. Although geographically distanced, people and nations began to interconnect with one another at a much faster pace through improved ways of travelling and communicating, especially since the dawning of the postmodern era. International business relations, political coalitions, and the all-encompassing high-tech revolutions shrank the inhabited earth into a close-knit neighborhood. A global culture is already at work in business, technology, and politics. Yet, the nations of the world maintain their inalienable to right to remain independent, adhering to their value systems and to not be subject to powers outside of themselves.

Nations like India and China are interacting with modernity in their own individual ways, spreading their version of modernism and postmodernism in the rest of the world and making their voices heard in unmistakable ways.[18] This is in spite of the fact that postcolonial India is constantly reviving its inherently Hindu ethos and establishing a (successful) political front at the national level. China, while not completely rooting out religious organizations, has remained for over a century predisposed to the Marxist-Communist worldview.

> Interconnectedness and interdependency are necessitated by today's changing environment.

Interconnectedness and interdependency are necessitated by today's changing environment. Imperialism and colonization are things of the past and irrelevant in today's world order. Missionaries and mission fields must awaken to it. The church can do no other. Isolating ourselves from the rest of the world is a dangerous move in today's fluctuating socio-cultural and political environment. Partner churches (formerly, daughters and sisters) and their parent mission organizations must become interdependent—not mutually exclusive—and make their voices heard, together. This approach makes our *common* confession truly a shared experience.

Disengaging churches from their traditional culture and requiring them to follow traditions and practices that are foreign to them is detrimental to their organic growth and self-sustainability. A certain "dependency disorder" is the end result. On their own, cultures are neutral. They become unseemly in the way people choose to deal

with the value systems and mores of others. Century-old Christian mission cannot continue to claim "mission status," nor for that matter, daughter and sister status, through the entirety of its existence. If a mission grows organically, in a few decades it will grow as a church, just as a child grows into adolescence, becomes a mature adult and engages in reproductive activities in a few short years within a seventy- to eighty-year life span. A maturing mission will develop into a vibrant indigenous church, and soon that church will beget other churches.

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> just as a child grows into adolescence, becomes a mature adult and engages in reproductive activities in a few short years within a seventy- to eighty-year life span.

In today's mission context, mission boards have a tendency to willfully intrude into the partner church's territory and dictate administrative policies to the overseas partners. This attitude only escalates the dependency syndrome and dwarfs the partner church's potential for achieving the goals the Three Self Movement[19] set for them, into which numerous (former) mission fields are aspiring to grow. Ongoing support of mission primarily in mission dollar amounts demoralizes people and organizations at the receiving end, minimizing their own potential for generating resources locally and achieving self-support. Paternalistic intrusion into the day-to-day activities of a partner church is abuse of parental privileges. It also provides the opportunity for the non-Christian neighbors to accuse Christians as agents of Western imperialism and colonialism.

Biologically, daughters grow up and become mothers. If century-old missions habitually address their partners as mothers, it only shows their lack of self-awareness and self-confidence, which significantly mars the potential for growth. Sending money, even "mission money," cannot settle the fundamental issues partner churches are facing in our generation. Ongoing and unseasonable monetary support encourages partners to ask for more money and pretend poverty on their side.

Most international missions in modern times first began with the poor and the oppressed classes of peoples in the world. The second and third generations of these overseas Christians are no longer poor as their grandparents and parents. They have grown significantly out of such poverty especially through the support and encouragement they received from the Christians who first brought them the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Today's generation of partner church members are capable of supporting their church if only they are strongly encouraged to do so. The "mother" churches must rekindle that spirit in them instead of squelching it by sending more money. Instilling awareness for using money they already have properly is a

healthier sign of partnership than sending more money, which sends partners the message that dependency is an admirable advantage.

In the typical American culture, graduating from high school is a threshold moment for most young people as they move on to college or pursue other paths to make a living for themselves, anticipating the least help from their parents. As a rule, they do not return to their roots, soliciting financial support, as they acknowledge in this case that self-support is the best support. Mission boards could serve the partner churches in a better way if they shared with them the invaluable principles they inculcate in their own biological children. Institutionally too this is an opportunity to train partner churches in the art of Christian stewardship.

The cultures of various peoples differ greatly in how each functions. When interacting with a new people group, it is important first to understand how they function and not simply jump into uninformed and foregone conclusions. The requirement that we understand our own presuppositions is of paramount importance as we begin to build bridges with other cultures for the sake of bringing Christ to them. In a global culture, Christians are relating to people at *their* level, who have their own imagination for new lives, make plans, travel, and form networks, assume identities, and socialize their children. As a "glocal culture" is permeating all aspects of human life, Christian mission cannot extricate people from their natural surroundings.

> The requirement that we understand our own presuppositions is of paramount importance as we begin to build bridges with other cultures for the sake of bringing Christ to them.

If language is a social construct and context determines the meaning, then within such limits the term recontextualization serves missiologists and missionaries for a specific purpose. Recontextualization is neither a new theology nor missiological strategy; it simply is another way of saying that mission, mission-fields, and mission agencies must become even more cognizant of the commission God has vested in them, presenting the Gospel to others with gentleness and respect for the listeners. Truth will not be compromised, regardless of how fast the world and the human situation may be changing. The introduction of another word in the missional wordbook is required to trigger further conversations on how Christians do missions and stabilize ministry and mission partnerships, encouraging and supporting one another, crossing cultural boundaries daringly.

The town I grew up in India is Trivandrum. India's postcolonial culture has renamed it to its pre-colonial original, Thiruvananthapuram. Madras is now Chennai; and Bombay, Mumbai. Recontextualization does not change the message; rather, it presents the message in a way that the listener embraces it and feels proud to own up

to the message and its ramifications. It enables the prospective listener to comprehend, teach, live, and express the Gospel in a way that is relevant directly to specific life situations.

God's purpose for His world is holistic. He is the life as well as the life-giver. In Him is life for all, and in no other; forgiveness and salvation for all flow only from Him. As in the creation narrative in Genesis, the Book of Revelation concludes with the water of life flowing from the throne of God, and the tree of life yielding fruit, and its leaves bringing healing for the nations (Rev 22:1, 2). From beginning to end, God speaks His life-giving words in organic language.

Endnotes

[1] For an exhaustive list of scholarly articles and books on the topic, see A. Scott Moreau, *Contextualization in World Mission: Mapping and Assessing Evangelical Models* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2012).

[2] Olsen, Rolv, "True Or False?" Contextualization Efforts of Carl Ludwig Reichelt and the Tao Fang Shan Christian Institute, 1935–55." *Sevensk Missionstidskrift* 90.1:103–28, quoted in A. Scott Moreau, *Contextualization in World Missions: Mapping and Assessing Evangelical Models* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2012), 233. Italics mine.

[3] Alan J. Roxburgh, *Structured for Mission: Renewing the Culture of the Church* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2015), 73.

[4] The "East-West" distinction is used here for convenience. Again, this is perspectival, depending on where the geographical location of the speaker.

[5] Non-Christians who migrate to Christian countries do not convert to Christianity although they become part of the mainstream in all other aspects of Western life and lifestyle. Few Hindus who make their home in Iceland convert to Lutheranism.

[6] If among the new generation of Christians today, there is a strong desire to return directly to Jesus beyond the already established ecclesiastical structures. In the non-Western cultures, people would see Jesus as the answer to their spiritual quest, if only He is presented to them the way the Gospels present Him and His teachings. As a case in point, early twentieth century Indian Christian theologians were speaking of the "Raw fact of Christ."

[7] This practice is "under review" in the contemporary scene. For example in the West, immigrant communities have developed syllabi for teaching their inherited religions at home and in schools. In India, Hindu Study groups operate in high school and college campuses.

[8] Ninian Smart, *The Religious Experience*, 4th ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1991), 1–23.

[9] Smart uses the language of comparative religion that does not distinguish myth from history, unlike Christianity that understands God as Creator and that history is evidence that God is at work in everything He does as creator, redeemer, and preserver.

[10] Pantheism signifies that everything is god and panentheism represents the idea that everything is in god. A related word in this domain, Kathenothism, argues for "one god at a time." Thus the modern and postmodern generations find in pre-modern religions sufficient reasoning for embracing new spiritualities that actually are a combination of ancient practices that were once labeled "primitive."

[11] Smart, 513.

[12] Paul Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews: An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2008), 222.

[13] Ibid., 226.

[14] Paul Hiebert, "The Flaw of the Excluded Middle." *Missiology* 10 (1982): 35–48.

[15] Early on, the Roman Catholic Church has been handling this issue rather carefully. Other traditions in the "mission field" have since followed. Christians have numerous rites and ceremonies included in their liturgical practices. For example, when buying or building a new home, the pastor visits the site and says a blessing, in fact, inviting the neighbors to join in the act. During the house dedication ceremony, the pastor with the worship team will enter each room to say prayers especially to ward off evil. When a Christian buys a new automobile, it is brought to the parsonage for a blessing. When congregations process on the streets with Christian symbols, they incorporate rites and rituals that are indigenous to the culture, although that might appear to be "non-Christian" to the uninitiated westerner.

[16] Stephen Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology: Revised and Expanded Edition* (MaryKnoll, NY: Orbis, 2002). Along these lines, Robert Schreiter proposed numerous ways of constructing local theologies. For example, see his work on *Constructing Local Theologies* (London: SCM, 1985).

[17] Moreau, *Contextualization in World Mission*, 19.

[18] Humorous as it may sound to many, recently India fought with Amazon (and won) to stop the sale of designer underwear that displayed India's tri-color national flag.

[19] "The pioneer protestant missionaries cast this vision for the church in India so that it may take deep roots in India even after expatriates left the country. More recently, Christians in China are exploring the 'three self patriotic movement' that also has political ramifications. This essay is stating the case that the 'three selfs' are helpful to move to the 'fourth self' that David Bosch suggested for all mission fields, that of self-theologizing." See his *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1997), 450-457.

Demography and Mission in the LCMS:
A Response to Journal of Lutheran Mission,
December 2016

William W. Schumacher

Abstract: This essay offers both methodological and missiological responses to demographic studies published in the December 2016 issue of the *Journal of Lutheran Mission.* Central to those studies was the correlation between membership in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) and birth rates among white Americans, both to explain declining LCMS membership and as the basis for "pronatalist" recommendations to reverse that trend. But the correlation deserves to be scrutinized, and the arguments proposed must be examined critically. In particular, LCMS choices and policies about mission must focus on seeking and saving the lost, not on denominational survival.

The LCMS, like many other Protestant denominations in the United States, has been declining in membership for decades, after a membership peak in the 1970s. The causes, implications, and meaning of that decline have also been long debated, and the statistical data have occasionally been mined for evidence in support of (or in opposition to) a range of theological, missiological, liturgical, and even political proposals. Some have taken the Synod's membership losses as *prima facie* evidence that confessional Lutherans lack evangelistic zeal. Others have blamed the waning numbers on theological disunity or liturgical confusion.

In an effort to understand what drives the statistical trends, the Synod's Office of National Mission commissioned studies from demographers George Hawley and Ryan C. MacPherson. The December 2016 issue of the *Journal of Lutheran Mission*

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(JLM) is devoted to the publication of these studies. The Hawley study as published includes two parts, "A District-Level Examination of Demographic Trends and Membership Trends within LCMS Districts" and a much longer piece entitled "The LCMS in the Face of Demographic and Social Change: A Social Science Perspective." The MacPherson study is entitled "Generational Generosity: Handing Down Our Faith to Our Children and Our Children's Children." Already prior to publication, some version of the conclusions of the studies was informing public pronouncements and policy choices of the Synod's leadership,[1] and for that reason it is to be applauded that the studies themselves are now available for wider study and discussion.

This short paper is intended as a contribution to that discussion. In what follows I propose to do two things. First, it is necessary to highlight some significant implications of both the data and the recommendations attached to them, because these studies are currently being used to shape policies and priorities of the LCMS and therefore need to be more widely understood and discussed. I think it is appropriate to raise a few methodological considerations that may temper our acceptance and use of the studies' results. I am not a demographer, and I may be wrong in my understanding of the data and methodology—but, of course, the studies are not written only for professional demographers; and if I am wrong in my doubts, it will nevertheless be helpful if my misunderstandings can be corrected. And secondly, I will offer some theological and missiological analysis in response to the studies and the direction in which they point us.

Demographic and Statistical Considerations

It is not my purpose here to offer a technical review of the data and methodology of the studies in this Special Issue of JLM. Such a review might be necessary, but should be left to those with the scientific and statistical expertise appropriate to the task.[2] The non-expert may be occasionally either distracted or impressed by some technical jargon in the studies,[3] but in general the studies are clearly aimed at an audience of non-specialists and thus invite reflection and response from non-specialists.

There can be little argument with the data, since both Hawley and MacPherson seem to have taken care to draw on the best numerical demographic data available, both from the U. S. Census Bureau and from the Association of Religious Data Archives. In other words, these studies are not simply sifting the self-reported figures from the LCMS and its districts and congregations, which may or may not be reliable. However, analyzing data at the synod, district, and county level may not provide the necessary level of detail. District or synod statistics easily mask significant variables at the congregational level. The scale of analysis provided in these studies cannot help us distinguish between a congregation that is thriving and

another that is in some stage of decline or death. In the present studies, those two congregations look exactly the same if they are located in the same district and county; their very different statistics are aggregated and correlated with a county-wide birth rate. The crucial details that distinguish the two disappear. One must keep in mind, when reflecting on the LCMS membership statistics at the synod or district level, that it is very easy to miss entirely important particularities of thriving or failing congregations.

Accepting the basic accuracy but limited detail of the data, one initial impression of the analysis in these studies is that they might exhibit some kind of confirmation bias. Simply put, you find what you are looking for. If you ask systematic theologians to consider the contemporary situation in the LCMS, you are likely to get answers that point to doctrinal issues; and if you commission demographers to study membership trends, you can expect that they will discover that those trends are driven by demographic factors. Hawley states plainly at the outset:

> This paper was created with the expectation that family formation patterns within these various districts are predictors of the denomination's health—that is, in places with high rates of marriage and childbirth, the LCMS is suffering a less severe decline. The forthcoming results provide confirmation of this suspicion, with some caveats. (2)

Of course, it could be argued that if one sets out with the expectation of finding a correlation between family formation patterns and LCMS membership, it is not surprising that one finds evidence to confirm such a correlation. This does not make the conclusion invalid, but it should prompt the reader to ask what could have been found if the study had proceeded with different expectations.

It should be noted that the fundamental correlation that lies at the heart of these studies—a connection between declining birth rates and the decline in LCMS membership—is actually not very strong. Hawley states that the Pearson's R coefficient for correlation between LCMS membership change and the white birth rate as 0.50, which (if I understand his own explanation correctly) falls at the lower limit of a "moderate" correlation (4). This may suggest that we should not be overly confident about the conclusions or recommendations that develop from this moderate correlation.

> The fundamental correlation . . . is actually not very strong. . . . Correlation does not prove causation.

And apart from the lingering question about that basic correlation, there is an even more important question about causality. However, correlation does not prove causation. Even a stronger correlation than the one that is documented would not

provide evidence that the declining birth rates *caused* declining membership. The direction of causality might even run in the opposite direction, as Hawley hints when he admits that "the decline in church membership and religious faith may be driving down marriage and fertility rates" (20). Other factors entirely, which are not examined in the studies, could be playing the decisive role in both trends. The data provided, and the methods of analysis applied, simply do not establish "cause" of events or trends. But this important distinction seems to be glossed over repeatedly in the studies. Hawley explains, "This paper examines one of the most important *causes* of the LCMS's decline: low fertility among its adherents" (7, emphasis added), but his assumption may beg the question by assuming causation that remains to be proven. MacPherson asserts that "One factor has overpowered all other factors in the synod's numerical decline: a plummeting birth rate" (87), when the evidence of correlation does not support such dogmatic certainty. Similar assertions that birth rates cause changes in LCMS membership are repeated frequently. MacPherson also quotes the "conclusion" of the LCMS president, "The single most significant factor *causing* our decline has been that fact that we have largely adopted the prevailing cultural attitudes toward marriage and reproduction. Our young people are marrying later, if at all, and are having far fewer children" (88, emphasis added).[4] But such a statement remains a bare assertion, not a fact, because it cannot be proven by the data or methods employed here.

The focus on birth rates and family formation is central throughout the studies, and this focus points us repeatedly and emphatically to the question of how to increase fertility of LCMS women. But that focus itself is based on the assumption that "LCMS affiliation tends to be an inherited trait" (4). That assumption was probably a useful starting point in the past (note the study's aside that the relationship between birth rates and LCMS adherence was higher in the 1970s than in more recent data). But it is no longer a valid assumption, because religion is no longer an inherited trait. There is significant recent research that suggests religious affiliation is no longer an inherited trait in the same way. On the contrary, more than half of Americans today have changed their religious affiliation.[5] The assumption that people will remain in the religious tradition into which they are born cannot form the core of our thinking about how to bring the Gospel to unbelievers.

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The dubious assumption that religious affiliation is (still today) primarily an inherited trait is connected to another dubious assumption in the studies: namely that

the LCMS is—and will remain—identified with a particular ethnic group. In contemporary America, "our" ethnic group has a generally low birth rate; as a result, the LCMS does not benefit from the relatively high birth rate in America as a whole, because immigrants have higher birth rates than the general population (9). The German roots of LCMS history are obvious and well-known, but there is no reason to celebrate such ethnic identification or to use it as a basis for planning and policies. The Hawley study seems to do exactly that when it suggests that LCMS efforts should be concentrated mostly in counties populated by white German Americans (perhaps especially if they are rural and middle class). If we accept it as normal that the LCMS is a tribal church body for "people like us," we will prioritize familiar places and people[6] in our outreach efforts, at the expense of those we do not know well. We will privilege (perhaps unconsciously) those practices or structures that serve to reinforce or perpetuate a German American ethnic identity, when we should instead look for ways to remove cultural obstacles that make it needlessly difficult for people to find their way into our churches.

Women readers (and not only women) may be forgiven for detecting a patronizing view of women throughout the studies. Consistently, women are valued primarily as fertility units, rather than for their intelligence, education, skills, wisdom, faith, discernment, etc. And lower fertility rates are generally seen as resulting from women's attitudes and choices, which run counter to an imagined "ideal"[7]. One may, without caricature, summarize the view of women and their education in these studies thus: *The overeducated white women of the LCMS are responsible for the denomination's numerical decline. Our women get too much education*[8], *which leads them to want to work professionally,*[9] *raises their aspirations for material prosperity,*[10] *burdens them with student debt,*[11] *makes them too persnickety in their choice of husbands,*[12] *and delays their proper Christian work of child-bearing.*[13] The argument always tends in the direction of maximizing fertility, and other contributions of women to society and to the church are simply not considered: "the later a woman chooses to become a mother, the fewer children she will be physically capable of bearing" (25).

An alarming bias against higher education makes an appearance, especially toward women (who, after all, do not need a professional education for their Christian fertility duties), but it may apply also to men. The suggestion that the Concordia University System be reorganized to focus primarily on vocational training for middle-class jobs as quickly as possible should be viewed with either alarm or amusement—but it is a logical corollary of the sustained focus on having more babies: "The earlier a young person completes his or her education and has established a career, the better that person's long-term fertility prospects" (81). By this theory, education in the liberal arts tradition needlessly delays procreation and leads to jobs that pay too little for a man to support his (growing) family on his income alone. While higher salaries and wages (at least for men) might be a policy

for which the LCMS could lobby and advocate at state and national levels, the priority is placed on raising *clergy* salaries to ensure that pastors and other (male) church workers can support their wives and children on that salary alone (105).

Missiological Analysis and Response

If we turn from questions of the demographic data and analysis provided in these studies and undertake a different kind of analysis from a theological and missiological perspective, it is difficult to know where to start. The reason is that the reports, though comprising a special issue of the *Journal of Lutheran Mission*, actually have almost nothing to do with *mission* at all. These studies, with all the data, literature review, and analysis, are ultimately all about us and our denomination. A study of "LCMS adherents" (where they live, how old they are, factors that affect their fertility rates, etc.) *cannot* be the basis for understanding how we can effectively bring the Gospel to others. A program that aims directly at denominational survival is not a program that embraces or embodies the mission of God.

Of course, from time to time, the authors note that the LCMS should also take some steps to bring new members into the church from outside, but such comments are few and cursory, and the literature cited is not current.[14] As anyone seriously involved in the mission of the church knows acutely, there is a fundamental difference between "increasing fertility," "retaining members," and "making disciples." Some careful attention to the former may be needed as we walk together as a church body, but our Lord commissions us to busy ourselves with the latter until He returns.

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The studies here considered exhibit the difficulty of keeping that proper focus on leading others to become followers of Jesus (just as we ourselves are being led to follow that same Jesus) when the scale of our attention is exclusively denominational. While the studies constantly refer to "LCMS adherents," the fact is that almost no one "joins" the LCMS or a district of the LCMS. People join congregations, if/when/because they hear there the Gospel by which the Holy Spirit calls, enlightens, sanctifies, and keeps them in the true faith. In a congregation, we confess and are forgiven; we taste and see that the Lord is good; we rub shoulders with other sinner-saints who encourage us, forgive us, teach us (and we them). For most of us, the denomination *per se* is simply not the locus of our faith formation.

The studies in the JLM Special Issue generally miss this fact, and as a result the view they offer (even if technically accurate) is inevitably and disastrously incomplete. This is a point at which the limitations of the data collide with the realities of the church: the data are analyzed at the level of districts and counties,[15] but even such a picture is too coarse to let us see the crucial, local specifics that have to be at the center of effective local responses to the mission challenges that confront the church today. This certainly does not mean that the high-level statistical analysis of aggregate district and national data is invalid, but only that such data and analysis cannot be sufficient either to understand a specific local community or to guide a specific local ministry. The LCMS as a denomination does not reach the lost. People who do not know or trust Jesus will probably not hear the Gospel from a district office. Local congregations, in all their bewildering variety and individual uniqueness, are the primary agents in communicating Christ to their neighbors so that they, too, may hear the Gospel promise and be drawn into a life of faith in Jesus. Research that aims at helping non-Christians to hear the Gospel must focus on congregations, not on the denomination.

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The JLM studies not only focus on the denomination, they are designed and presented as data and recommendations to ensure the *survival* of the denomination. "Encouraging marriage and parenthood in the context of marriage is critical for the *survival of the church*" (37, emphasis added). If true, that is an alarming warning. But it is true, even humanly speaking, only if the survival of *the church* is equated with the survival of *the LCMS* or any other denomination or institution. Something like that equation lurks in the background of many statements in this Special Issue.[16] But the equation is not true. The LCMS, or any other denomination, is not coterminous with the kingdom of God. It is no good quoting biblical promises about the permanence of Christ's Church in order to prop up unconditional confidence in the human institution called the LCMS. Christ's Church was alive and well in the world long before the LCMS was founded in 1847, and it will endure even if the LCMS disappears everywhere except in a few dusty files in the archives. The Lord's promise of the indomitable, hell-defying survival of the Christian Church is no assurance of the permanence of our denomination. The "survival of the Church" depends on the Lord's own word and promise, not on our fertility, and not on any strategy of ours to shore up our organization.

And what if our aim is not "the survival of the Church"? The New Testament view seems to be that the question of our "survival" has been settled—in a startling and wonderful way. We have already *died* and the only life we have is *Christ* (Rom 6:8; 2 Cor 5:14; Col 3:3; Gal 2:20). Now we want others to share that same life in Christ too. The question now is, with the question of our survival settled, what our

posture in the world would look like if we (as a denomination, or a district, or even a congregation) stop worrying so much about our own survival and start worrying much more about the survival of people around us who do not yet know and trust Jesus. What decisions will we make differently than we do now? For that matter, how would we *use* differently what we have and what we know—including what we know about demographics? For example, to return to just one point that was touched on previously, perhaps our real demographic problem is not that too many of our women have too much education and too few babies, but that we simply do not have enough of those women who *do* have more babies: the poor, the uneducated, non-white, non-Anglo women (and men).

> If we want to document decline, we should look at ourselves. If we want to seek and save the lost, we should look at them— and at Christ, because He is in that business (Lk 19:10).

In the end, one finishes the whole "special issue" with a gaping, unanswered question: *What about the lost?* The copious data and capable methodology presented in these helpful studies do not provide us with an answer to this question. Answers we must seek elsewhere, if it is a question we ask seriously. If we want to document decline, we should look at ourselves. If we want to seek and save the lost, we should look at them—and at Christ, because He is in that business (Lk 19:10).

Endnotes

[1] LCMS President Matthew C. Harrison alludes to this in his introductory note, and Rev. Heath R. Curtis, the LCMS Coordinator for Stewardship, suggests the same thing in his remarks.

[2] For an excellent and helpful critical review of the studies from a more technical perspective, to which I am gratefully indebted, see Rebeka Cook, "Limits of Interpretation in the *Journal of Lutheran Mission* December 2016 Edition," in *Journal of Lutheran Mission* 4:1 (March 2017), iv–vii, as well as the authors' responses to Cook in the same issue, viii–xiii. Cook's substantive review is presented as a "letter to the editor" and is not, for some reason, listed in the issue's table of contents.

[3] Examples of this include "simple bivariate regression" (5), cohort-component projection analysis" (29), "Pearson's R correlation coefficient" (45), "dichotomous variable" (47), and "ecological inference fallacy" (49)—terms that are sometimes provided with cursory explanations, but sometimes not.

[4] MacPherson cites LCMS president Matthew Harrison frequently (at least seven times in his article), and always with agreement. Since Harrison's remarks are supposed to be conclusions based on the research, rather than mere assertions of his own opinion, MacPherson's use of his words to bolster his argument may, in the end, be circular.

[5] Cf. Robert D. Putnam and David E. Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us* (New York, 2010), especially their Chapter 5: "Switching, Matching, and Mixing."

[6] Note Hawley's identification of thirteen "core" LCMS states, in which at least 1% of the population are already LCMS adherents (46).

[7] "The ideal family from the church's perspective is likely one in which a family has a sole breadwinner and another parent at home, solely responsible for raising children." (80) "Ideally, we want people to wait until they have found a suitable partner to get married, *and no longer.*" (81, emphasis added)

[8] "While [the LCMS] should not discourage education *per se*, it should encourage adherents to pursue an education that will provide the skills needed to support a family and incur a minimal amount of debt." (81)

[9] "For a woman who desires a very lucrative or personally fulfilling career, the costs of children may not be worth the benefits." (16)

[10] "[A] college degree may also increase one's material aspirations and thus make the financial loss associated with raising children less palatable." (17)

[11] "Another study found that student debt is putting downward pressure on both marriage and fertility, and that this effect was especially pronounced for women . . . every $1,000 increase in student debt decreases female fertility by 0.13 children in the ten years following graduation." (27)

[12] "Women with a great deal of resources will extend the period of their lives in which they search for the most economically attractive men available to them." (16)

[13] "Unfortunately, a woman's decision to put off family formation until she has accomplished a laundry list of other goals may cause her to never start a family." (81)

[14] The section about "church marketing" comments that "Yellow Page advertising is one of the more common forms of church outreach" (35)—based on a study from *1989*! If that is still true of our congregations today, it may partially explain why we are often disconnected from our communities.

[15] Hawley points out the difficulties posed by analysis even at the county/district level, since district boundaries do not always follow state or county boundaries, making it hard to accurately map the various sets of data (2).

[16] Rev. Heath Curtis suggests, but does not directly state, an equation of the LCMS with "the Church" in his introduction to the issue. The same idea may explain why there are occasional indications that LCMS adherents are important largely as *financial* assets of the denomination (e.g., 12, 31, 36, 96).

Quo Vadis, LCMS?
Wine Women Worship Witness Warfare

Gerald B. Kieschnick

Editor's Note: This article was first presented as a sectional workshop February 26, 2015 at Best Practices for Ministry Conference at Christ Church Lutheran in Phoenix. It has been revised and updated for publication in this periodical.

Abstract: During the past 53 years, I've served The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod as elementary school teacher, vicar, pastor, mission developer, development officer, foundation chief executive, district president, and national president. Those responsibilities have brought joy, fulfillment, frustration, and disappointment.

Throughout those years, I've experienced the strength, beauty, and weakness of our church body. In this article I share, from my heart, my perspectives on matters that hinder the health and growth of our beloved synod. I pray this offering will stimulate healthy, responsible, evangelical conversation among us, to the glory of God and the building of His Church on earth.

Throughout much of our Synod's almost 170-year history, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod has been a living and vibrant church. But are we as alive and vital today as we ought to be? Will the church we hand down to our children and grandchildren be as strong as the one our parents and grandparents gave to us?

For more than the past half century, our church has been shrinking in size and relevance. Total membership in the congregations of our Synod has fallen by some
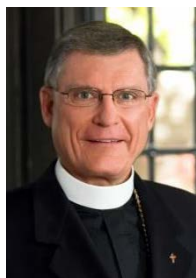
Rev. Dr. Gerald B. Kieschnick served for nine years (2001–2010) as national president of the 2.2 million-member Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. In January 2016 Dr. Kieschnick returned to Lutheran Foundation of Texas, recently renamed Legacy Deo, where he had served from 1986–91 helping Christians use God's gifts to create a legacy for family and faith. January 1, 2017, he became Legacy Deo's Chief Executive Officer. Since returning to Texas, Dr. Kieschnick has been instrumental in developing Mission of Christ Network, now with over 25 missionaries around the world; Pastor360, providing coaching for LCMS pastors; and MinistryFocus, providing loan repayment assistance grants to LCMS pastors, teachers, and other called workers burdened with overwhelming educational debt. GBKies@gmail.com

700,000 people over the past fifty years. This decline appears even more significant in light of the statistical realities. For example, the fewer than 2,000,000 LCMS members comprise:

- Approximately 3% of the world's 74 million Lutherans

- Approximately 0.6% (6/10th of one percent) of the U.S. population of 324.6 million

- Approximately 0.1% (1/10th of one percent) of the world's 2.25 billion Christians

- Approximately 0.03% (3/100th of one percent) of the world's 7.3 billion people

Essentially, when the LCMS speaks, not many people are listening or even know we exist!

In this article I'll share with you my thoughts about the future of our church body, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, in light of the question "Quo Vadis, LCMS?"

Those in my generation and perhaps some younger than I will recall that *Quo Vadis?* was a 1951 epic film starring Robert Taylor and Deborah Kerr in roles originally cast in 1949 with Gregory Peck and Elizabeth Taylor.

The action takes place in ancient Rome from AD 64–68, a period after Emperor Claudius' illustrious and powerful reign during which the corrupt and destructive Emperor Nero ascends to power and eventually threatens to destroy Rome's previously peaceful order.

The main plot is the conflict between Christianity and the corruption of the Roman Empire. The characters and events depicted are a mixture of actual historical figures and situations and fictionalized ones.

While saying nothing more about the movie, I hasten to note that it is the title of the movie that intrigues me greatly: *Quo Vadis?* Where are you going?

When I hear that question, I think about the church body of my birth, baptism, elementary education, confirmation, marriage, seminary education, ordination, and, some day, my rite of Christian burial. And I ask the question: "Quo Vadis, LCMS?" "Where are you going, Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod?"

Let me begin with my grandparents. Both my maternal and paternal grandfathers and grandmothers lived in this country at a time when its claim to be a Christian country was much different and perhaps much more accurate than that same claim today. They belonged to South Texas LCMS congregations full of faithful people of God who did not face the multifaceted challenges that confront congregations today, including the ones to which you and I belong.

Lots of things have changed in the past fifty years. And more changes are sure to come! Those changes will continue to have significant impact on our church of tomorrow.

Succinctly stated, I believe the greatest challenge we face in the LCMS is transitioning from an orthodox, evangelical, confessional, Christian, Lutheran church in what once was a *heterodox Christian culture* to what I believe we must become, namely, an orthodox, evangelical, confessional, Christian, Lutheran church passionately engaging with the Gospel *a culture indifferent or even hostile to Christianity*.

One example should suffice: Terry and I are active members of Zion Lutheran Church in Walburg, Texas. When Zion was first organized 137 years ago in 1880, the founding pastor gathered all the German Lutherans he could find and helped organize them into a Lutheran Christian congregation. His message to the newly formed congregation was expressed in these words: "The greatest enemy we have to face is German Methodism!"

While we could articulate a number of differences we still have today with our Methodist friends, I submit they are not our greatest enemies today. How about Islam, Hinduism, Atheism, Gnosticism, Mormonism, Narcissism, and apathetic indifference for starters?

When considering the future of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and how our church body needs to acknowledge, face, and accomplish this transition, no topic is of greater importance than what we believe,

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teach, confess, and practice. In this article, I intend respectfully and humbly to identify and briefly discuss five topics of greatest significance in that regard. I'm calling these topics Wine/Women/Worship/Witness/Warfare.

I. Wine: The Practice of Admission to the Lord's Supper

How we view the Lord's Supper is one of the greatest difficulties we face in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod when it comes to achieving internal harmony and reaching people outside our church. The Sacrament of Holy Communion, also called

the Lord's Supper, the Last Supper, and the Sacrament of the Altar, is a sacramental meal in which God's grace is freely offered to those who receive it.

It saddens me greatly that this means or vehicle in which the body and blood of our Lord are received has become a source of division and offense rather than the expression of unity and the powerful force for conversion and spiritual sustenance it is intended to be.

While there is widespread agreement in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod regarding the *doctrine* of the Lord's Supper, there is also significant *dis*agreement regarding its *administration*, specifically, who should be allowed at, invited, and even encouraged to approach the altar of our Lord. Such disagreement hampers the growth and threatens the unity of the LCMS.

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Holy Scripture speaks about the blessings of the Lord's Supper, warns against receiving the sacrament unworthily, and places the responsibility for proper reception upon the individual communicant. Holy Scripture says, "Let a man examine himself and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup."

Consider these simple statements regarding this precious sacrament:

1. The body and blood of Christ are truly and miraculously present in, with, and under the bread and wine of Holy Communion. (Real Presence)
2. The Lord's Supper is a wonderful gift of God through which forgiveness and undeserved love in Christ are received by each believing communicant. (Means of Grace)

These biblically based understandings are widely affirmed in the LCMS. Yet application of these principles varies widely among us.

Here's some of what the LCMS in national convention has said on the practice of what once was mostly called "close" but in recent years has been called "closed" communion:

- (1967 Res. 2-19) "Pastors and congregations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, except in situations of emergency and in special cases of pastoral care, [should] commune individuals of only those synods which are now in fellowship with us."
- (1981 Res. 3-01) "The LCMS has long encouraged its congregations and pastors in extraordinary circumstances to provide responsible pastoral care, including the administration of Holy Communion to Christians who are members of denominations not in fellowship with the LCMS."

- (1986 Res. 3-08) "The practice of close communion seeks to prevent both harmful reception of the Sacrament as well as a profession of unity in confession in faith where this unity does not exist."
- (1986 Res. 3-08) "Pastors and congregations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod [should] continue to abide by the practice of close communion, which includes the necessity of exercising responsible pastoral care in extraordinary situations and circumstances."
- (1995 Res. 3-08) The LCMS should "beseech one another in love to remember that situations of emergency and special cases of pastoral care or extraordinary situations and circumstances are, by their nature, relatively rare."
- (2007 Res. 3-09) The Synod in convention has recognized the continuing need for a uniform practice in keeping with our declared commitments to the positions of the Synod and that "the contemporary application of our historic position necessitates continued practical guidance for the faithful administration of the Sacrament."

Is anything unclear about these convention resolutions? Unfortunately, yes. Simply stated, the vacillating perspectives of these and other resolutions clearly reflect the differing opinions of the particular men and women who are elected as delegates to each of our national conventions every three years. The resolutions quoted were adopted by a simple majority vote. In some cases the majority was stronger than in others. In all cases, roughly 1,200 delegates have essentially established our Synod's position on a number of matters of doctrine and practice that the remaining minority of delegates, together with all LCMS congregations, ordained ministers, and commissioned ministers of the Gospel are expected to honor, uphold, and practice. That's not a good way to establish doctrine and practice in matters of importance such as Holy Communion.

The LCMS Constitution says: "All matters of doctrine and of conscience shall be decided only by the Word of God. All other matters shall be decided by a majority vote. In case of a tie vote the President may cast the deciding vote." (LCMS Const. Art. VIII. C.)

The Constitution also says: "In its relation to its members the Synod is not an ecclesiastical government exercising legislative or coercive powers, and with respect to the individual congregation's right of self-government it is but an advisory body. Accordingly, no resolution of the Synod imposing anything upon the individual congregation is of binding force if it is not in accordance with the Word of God or if it appears to be inexpedient as far as the condition of a congregation is concerned." (LCMS Const. Art. VII.1.)

Much of the disagreement in our church body results from differences in individual and congregational understanding of what Scripture does or does not say about requirements for communing at altars of our LCMS congregations and from

differing interpretation of statements in our Synod's governing documents and convention resolutions. Consider that reality in light of what I wrote in *Waking the Sleeping Giant* (CPH–2010):

- "Unfortunately, the desired uniform practice [in the administration of Holy Communion] has not been achieved, mainly, in my humble opinion and broad experience, due to the different understanding of individual pastors and congregations of our Synod regarding the meaning of 'responsible pastoral care,' 'extraordinary situations and circumstances,' and under what circumstances pastors and congregations of the Synod should involve themselves in 'the administration of Holy Communion to Christians who are members of denominations not in fellowship with the LCMS' (48).

- "We must be very careful in the administration of this Holy Sacrament. We certainly must not 'cast pearls before the swine' (Matt. 7:6). We must also constantly consider and always recognize that it is a means of God's grace in the lives of repentant sinners, not a reward to be given or withheld for reasons that go beyond the clear teaching of Holy Scripture" (50).

- "We believe, teach, and confess that the Spirit works, whenever and wherever He chooses, through the means of grace. Our task ultimately is not to keep people away from the means of grace, but to connect people to those means, faithfully bringing people into contact with God's Word and Sacraments" (50).

- "A responsible practice of admission to the Sacrament avoids two errors:

    1. *Opening* LCMS altars to anyone who wants to commune, regardless of what an individual personally believes, teaches, or confesses; or,

    2. *Closing* LCMS altars to anyone (including an LCMS member) who is not a member of a specific congregation or to an individual, who may be a non-LCMS Christian, in a situation requiring the exercise of 'responsible pastoral care'" (50).

My respectful request is that we reexamine and reconsider the specific biblical requirements for proper reception of the Lord's Supper. Consider this example: A Christian person, whether or not a member of the LCMS, *participates sincerely*, with a believing heart, in a worship service at an LCMS congregation. That service includes confession of sin (which is in actuality self-examination), absolution (which pronounces forgiveness of sin), proclamation of the Word of God, public creedal profession of faith, and an explanation, printed or verbal, of the nature and benefit of the sacrament. What biblical basis exists for that person to be told that he or she is not welcome at the table of the Lord?

Historically our Synod has said that proper reception of the Lord's Supper by the person described above requires agreement with LCMS doctrine and practice. I believe it would be very difficult for many pastors to state with absolute assurance that every member of their congregation, even those in good standing, agrees with every aspect of LCMS doctrine and practice.

The key scriptural requirement for proper reception, as stated above, is 1 Cor 11:28–29: "Each one must examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats the bread or drinks the cup without honoring the body of Christ, eats and drinks God's judgment upon himself."

Paul goes on to say that God's judgment falls upon a person for "not discerning the body." He quickly adds that such judgment includes weakness, sickness, and even physical death but does not include eternal condemnation (v. 32).

Martin Luther summarizes this matter well in these quotations from his Large Catechism:

- "We do not intend to admit to the sacrament and administer it to those who do not know what they seek or why they come."

- "We go to the sacrament because we receive there a great treasure, through and in which we obtain the forgiveness of sins."

- "He is worthy and well prepared who has faith in these words: 'Given and shed for you for the remission of sins.'"

- "We have a clear text in the words of Christ, '*Do this* in remembrance of me.' These are words of precept and command, enjoining all who would be Christians to partake of the sacrament."

- "Those who are shameless and unruly must be told to stay away, for they are not fit to receive the forgiveness of sins since they do not desire it and do not want to be good. The others, who are not so callous and dissolute but would like to be good, should not absent themselves, even though in other respects they are weak and frail."

- "He who earnestly desires grace and consolation should compel himself to go and allow no one to deter him."

- "They alone are unworthy who neither feel their infirmities nor admit to being sinners."

- "He is truly worthy and well prepared who believes these words: 'given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.'" (Martin Luther, "Fourth Part: Concerning Baptism" in The Large Catechism in Kolb-Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000], 456–467.)

Consider also this statement: "We believe, teach, and confess that no true believer—as long as he has living faith, however weak he may be—receives the Holy Supper to his judgment. For the Supper was instituted especially for Christians weak in faith, yet repentant. It was instituted for their consolation and to strengthen their weak faith [Matthew 9:12; 11:5, 28]." (Formula of Concord, Epitome, VII: "Concerning the Holy Supper of Christ." Affirmative Theses 9 [paragraph 19] in Kolb-Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000], 506.)

Recall also the words of Franz August Otto Pieper, fourth President of the LCMS: "Christian congregations, and their public servants, are only the administrants and not lords of the Sacrament. . . . On the one hand, they are not permitted to introduce 'Open Communion'; on the other hand, they must guard against denying the Sacrament to those Christians for whom Christ has appointed it." (Christian Dogmatics, III, p. 381).

Finally, these words from St. Paul: "*So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another—if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home—so that when you come together it will not be for judgment. About the other things I will give directions when I come*" (1 Cor 11:33–34 ESV).

Unless and until we resolve the issue of what is called "close" or "closed" communion among us, the LCMS will continue to be seen as a group of separatistic sectarians and will continue to bring unnecessary offense to repentant Christian sinners who hunger and thirst after the miraculous and life-giving blessings offered in this precious sacrament.

Stay tuned for an exegetical paper on this topic currently in the process of completion.

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II. Women

The 1969 decision of the Synod to grant woman suffrage summarized the Synod's historic position on the ordination of women with this statement:

> Those statements of Scripture which direct women to keep silent in the church and which prohibit them to teach and to exercise authority over men, we understand to mean that women ought not to hold the pastoral office or serve in any other capacity involving the distinctive functions of this office.

With specific reference to this statement, the Synod has reaffirmed its position on this issue at no fewer than five of its conventions (1971, 1977, 1986, 1989, and 1998).

1969 Res. 2-17   "To Grant Woman Suffrage and Board Membership"
1971 Res. 2-04   "To Withhold Ordination of Women to the Pastoral Office"
1977 Res. 3-15   "To Reaffirm the Synod's Position on Women with Reference to the Pastoral Office"
1986 Res. 3-09   "To Reaffirm Position of LCMS on Service of Women in the Church"
1986 Res. 3-10   "To Reaffirm Position of Synod on Ordination of Women"
1989 Res. 3-13A "To Study and Clarify Services of Women in Congregational and Synodical Offices"
1998 Res. 3-25A "To Affirm Position of Synod that Only Men May Hold the Pastoral Office"

On a slightly different note, the 2004 convention adopted Res. 3-08A: "To Encourage Service of Women in the Church."

In *A Statement of Scriptural and Confessional Principles,* adopted as an official doctrinal statement in 1973, nearly forty-five years ago, the Synod referred to the issue of women's ordination (The Gospel and Holy Scripture). The Synod rejected as a distortion of the relationship between the Gospel and the Bible the following: "That the Gospel, rather than Scripture, is the norm for appraising and judging all doctrines and teachers (as, for example, when a decision on the permissibility of ordaining women into the pastoral office is made on the basis of the 'Gospel' rather than on the teaching of Scripture as such)" (3).

With respect to the role of women in general, the Synod rejected the following view (The Infallibility of Scripture): "That the Biblical authors accommodated themselves to using and repeating as true the erroneous notions of their day (for example, the claim that Paul's statements on the role of women in the church are not binding today because they are the culturally conditioned result of the apostle's sharing the views of contemporary Judaism as a child of his time)" (5).

Interestingly in that regard, Synod in convention has not officially said much, if anything, about other also verbally inspired statements from the pen of the apostle Paul regarding the authoritative nature of those "culturally conditioned" statements of the apostle about the length of women's hair, the wearing of excessive jewelry, etc.

The same is true with the meaning of his injunction that women be silent in church and to ask their husbands if they have any questions. We obviously have not literally complied with that directive, seeing that women are allowed and encouraged to pray, to sing, and to confess the creeds in church, to attend voters' assemblies, and

to serve in various congregational offices. In addition, as is quite obvious, not every woman in the church has a husband.

If Paul's statements on the role of women in the church are binding today, why then would not his statements on other aspects of the attire or behavior of women also be binding today? Throughout the history of the church, including the LCMS, many have undertaken the task of answering this question, including reference to other portions of Scripture. The reality remains that the question of how to interpret what Paul says about women is one that continues to be begged.

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An additional thought on this topic: For years I've been saying, publicly, that the LCMS should explore the clearly biblical (both Old and New Testament) office of prophetess. My conviction is that if a prophet is a spokesman for God, a prophetess must be a spokeswoman for God. So, what would the office of prophetess, whether it's specifically called that or not, look like in today's church and world?

How the LCMS answers these questions could have a direct and significant influence on the health and growth of the Synod in the years ahead. We must carefully examine all of what Holy Scripture says about the role of women in the church, not simply appealing to "the order of creation." That concept is difficult to reconcile with other Scriptural statements such as: Galatians 3:28: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

Consider also the crystal clear words of Peter in Acts 2: "This [the outpouring of the Spirit that you have just witnessed at Pentecost] is what was uttered through the prophet Joel: 'And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; *even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.*'" (Joel 2:28–29, emphasis added)

Those "last days" must have referred to what was happening at the Festival of Pentecost just after the ascension of Jesus into heaven. Peter uses the Old Testament reference to explain the biblical reason for what the devout Jews living in Jerusalem perceived was the result of early morning inebriation. His response was an effort to dissuade the Pentecost critics from believing that those who had received the gift of the Holy Spirit (sons and daughters, male servants and female servants) were drunk already at nine o'clock in the morning.

What I'm arguing for is not a *de facto* reversal of our Synod's long-standing position against ordination of women to the pastoral office. I'm simply saying that women in Holy Scripture appear to have been entrusted with greater responsibility than our Synod has thus far given to women today. Consider the significant roles of Deborah, Mary Magdalene, Anna, Lydia, Priscilla, Euodia, Syntyche, and, arguably, Junia.

We simply cannot and must not ignore the exodus from our church body of spiritually gifted women who see our position of limiting the role of women as, at best, not clearly supported by Scripture and, at worst, misogynistic.

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Recognizing that God has bestowed unique gifts "upon both men and women of the church, the priesthood of believers" and that "the Synod has not yet utilized the service of women to the fullest extent in the life and work of the church," the Synod stated in 1989 Res. 3-04A: "That the Synod recognize with thanksgiving all of God's gifts to His church, in particular the gift of people" and "That the Synod encourage districts and congregations to make full appropriate use of the ministry and service of women."

Many would say, and I would agree, that we have a long way to go in this regard.

III. Worship

So-called "worship wars" have been going on for a goodly number of years in our church body. During my childhood years at St. Matthew Lutheran Church in Houston, we used exclusively The Lutheran Hymnal of 1941, which was published only two years before I hit the ground. It was the "new" hymnal back in those days. I could, and still can, sing without the aid of the book itself all the major orders of worship, including the Order of Service without Holy Communion on p. 5, the Order of Service with Holy Communion on p. 15, and the Order of Matins on p. 32. That's all we ever used as I was growing up.

While I still to this day have a healthy respect and love for those orders of worship, as I look back upon that experience, I have to admit recalling a sense of monotony with the constant repetition of the same liturgy virtually every Sunday of my life. Notwithstanding the highly qualified musicians with which our congregation

was bountifully blessed in those days, I simply found the repetitive order of worship a bit less than exciting or spiritually refreshing.

In 1982 the introduction of Lutheran Worship, the so-called "new" hymnal, was intended to spice things up a bit but had many drawbacks. Later, as Synod president, I presided over the 2004 national LCMS convention at which Lutheran Service Book was officially accepted, as well as much of the process preceding its publication and adoption. I'm happy to say it has been widely received and is being widely used. Truth be known, sales of LSB added greatly to the fiscal stability of Concordia Publishing House!

During the years between TLH and LSB, other less formal worship rites began to be used in our circles. "Contemporary" worship had its roots in folk music, the Chicago Mass, etc., and has transitioned in and out of several musical genres, mostly utilizing non-organic musical instruments like guitar, drums, keyboard, and, in what are called "Bluegrass" or "Gospel" services, banjo, fiddle, and harmonica. That trend has grown in recent years.

Frankly, my personal taste in forms of worship is a bit schizophrenic. I still love a well done traditional liturgy. I also love a well done contemporary or blended service. Notice the common ingredient? Well done!

The factors that satisfy that requirement include hymn or song selection and tempo of instrumentalists, whose primary task is to aid group or congregational singing, not performance or entertainment, whether the musicians in question comprise an orchestra or a praise band. Trying to sing a hard or difficult or impossible hymn, whether from LSB or not, is downright frustrating! Singing what has not-so-lovingly been referred to as a "7/11" song—seven words repeated 11 times—is equally frustrating!

For the record, it's my firm conviction that whether traditional, liturgical, blended, or contemporary in form, a Christian worship service absolutely needs to integrate certain essential elements. That includes reading of Holy Scripture, confession and absolution, prayer, proclamation, and public creedal statement of faith. It's also a pretty good idea to include opportunity for the people of God to present gifts that represent an offering of thanksgiving to God for His bountiful blessings. Whether via a traditional offering plate or using any of many electronic forms, people need to be encouraged to enjoy the hilarity of giving God says He loves (2 Cor. 9:7).

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Toward the end of my time in the International Center, my staff and I put together a document titled "This We Believe—Faith and Practice in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod" (CPH–2010). It provides a succinct summary of formal actions taken by the LCMS in convention on forty-eight topics, from Abortion to Worship. Here's what the Synod has said about the subject of worship:

The Synod has encouraged its congregations (1992 Convention Proceedings, Res. 2-02) to give their "worship life . . . the highest priority" and has urged that "all worship (liturgies, sermons, songs, prayers, etc.) conducted within the Synod . . .

> 1. be Christ-centered and not human-centered;
> 2. distinguish properly between Law and Gospel;
> 3. emphasize the Gospel of Christ's forgiveness; and
> 4. be faithful to the Word of God and in harmony with our Lutheran

Confessions" (109–110).

Three of the five resolutions since 1992 that deal with worship refer to an "Objective" of the Synod in the LCMS Constitution that deals with worship practice. Article III.7. states:

> "The Synod, under Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, shall . . .
> 7. Encourage congregations to strive for uniformity in church practice, but also to develop an appreciation of a variety of responsible practices and customs which are in harmony with our common profession of faith."

The other two resolutions call for further study, discussion, and guidance regarding the use and development of diverse worship resources and practices that are consistent with "our common profession of faith."

So what's the big deal? Simply this: Some in our Synod maintain that the only true and pure worship must come exclusively from officially approved Synod hymnals. In LSB that includes a number of renditions of "Divine Worship." Others obviously disagree.

The disagreement is not always collegial or congenial. It has even come to the point that candidates for appointment to certain positions of significance in the Synod, its agencies and institutions are not approved for service if they are affiliated with congregations that use anything but officially adopted worship resources.

Of significant import is the statistical reality that congregations utilizing a variety of worship formats are experiencing an amazingly high percentage of all new adult confirmations in the Synod. The implications of such objective facts cannot be ignored.

For me, the issue of worship is resolved in passages of Holy Scripture such as Psalm 150:

[1] Praise the Lord. Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens.

[2] Praise him for his acts of power; praise him for his surpassing greatness.

^{3} Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet; praise him with the harp and lyre;
^{4} praise him with tambourine and dancing; praise him with the strings and flute;
^{5} praise him with the clash of cymbals; praise him with resounding cymbals.
^{6} Let everything that has breath praise the Lord!

IV. Witness

Witness is one part of the current LCMS emphasis: Witness, Mercy, Life Together. Witness is a word that means different things to different people. The New Testament is full of a variety of uses of this word. The most powerful is in the words of Jesus to His apostles just before His ascension: "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

Some of our pastors and congregations spend much time and energy in motivating parishioners to speak boldly and to give witness of their faith. That was a huge part of the Ablaze movement, officially approved by the LCMS convention in 2004 as a synodical emphasis until 2017. Not much mention of this movement has been made in recent years.

What has made headlines, both parochially and publicly, is the matter of witness being offered by two LCMS pastors, both following times of unthinkable tragedy in our nation. Dr. David Benke offered a public prayer at an event called "A Prayer for America," convened by then Mayor of New York City, Rudolph Giuliani. The event was held at Yankee Stadium on September 23, 2001, just twelve days after the terrorism of 9/11.

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Then, more than a decade later, Rev. Rob Morris, pastor of Christ the King Lutheran Church in Newtown, CT, was told to apologize to those who were upset or offended by his participation in a December 16, 2013, vigil at Newtown High School. The vigil was held following the traumatic shooting of twenty-six young elementary school children. Pastor Morris' participation was offering a benediction that came straight from the pages of Holy Scripture.

Needless to say, the reaction of many people in both instances was incredulity. Most were embarrassed and offended that high-ranking officials and others, almost all clergy, found fault with pastors who were trying to bring hope and healing to some of the millions of people whose hearts were shattered by the manifestations of evil that took the lives of innocent men, women, and children.

Neither pastor was told before the event in which they participated what to say or not to say. Both pastors reflected in their words the comfort of the God we worship—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Not insignificantly, both pastors were acting well within the parameters of a document commended by the 2001 LCMS convention for "use and guidance." I was not in office at the time Pastor Morris gave his witness, so I can't speak directly to that circumstance. But I was in office when Dr. Benke gave his witness. Having received his assurance not only once but twice that the invitation to pray did not in any way include a restriction on his Christian witness, I offered my counsel that our pastors "may for valid and good reason" participate in such an event.

My counsel was based, in large part, on "The Lutheran Understanding of Church Fellowship: A Report on Synodical Discussions." This document was part of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations end-of-triennium report to the 2001 LCMS Convention (Appendix R3-01A, pp. 48–51 of the 2001 Convention Workbook).

At that 2001 Convention, the "Report on Synodical Discussions" and its accompanying "Study Materials" of 2001 were "commended by the Synod for use and guidance" (Res. 3-07A). That Convention action provided specific guidance for my position on Dr. Benke's act of public witness. Here are the pertinent portions:

> Pastors, teachers, and other officially recognized church workers are often asked to participate in activities outside of their own and other LCMS congregations. Some of these are civic events. Offering prayers, speaking, and reading Scripture at events sponsored by governments, public schools and volunteer organizations would be a problem if the organization in charge restricted a Christian witness. For instance, if an invitation requires a pastor to pray to God without mentioning Jesus, he cannot in good conscience accept.

> Without such a restriction, a Lutheran pastor may for valid and good reason participate in civic affairs such as an inauguration, graduation or a right-to-life activity. These occasions may provide opportunity to witness to the Gospel. Pastors may have honest differences of opinion about whether or to what extent it is appropriate or helpful to participate in these or similar civic events. In these cases charity must prevail.

> There are also 'once-in-a-life-time' situations. It is virtually impossible to anticipate all such situations or to establish rules in advance. Specific answers cannot be given to cover every type of situation pastors and congregations face. These situations can be evaluated only on a case-by-case basis and may evoke different responses from different pastors who may be equally committed to LCMS fellowship principles. The LCMS has always recognized this.

In November 2001, the President of the Synod (yours truly) asked the CTCR to prepare guidelines for participation in civic events that would specifically address the "participation of LCMS pastors, teachers and church workers in 'civic events' . . . which also involve participation from non-Christian religions." The CTCR, in April 2004, adopted and distributed to the Synod its report titled "Guidelines for Participation in Civic Events" [GPCE].

At its 2004 convention (Res. 3-06A), the Synod took the following position regarding this report: "That we [the Synod in convention] commend the CTCR's report, 'Guidelines for Participation in Civic Events' for study to help pastors, teachers, and church workers make decisions about participation in civic events."

Following this "Resolved," the Synod commended the CTCR's report for study to help the members of the Synod make decisions regarding participation in civic events:

> 1. That faithfully reflect our unqualified commitment to the absolute truth of the Holy Scriptures as the Word of God;
> 2. That seek to take full advantage of every legitimate opportunity to proclaim clearly in the public realm that "only in and through Jesus do we have the definitive revelation of the true and only God," that God "is known as Father and Savior only through Spirit-wrought faith in Jesus Christ," and that "only the Triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—is the object of our worship and the hope of our salvation" (GCPE, p. 8);
> 3. That honor and uphold the free and willing commitments we have made by virtue of our membership in the Synod;
> 4. That demonstrate concern and sensitivity for how participation (or non-participation) in civic events may be perceived by those inside and outside of the LCMS; and
> 5. That recognize that "clarity in doctrine and practice and charity in our dealings with one another are both essential to the church's life and witness" (GPCE, p. 23). ("306-A To Commend CTCR Report on Guidelines for Participation in Civic Events" [GPCE], 2004 Convention Proceedings [St. Louis, MO: LCMS], 132–133.)

It is clear to me from Holy Scripture that faithful public Christian witness is God-pleasing and can be eternally life changing. Biblical examples abound, including the three men in the fiery furnace (Daniel 3), Daniel in the lions' den (Daniel 6), the apostles Peter and John (Acts 4–5), and the apostle Paul before Agrippa and Festus (Acts 26). These are powerful examples of many stories in the Bible of God-fearing people who literally risked their lives by testifying publicly to the truth that there is only one God, who has revealed Himself in Holy Scripture as the triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Does the Christian faith have anything to say to people, both Christian and non-Christian, in such times? Of course, it does! Do we Christians have the God-given responsibility to share our faith, with both Christians and non-Christians, in such times of difficulty and disaster? Of course, we do! Will God-fearing Christians differ in their understanding of how, when, and where such faith sharing and witness giving should occur? Quite obviously, yes, indeed! Do we compromise our faith when we pray at gatherings in which individuals from other denominations or religions also pray? Not if our prayer is clear, faithful, and unequivocally Christocentric and/or Trinitarian!

I have an unwavering conviction regarding the absolute necessity of being prepared to share our faith in all circumstances, especially at public gatherings, in a way that leaves no doubt or question about the nature of that faith. There must be no compromise, no apology, no confusion about our Christian witness whenever we have the opportunity to share it by "offering prayers, speaking, and reading Scripture" in public gatherings.

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To the argument that praying *in the presence* of members of non-Christian religions implies praying *with* those non-Christians to the deity they are addressing I simply but significantly point to the story of Elijah and the prophets of Baal in 1 Kings 18. The 450 false prophets prayed to their god, who never answered. Elijah prayed to the true God, who answered immediately and powerfully!

It makes no sense to maintain that Elijah was guilty of syncretism or praying to a false god because he prayed in the same gathering at which the prophets of Baal were also present! Does anyone really believe Elijah was praying to Baal simply by being at the same place at the same time as those who absolutely were praying to a false god?

I hasten to state my additional conviction that to avoid or bypass opportunities like Dr. Benke and Pastor Morris had is unthinkable. Do we really want to yield the microphone and the platform to representatives of other denominations or even other religions when given the opportunity to provide a clear, unequivocal, unapologetic

witness to our great, almighty, sovereign, merciful, triune God? I say that to do so is diametrically opposed to the witness of Peter and John in Acts 4, who said, after being imprisoned and beaten for their witness to the resurrection of Christ: "We cannot help speaking about the things we have seen and heard!"

Although these two incidents are "yesterday's news," I believe the principle illustrated in both is one faced every day by pastors and people in our church and in other expressions of the Christian faith. The weakness of our witness is manifested in the widespread absence of numerical growth and even epidemic decline in the number of people in our congregations.

It's obvious that a church body with average age of over 60 years will not accomplish significant growth and expansion through prolificacy. Having more children is simply not a realistic option for a huge number of folks in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

Nor will it accomplish the objective of proclaiming the saving Gospel of Christ by restricting serious Gospel proclamation primarily or even exclusively to the ranks of clergy. Evangelistic witness is the privilege and responsibility of every Christian person, not only a man in a clerical collar.

> Unless and until we in the LCMS get over our reticence and reluctance to give witness to Christ anytime, anywhere, under any circumstance, using the forms or testimony, dialog, prayer, preaching, or any other means of communication, we will fail to demonstrate the boldness and compassion so desperately needed by people in our country and world who live in darkness, desperation, and despair.

Unless and until we in the LCMS get over our reticence and reluctance to give witness to Christ anytime, anywhere, under any circumstance, using the forms or testimony, dialog, prayer, preaching, or any other means of communication, we will fail to demonstrate the boldness and compassion so desperately needed by people in our country and world who live in darkness, desperation, and despair.

Those who read this article may or may not agree with my exegesis, but I believe this is exactly what Jesus meant when He said: "Everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven; but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven" (Mt 10:32–33). Jesus mentioned no restriction regarding the venue or circumstances in which such witness should be offered.

Public prayer to the Triune God in the Name of Jesus Christ, Savior of the world and Lord of the universe, is a classic example of acknowledging the only true God "before men" and an opportunity to give public witness to our Christian faith.

V. Warfare

One spring at a pastors' conference in the Midwest I talked about the report of what then was a convention-mandated Task Force on Synod Harmony, specifically, the seven "Aspects of the Present Disharmony in Synod." As I listed them, the men in the room sat silently, some with heads bowed. I think what made them so pensive was that they realized just how much truth was contained in these points.

Here are those seven aspects of disharmony among us:

1. An inability to deal with diversity in such issues as admission to Holy Communion, worship substance and style, the Office of the Public Ministry and the role of laity, and the service of women in the church.
2. A lack of civility that leads to rumors, lies, slander, sarcasm, and cruel satire, doing violence to the Eighth Commandment and sorely wounding our church.

3. A politicized culture that has turned our Synod into "a denomination of parties."
4. These problems "are primarily a clergy problem. Pastors are in the forefront of practices and attitudes unbefitting God's people."
5. Poor communication across the lines that divide us hampers the ability, or the will, to listen to one another.
6. A lack of accountability for sinful attitudes and behaviors, falling on the shoulders of district presidents and circuit counselors to counsel, admonish, teach, encourage, and model churchmanship.
7. Distrust, particularly among clergy, resulting in increasingly partisan politics.

As disconcerting as these aspects of disharmony are, it is important that we acknowledge them. For only by naming our problems can we hope to begin to fix them. Unity, harmony, and concord among us are not what they ought to be and need to be improved significantly.

The spirit of dissension among us is not yet physically violent, like battlefield warfare itself. But I can tell you from personal experience that the spirit demonstrated by LCMS clergy who believe the end justifies the means is nothing less than emotional and spiritual combat, sometimes downright evil and demonic in nature.

Weapons of neither individual nor mass destruction in a military sense have to date been used in the LCMS. Yet in more than just a few battles over wine, women, worship, or witness, the weapons of judgmentalism, allegation, accusation, gossip,

caricature, blasphemy, litigation, and character assassination are regularly utilized by certain groups of theological zealots among us.

My dear friends in Christ, such activity simply has no place in our beloved church body. It does not reflect the biblical injunctions:

Galatians 5:19–26: "The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: . . . hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy. . . . I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other."

1 Peter 3:15–16: "But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander."

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, when the unbelieving world sees and hears how disrespectfully we treat one another, they want nothing to do with us. All the insistence in the world about pure doctrine pales into insignificance when outsiders fail to see what we proclaim, namely, that we love one another.

Some observe that in recent years the church appears to be at peace. The reason for this appearance is simple. Historically, those who have demonstrated the behavior cited above have done so only when they were not in positions of leadership. Such is true today.

In our case, under a peaceful façade, there lies a broad sense of frustration, chagrin, disappointment, even embarrassment at positions and actions of fellow church members and leaders.

> Under a peaceful façade, there lies a broad sense of frustration, chagrin, disappointment, even embarrassment at positions and actions of fellow church members and leaders.

Our very real problem today is one Martin Luther recognized among his opponents five hundred years ago. He said to one of them: "You have a different spirit than we." That's true in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and it's what greatly contributes to the warfare that still goes on, visibly or invisibly, in public or under the radar. It simply must stop.

Conclusion

Today, congregations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod are comprised of and surrounded by a great diversity of cultures, calling for an appropriate measure of resilience in how we communicate the Gospel. In most cases, the church of our grandparents didn't face such cultural diversity, at least not in this country.

The setting back then was the farms and small towns and burgeoning suburbs of largely Anglo America. The setting today is that and much more. It's the big city, the barrio, the Muslim in Dearborn, the Somali in Iowa. It's the immigrant from Croatia, China, Ghana, Nigeria, Bolivia, Mexico, and many other lands. It's the youngster plugged into his iPod, the high school freshman sending thousands of text messages every month on her iPhone, the college student on the secular campus, the young man displaced from the auctioned-off family farm. It's the unmarried couple living together, the gay, the lesbian, the transgender, the homosexual, the bisexual, the single mom or dad, the lapsed Christian family.

> We can't productively share the Gospel with such vastly differing people unless we get to know them, develop relationships with them, demonstrate Christian care and concern for them, and figure out ways to communicate effectively with them. They're not automatically coming to the church. So we must go to them.

We can't productively share the Gospel with such vastly differing people unless we get to know them, develop relationships with them, demonstrate Christian care and concern for them, and figure out ways to communicate effectively with them. They're not automatically coming to the church. So we must go to them, becoming "all things to all men (and women) so that by all possible means [we] might save some. [We] do all this for the sake of the Gospel, that [we] may share in its blessings." (1 Cor. 9:22b-23)

Tomorrow, the church we leave for our descendants must be many things:

- A church that provides safety and security in troubled times;
- A church where wholesome relationships can be established as a balance to the anonymity and sterility of a high-tech/low-touch world;
- A mission-focused community where people can live out their passion for mission personally and corporately;
- A church that invites people to use their God-given gifts in tangible and creative ways; but most of all,
- A church where the authority of God's Word is honored and taught and where forgiveness in Christ is freely offered through Word and Sacraments.

So there you have it, my dear friends in Christ: Wine/Women/Worship/Witness/Warfare. The future of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod as a national church body is directly connected to the way in which we come to a greater consensus on how we will deal with these currently divisive issues among us. *Quo Vadis, LCMS?* The answer remains to be determined!

Pray with me this portion of a Closing Prayer by George Ridding: "Dear Lord, In times of doubts and questionings, when our belief is perplexed by new learning, new teaching, new thought, when our faith is strained by creeds, by doctrines, by mysteries beyond our understanding, give us the faithfulness of learners and the courage of believers in you. . . . Give us boldness to examine, and faith to trust, all truth; and in times of change, to grasp new knowledge thoroughly and to combine it loyally and honestly with the old; free us from stubborn rejection of new revelations, and from a hasty assurance that we are wiser than our forebears."

> The future of The Lutheran Church— Missouri Synod as a national church body is directly connected to the way in which we come to a greater consensus on how we will deal with these currently divisive issues among us.

And a prayer for guidance in our calling: "Lord God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing exactly where you want us to go or where the paths of life may take us, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen."

Soli Deo Gloria!

The Dubious History of "Contextualization" and the Cautious Case for its Continued Use

Glenn K. Fluegge

Abstract: This study first traces the history of the term "contextualization" by uncovering two underlying historical undercurrents that go back as far as the seventeenth century and then by examining the theological agendas of those who first advocated the idea. It concludes that dangers and cautions do indeed abound for the theologically conservative Christian. However, the study also makes the historical and theological case for the continued use of a more narrowly defined "contextualization" by underscoring the inherent translatability of the Christian faith and by focusing attention on the incarnation and the doctrine of justification as the foundation for a more conservative Lutheran approach.

Introduction

Recently two prominent evangelical pastors have publically taken to task the idea of "engaging culture." Their point is that the church should be "absolutely distinct" from culture.[1] This fear of the surrounding culture has led more than a few Christians to ignore or dismiss the cultural context in which they live. It can also give rise to the tendency to withdraw from the surrounding community altogether. "Rounding the wagons" as the pressure from society increases is a natural thing to do.

Some might dismiss this as naïve, but I believe it merits a reasoned response. First of all, I can understand the fear because it also nags at me—the fear that such engagement will inevitably end up distorting the Gospel, tainting the church, and eternally hurting souls. A quick survey of history would show us that their concern is legitimate. But this also deserves a carefully thought out response because it directly effects how we carry out the mission of the church. As a former Lutheran missionary in Africa for almost a decade and half, I have more than a passing interest in this topic.

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The question that we are dealing with here is essentially the question of "contextualization." This article will certainly not be the final word on that topic, nor is it meant to be. Neither do I intend to address the practical question of how one goes about doing contextualization. An incredible amount has already been written on "contextualization" in the past four and half decades and I would encourage the reader—proponent, opponent, or undecided—to at least dabble in some of it.[2]

This being said, I intend to address the underlying question of whether or not we should even be engaged in contextualization in the first place. Should we even be using this term? More specifically, I propose to do two things in what follows: (1) briefly trace the history of the term "contextualization," uncovering its potential dangers and benefits; and (2) make the case within an evangelical confessional Lutheran framework for the continued use of a more narrowly defined "contextualization." Of course, I surely cannot do justice to each of these topics in such a short article. My goal here is to simply present a few ideas, especially from a conservative evangelical Lutheran perspective, in the hope that they serve as an impetus for further reflection and conversation.

The Dubious History of "Contextualization"

I often start off my Church History class with a dictum that seems to apply here as well: *History may elude us, but we never elude history.* What I mean is that we may discount history, but it has an uncanny tendency in the end to influence and shape us, even unbeknownst to us. It is best, then, I contend, to spend at least some time becoming familiar with how the term and concept of "contextualization" emerged. As we will see, for the biblically and theologically conservative Christian, dangers and cautions abound. We are then left with the question: Does it merit jettisoning the term altogether or might it yet prove useful in our context today?

Historical Undercurrents of "Contextualized Theologies"

The term "contextualization" was first coined in the early seventies. The idea itself, however, was long in the making. In retrospect, it seems to have been the result of at least two historical undercurrents that began to reshape modern thinking as far back as the seventeenth century.

We can trace the first of these to Francis Bacon (1561–1626), whose innovative ideas reoriented the entire discipline of what we know today as natural science. Whereas knowledge had traditionally been linked to timeless principles uncovered by the ancients, Bacon advocated for an approach to knowledge that paid particular attention to events observed in nature. This shift from a deductive to an inductive and empirical method of attaining knowledge was revolutionary to say the least. It contributed greatly to what historians have called the "scientific revolution" and serves to this day as the foundation of modern science. The shift that took place

between then and now is striking. Before and during Luther's time, for example, university students of medicine commonly studied the popular writings of Hippocrates and Galen, ancient Greek authorities on traditional theoretical medicine.[3] Two hundred years later, students were conducting experiments based on a scientific method very similar to that used today. As a sign of the times, in 1859 Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species* was founded on the close scrutiny of various species of animals within their natural environments. *It is important to note that what changed in all of this was the starting point of how to attain knowledge—from timeless principles to observation of nature.* And, as a result, advancements in science have grown astronomically, as has the plethora of other "human sciences" based on similar methodologies, e.g., sociology, anthropology, psychology.

It was inevitable that this method would eventually be applied to the discipline of theology. In times past, theology had claimed the proud title of "queen of the sciences" precisely because it was based on not only timeless but also divine principles.[4] With the advent of the Age of Enlightenment, we begin to see a shift in thinking. Theology's dogma and creeds cease to be measured and validated by their conformity to divine truths and are instead judged by their usefulness and relevance in the real-world context.[5] Consequently, the study of theology at the university is relegated to a position beneath that of medicine and law. In the mid-nineteenth century, Charles Darwin's idea of "natural selection" challenged the traditional idea of divine providence and championed the environment as the cause of different species. If this is true of

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biology, why not also theology? Are disparities in theological beliefs simply a result of different environments? Indeed, theological disparities, once condemned as "heresies," instead give rise to a number of different "denominations" that agree to coexist in peace.[6] *The starting point of theology gradually shifts, giving much more weight to the importance of real-world context in theological formulations.* That is the first historical undercurrent that would eventually in the 1970s give rise to the idea of "contextualized theologies."

There was also a second, related historical undercurrent. Christian theology was never really a simple matter of readily accessible eternal truths. Those truths came to us through the written texts of the Bible, thus raising the question: How does the reader acquire meaning from those texts?

In a deep and insightful study of Johann Gerhard's (1583–1637) understanding of the Word of God, historian and theologian Bengt Hägglund argued convincingly that a major epistemological shift took place in the eighteenth century in terms of

how one answered that question.[7] Beforehand, during the Reformation in the sixteenth century and throughout the following century, it was commonly believed that the human mind played a much more *receptive* than *active* role in the process of attaining knowledge. It is important to understand here that knowledge is acquired through the "interplay" between my mind and an external object, e.g., a tree. But which of these plays the prominent role in my apprehension of, for example, what a tree is? My mind or the tree? In previous centuries, the external object was deemed the starting point of knowledge and our apprehension of it an effect of that external object. In other words, the external tree played the prominent role because it was essentially thought to have "created" my apprehension of what a tree is. Hägglund described it thus: "Apprehension is not from the subject [my mind] to the object [e.g., tree], but vice versa from the object [e.g., tree] as the underlying and determining factor to the subject [my mind]."[8] Or, as one historian succinctly put it: "Our mind does not measure the thing, but is measured by the thing."[9]

Much of this may seem strange to our modern sensibilities since it is diametrically opposed to how we approach understanding something today. It appears counterintuitive to relegate our minds to a quasi-passive role and allow that they "be measured" by things outside of us. This perception is mostly because we live under the dominating influence of Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) and his innovative epistemology.[10] In the preface to his *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant himself described it as the "Copernican Revolution." And a revolution it was. He essentially overturned the existing cognitive theory and assigned our minds to a position of increasing prominence in the understanding process.[11] According to Kant, an external object in and of itself cannot be detected and give rise to true understanding. It cannot be truly known apart from categories preexisting in the human mind. A reversal has taken place. "The measured has become the measurer."[12]

As one might expect, this "epistemological revolution" has had an enduring influence on the discipline of theology. It essentially set the theologian in a place of prominence over Scripture, i.e., the external object. In his magisterial work on the history of biblical interpretation over the last few centuries, Hans Frei concluded that with the modern age came a reversal of the direction of interpretation and understanding of Scripture.[13] Rather than fit the real world into the biblical narrative as had been done before, the overarching concern was to fit the scriptural world into the contemporary world. Hence, those parts of the text deemed ill-suited for contemporary society, e.g., angels, demons, and miracles, were set aside as nonessential to the "deeper meaning" of the text. The end result, as one might expect, was a depreciation of the text itself and a chronic separation from its "deeper meaning."

As many have pointed out, there are three factors to be considered in the process of interpretation: The author (and his world), the text itself, and the receptor (and his

world).[14] With the diminishing importance of the text came efforts from both liberals and conservatives alike to get at the "deeper meaning." *In the age of modernity, they did so by focusing on the world of the author.* Liberals attempted to reconstruct the historical composition of the original text (i.e., historical criticism) and conservatives the historical events of the original context.[15] There was a foreboding sense, however, that neither would succeed in bridging the ever widening gap between then and now.

A change in focus was inevitable. We detect hints of it already as far back as Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834), who held the view that "all theology was influenced, if not determined, by the context in which it evolved."[16] In other words, our current context may be more relevant than that of the original author's when it comes to doing theology. But it was not until the twentieth century that pivotal change was ushered in by the likes of Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), Michel Foucault (1926–1984), and Jacque Derrida (1930–2004), architects of the postmodern mindset.[17] *With the dawn of postmodernism, attention was directed definitively to the world of the receptor.* Accordingly, meaning came to be seen

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increasingly as a mere "creation" of the viewer as he or she "played" with the text.[18] Note that this is virtually the opposite of the view espoused by the likes of Luther and Gerhard in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Objective knowledge apart from the knower is now deemed impossible. The very notion of universal truth is rejected, since it is commonly believed that truth is dependent on (and only valid in) a particular context.

Moreover, within this twentieth century context, what Nietzsche called a "hermeneutic of suspicion" was widely applied to all areas of scholarship, including theology.[19] Such a "hermeneutic of suspicion" sought to uncover the hidden power agendas of those elitists "from above" who shaped their disciplines in order to retain power, even if done unknowingly. It was applied in an effort to liberate those "from below," the socially, economically, and politically oppressed. This "liberation" emphasis came into focus especially during the 1960s and 1970s when a great number of third world countries were in the throes of liberating themselves from European colonial powers. Hence, as a sign of the times, Brazilian educator Paulo Freire published in 1970 his groundbreaking *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, in which he introduced his view of "liberation pedagogy," an approach to education that would break down oppressive power structures and empower the oppressed. Also fundamental to this "hermeneutic of suspicion" was the firm belief that the vantage point of those "from below" was to be preferred over that of those "from above." This was especially true for theology.

It is important to note in all of this that the starting point of knowledge has dramatically shifted over the past centuries. It is now focused decisively on the individual within a particular context.

> It is important to note in all of this that the starting point of knowledge has dramatically shifted over the past centuries. It is now focused decisively on the individual within a particular context.

Historical Context of the Term "Contextualization"

These long-term historical developments were among those that led to significant changes in mission thinking throughout the twentieth century. One of the most important was the ecumenical movement and its accompanying progressive approach to theology. The roots of the movement can be traced to the nineteenth century, but it was solidified, at least to a degree, at the World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh in 1910. The International Missionary Council (IMC) was an outgrowth of this conference and had a large influence on mission thinking throughout the twentieth century. Unfortunately, disappointed with the Council's progressively liberal agenda, e.g., evangelism as "social engagement" or "social gospel," more conservative fundamentalists and evangelicals increasingly distanced themselves from it.[20] This, of course, strengthened the liberal agenda, culminating in the IMC's merging into the World Council of Churches (WCC) in 1961 to become its Division on World Missions and Evangelism (DWME).

At that point, the departure of many of the remaining evangelicals left the DWME without a more conservative voice. As one might expect, it was at this time that a number of mission trends emerged that tended toward the extreme liberal side of the theological spectrum. The "ecumenists," as one missiologist calls them, reduced evangelism to "presence" (versus proclamation), emphasized interreligious dialogue, and debated whether those from non-Christian religions were "anonymous Christians."[21] The term "missions" (plural) was replaced by "mission" (singular), emphasizing what God was doing in the world, whether inside or outside of the church. This idea was popularized through the term *missio Dei*. They challenged the church to "let the world set the agenda" and "discern the signs of the times."[22] Prominent missiologist David Bosch explains the underlying gist of such statements:

> Whereas evangelicals seek to apply Scripture deductively—in other words, make Scripture their point of departure from which they draw the line(s) to the present situation—ecumenicals follow the inductive method; the situation in which they find themselves becomes the hermeneutical key. Their thesis is: we determine God's will *from* a specific situation rather than

in it. . . . In the words of the Uppsala Assembly: "The world provides the agenda."[23]

Hence, they encouraged the church to exegete local communities in order to find out how and where God was already at work in the socioeconomic and sociopolitical contexts of those communities. Mission work was no longer deemed a matter of evangelism and church planting, but instead the struggle for justice and liberation for those who lived under oppression.[24]

It was within this unsettling context in 1972 that Shoki Coe first used the term "contexualization." It was quickly picked up by other ecumenists. Coe later explained: "Contextuality . . . is that critical assessment of what makes the context really significant in the light of the *Missio Dei*. It is the missiological discernment of the signs of the times, seeing where God is at work and calling us to participate in it."[25] Hence, rather than give priority to the biblical tradition and confessional statements of the historic church, Coe's version of "contextualization" sought to emphasize local cultures because, it was thought, God was already at work within those cultures, especially within their "social and economic dimensions."[26] When he coined the term, Coe was the General Director of the Theological Education Fund (TEF), a fund set up by the IMC to raise the level of theological education in the Third World. The term was first used, then, in the context of encouraging Third World scholars "to evolve theologies and programs designed specifically for their respective constituencies and cultures."[27] This led to such "contextualized theologies" as Liberation Theology (in various forms), Black Theology, Third Eye Theology, Water-Buffalo Theology, Yin-Yang Theology, etc. Not surprisingly, many of these, though culturally sensitive, seem to skirt the edges of orthodoxy when evaluated in light of Scripture and historic Christianity.[28]

Concluding Reflections on the History of "Contextualization"

There is no denying that a great deal of good has resulted from the aforementioned historical shifts. As one of our professors of biology recently pointed out to me, the advances in scientific methodology have directly translated into huge medical advances over the past few centuries and reaped enormous benefits for those of us alive today. Recognition of the important influence of context on one's beliefs, values, and practices has led to significant advances in understanding both the variety and unity of humankind, as well as communication across these different contexts.

There is also no denying that, theologically speaking from a confessional evangelical Lutheran perspective that values the foundational authoritative importance of Scripture, this history can be quite disconcerting. The term as well as the concept of "contextualization" have carried and may very well still carry theological baggage that is sharply at odds with a more traditional approach to

Christianity shaped by the Reformation. As I mentioned earlier, dangers and cautions abound.

But does it merit jettisoning the term altogether? I think not, as I intend to argue below. Indeed, my purpose in laying out this historical background is not to convince us to simply dismiss the term, but rather to shape our continued use of it and to establish the need for caution as we proceed. Perhaps more than anything else, this "history lesson" would seem to suggest certain helpful boundaries and warning signs as we engage in what I argue below is the inevitable task of contextualizing the message of the Gospel.

The Cautious Case for the Continued Use of "Contextualization"

In what follows I wish to make the historical and theological case for the continued use of the term and concept of "contextualization." As I mentioned earlier, we will proceed with caution in light of the rather dubious historical origins of the term.

The Historical Case for the Use of "Contextualization"

The history of contextualization did not stop with Shoki Coe and the ecumenists. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, a "battle" of sorts ensued over the meaning of the term as liberals and conservatives alike sought to clarify and define it. The plethora of articles and books written at the time by more conservative theologians attests to this struggle.[29] A number of different models were proposed to map out the different approaches to contextualization. Two Roman Catholic scholars, Stephen Bevans and Robert Schreiter, each proposed his own "map" of the terrain of contextualization.[30] Several conservative evangelical theologians also proposed "maps," but they went so far as to distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable models.[31]

In light of the liberal agenda associated with the origins of the term, it is understandable why these evangelicals viewed it with such deep suspicion. It is noteworthy, however, that they refused to jettison the term altogether. Rather, they sought to rescue it from its liberal context and adapt it to their more theologically conservative thinking. Why? More than anything else, they realized that it captured a truth fundamental to Christianity from its very inception: *The translatability of the Christian faith requires attention to context.*

> The translatability of the Christian faith requires attention to context.

But why take up such a non-biblical and non-theological term, especially one surrounded by such controversy? First of all, adopting a non-biblical term to express a fundamental truth of Christianity is nothing

new. Even such cherished expressions as "being of one substance with the Father"[32] and "theology as habitus"[33] entered into our church vocabulary only after serious debate and careful clarification. But more to the point, there were, of course, other terms besides "contextualization" that had been used to express this fundamental truth. Terms such as "indigenization," "adaptation," and "accommodation" were quite commonplace, but they also carried their own weighty baggage. In retrospect, they seem rather disparaging and paternalistic, giving the impression, as Lesslie Newbigin has pointed out, that the missionary had the "un-adapted" Gospel and that concessions could be made to adapt it for other cultures.[34] "Indigenization" *had* been a useful term in the context of foreign missions; but with today's increasingly "glocal" mission field triggered by massive diaspora movements, it is hopelessly outdated.[35] So, "contextualization" has become a part of accepted mission lingo as a useful way to describe the church's engagement with contexts precisely because of the translatability of the Christian faith.

In his brilliant work on mission as translation, Lamin Sanneh established definitively that "translatability" is not peripheral to Christianity, but essential to its very nature.[36] In other words, the church does not engage in translating the faith across cultures because of convenience, but because it is in its very nature to do so. At this point, I am not talking about the command of Jesus to "make disciples of all nations" (Mt 28:18). *Rather, I am referring to the fundamental belief at the very core of Christianity that the faith actually can be translated from one cultural context to another and that this core belief naturally and necessarily feeds into the urge to do so.* Moreover, the "translation" Sanneh is referring to here goes beyond mere texts and literary works. Language and culture are so intricately bound together that any translation is as much a matter of culture as it is linguistics.[37] As I often remind my students in missionary training, "Learn a language, learn a culture." For this very reason, the church will always inevitably be engaged with cultural contexts.

If this is true, then we should see the church thus engaged all throughout its history. And we do. As Sanneh points out, we see this most clearly in the earliest days of the church, as Christianity was translated out of the Aramaic and Hebrew context and into the Gentile culture.[38] Of course, it was not an easy process, and both Jewish and Gentile cultures were intertwined in the resulting Christian culture. Nonetheless, it is an amazing fact about Christianity, and one that often goes unnoticed, that "its continuous translatability left it as the only major world religion that is peripheral in the land of its origin; and what it lacks in the predominance of its birthplace it has more than made up for in the late fruits of its expansion."[39] It surely says something about the translatable nature of Christianity that only remnants of it remain in the vicinity of Jerusalem, its geographical cradle.

We tend to know this instinctively, but it is worth reminding ourselves how deeply translating the faith has been a part of the expansion of Christianity throughout its history. Even before the Christian era, the Septuagint rendered the

Hebrew Bible into Greek. The birth of the Church on the Feast of Pentecost was also essentially the first "evangelism event" of the Church. What "utterly amazed" the onlookers was not the strange violent wind or even the tongues of flame sitting on the heads of the apostles, but the extraordinary miracle that they spoke in different languages such that "each one heard them speaking in his own language" (Acts 2:6–7). It is not a little significant that the first miracle wrought by the promised Holy Spirit was that of overcoming the barrier of language. It comes as no

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surprise, then, that Augustine (354–430) considered it quite natural and necessary that the Bible be translated and "disseminated through the whole world [and . . .] become known to the nations for their salvation."[40] Around the time that Jerome was translating the Scriptures into what would become the Vulgate, those same Scriptures were being translated by missionaries into the Armenian and Gothic languages.[41]

Jerome's Vulgate allowed Latin to claim definitively, as it were, its place as the official language of Western Christianity. Notwithstanding, despite considerable resistance on the part of some, translation into the vernacular continued through the Middle Ages as an important missionary activity among the northern "barbarians."[42] It is often pointed out that the Luther Bible of 1534 attests to Martin Luther's conviction that cultural context matters. Reformation scholar, James Nestingen, recently pointed out that the same could be said regarding his Catechisms.[43] They were in fact translations of the faith into the heart language of the people. Interestingly, he argues that Luther's Catechisms go beyond mere first level linguistic translation and engage in second level cultural translation.[44] On this second level, Luther was "contextualizing" the faith, that is, recognizing and, to the extent possible, making use of the cultural assumptions embodied by the Germanic language at his time in order to speak to the heart.[45] Sanneh, himself an African (Senegalese), has even pointed out that Europe's "Age of Colonialism," despite being tainted by the urge to perpetuate European culture throughout the world, still bears strong witness to Christianity's persistent interest in and promotion of the vernacular (both language and culture).[46] The missionary work of Robert De Nobili (1577–1656) in India, William Carey (1761–1834) in China, and David Livingstone (1813–1873) in Africa come to mind.

And so it has continued throughout the history of the church. The point here is not to romanticize or gloss over the church's struggle—at times, bitter strife—over the question of how far one can go when it comes to translating the faith. The point

is that this struggle itself is evidence of the translatability of Christianity. It is reflective of the inherent tension between Christ and culture that the Church inevitably endures as it translates the faith from one culture to another. There would be much less tension if Christianity were, for example, a religion like Islam, for which the *un*-translatability of its sacred text forms an inviolable principle.[47] For the Muslim, "there can be no translation of the Quran, for translation is always adaptation."[48] But the Church, as a whole, has refused to embrace Islam's approach to mission by "diffusion" of the home culture and has instead tended toward an approach to mission by translation.[49]

> But the Church, as a whole, has refused to embrace Islam's approach to mission by "diffusion" of the home culture and has instead tended toward an approach to mission by translation.

That brings us to the deeper question: Why is translatability so inherent to Christianity, whereas for other religions like Islam it is such a foreign idea?

The Theological Case for the Use of "Contextualization"

That is a theological question. There are a number of theological points that could be brought up here, many of which have been highlighted by other scholars.[50] I would like to underscore only two that I believe form the foundation for any Lutheran approach to contextualization and, incidentally, set Christianity apart from such a religion as Islam.

Incarnation and Contextualization

The first is fairly evident and quite often cited in these discussions: the Incarnation. The fact that God entered history and was born a fully human being at a precise time and in a specific cultural context has deep implications for the salvation of the world He entered. It also tells us something about God and the way He tends to work. The Lutheran reformers and those who followed them understood that God works in such a way that the "finite is capable of bearing the infinite" (*finitum capax infiniti*): "The drama of salvation and vocation is not lived out in the angelic realm because the finite cannot bear the infinite; it is worked out in the finite realm because, under the Word, it is capable of bearing the divine."[51] "There is no good trying to be more spiritual than God," C. S. Lewis once wrote, "God never meant man to be a purely spiritual creature. That is why He uses material things like bread and wine to put the new life into us. We may think this rather crude and unspiritual. God does not: He invented eating. He likes matter. He invented it."[52] If this is true of

God with regard to bread and wine, water, and human mouths, it also suggests something about how God works in and through human history and culture.

"Historicity" lies at the foundation of what it means to be Christian. In my core theology class for undergraduate freshmen, I often have the privilege of teaching students who are very unfamiliar with Christianity and the Bible. Very often they are under the mistaken impression that the Bible is a written record of God's revelation to or through one person. They assume, for example, that the Christian Bible is similar to the angel Gabriel's revelation to Mohammed (Quran) or to Joseph Smith's translation of the golden plates revealed to him by the angel Moroni (The Book of Mormon). They are surprised to learn that the origins of the sixty-six books of the Bible span well over a thousand years, thousands of miles, and three different spoken languages. For a religious book often referred to as the revelation of God to human beings, it is rather embarrassingly mired in human history. Large portions of it are not even "revelations" but simply historical accounts written by those alive at the time.[53] As such, although the Word of the Eternal God, the Bible is, oddly enough, prone to the poking and prodding of the historical sciences. It is significant that few other religions could or would so willingly embrace the idea, for example, of a Biblical Archeological Society.[54]

In fact, the most important part and center of the entire Bible—the four Gospels—is not an angelic vision or ecstasy, but mere eyewitness accounts of an event that took place in real history—the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. It says something about Christianity that at its very center lies such a mundane, earthy, unspiritual event. God became a human being and in terms of His humanness He was like anyone else during that time. Moreover, this raw historicity of the Christian faith was not something peripheral to the essence of Christianity, something dispensable that could be laid aside or even deemphasized. We know this because already during the apostolic era and in the centuries afterwards there was tremendous pressure to "de-historicize" Christianity. This effort came in the form of Gnosticism, a Greek philosophical approach to spirituality that valued the spiritual and shunned the material. Whereas the modern tendency is to question Jesus's *divinity*, the first major attack against Christianity had no problem with His divinity but instead rejected His *humanity*. For the gnostics, Jesus Christ was entirely too human and too historical. It was scandalous to them that God would sully Himself by being embedded in a historical context. And so they sought to "disentangle the gospel from its involvement with 'barbaric and outmoded' Jewish notions about God and history."[55]

The Early Church, however, recognized that to distance the Gospel from its historical setting was to lose the Gospel altogether. Hence, they resisted the Gnostic temptation and insisted all the more on the historicity of the Christ Event. The Apostle John writes that he testifies about "that which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched" (1 Jn 1:1).

Even the earliest versions of the Apostle's Creed confess that the Son of God was *born* of a woman and was *crucified* and *buried* under *Pontius Pilate,* a known ruler at the time. Such statements place the Gospel squarely in history.[56]

These facts are germane to our discussion so far because a Gospel centered on a historical event is, by definition, a "contextualized Gospel," that is, a Gospel "embedded" in a certain historical, political, social, and cultural context. This is certainly not to say that the Gospel had relevance only for that context, but to underscore the fact that as a historical event—as opposed to, e.g., a vision or spiritual encounter—it has a *real-world* context. Consequently, translation is required from that context to another and so on and so forth.

That this translation happens vertically throughout history, i.e., from earlier to more recent historical contexts, can be seen in the biblical record itself. God has embedded His entire revelation within real-world contexts, whether through prophets embedded in ancient Israelite culture, His own Son born into a Palestinian context, or the apostles ministering in a Greco-Roman world. It goes without saying that Jesus ministered in a context that was not of Moses. Consequently, a grammatico-historical approach to interpretation bids us pay careful attention to the socio-historical context of a passage before bringing its message to those in our own context. Translating the faith over the years, centuries, and millennia has been an important part of guarding the faith. But translation also happens horizontally throughout history, that is, from one cultural context to another within the same historical period. The biblical record also attests to this as more than a few scholars have pointed out.[57]

My point here is this: Historicity and translatability go hand in hand when it comes to Christianity. *The historicity of the Christian faith as established definitively by the Incarnation justifies theologically and necessitates practically its translatability. This translation (on both the first and second levels)[58] is what has come to be termed "contextualization" as it is more narrowly defined by more conservative theologians.*

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Justification and Contextualization

The second theological point that I would like to underscore here is a bit more nuanced and mentioned much less frequently in discussions about contextualization:

justification through faith alone. I believe it too, along with the first, forms the foundation for any Lutheran approach to contextualization. I say this because, upon reflection, the belief that we are saved by "faith alone" (*sola fide*) has deep missiological implications for Christianity—much deeper than we might be aware of at first glance.[59]

Let us begin with a purely hypothetical question: What would the Christian religion look like had it been *un*-translatable? It would have led to one of two extremes. It would have devolved into a localized regional religion with no universal claim on all peoples, or it would have insisted on the perpetuation of the Jewish language and culture as part of its universal religious claims.

In making the case for his proposed missionary trip to Spain (Rom 15:24), Paul refutes the first of these by insisting on the monotheistic claims of Christianity (Rom 1:18–25; 3:30). The Old Testament, as well as the New, is rife with passages that reveal Yahweh's claim to the whole world, e.g., Ex 9:14–16; Josh 4:24; Ps 86:8–13; Is 60:3; Mt 28:18–20. But Paul also talks a great deal about "faith alone" versus "works of the law" (Rom 3:21–4:25) and seems to use this doctrine, both theologically and logically, to support the universal claim of Christianity. In fact, he appears to use it as a way of "leveling the playing ground," if you will, between two ethnic groups, the Jews and the Gentiles (Rom 3:29–30), presumably also including those as far away as Spain (Rom 1:5).[60] Although using different terms, he seems to imply that the universal, supracultural nature of faith means that Christianity can be and truly is for all people.[61] All attempts to observe the Law, whether it be circumcision, incense burning, or animal sacrifices, tend to be tied to specific places and cultures. In other words, "works" are almost always culturally relative. Faith, i.e., trust, in and of itself, is not. As Luther so astutely pointed out, "to have a god is nothing else than to trust and believe in that one with your whole heart."[62] All people, regardless of place or culture, can and do have faith, even if it might be faith in a false god. Hence, being saved by faith "levels the playing ground." Christianity as a religion of *sola fide* can readily find a home in all nations and cultures (Mt 28:19).

Much more dangerous than Christianity's devolving into a localized religion was the very real threat of its devolving into an attempt merely to reproduce the Jewish language and culture throughout the world. Paul spends considerable time and energy refuting this idea, insisting that to do so inevitably means losing the Gospel of salvation by grace alone through faith alone (Gal 2:15–4:7). This idea was picked up by Martin Luther and the other reformers and served as the seed of the Reformation movement. Since that time, Protestant Christianity has been concerned especially with internal matters of the heart, i.e., trust, and not merely with external actions carried out *ex opere operato* (mere performance of the act without faith).[63] Conversion entails a change of heart and not simply imitation of external rituals and ceremonies, even if those rituals and ceremonies may have value. Such a change,

that is, saving faith, requires the Gospel promise or message of forgiveness in Christ Jesus to which it clings (Rom 3:22; 10:14–15). That promise differs greatly from the simple "diffusion" of an external code to be adopted and observed by the newly converted. Rather, the Gospel message must be spoken in such a way that it can be understood, not only by the head (historical faith), but also in the heart (trust), hence the need for translation and, therefore, attention to context.[64] In other words, although the question of what is being communicated is undeniably important, the doctrine of justification *sola fide* requires us to also pay attention to what is being heard.

> In other words, although the question of what is being communicated is undeniably important, the doctrine of justification sola fide requires us to also pay attention to what is being heard.

My point throughout this section is simply this: *The difference between religions of works and Christianity as a religion of sola fide extends beyond how we are saved. It also shapes the way we do mission work*.[65] Most ritual-centered religions, e.g., Islam, tend toward "mission by diffusion" (of rituals and ceremonies of the home culture). Christianity as a religion of *sola fide* naturally tends toward "mission by translation."[66] Of course, Lutheran Christians place high value on certain rituals, such as Baptism, the Lord's Supper, and Absolution. This is one significant point of difference between conservative Lutheran and Evangelical approaches to contextualization and one that begs to be more fully explored by Lutheran missiologists. This being said, since Luther's German Mass of 1526, Lutherans have been keenly aware of the need for teaching and translation, even and especially with regard to these liturgical and sacramental rituals (primarily because of their previous abuse by the "Papists"). This is perhaps nowhere more evident than in Luther's Small Catechism.

Concluding Reflections on the Case for Contextualization

Nearly everyone vaguely familiar with Christianity would admit the translatable nature of Christianity with regard to foreign missions. When I served and lived for many years as a missionary in Togo, West Africa, it was unquestionably understood that translation (both linguistic and cultural) was a natural part of the job. But is it also true closer to home? Does the translatable nature of Christianity justify, or even require, contextualization on the home front, within our own communities here in the United States?[67]

Church historian, Richard Muller, has pointed out that Christians have always done contextualization but have only recently begun to do it more consciously.[68] One

of the reasons he gives for this is that we have contextualized the Christian faith for so long and so successfully in the West that it has become "culturally invisible."[69] In other words, we in the United States have lived in such a thoroughly Christianized culture that there has been little perceived need for contextualization. But this is changing rapidly and dramatically. Studies show that massive immigration movements are rapidly making previously monocultural communities into multicultural havens within the United States.[70] The city of Irvine, CA, where I currently sit writing this is forty percent Asian, forty percent Caucasian, and the remaining twenty percent a mixture of various other ethnicities. In addition, the rapid rise of the "nones" (those claiming no religious affiliation) to over one-quarter of the U. S. population is indicative of an America that is quickly becoming "de-churched."[71]

Missiologist Ralph Winter popularized the evangelism-mission strategy spectrum E1, E2, E3, M1, M2, M3. The spectrum attempted to illustrate the cultural barriers one would have to cross in order to reach a community with the gospel. Possible scenarios ranged from few if any barriers requiring only basic evangelism (E1) to numerous significant barriers requiring careful attention to culture and the use of intentional culture-crossing strategies (M3). Whereas previously E1, E2, and E3 described the vast majority of the U. S. and M1, M2, and M3 the mission fields overseas, that is no longer the case today. Significant parts of the U. S. are sliding further down the scale and requiring the use of M1, M2, and even M3 strategies. In short, those two factors— massive immigration and the tendency toward a "de-churched" society—mean what we intuitively already know: The United States is a mission field and is becoming increasingly similar to foreign mission fields. Consequently, contextualization strategies once reserved for foreign mission fields, must now be employed intentionally on the home front.

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Finally, if I have indeed made my case about the reality of "contextualization" because of the inevitable translatable nature of the Christian faith, then I would make two further proposals. First, let the conversation begin about *how* to contextualize the faith in ways that remain faithful to our theological heritage and to the mission of

which God has privileged us to be a part. And, secondly, let us encourage one another in this endeavor, while also gently holding one another accountable.

Endnotes

[1] Pastors John MacArthur and Thabiti Anyabwile as cited in a blog by Ed Stetzer, August 11, 2010, "Calling for Contextualization: Part 4," *Christianity Today: The Exchange*, February 17, 2017, http://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2010/august/calling-for-contextualization-part-4-untangling-cultural.html

[2] The two classic works on contextualization are Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, rev. ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002) [originally published as an article in 1985] and Robert J. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (London: SCM Press, 1985). For more of an evangelical approach, see, e.g., David J. Hesselgrave and Edward Rommen, *Contextualization: Meanings, Methods, and Models* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989); Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 75–103; Charles Kraft, "The Development of Contextualization Theory in Euroamerican Missiology," in *Appropriate Christianity*, ed. Charles Kraft (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2005), 15–34; A. Scott Moreau, *Contextualization in World Missions: Mapping and Assessing Evangelical Models* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2012). For an intriguing collection of essays and response essays on contemporary issues related to the topic, see David J. Hesselgrave and Ed Stetzer, eds., *Missionshift: Global Mission Issues in the Third Millennium* (Nashville: B&H, 2010), 82–163.

[3] See, e.g., Roger French, *Medicine before Science: The Business of Medicine from the Middle Ages to the Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 9–58, 157–184.

[4] See the influential argument of Thomas Aquinas: *Summa Theologica* I, qu. 1, art. 4.

[5] David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991), 421–422.

[6] Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 422.

[7] Bengt Hägglund, *Die Heilige Schrift und ihre Deutung in der Theologie Johann Gerhards: Eine Untersuchung über das altlutherische Schriftverständnis* (Lund: C.W.K. Gleerup, 1951), 16–80, 212–218, 242–255. For a short summary available in English, see Bengt Hägglund, "Pre-Kantian hermeneutics in Lutheran Orthodoxy," *Lutheran Quarterly* 20 (2006), 322–325. I also explore this in some depth in Glenn K. Fluegge, "The Making of the Theologian: The Nature and Study of *Theologia* according to Johann Gerhard" (PhD dissertation, University of Pretoria, 2015), 84–121.

[8] Hägglund, *Heilige Schrift*, 214.

[9] Max Wundt, *Die deutsche Schulmetaphysik des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1939), 23.

[10] Some would trace this epistemological break already to René Descartes in the seventeenth century, see Gary Hatfield, "The Senses and the Fleshless Mind: The Meditations as Cognitive Exercises," in *Essays on Descarte's Meditations,* ed. A. O. Rorty (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986), 45–48.

[11] "Up to now it has been assumed that all *our cognition must conform to the objects*. . . . Hence let us once try whether we do not get farther with the problems of metaphysics by assuming that *the objects must conform to our cognition . . .* which is to establish something about objects before they are given to us. This would be just like the first thoughts of Copernicus, who, when he did not make good progress in the explanation of the celestial motions if he assumed that the entire celestial host *revolves around the observer*, tried to see if he might not have greater success if he made *the observer revolve and left the stars at rest*" (italics mine) (Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. and ed. Paul Guyer & Allen W. Wood [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998], 110).

[12] Fluegge, "Making of the Theologian," 95.

[13] Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of the Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (London: Yale University Press, 1974), 5–6.

[14] See the summary and comments by James Voelz, "Literary Interpretation of the Scriptures (Mark 8:22–26)," in *Listening to the Word of God: Exegetical Approaches*, ed. Achim Behrens and Jorg Christian Salzmann (Göttingen: Edition Ruprecht, 2016), 75–76.

[15] Voelz, "Literary Interpretations," 74–75.

[16] Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 422.

[17] For an introduction to history and thought of postmodernism, see Lawrence E. Cahoone, *From Modernism to Postmodernism: An Anthology* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996); David J. Hoeveller, Jr., *The Postmodern Turn: American Thought and Culture in the 1970's* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1996).

[18] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "A Lamp in the Labyrinth: The Hermeneutics of 'Aesthetic' Theology," *Trinity Journal* 8 (1987): 37–39.

[19] Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 424. For an insightful response to such a "hermeneutic of suspicion," see Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1989), 149–154.

[20] Moreau, *Contextualization in World Missions*, 33. For a helpful history of the different missionary organizations (ecumenical, fundamentalist, and evangelical) that arose in the wake of the conference at Edinburgh, see David J. Hesselgrave, "Will We Correct the Edinburgh Error? Future Mission in Historical Perspective," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 49.2 (Spring 2007): 121–131.

[21] Moreau, *Contextualization in World Missions*, 33–35.

[22] Michael Pocock, Gailyn Van Rheenen, & Douglas McConnell, *The Changing Face of World Missions: Engaging Contemporary Issues and Trends* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 322.

[23] David J. Bosch, *Witness to the World: The Christian Mission in Theological Perspective* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1980), 38.

[24] Pocock, Van Rheenen, McConnell, *Changing Face of World Missions*, 322. It is then not surprising, as Hesselgrave ("Edinburgh Error", 126) has pointed out that, whereas mainline protestant denominations accounted for eighty percent of the North American missionary force at the beginning of the twentieth century, they accounted for only six percent at the end of the century.

[25] Shoki Coe, "Contextualized Theology," in *Mission Trends No. 3: Asian, African, and Latin American Contributions to a Radical, Theological Realignment in the Church*, ed. Gerald H. Anderson and Thomas F. Stransky (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 19–24.

[26] F. Ross Kinsler, "Mission and Context: The Current Debate About Contextualization," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 14.1 (1978): 87.

[27] Hesselgrave, "Edinburgh Error," 126.

[28] Ibid.

[29] See, e.g., Byang H. Kato, "The Gospel, Cultural Context and Religious Syncretism," in *Let the Earth Hear His Voice*, ed. J. D. Douglas (Minneapolis: World Wide Publications, 1975); Charles Kraft, "The Contextualization of Theology," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 14.1 (1978): 31–38; Kinsler, "Mission and Context" (1978): 23–29; Bruce J. Nicholls, *Contextualization: A Theology of Gospel and Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1979); Krikor Haleblian, "The Problem of Contextualization," *Missiology: An International Review* 11.1 (1983): 95–111; Richard W. Engle, "Contextualization in Missions: A Biblical and Theological Appraisal," *Grace Theological Journal* 4.1 (1983): 85–107; David J. Hesselgrave & Rommen, *Contextualization* (1989).

[30] See endnote 2.

[31] See, e.g., David J. Hesselgrave, "Contextualization Continuum," *Gospel in Context* 2.3 (1979): 4–11; Bruce J. Nicholls, "Towards a Theology of Gospel and Culture," in *Gospel and Culture: The Papers of a Consultation on the Gospel and Culture, Covened by the Lausanne Committee's Theology and Education Group*, ed. John R. W. Stott and Robert T. Coote (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1979), 69–82.

[32] A cherished part of the Nicene Creed, the Greek term *homoousion* was sharply debated by the semi-Arians and fiercely defended by Athanasius despite its non-biblical origin (see his *Defense of the Nicene Definition*).

[33] Luther rather vehemently opposed the use of *habitus* in the theological realm. It only entered into Lutheran theological language, borrowed from Reformed theologians, around the turn of the seventeenth century and was hotly debated at that time in the often overlooked "*habitus* controversy." See Markus Friedrich, *Die Grenzen der Vernunft* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004), 179–222, 300–308. For a summary in English, see Fluegge, "Making of the Theologian," 56–68.

[34] Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 142.

[35] For example, a term such as "indigenization" would never pass muster with more recent conceptualizations of missions, such as "Diaspora Missiology." See Enoch Wan, *Diaspora Missiology: Theory, Methodology, and Practice* (Portland: Institute of Diaspora Studies, 2011).

[36] Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture*, 2nd ed. (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2009).

[37] Ibid, 3. Translation studies have increasingly shown the significance of the cultural factor in translation; see, e.g., Michael P. DeJonge and Christiane Tietz, "Introduction: Translating Religion," in *Translating Religion: What is Lost and Gained?*, ed. Michael P. DeJonge and Christiane Tietz (New York: Routledge, 2015), 3–4.

[38] Sanneh, *Translating the Message*, 1–55.

[39] Ibid, 5.

[40] Augustine, "Christian Doctrine," in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, vol. 2, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. J. F. Shaw (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1889), II.6, 536.

[41] Stephen Neill, *A History of Christian Missions* (London: Penguin, 1964), 47–48.

[42] Ibid, 67. For the mission efforts to the Slavic people of the Northern Danube and the struggle for the vernacular, see Sanneh, *Translating the Message*, 81–92.

[43] James A. Nestingen, "Luther's Cultural Translation of the Catechism," *Lutheran Quarterly* 15.4 (2001): 440–452.

[44] Ibid, 443–448.

[45] Ibid, 448–449.

[46] Sanneh, *Translating the Message*, 122–190.

[47] Sanneh (*Translating the Message*, 252–276) provides a very helpful analysis of the contrast between Christianity and Islam in this regard.

[48] Newbigin, *Gospel*, 145.

[49] Sanneh, *Translating the Message*, 33–34. Of course, historically the two approaches are not so easily untangled, e.g., missionaries serving as agents of "civilization"; nevertheless, as Sanneh has pointed out, for Christianity the "preponderant balance of emphasis" has fallen on the side of "mission by translation" (p. 34).

[50] For a delightful taste, I would recommend starting with the first five essays in Angus J. L. Menuge, ed., *Christ and Culture in Dialogue* (St. Louis: Concordia Academic Press, 1999), 31–144.

[51] Martin E. Marty, "Articles of War, Articles of Peace: Christianity and Culture," in *Christ and Culture in Dialogue*, ed. Angus J. L. Menuge (St. Louis: Concordia Academic Press,

1999), 64. This matter became a point of contention in the debate between Reformed and Lutheran theologians regarding the Lord's Supper. The Reformed held that the "finite was incapable of bearing the infinite" (*finitum non capax infiniti*) and, thus, the bread and wine could not be the Lord's true body and blood.

[52] C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 64.

[53] For the significant difference between "revelation" and "inspiration" and inspiration's necessary connection to personal, cultural, and historical factors, see the brief overview by Wilbert Kreiss, *Thus Speaks the Lord. The Doctrine of Holy Scripture: Authority, Inspiration, and Interpretation*, trans. Lyne Schmidt and David Somers (St. Louis: LCMS World Mission, 2000), 34–43.

[54] This society, http://www.biblicalarchaeology.org, publishes the *Biblical Archeology Review*, a journal that seeks to act as a bridge between the Bible and the academic science of archeology.

[55] Bruce L. Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language*, 3rd ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2008), 52. Shelley offers an intriguing overview of this "first major test to the faith in the Event" and the Church's response; see pp. 46–56.

[56] Ibid, 54–55.

[57] See, e.g., Dean Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament: Patterns for Theology and Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005); Engle, "Contextualization," 91–99.

[58] See endnote 37.

[59] Missiologists have been making this case for quite some time. Biblical scholars over the past few decades, especially proponents of the "New Perspective on Paul," some with more dubious motives than others, have also picked up this theme. While I believe emphasizing the socio-cultural dimension of Paul's Gospel is a helpful addition to Pauline studies, I do not embrace some of the directions and implications of the New Perspective on Paul which would make his teaching of justification peripheral and incidental to his theology. See Mark Seifrid, "The 'New Perspective on Paul' and Its Problems," *Themelios* 25.2 (2000): 4–18.

[60] I see this as an implication or application of Paul's foundational doctrine of justification, not vice versa that his doctrine stems incidentally from his concern for racial inclusivism. See Mark Seifrid, "The New Perspective from Paul," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 14.3 (2010): 23–26.

[61] Many proponents of the New Perspective on Paul have been quick to point out the implications of "faith alone" for racial inclusivism, e.g., the idea of "gracism" in Michael F. Bird, Tremper Longmann III, and Scot McKnight, eds., *The Story of God Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 130–136. I believe it also helpful to connect his insistence on "faith alone" (Rom 3–4) to his proposed missionary trip to Spain (Rom 15:24) and, therefore, to highlight the universal, "culture-crossing" missionary thrust of "faith alone." See Thomas Schirrmacher, "Romans as a Charter for World Missions: A Lesson in the Relation of Systematic Theology and Missiology," *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 10.4 (1993): 159–161.

[62] Large Catechism, part 1, First Commandment; Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 386.

[63] See, e.g., *Apology of the Augsburg Confession*, art. 4, §§ 130–139; Kolb & Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 141–142.

[64] I am not here dismissing the primary work of the Holy Spirit in conversion, but simply pointing to the reality that the Spirit has called us mediately "by the Gospel" (Small Catechism, The Creed, Art. 3; Kolb & Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 355).

[65] For an insightful, albeit in German, article on justification as the "shaping power" of missions, see Georg F Vicedom, *Die Rechtfertigung als gestaltende Kraft der Mission* (Neuendettelsau: Freimund, 1952).

[66] See endnote 49. Sanneh underscores what he calls the "persuasive rule" as one of the reasons Christianity has opted for "mission by translation" (p. 34). In other words, the obligation felt by missionaries to persuade potential converts toward a change of heart has made them open to translating the faith.

[67] Admittedly, the question itself is rather paternalistic. It ignores the significant reality that for the rapidly growing church in the South and East, the United States is the foreign mission field and that missionaries to the States will inevitably engage in the process of contextualization. See Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford, 2011).

[68] Richard Muller, *The Study of Theology: From Biblical Interpretation to Contemporary Formulation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 201–204.

[69] Ibid, 202.

[70] Jenkins, *The Next Christendom,* 125–131.

[71] James Emery White, *The Rise of the Nones: Understanding and Reaching the Religiously Unaffiliated* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014), 11–19.

Quincentennial Celebration: The Paradigm Shift from Martin Luther Then to Ours Now—Part One

Enoch Wan

Editor's Note: Dr. Wan served as the keynote speaker at the 2017 Multiethnic Symposium at Concordia Seminary, Jan. 24–25, 2017. He has graciously consented to the publication of his presentation, which is here presented in two parts. This first installment focuses on his analysis of the contextual paradigm shifts of both the Reformation era and our contemporary age. The second installment will deal with his "personal proposal to the leadership of Lutheran church bodies in North America in the twenty-first century," based on the three global trends identified in this first segment: the shifting landscape of Christendom, the phenomenon of diaspora, and the rise of socio-cultural relativism.

Abstract: Historical review of the paradigm shift of Martin Luther occurred five hundred years ago, followed by a personal proposal to the leadership of Lutheran church bodies in North America in the twenty-first century for a contextual paradigm shift, based on three selected global trends (i.e. the shifting landscape of Christendom, the phenomenon of diaspora, the rise of socio-cultural relativism which includes postmodernist epistemology, religious, ethical, and cultural pluralism), leading to the embrace of new paradigms (i.e. multiethnic ecclesiology and strategic Kingdom partnership, diaspora missiology, and relational realism).

I. Introduction

It is an honor to participate in the 2017 Multiethnic Symposium, especially in this year of celebration of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation.

This paper will begin with a brief historical review of the paradigm shift of Martin Luther and the reformers that occurred five hundred years ago, followed by an analysis of three selected global trends that characterize the paradigm shift of our

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contemporary mission context. My **assumption** for this topic is as follows: during the quincentennial celebration of the Reformation and its enduring accomplishments, the Lutheran churches in the US in the twenty-first century are encouraged to have vision and action for facing the present and future challenges in the mission of Christ in the spirit of responsible stewardship of these great gifts and legacies.

II. The Paradigm Shift of the Reformation Era

Martin Luther and other reformers of the time were part of the wave of change in various areas of life.

> Luther was the central figure of the Protestant reformation. There were religious reformers prior to him. However, it was Luther who brought the reformation to fruition and defined its essence. Today Luther stands in the direct line of some 58 million Lutherans and indirectly of some 400 million Protestants. He also helped set in plan forces that reshaped Catholicism and ushered in the modern world.[1]

There was a "paradigm shift,"[2] i.e., a radical change in the understanding of all reality of life, from the old paradigm of Medieval Catholic tradition to the new paradigm during the Reformation as shown in Figure 1. Listed in Figure 1A are three aspects of the paradigm shift (doctrine, religion, and spirituality) with more in Figure 1B (politics, communication, etc.) In accordance with Medieval Catholic tradition, doctrinal authority was exclusively the monopoly of the pope and dominated by church tradition and church councils. Salvation was accessible only through the Catholic Church and by good works of both clergy and laity, i.e. work-based merit and law-based salvation. The sale of indulgences was motivated by monetary gain for massive construction of Catholic edifices motivated by the desire to earn God's favor and reduce time in purgatory for both the living and the dead. At the time, the ultimate end of all was to the glory of individuals and the institutional church. Doctrinally, the reformers ushered in a paradigm shift by replacing the Medieval Catholic tradition with the Reformation "solas" as listed in Figure 1A.

Under "religion" in Figure 1A, three aspects of the Medieval Catholic Church included church tradition, Scripture, and rule. The paradigm shift was marked by a major departure from Roman Catholic Church tradition. The interpretation of Scripture was no longer dominated by papal authority and clergy alone but by the community of believers, and the Latin vulgate was replaced with the vernacular of the land for the common folks. Spirituality was no longer institutionally sanctioned by the Catholic Church but based on individual conscience and free personal pursuit of spirituality.

Figure 1—Paradigm shift: Old paradigm of Medieval Catholicism
→ New paradigm of Martin Luther & fellow reformers

Figure 1A—Doctrine, Religion, & Spirituality

Aspect	Old paradigm of Medieval Catholic Tradition	New paradigm of Martin Luther & company
Doctrine	Medieval Catholic Tradition: • Authority: papal declaration, church tradition, and church councils • Salvation is located in the church -Good works → atone spiritual debt • Work/law-based salvation • Indulgences: God's favor, purgatory • Ultimate end of all to man's glory or church's glory	Reformation: The Reformation "solas" • Bible only (*Sola Scriptura*) -inspired authoritative Word of God • Christ only (*Solo Christo*) -salvation by grace through faith in Christ • Grace only (*Sola Gratia*): grace-based • Faith only (*Sola Fide*): faith-based[3] • God's Glory only (*Soli Deo Gloria*) -efficacious call of God to His glory
Religion	Church tradition: • Auricular confession, celibacy, indulgences, papacy, pilgrimages, purgatory, monastic vows, relics, saints, worship practices, etc. Scripture: • In Latin vulgate alone, handled by clergy alone • subordinated to church authority Rule: • Principle of papal & clergy authority • Judaic legalism and superstition	Reformation: • freed from church tradition: the 7 sacraments, celibacy, performance of the sacrificial Mass, magisterial authority Scripture: • in vernacular, by common folks • interpretation done in community of believers Rule: • Principle of freedom in Christ, priesthood of believers, and authority of Scripture
Spirituality	Institutionally sanctioned spirituality	Individual conscience & pursuit of spirituality

Based on Medieval Catholic tradition, the church (papal authority) was above the state (kingdom and political order). In ethics, Luther's understanding of *Vocatio,*[4] to glorify God and serve neighbors through work, led to a productive work ethic and self-reliance. Leaders of the Reformation like Martin Luther had successfully ushered in the great creativity and prosperity of the modern era. In terms of economy, the theocracy of Medieval Catholicism would be replaced by a new mentality, "the Protestant ethic," as termed by Max Weber.[5] The monopoly of the Catholic establishment in communication was broken when movable-type printing became available to the public to be better informed.

In Figure 1B, several other aspects are noted: politics, law, social order, ethics, science, economy, and communication. The modern era of Western civilization was ushered in by the confluence of two major factors, i.e., the massive, extensive, and transformational socio-cultural changes of the Reformation and the Renaissance.

Figure 1B – Politics, Communication, etc.

Aspect	Old Paradigm	New Paradigm
Politics & law	Power: church governed politics Authority: the church ruled over every sphere of life	Power: separation of church & state Liberty: right & obligation of the individual conscience (modern democracy)
Social order	Papal authority & concentration of power in Rome	The Peasants' War, the indigenous movements, & "Protestantism"[6]
Ethics	Subject to the authority of the pope and ecclesiastical order	Individual liberty & conscience[7] "*Vocatio*"[8]
Science	Conformism: no individual pursuit	The Renaissance—free to explore all aspects
Economy	Monasticism & church vocations	"The protestant ethic"—Max Weber
Communication	Monopoly of the Catholic establishment	Printing and literacy: • Movable-type printing & informed public • Linguistic & literary legacy

III. An analysis of global trends in the twenty-first century, leading to a personal proposal to the leadership of Lutheran church bodies in North America for a contextual paradigm shift (*Ed. note*: The focus of Part Two)

I wish to identify three global trends that will require a paradigm shift in the twenty-first century North American context. Figure 2 summarizes these, with action points to be considered by leaders in the Lutheran church.

Figure 2 – A modest proposal for action in the context of North America in the twenty-first century

Global Trends	Old Paradigm	New Paradigm	Action Point
#1A -- Shifting landscape of "Christendom: northern hemisphere → southern; West→ rest;	Euro-centric	Multilinear & multidirectional	Multiethnic ecclesiology & multiethnic leadership, strategic Kingdom partnership
#1B -- The emergence of the global South	Paternalist approach	"mission of majority world"[9]	Global theology & contextualization
#2 -- The phenomenon of diaspora: internationally to G7 & internally to urban centers	Traditional missiology: territorial, unilineal, etc.	Traditional missiology; → Diaspora missiology	New strategy, e.g. BAM,[10] holistic mission,[11] diaspora missions, missions at your door step & "glocal"[12]
#3A -- The failure of traditional institutions: marriage, family, & ethics	Traditionalist approach	Relational realism paradigm; Relational approach in discipleship, counseling, missionary training,[13] etc.	Relation-oriented approach in ministry
#3B -- "socio-cultural relativism" - "post-modernism, religious, & cultural pluralism, i.e. multiculturalism	Modernist paradigm and critical realism		Revitalizing Christian faith and practice as counter culture

Global Trend 1—Shifting Landscape of Christendom and the Rise of the Global South

There is a shifting landscape of Christendom from the northern to the southern hemisphere as observed by Philip Jenkins and Andrew Walls.[14] This is evidenced by various phenomena, such as the fact that the current pope is from South America (not Europe) and that the Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization (LCWE) II and LCWE III occurred in Manila and South Africa respectively (not in Europe, but in Asia and Africa). In light of the demise of the West in a post-Christian mode and the surge of mission forces in the global south in Christian missions (see #1B in Figure 2), there are many practical implications for contemporary ministry to be considered by the leadership of the

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Lutheran churches here and now. Here I will note several key aspects to be discussed further in Part Two: replace the Euro-centric and paternalist paradigm of traditional

missiology with a multilinear and multidirectional paradigm, embrace multiethnic ecclesiology to reflect the population reality, promote multiethnic leadership and adjust to Kingdom-orientation by active involvement in contextualization, and engage in multilevel strategic partnership with churches in the global south.

Global Trend 2—The Phenomenon of Diaspora and Diaspora Missions

I would offer a definition of "diaspora" and description of the phenomenon as follows:

> Etymologically, the term "*diaspora*" is a derivation from the Greek word "*diaspeirein*" which means "to scatter about" or "disperse" (from, *dia–* about, across + *speirein*—to scatter). . . . The size and significance of diasporas have increased in the 21st century. Approximately 3.2% of the global population lives in countries other than their places of birth because of urbanization, international migration, and displacement by war and famine. According to a recent UN report, diaspora population was 175 million in year 2000, 192 million in year 2005, and 154 in 1990 and the total sum of international migrants will hit as many as 405 million by 2050.[15]

The trend of the global phenomenon of diaspora is reversing the historic direction of shifting Christendom (from the West to the rest and from northern to southern hemisphere), with massive numbers in the diaspora moving toward the G7 countries, that is, toward the northern hemisphere and from the rest to the West. Therefore, there are no more "unreached people" and no more unilineal/unidirectional missionary deployment as in traditional mission. The diaspora phenomenon described thus far does not include the unprecedented internal migration of the two most populous countries, China and India, due to urbanization[16] and the ever-increasing population shift that results.

"Diaspora missions" can be defined as "Christians' participation in God's redemptive mission to evangelize their kinsmen on the move, and through them to reach out to natives in their homelands and beyond." There are four types of diaspora missions:

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- Missions *to* the diaspora—reaching the diaspora groups in forms of evangelism or pre-evangelistic social services, then discipling them to become worshiping communities and congregations.

- Missions *through* the diaspora—diaspora Christians reaching out to their kinsmen through networks of friendship and kinship in host countries, their homelands, and abroad.

- Missions *by* and *beyond* the diaspora—motivating and mobilizing diaspora Christians for cross-cultural missions to other ethnic groups in their host countries, homelands, and abroad.

- Missions *with* the diaspora—mobilizing non-diasporic Christians individually and institutionally to partner with diasporic groups and congregations.[17]

The implications of the importance of this phenomenon will be discussed in Part Two.

Global Trend 3 (see Figure 2)—Failure of Traditional Institutions and the Rise of Socio-cultural Relativism

There are many factors contributing to the failure of traditional institutions of marriage and family,[18] such as the women's liberation movement that began in the 1960s–1970s, the common practice of co-habitation, publicly recognized same sex marriage, etc. The advent of the feminist movement and homosexual marriage have caused the demise of the traditional family.[19]

The term "socio-cultural relativism" is a reference to "post-modernist epistemology," religious, ethical and cultural pluralism (multiculturalism). By "postmodern epistemology"[20] I refer to the newly emerged worldview that denies the idea of a single universal truth. From a postmodern perspective, it is futile to attempt systematically to define or impose a logic on events due to our limitations.[21] "Religious pluralism" is an attitude or posture regarding the coexisting diversity of religious systems in society.[22] Cultural pluralism (multiculturalism) has endured from antiquity to postmodernity. Ethical pluralism is the conviction that moral theories of what is "right" and "wrong" validly coexist, though a theory might be incompatible and/or incommensurable with the holder's personal view. The terms "value pluralism," "ethical pluralism," "moral pluralism" may be used in ethics interchangeably[23] to recognize that several values (even conflicting ones) may be equally correct and valid, because there is no objective judgment call.

"Multiculturalism" ("cultural pluralism") can be a description/conviction or government policy, e.g. the "cultural mosaic" of the Canadian government, recognizing the coexistence of diverse cultures. However, the term "diverse cultures"[24] is a fluid term applicable to "racial, religious, or cultural groups" (macro-

level) or "behavioral pattern, cultural assumptions, cognitive patterns, communicative styles and worldview" (micro-level).

Due to the failure of traditional institutions and the rise of socio-cultural relativism, a paradigm shift is proposed that embraces a "relational realism paradigm," by which I mean "a conceptual framework for understanding reality based on the interactive connections between personal beings/Beings."[25] The philosophical element of the relational paradigm is based on "relational realism,"[26] and the methodological element is based on "relational theologizing,"[27] all of which will be dealt with in Part Two of this article.

> Due to the failure of traditional institutions and the rise of socio-cultural relativism, a paradigm shift is proposed that embraces a "relational realism paradigm."

IV. Conclusion

In this paper, I have offered an historical review of the paradigm shift that occurred five hundred years ago and was a significant part of the social context of the Lutheran Reformation. Correspondingly, our present century is witnessing similarly consequential social changes that form the context for mission and missiology today. In what follows, I will offer some practical implications and a proposal to the leadership of Lutheran church bodies in North America in the twenty-first century for a contextual paradigm shift, based on three global trends: the shifting landscape of Christendom, the phenomenon of diaspora, socio-cultural relativism. The proposal should lead to the embrace of new paradigms appropriate to missiological thinking today, including multiethnic ecclesiology, strategic kingdom partnership, diaspora missiology, and relational realism.

Endnotes

[1] "Martin Luther," *New World Encyclopedia*
http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Martin_Luther (retrieved Dec. 20, 2016.
[2] Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions.* 1962; second edition 1970. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press).
[3] Martin Luther, "Faith is a living and unshakable confidence, a belief in the grace of God so assured that man would die a thousand deaths for its sake." *Preface to the Epistle to the Romans.* As quoted by Debra Ronca, "Martin Luther and the New Paradigm," www.reasons.org, July 23, 2014 (retrieved Dec. 29, 2016).
[4] Marc Kolden, "Luther on Vocation" Oct. 1, 2001. Journal of Lutheran Ethics https://www.elca.org/JLE/Articles/1015 (retrieved Dec. 29, 2016).

[5] Enoch Wan, "Protestant Ethic and Chinese Culture: A Reflection of Max Weber's Theory and Methodology," in *East & West: Religious Ethics and Other Essays*, ed. Zhang Zhigang & M.Y. Stewart. (Beijing: Central Translation & Publication of China, 1996).

[6] Originated from a "protest" from Lutheran princes, e.g. Phillip of Hesse, in Lutheran territories in response to the attempts of Emperor's representative to reestablish Catholicism in Lutheran territories at the Second Diet of Speyer.

[7] Luther's tract, "The Freedom of a Christian" (1520)—"A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none; a Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all."

[8] Luther's contribution to the Protestant understanding and practice of *Vocatio* is widely recognized. See Marc Kolden, "Luther on Vocation," Oct. 1, 2001. (Luther Seminary, 1983) from *Word & World*, Volume III, no. 4, 382–390, https://www.elca.org/JLE/Articles/1015 (retrieved Dec. 20, 2016).

[9] Enoch Wan and Michael Pocock (eds), *Missions from the Majority World: Progress, Challenges, and Case Studies* (Evangelical Missiological Society Series Book 17) (William Carey Library, 2009).

[10] BAM (business as mission) is not easily defined but can be described by the characteristics such as: "Profitable and sustainable businesses; Intentional about Kingdom of God purpose and impact on people and nations; Focused on holistic transformation and the multiple bottom lines of economic, social, environmental and spiritual outcomes; Concerned about the world's poorest and least evangelized peoples." From "Business as Mission," *The BAM Review*. January 14, 2015, http://businessasmission.com/what-is-bam/
An extensive coverage (88 pages) on BAM in the document produced by the LCWE Issue Group entitled, "Business as Mission." Lausanne Occasional Paper No. 59, 2004, https://www.lausanne.org/docs/2004forum/LOP59_IG30.pdf (retrieved Dec. 20, 2016).

[11] Holistic Christianity is done with strong integration of the Great Commandment and the Great Commission, engaging in pre-evangelistic Christian charity towards the diaspora.

[12] Tuvya Zaretsky, "Glocalization, Diaspora Missiology, and Friendship Evangelism," May 2010, http://www.lausanneworldpulse.com/themedarticles.php/1280/05-2010?pg=all and Sadiri Joy B. Tira, "Filipino International Network: A Strategic Model for Filipino Diaspora Glocal® Missions," Global Missiology, (October 2004); available at www.GlobalMissiology.org.

[13] Enoch Wan & Mark Hedinger, *Relational Missionary Training: Theology, Theory and Practice* (CA: Urban Loft Publishers, 2017).

[14] Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*. (Oxford University Press, 2002). Andrew Walls, "Culture and Coherence in Christian History," Evangelical Review of Theology, 9, no. 3 (1984): 215.

[15] Enoch Wan. *Diaspora Missiology: Theory, Methodology, and Practice*. Rev. ed. (Portland, OR: Institute of Diaspora Studies, 2014): 13–15.

[16] Enoch Wan & Joe Dow, "Serving China's internal diaspora: motive, means and methods," *Global Missiology*, www.GlobalMissiology.org, January 2016.

[17] Wan, *Diaspora Missiology*, 7–8.

[18] A case in point is the current state in the US as quoted below, by John W. Whitehead, "The Breakdown of the Traditional Family: Why Conservative Christians Should Rethink Their Blame Game," *The Huntington Post*, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/john-w-whitehead/the-breakdown-of-the-trad_b_675444.html—"Since 1974, about 1 million children per year have seen their parents divorce, and children who are exposed to divorce are two to three times more likely than their peers in intact marriages to suffer from serious social or psychological pathologies. In their book *Growing Up with a Single Parent: What Hurts, What Helps*, sociologists Sara McLanahan and Gary Sandefur found that 31% of adolescents with divorced parents dropped

out of high school, compared to 13% of children from intact families. They also concluded that 33% of adolescent girls whose parents divorced became teen mothers, compared to 11% of girls from continuously married families. And McLanahan and her colleagues have found that 11% of boys who come from divorced families end up spending time in prison before the age of 32, compared to 5% of boys who come from intact homes. . . .

Sociologist Paul Amato estimates that if the United States enjoyed the same level of family stability today as it did in 1960, the nation would have 750,000 fewer children repeating grades, 1.2 million fewer school suspensions, approximately 500,000 fewer acts of teenage delinquency, about 600,000 fewer kids receiving therapy, and approximately 70,000 fewer suicides every year."

[19] Gretchen Livingston, in a Pew Research Report dated December 22, 2014, "Fewer than half of U.S. kids today live in a 'traditional' family." http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/12/22/less-than-half-of-u-s-kids-today-live-in-a-traditional-family/

"Fewer than half (46%) of U. S. kids younger than 18 years of age are living in a home with two married heterosexual parents in their first marriage. This is a marked change from 1960, when 73% of children fit this description, and 1980, when 61% did, according to a Pew Research Center analysis of recently released American Community Survey (ACS) and Decennial Census data."

[20] There is an interesting introductory chapter entitled, "The Failure of Traditional Ethics" linking it to the emergence of postmodernist ethics, Stephen G. Morris, *Science and the End of Ethics* (NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 1–12.

[21] Phil Johnson & Joanne Duberley (eds.) *Postmodernist Epistemology—Relativism Unleashed?* (Sage, 2000).

[22] Recent publications of this persuasion are as follows:

- Eck, Diane. *A New Religious America: How a "Christian Country" Has Become the World's Most Religiously Diverse Nation*. San Francisco: Harper, 2001.
- Hutchison, William R. *Religious Pluralism in America: The Contentious History of a Founding Ideal*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003.

[23] "Ethical pluralism," *New World Encyclopedia*, http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Pluralism

[24] The term "diverse cultures"[24] is a fluid one, for there are 140 synonyms and 91 antonyms according to "Power Thesaurus," https://www.powerthesaurus.org/ multicultural (retrieved Dec. 20, 2016). A helpful guide amidst the confusion is *Mapping Multiculturalism* (University of Minnesota Press, 2008), edited by Avery Gordon and Christopher Newfield with twenty-six helpful essays mapping the terrain of multiculturalism in its varied dimensions in the US.

[25] Wan & Hedinger, *Relational Missionary Training*.

[26] Enoch Wan, "The Paradigm of 'Relational Realism'," *Occasional Bulletin*, EMS, vol. 19, no. 2 (Spring 2006):1–4.

[27] Enoch Wan, "Relational Theology and Relational Missiology," *Occasional Bulletin*, EMS, vol. 21, no. 1 (Winter 2007): 1–7.

Multiethnic Ministry: Some Obstacles and Insights to Overcoming Them

Paul Mueller

Editor's Note: The author was invited to respond to the preceding paper presented by Dr. Enoch Wan at the Multiethnic Symposium of Concordia Seminary, Jan. 24, 2017.

Abstract: Both missionary ministry and academic studies help identify barriers as well as bridges as cultures begin to live side-by-side. There are notable organizational as well as cultural and heart barriers which hinder robust partnerships between ethnic groups in the United States and established faith communities with whom connections are made. Some of these may be easily resolved. Others present significant challenges and subsequently require significant change.

Introduction

Multiethnic ministry is a noble goal, but it brings with it challenges that many individuals and organizations have yet to encounter. Through no fault of their own, people approach multiethnic ministry using lenses and worldviews from the world with which they are familiar, not recognizing the inherent flaws in that approach. This paper will attempt to take the normal 30,000-foot theological and missiological look at multiethnic ministry and bring it down to earth with everyday, on-the-ground practices and insights that the church might consider as it attempts to move toward a more multiethnic expression of the church in its own backyard. A teacher by trade, my thought process always moves toward the how to and what to do, and so this paper will share insights and ideas which you can take and apply or implement into your own ministry context.

This paper responds to a question that I was asked, "What do I know related to structural challenges which inhibit the ability of the LCMS to becoming a multicultural/multiethnic church, capable of *diaspora* outreach? How might the

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church navigate, or begin to navigate, the institutional challenges right here in the U. S. so we might be a multiethnic church body or at least working toward that dream?" Asked that question, I knew that I was limited in my ability to respond adequately; I am not an expert on multiethnic ministry. I have not tried to initiate a multiethnic church plant. I have not attempted to incorporate into an existing congregation a multiethnic expression of the church. Thus, my experience in this particular mission ministry is limited to say the least.

Having given reasons, and good ones at that, why you do not need to embrace the insights and ideas in this paper, there are reasons I believe I was asked to answer this question. I have worked in numerous cultures around the globe. I spent most of my boots-on-the-ground cross-cultural ministry in West Africa, but have worked across the African continent and taught and worked in Indonesia, the Philippines, Viet Nam, Kazakhstan, Mexico, Thailand, and a few other countries for shorter periods of time. I have spent time with mission leaders who have served in many places around the globe, including America; and our conversations have been robust and challenging. I have learned a few things along the way and hopefully some of those are translatable to our American context.

Probably the other reason you might consider embracing the insights and ideas in this paper, and maybe this the most important, is that I am not afraid to express my opinion, which of course, you are free to ignore, debate, or agree with and take and move to action.

One note as you wade through this paper—it seems that many, if not all, of the items I will mention are interrelated. When you touch on one issue, you are also touching a number of others. So please forgive me if this paper seems to repeat itself when entering a new topic.

Ethnic ministry as we are discussing it here is not a program. It is not a strategy. It is about people and at least two cultures, and all that they bring with it. If I were asked to tell you how Africans could do Caucasian ministry, you would think me a fool if I simply talked about one factor only: worship style, for example. That would not even begin to get the job done.

Let me share three pieces of wisdom—not my own, but I believe wisdom we could all take to heart.

First, it's better to create something that others criticize than to create nothing and criticize others. In my church tribe, we have a tendency to do the second—offer up critique without giving valuable recommendations other than suggesting we continue to do the same things we have done in the past, only

> It's better to create something that others criticize than to create nothing and criticize others.

better. I encourage you to be creative, innovative, bold, courageous, and daring when wading into the waters of multiethnic ministry.

The second bit of wisdom, which I learned from Facebook of all places, is this: In times of change, learners become the leaders while the learned are the leaders of the world that no longer exists. If you are in a leadership position, be wary of your wisdom. The world is definitely in a time of change and those people who are in the midst of it, navigating it, investing deeply in it, and learning while they do so are the leaders within it. We need to listen more than we need to lead.

> In times of change, learners become the leaders while the learned are the leaders of the world that no longer exists.

Third, when beginning to form or gather a multiethnic community of faith, diversity must become a treasured value. The community must want it. And that will only happen when the community of faith experiences an uncomfortableness with the lack of diversity. Leadership needs to build a holy discontent. If a congregation or faith community truly and sincerely desires a multiethnic expression among the gathered faithful community, then movement can happen.

Once the movement begins based on a Christ-like desire for its reality, a multiethnic new normal will begin to supplant a desire to return to what was normal in the past. It will embrace what now is becoming and work hard to sustain it. Diversity must become a new normal in the life of the church. Tradition is a powerful motivator. If diversity becomes tradition, it will be difficult to change it.

1.   Living in Exile—Ethnic Leaders Have Something to Teach Us

Regardless of how one labels or describes it, the church is no longer the center of the universe. It is living in a post-Christendom or postmodern world, or as some are bold to proclaim today, living in exile. And it has no idea how to do so. In my lifetime and yours, the LCMS has never been marginalized; never been pushed to the fringes. The church has worked and served and ministered in a world which respected and listened to its voice. The church has had privileged status. Add to that our white privilege—and the church has had a relatively easy row to hoe.

For Christians in the church of Acts, living as a church in exile was common from the beginning. Saul helped start the persecution, and it continued from the Roman emperor's throne. Peter wrote to the Christians who were living as a marginalized community, as a church in exile, persecuted and in fear, "Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us" (1 Pt 2:11–12).

From the very beginning of his letter Peter labels them as such. He writes, "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to God's elect, exiles scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia" (1 Pt 1:1). To paraphrase the comments of Rev. Dr. Robert Newton (President of the California-Nevada-Hawaii District of the LCMS) about these verses: Though a comma appears after the phrase "to God's elect, exiles scattered", another possible reading would be to remove the comma so it reads, "to God's elect exiles, scattered," reinforced by Peter's follow-up comments from the verses in chapter two above. God, just as He chose the Old Testament Israelites to be His exiled people in the *diaspora* of Babylon and Assyria, people chosen by God to be scattered as seeds planted among the tares and weeds, chose these new Christians to be His exiles in the middle of a world they would have never chosen. And those new Christians began to learn how to live in that world and still impact God's kingdom in powerful and effective ways. By the middle of the fourth century, some have estimated there were over 3.5 million Christians, populating over 50% of the Roman Empire. Now that is impact! How did they do that in three hundred years? What did they do?

Leap ahead two thousand years to today. Many people around the world today understand how to live in that world as exiles, marginalized and sidelined. Christians are jailed for being Christian. Churches are burned. Police halt gatherings. Governments give preference to non-Christian requests. They experience the persecution of the church, yet these modern-day Christians in exile still "git 'er dun."

Most of us in America have never experienced in any significant way or for any length of time—or even have a real sense of—what it is like to live and work as a Christian leader in places where the church is not at or near the center of the culture.

I was recently in Viet Nam several times to teach for the Lutheran Institute of Southeast Asia (LISA), the last time in Ho Chi Minh City. The church there is a quiet organization. It is not boastful or loud. And it is postured as such due to the constant watchful eye of the government over its work. But a few months before I taught there my second time, the Christian leadership development program was called into question by the public authorities. The LCMS missionary was present at that moment when they arrived. Try to put yourself in his shoes!

That missionary was also the one who received me in Ho Chi Minh City a few months later. He was subsequently told by the local Christian leaders it would be best if he were not around in Ho Chi Minh City while I taught. And I was told that we might have

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some visitors—and not the kind one is glad to see in your worship or teaching moment. How many of you even think about that type of possible persecution in America?

Many of the ethnic leaders in our midst know exactly how that feels, how that works, and how to manipulate the system in order to remain a ministry in those places. And they bring that mindset and worldview to America—a place where the church is slowly, at times quickly, and if not there already, moving ever so close to being the *diaspora* in exile. These wise, seasoned leaders understand that the church is not a given, that the ministry is always in jeopardy, that in a moment's notice, the doors might close and/or someone could be hustled off to the police station.

We Lutheran Christians in North America have much to learn from them. Multiethnic ministry will be possible only if we listen to these leaders and follow their lead as we enter this world of change. For as confident as we are about our understanding of our theology, we have much to learn about how to live that same theology in a new world which we have never experienced.

2. Partnership—What Is It?

When an organization has lived long with privilege and power and authority, and then add to that list a distinguished history as well as a powerful education system and assumed theological acumen as well as money, it is difficult for that organization to recognize the powerful platform on which it stands when trying to form partnerships in which each partner works together and alongside each other with equal privilege and power and authority. In multiethnic partnerships, it is difficult for the partner who has lived with privilege to share, let alone give away power and authority.

Let me share with you a short definition of partnership which has served me well. Shared Risk + Shared Responsibility = Shared Rewards. Partnerships need to be built on trust and mutual admiration for one another. Each partner brings to the table the resources, gifts, skills, and wisdom that his is able to supply in an honest, transparent, conversation and dialogue. No partner can assume authority and power over another simply because it seems to bring more to the table/partnership.

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Partnerships require several things. First of all, when dealing with two or more culture groups, cross-cultural competency is required, and not just from the dominant culture group, but from all culture groups sitting at the table. But let me say this to the dominant Anglo culture in our LCMS congregations: The ethnic communities

which surround you, which live among you and which drive to work each day and go to Walmart and McDonalds and the bank and sports fields and schools, know your culture far better than you know theirs. They negotiate and navigate our America each and every day—just in order to survive. They may not know why we do all the things we do, but you know far less about their culture than they know about yours.

Remember this when you begin to work toward multiethnic ministry: The visitor knows you better than you think they do, and you have very little knowledge about the life and culture of the immigrant in your midst. In that regard, as partnership conversations begin, might I suggest that you find people who are bi- and tri-cultural, who want to understand and are committed to understanding the cultures of people different from themselves. Those who are familiar with the consequences and outcomes when cultures come together have an invaluable contribution to make. Find people who dream in multicultural worldviews.

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Secondly, true partnerships can never be one-way conversations. One partner cannot determine the criteria for what is enough shared risk or shared responsibility or how much shared reward each partner receives in the equation. If one partner determines the criteria for what is enough shared, that partner then becomes a "super partner" with more power and voice. When one side dictates conditions and rewards, the outcome is a contract, not a living, dynamic partnership.

An issue closely related to this conversation is the following: Some ethnic communities would rather have an American partner invest resources into whatever project or program that partner chooses to support rather than lose the investment opportunity by pushing their own ideas. This has sometimes resulted in ministries started but never realized, assets accumulated but never used for ministry.

In my experience, very few national churches—and I believe it plays out in ethnic and multiethnic ministries in this country as well—believe that a mission vision they express will be supported. Why? They are afraid their vision will not connect with the vision of the powerful partner who is willing to share resources, and subsequently the ethnic community will lose the possibility of the investment. On the basis of past experiences with a host of mission funders, they have learned that unless their vision matches the partner's vision *for them*, they will not receive support. As a result, ethnic leaders work very hard to determine which projects will

find better reception among their wealthier partners and pitch those particular types of projects, even if those projects do not support their real vision for themselves.

These conversations are genuinely courageous. But true partnership cannot exist if one party is perceived to hold the power and authority and is the final arbiter of decisions that need to be made, or if one or more parties are afraid to voice opinions, are afraid to share visions, or are afraid to participate fully because they believe that rewards will be changed if they do. Those scenarios describe a partnership in name only. Partnerships.Are.Not.One.Way!

3. Who Holds and Has Access to Leadership Authority and Power?

As I just mentioned, power and authority are significant issues in ethnic and multiethnic partnerships. In the LCMS, it is quite obvious who is in charge and holds the leadership and decision making powers. As many studies have shown, the LCMS is 95%+ white. And people in leadership reflect that reality even more starkly.

This fact is no different in our local congregations and faith communities. Local leadership on the church council or the chairs of committees reflect that same reality: almost all are members of the local white congregation, even in congregations desiring to move to multiethnic models.

One of the most obvious structural issues to address in moving toward a multiethnic congregation or faith community is found in the question, "Who has the authority, the power, the vote?" So consider your congregation's church council or board of elders. How many people on those committees vote? And when the votes are counted, how many of them represent the white dominant culture? In my opinion, if 51% of the votes are white votes, you will never have an effective multiethnic faith community. The cultural superiority and decision-making processes are all slanted toward the local, normally white Lutheran church. If the faith community is to be white and Hispanic, over 50% of the votes need to be Hispanic. If the faith community is inviting several ethnicities into the community, then representation must be predominantly non-white vote.

> One of the most obvious structural issues to address in moving toward a multiethnic congregation or faith community is found in the question, "Who has the authority, the power, the vote?"

I have witnessed immigrant groups finally leave because they could not get along with the existing Anglo church, even though both sincerely intended it to work and tried hard to make it do so. The cultural distance was just too great, and the local white Lutheran congregation just could not embrace the differences or allow the immigrant group to lead; decisions were always made to benefit the existing Anglo church.

I have also experienced a courtesy allowed to ethnic groups to speak their mind and hearts, but a rigid, unrelenting ability to act on their wisdom. The local dominant church is simply not able to see through spectacles filled with multicultural lenses. Ethnic leadership as it begins to speak on those significant issues has local congregations listening, nodding politely, giving adequate moments to the issue being discussed, and they then simply ignore the comments and insights and wisdom shared and move on.

If a faith community desires to become multiethnic, the ethnic community or communities must have power and authority and voice and vote. In my opinion an Anglo dominant church that also holds the power and authority and voice and vote cannot lead a successful multiethnic faith community unless the ethnic communities coming together have already assimilated into American patterns, values, and worldviews.

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4. Generational Considerations in Multiethnic Ministry

Let me share another hurdle with which you all are probably aware. First-, second-, third-, and perhaps even fourth-generation realities exist. They cannot be ignored or overlooked. And though these few issues I will highlight are not exhaustive, they are important things to consider.

For example, it is difficult to create multiethnic community and worship when the heart language still needs to be spoken or at least used regularly for communication in worship or in meetings. Spoken language is a barrier, but so is nonverbal language: the styles and forms and practices. The various worldviews which shape people groups with their values and their presuppositions that underlie all manner of talk and thought and activity—all are barriers which need to be addressed.

Unfortunately, in my opinion, too many of us still hold to the presupposition that immigrants need to become like us in order for them to be successful in the West. They need to learn English, understand our Western customs and styles and forms, begin to think like Americans, and embrace our values; in the words of Nike, they need to be like Mike.

Assumptions that require those who come to America and wish to join Lutheran congregations or partner with Lutherans in beginning Lutheran congregations to become English speakers and thinkers must be re-imagined. If we hold that the Good News and theological constructs and doctrines can be clearly comprehended and understood only in English or German or Greek or Hebrew languages or translated

into another language from the texts we in the West have written and/or through American culture or Western forms and styles and structures, we are holding the Gospel hostage to an ethnocentric, myopic perspective contrary to Scripture. Remember Pentecost: The missionaries spoke in the languages of their ethnic visitors who came to Israel—it was not the other way around.

If the heart language (and all that term means) is the appropriate one for communicating the Good News, then multiethnic worship and ministry will be difficult. Ignoring this important part of anyone's world ignores that person's pre-suppositional starting points which make life work for him/her.

A second insight involves the type of ministries needed to help immigrants face the new world in which they now live. Local congregations that begin to connect with immigrant communities quickly discover that the types of ministries which they have highlighted and developed for their own communities do not meet immigrant needs.

Ethnic communities, especially those who are first and second generation, desire ministry programs that help them navigate issues most of us in this room have never addressed: immigration issues (green cards, work permits, government requirements), finding jobs and job interviewing, employer expectations of employees, security, accessing education, housing, ESL, time requirements, and many others we often pigeonhole as social ministry or social justice.

In matters of social ministry, a congregation's normal activity is often limited and realized, for example, by gathering bags of food for the food bank or heading to the nursing home to serve. Their normal practice does not allow the congregation nimbly to re-imagine and then refocus its ministries to reflect the immigrant needs. Check your church calendar, and you will notice that most ministries revolve around youth group activities, small groups, Sunday School, committee meetings, Bible studies, and maybe pre-schools/elementary schools. These ministries are very different from the ministry needs of many immigrant populations coming to America. It is important for faith communities to ask the multiethnic communities what would be most helpful and then boldly begin to develop those ministries.

Another generational barrier is the desire in most immigrant communities to remain connected to their homelands and countries of origin. When multiethnic groups gather, not all want to support the emphasis of one particular ethnic group in the same way. Connections, travel, communication, support, and participation in the life and lives of people back home draw similar communities together and mitigate against a multiethnic expression of community.

A good example is the Lutheran Sudanese community in the LCMS. As many of you know, they have developed a strong Sudanese Lutheran Mission Society which continues to connect in powerful ways with their family and church back home in Sudan. The Oromo Evangelical Lutheran Mission Society is a similar phenomenon.

For a multiethnic faith community to focus on one or even two ethnic communities back home, while neglecting other communities represented by other immigrant communities in their gatherings, requires a depth of understanding and willingness to do so. Rotating the support from one year to another might be a possible solution. But whatever the solution, it takes wisdom and Spirit-led leadership to navigate these difficult conversations

5. Seeing the Biblical World Through Different Cultural Lenses

Another issue which rankles our sensitivities has to do with understanding and interpreting Scripture. Let me begin with my own experiences as the former Regional Director to and local missionary in Africa. The use of Luther's Catechism was a handy resource. For the most part, Luther's contribution—the six chief parts: the Ten Commandments, Apostle's Creed, Lord's Prayer, Baptism, Office of the Keys, and the Lord's Supper—was helpful. But the farther one enters into that little book, the more obvious it becomes that the book was developed from a worldview asking questions that people in the West were asking.

For example, there is little, if anything, in the Catechism addressing polygamy, evil spirits, healings, sacrifice, local chiefdom government forms, or communal life versus an individualistic life—all important issues in Africa. And there are many others. We have defined and explained sin from an individualistic guilt culture, which connects quite well in an American or Western context. But much of the world lives in a collective community, honor- and shame-based culture, where an act of sin or evil brings shame to the family or group, not just simply breaking a rule/commandment and subsequently feeling individually guilty about that act. How do you manage and implement Matthew 18, where the first step is approaching the other individual one-on-one when you live in a context where doing so is very inappropriate and forgiveness requires community involvement to solve interpersonal relationship problems?

The Catechism is just one example of how the West approaches biblical interpretation and teaching.

While at the seminary, I was told quite clearly that there was only one point of comparison, one main teaching or main truth in any of the parables. And that truth was exegetically dug out of the text with questions formed by a Western worldview. But when the Scriptures are being read and interpreted by other ethnicities, multiple comparisons and truths are identified. They are asking different and significant questions of the story and narrative.

While serving in Liberia, we studied the narrative of Joseph. I was taught as a young boy in Sunday School that the main teaching of the Joseph narrative was that despite the hardship, the difficult moments in Joseph's life, he persevered with God's help, that God never left him, that God had his back the entire 20+ years of that

journey. It taught me that I needed to continue to trust in God and His mysterious ways even when the road seemed difficult. God is in control.

I quickly found out that the Liberian Christians had a different main teaching. It was clear to them that Joseph, as a man of God, continued to care for his family, never forgetting them, even though they had done despicable things to him—selling him into slavery and precipitating all the fall-out that followed. Despite how Joseph (and people today) may have wanted revenge for being treated so poorly, a man of God will still love and protect and take care of his family. To the Liberian, Joseph's life story clearly implied that taking care of one's family is fundamentally important. It emerged as the moral of the story because their worldview—shaped by a community focus, not an individual focus—reigns supreme, and family is so very important.

In multiethnic ministry, Westerners simply cannot assume that we have the Bible figured out for all people in every culture. The task is to dig out the truth, preach it, and develop forms and styles which clearly communicate that message into the ears and hearts of those who listen. Remember St. Paul in Romans 10? He asked two questions: Did the Israelites hear the message and did they understand the message? If both of those questions cannot be answered in the positive, it is incumbent upon the communicators to re-fashion their communication modes so that the listeners are able to connect with God their Father.

But probably much more significant is the following. In the West, we emphasize facts and systematic structures and proof texts and doctrine and by so doing pay attention to the mind, ignoring the rest of the person. We simply do not know how to connect facts and faith with the real starting point for many who come to America from other places across the globe: the heart, soul, and body. Immigrant groups are constantly reminding us, that is, if we are willing to listen and learn, that Americans don't live with God in every moment. For many people on this planet, all life is extraordinary. All life is supernatural. There is no separation between the physical, empirical world and the spiritual world. They are one. Unlike Americans who can leave God in church on Sunday morning, and then add Him at mealtimes, evening prayers, and devotions, immigrants realize His presence while harvesting crops, driving a taxi, going to work, simply breathing. Americans talk this reality but hardly ever experience it.

> Multiethnic ministry requires partners to explore scriptural truths together and allow the worldviews of the West to be informed and broadened by the insights and worldviews their ethnic partners bring to the reading of the same biblical texts.

Multiethnic ministry requires partners to

explore scriptural truths together and allow the worldviews of the West to be informed and broadened by the insights and worldviews their ethnic partners bring to the reading of the same biblical texts. Christian leaders in the West might be able to talk theology, but many of them cannot decode another society. Western Christians simply cannot assume that we have the Bible figured out for all people in every culture. I believe this task requires Western partners to ask their ethnic partners how to address issues scripturally and how to understand narratives without first offering answers. In addition, Western partners need to learn and practice what it means to not only have faith in our heads, but to live and breathe it. Allowing our Christian brothers and sisters to teach and lead and model that reality to which we Americans give lip service is a start.

6. Structures, Strategies, Methods, Forms, and Styles

A significant stumbling block for successful multiethnic ministries is the LCMS's reliance and often insistence on specific forms, styles, methods, strategies, and structures. For example, while attending a conference in South Africa, a leader from one of the LCMS seminaries led morning worship. Each day we used Matins. The form is rather static. We stood for much of the worship. At one point during the day, the Bishop of the Lutheran Church of South Africa, in a conversation about using drums in worship, asked why we were told to stand for worship, especially when the Gospel was read. The response was that the form shows respect to God. The Bishop then noted that among the Zulu, when the chief arrives in the room, respect is shown by sitting down. Rather than using the appropriate form for the dominant Zulu members present, which communicated the awesome respect reserved for God, the powerful Western leadership in that room decided, unknowingly, that teaching a new way to show respect was necessary. They simply assumed that their form was universal. They had not learned the cultural patterns of the South African Zulu. And when they did realize the difference, they continued to practice their same form the following days.

Models used in international contexts from where ethnic leadership arrives are not, in my opinion, valued in the West. In fact the models, though often praised and applauded as they were implemented internationally, are ridiculed or severely limited when attempting to implement them in our own local mission fields. Ethnic church planters and pastors who arrive in the West and have not studied theology through an accredited institution, attended a seminary, or in our specific Western context, Ethnic Immigrant Institute of Theology or Specific Ministry Pastor models are not given the permission or credentials to serve as church planting leaders without the appropriate training the LCMS decides is necessary, including all the fiscal burdens associated with that training. And if some leaders are given permission to lead, it is usually with strings attached. They can lead, but are not given permission to do so in similar ways as they did back in their homes—as lay pastors in Word and Sacrament ministries.

An additional set of rules and regulations is placed on them if they desire to continue leading people into God's mission.

The assumption that the LCMS has developed correct responses and forms allows us to export them into international contexts with our partner churches. Liberian Lutheran leadership admitted to me just recently that they have adopted forms and styles of the LCMS without a clear reason for doing so other than that they believe partnership is based on similar forms and styles.

The LCMS recently was found teaching the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) leadership how to chant the Western liturgy, as if that will enhance and embolden their church's ministry. Yet, the EECMY, a fifty-eight-year-old church body, which was instituted as a National Church in 1959, 112 years after the LCMS, has 8,500 congregations, 4,000 preaching stations, and 8.6 million members. It regularly adds a 150,000 new people yearly to its membership, all in a country of 80 million people. On the other hand, the LCMS has been around since 1847—over 150 years—in a country of 315 million, and we have only 2 million members and are losing thousands each and every year. Yet the LCMS, in my opinion, acts and talks and postures itself as if it is the expert.

I believe the EECMY should be teaching us, not the other way around. How about this for structural change: Ethiopian and Eritrean Lutheran leadership in this country serve as District Mission Execs and/or in mission leadership roles in the LCMS's Office of International or National Mission? Who from these missionary-minded people groups are members on our LCMS Board of Mission?

Being the Church of God today does not mean dictating to people the right words, the right structure, the right model, the right forms, or which organization or Christian group is allowed to be a partner. If the dominant local faith community decides that a requirement is the use of traditional Western forms in order for ministry to thrive, multiethnic ministry will struggle. Ethnic groups need the freedom to develop partnerships and use the strategies and methods which they know connect with their communities, as well with as other ethnic communities that surround them. In our church, it is hard to imagine a single ethnic group being allowed this freedom.

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7. Resources—Ministry with or without Them

Though this may not be as important as other insights, I simply need to share it because once again, we do not have this value in our own DNA. Multiethnic ministry, as seen from a district office or a congregation, normally begins with a huge question for us in the West: "Where will we find the resources?" Most of us in the West don't even begin to imagine and dream and vision unless all the resources are in place or at least the possibility to accumulate them is viable. It is how we sell the vision. Rather than selling a vision because of its mission to reach people for Christ, we sell a vision to people once we know the resources to begin and hopefully accomplish the vision are already in hand or promised; or we pitch the vision, knowing that the budget is up for grabs and we need our slice of the pie. That is a mindset of a people who don't live in exile, who are not marginalized.

On the other hand, imagine living as a Christian in a place where the church has no access, no voice, no place or space or resources. How would we ever get anything done? I have yet to meet an immigrant leader who has asked for support and funds and other resources give up and stop his vision from being implemented when he is told there were no funds and resources available. Giving up is not the mindset of a Christian who grew up where the church is on the fringe.

It becomes difficult to maintain this mindset when well-meaning organizations and individuals pour money and resources into places where the Christian church has thrived without them. I constantly remind Christian leaders that it does not require resources to share the Good News found in Jesus Christ. But the model Western Christians bring to these places is one that starts with resources and hopefully ends with success.

Please don't interpret these words as coming from someone who is anti-support. On the contrary, I am a firm believer in Christians' supporting and helping other Christians. But the West has created dependency. It has created models which are unsustainable once resources required to develop and build and sustain are removed due to economic downturns, budget cuts, or, more often the case, a loss of interest in the particular ministry, and funds are diverted to the next exciting Christian adventure.

> Any multiethnic expression of ministry needs innovative and creative ethnic leaders who see resources as only one obstacle in the way.

The West has much to learn from leaders who persevere in Christian ministry, and who even grow the church when resources are lacking. Any multiethnic expression of ministry needs innovative and creative ethnic leaders who see resources as only one obstacle in the way. This means that the Western mindset of resources first, then ministry needs to change. It must allow these creative and innovative ideas to flourish and

take root even when resources seem lacking. At the least, Western congregations need to listen and then step out in faith or step out of the way.

8. Money

As long as I brought it up, money is a problem but also a wonderful resource. So let me briefly address this touchy subject. As I mentioned earlier, money is clearly and closely associated with power and authority and often drives decisions on both sides of the checkbook. Resource decisions among partners is multifaceted. Subscribing to the partnership equation "Shared Risk + Shared Responsibility = Shared Rewards" is a start. But let me share specific suggestions and some personal advice based on my experience in working with this issue.

First and foremost, as resource agreements are made, support ministry, not ministry positions. Give support to the ministry in an undesignated fashion and allow the leadership receiving the support to determine how those funds should be used to support their vision. The request may include support for funding positions or people but do not designate support for positions. It is up to the ministry to decide how to use the support: salary/support for a position, programs, day-to-day budget needs, etc. Ongoing support designated for salaries binds a support partner and the receiving partner to that funded person's ability to stay and do ministry. However, there is never a guarantee that a person is the right fit, that funds budgeted remain constant, or that the interest of the funding partner will continue. When the receiving church is in control of its own budget, it is enabled to grow in its ability to manage its own affairs and is reciprocated in trust-building between partners.

My second piece of advice: Don't be the money police. If a program is funded, release the funds to the ministry to run the program. Do not distribute it in bits and pieces as reports are given that satisfy the grantor's dreams. I understand that this is not always possible—large sums or long-term grants and other reasons might mitigate against this policy. But as often as possible, distribute the funds for the budget year in a lump sum. At year's end, initiate required evaluations and assessments to determine reasons for success and failure, and move forward with future decisions from there. Do not be labeled as the money police.

Finally, never connect money with partnership agreements. When money is connected to partnership agreements, it is immediately and intimately connected to power, authority, influence, manipulation, and in my opinion egregiously so. I have recently

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seen international partnership documents from the LCMS that connect these two items. It is simply wrong to "buy" partners. Money should never be used as a tool to gain compliance from another.

Wrap-up

Attempting to form multiethnic ministries and faith communities is a God-given task blessed by Him and guided by His Spirit. It requires local, existing faith communities desiring diversity in their midst. Without an honest, Holy Spirit-, Revelation 7-driven desire, the outcome will simply be a white-dominated church with immigrants who are willing to be like Mike.

Let me close with a personal comment. I do not care what forms ethnic Christians—let me say that again, **Christians**—use in multiethnic Christian worship, in what order ethnic Christians place the parts of their worship, what day ethnic Christians gather, whom ethnic Christians as a congregation have chosen to be their leaders and pastors, what organizations are chosen to be partners, etc. And as those Christians make those decisions based on the faith they have been given by the Holy Spirit and guided by the Scriptures, authentic worship and praise will be sent to the heavens, and God will hear their gifts of praise and serve them with His gifts.

Having noted that, I may not agree with them. I cannot imagine I would agree with every decision made to move multiethnic ministry forward. I expect that some people, including me, would not be comfortable in some multiethnic community worship or ministry moment—even those in LCMS settings. But, in my humble opinion, we spend so much time criticizing Christians, even those among our own tribe, that those who still do not know Jesus live and die without Him. We expend energy and time trying to get the message right and coercing others to comply rather than getting the message out! We are so convinced that if we, and those we oversee, do not have it perfect, God's Spirit cannot work and the result will be a faith which damns rather than saves. We need to stop making ourselves so important, quit believing that we are the gatekeeper of the Spirit's work, quit the posturing which indicates that only we have the correct answer to all the questions being asked and let God through His Holy Spirit lead.

> We are so convinced that if we, and those we oversee, do not have it perfect, God's Spirit cannot work and the result will be a faith which damns rather than saves.

If we are about His Kingdom building, and not our kingdom building, focused on people meeting Jesus and the claims He has on their life, then we need to get out of His way and let Him do His work, even if at times it might press us to reexamine our own truth and confess our sins rather than begin with an assumption that we are

right and they are wrong and thus free to condemn or criticize. I believe Gamaliel was wise, and maybe, just maybe, we should take his advice: "for if this plan or this work is of men, it will come to nothing; but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it—lest you even be found to fight against God" (Acts 5:38–39). That just might mean giving advice only when we are asked.

Thanks for this opportunity to share. May God bless His efforts through us to impact heaven's population.

God of the "In Between"
in Humanity, Space, and Time in Japan

Roger W. Lowther

Abstract: The Apostle John tells us, "I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb" (Rev 7:9). In heaven and on earth, we find people from every language and culture. These cultural differences give insights into the essence of the Gospel and the person of Christ. The short meditation that follows explores some of those insights through the Japanese concept of "ma" (in between) as found in the Japanese concepts of humanity, space, and time.

When entering a home in another culture, you will most likely notice some differences. You may be asked to take your shoes off. You may be unaccustomed to the style of furniture or decorations. You may be unfamiliar with the smell in the air due to spices or incense. You may not understand what is being said, because different places often have different languages and cultures.

Language can give insights into culture. Consider the Japanese word for "human" 人間 pronounced "nin-gen." What an interesting word! It is a combination of the words "person" and "in between."

Humanity, in its essence, consists of not only the 人 "person" but also the 間 "in between" of each person. This "in between" is important as it expresses identity as much as personality, gifts, and appearance.

A cursory look at this concept of "in between" can reveal ways to think about ministry and missions and give us a deeper understanding of the Gospel and the person of Christ.

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God of the "In Between" of Humanity

In the context of 人間 "humanity," the 間 "in between" describes relationships: 仲間 and 間柄 "close relationship," i.e., relationship to family, friends, or a teacher; 世間 society, i.e., relationship to a community; 民間 civilian, i.e., relationship to a nation; and others. The Japanese word for humanity shows us how we depend on our relationships with God, each other, and this world.

The importance of the "in between" in humanity becomes clearest when it is broken.

> Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as He was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, "Where are you?" He answered, "I heard You in the garden, and I was afraid . . . so I hid" (Gn 3:8–10).

When mankind disobeyed God, the space "in between" God and man was broken. Man became afraid. He felt isolated, abandoned, and spiritually empty.

Isaiah wrote, "Your iniquities have separated you from your God" (Is 59:2). A gaping chasm pierced the space "in between" God and humanity.

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The relationship between people was also broken. Human beings turned into isolated individuals unable to relate to each other in healthy and loving ways. Danger, poverty, hunger, discrimination, and violence entered the world.

> Now Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let's go out to the field." While they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him. Then the Lord said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" "I don't know," he replied. "Am I my brother's keeper?" (Gn 4:8–9).

The relationship between human beings and the earth was broken as well. "Cursed is the ground because of you" (Gn 3:17).

People lost important elements of their humanity. They fell from what they once were and began to war with God, each other, and the world. In order to heal mankind, God restored the "in between" of humanity.

The Trinitarian God, eternally existing in loving relationship, came into this world as the perfect 人間 "human" to fulfill the "in between" with God, people, and this earth. "The Word became 人間 'human' and lived with us." (Jn. 1:14)

God is love, and this love comes down, fills our "in betweens," and "binds everything together" (Col 3:14). The Gospel narrative tells not just of saving mankind but of the restoration of love and the intimacy of relationship.

> "[Mary] will give birth to a son, and you are to give Him the name Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call Him Immanuel" (which means "God with us") (Mt 1:21–23).

God who is "with us" is also "between us." God comes to us relationally and restores the "in between" of humanity. He seeks us from the beginning of the Bible in Genesis, where He asks "Where are you?" (chapter 3), to the end of the Bible in Revelation, where He says "I stand at the door and knock" (also chapter 3!).

God has been persistently pursuing us in the intimacy of relationship throughout human history. His pursuit has profound impact on our relationships when we realize that Christ, and not humanity, is the Lord of the "in between"—our Mediator—in our relationships with God, each other, and this world.

> The Trinitarian God, eternally existing in loving relationship, came into this world as the perfect 人間 "human" to fulfill the "in between" with God, people, and this earth.

God of the Space "In Between"

There are two places I recommend that all my friends visit on their first trip to Tokyo: Meiji Shrine, the Shinto shrine dedicated to the Emperor Meiji, and Sensoji Temple, Tokyo's oldest Buddhist Temple.

Both locations are reached by entering a huge gate and following a long pathway, but the two pathways could not be more different! The way to Meiji Shrine is lined with trees, water, rocks, and expansive open spaces (空間, "the empty in between"). Though located in the middle of the city, it feels completely removed. A peaceful quiet fills the air. In contrast, the way to Sensoji Temple is lined with shops selling food and souvenirs, full of people and the energy of city life.

The two are different, yet they have something in common with all temples and shrines: a gate, a path, and a main building. The gate and main building are of course important, but the path "in between" is also important. The journey along the long path is an extremely meaningful and memorable part of the experience.

Jesus said, "I am the gate" (Jn 10:9) and "I am the way" (Jn 14:6). He also said, "'Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.' . . . The temple He had spoken of was His body" (Jn 2:19–21).

Jesus is the gate, the path, and the temple.

Christians in the West tend to focus on "at the gate" experiences of conversion or "at the temple" experiences of God's presence, but "along the path" experiences are also important, especially in Japan!

What is an "along the path" experience?

Consider various activities that follow a "path" or "way" 道 (pronounced "dō") in Japan: 柔道 (Judo, The Way of Flexibility), 剣道 (Kendo, The Way of the Sword), 弓道 (Kyudo, Archery or The Way of the Bow), 茶道 (Sado, The Way of Tea), 華道 (Kado/Ikebana or The Way of Flowers), 書道 (Shodo, Calligraphy or The Way of Writing), 武士道 (Bushido, The Way of the Samurai), etc. All involve slow and steady physical, emotional, or spiritual training.

I have been studying Shinkyokushinkai Karate in Japan with my boys for years now. I first started Shotokan Karate as a child when I was bullied in school and needed a way to protect myself. Since then, I have realized there is more to karate than self-defense.

Karatedo 空手道 is made of three very simple words meaning "the way of the empty hand."

"The way of the empty hand" shows me small truths about myself. It is a litmus test of my daily patterns. Are they balanced? Are they healthy? Karate produces life in me by making me aerobically fit and reducing stress. It builds discipline and control over movement and emotions. It builds flexibility to prevent serious injury. The way of karate is a path, but not the end goal itself, to living more fully in this world.

Jesus called Himself the complete and everlasting "way, truth, and life"; therefore, early Christians called themselves followers of "The Way."

"There arose a great disturbance about the Way" (Acts 19:23).

"I persecuted the followers of this Way to their death" (Acts 22:4).

"I worship the God of our ancestors as a follower of the Way" (Acts 24:14).

What does it mean to be a follower of "The Way"?

Jesus is "The Way" that leads to God and His grace. The Gospel does not just show us how to live the Christian life but affirms that Jesus already walked that path for us. Nothing we do can change His love for us. The Gospel does not just show us a way to follow but helps us recognize our wandering to the right and to the left in weakness.

The Gospel shows us Jesus. Jesus followed the "in between" path with perfect obedience. Followers of "The Way" follow Jesus as fallen people in a fallen world in the guiding light of God's grace.

Jesus is the gate, and Jesus is the temple. Jesus is also the "in between" space. In this space, we find joy and fulfillment. In this space, our spirits find freedom and our spirits can dance. In this space, we see the person of Jesus.

God of the Time "In Between"

The Japanese understanding of time is perhaps the most fascinating of the three. Time is a combination of two words: 時間 ("in between" and "time"). What does it mean to be "in between" time?

Humanity's original concept of time came from the first day of Creation, when God made the night and the day. "There was evening, and there was morning—the first day" (Gn 1:5).

> What does it mean to be "in between" time?

We get our concept of the week from God's creation of the Sabbath and our concept of the month from God's creation of the moon. Though mysterious in its implications, we also get our concept of the seasons from the tree of life, which "yields its fruit every month" in both Eden and heaven. "On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month" (Rev 22:2). There are some kinds of seasons in heaven!

The seasons heavily influence the Japanese concept of time. Nobel Prize winner Yasunari Kawabata said in his acceptance speech, "We [Japanese] brush against and are awakened by the beauty of the four seasons."[1] Studies in the national and cultural identity of Japan point to the importance of the seasons. Writers of haiku and other poetry developed a formulaic use of "seasonal words" unheard of in neighboring Asian countries.[2]

Japanese literature often captures the importance and beauty of transitions in the seasons and from one time to another, as can be seen in Sei Shonagon's opening to *The Pillow Book* from the tenth century. "In spring, the dawn—when the slowly paling mountain rim is tinged with red, and wisps of faintly crimson-purple cloud float in the sky."[3]

This sensitivity to time in transition showed up in the film, *Your Name,* by Makoto Shinkai, which artfully explores the "in between" of day and night, past and present, natural and supernatural. The fact that it became the highest grossing anime movie of all time is proof that it resonates with Japanese people.

At some level, we humans live in a constant state of "in between-ness."

We live in the midst of cycles. We wake, eat, work, play, and sleep in daily cycles. Air comes through our nose and mouth, only to be exhaled once again (continuing the cycle God started with His first breath into us). Blood circulates around our bodies through our veins. Cycles are found not just at the cellular level

but at the most foundational level of the atoms. We come from dust and "to dust [we] will return" (Gn 3:19).

A poem by Empress Jito in the eighth century expresses the beauty in the "in between" transitions and cycles.

> Spring seems to have passed into summer
>
> See the white silk robes spread to dry
>
> On the Mountain of Heavenly Perfume?[4]

Spring seems to be over and summer seems to have come, but is it either one or neither or both? By observing summer garments being washed and prepared, the poet feels the coming of summer, though the weather is not yet hot, a masterful depiction of the ambiguity of time "in between" spring and summer.

Foundational to every dimension of Japanese culture is the importance and the subtleties of cycles in seasons. A view of history is one such example.

"Like the change of spring to summer to fall to winter, the flow of history is cyclical,"[5] wrote Japanese author Shuichi Kato. According to Japanese culture, history is cyclical and nations move in the midst of these cycles.

We even find this cyclical view of history in the Bible, especially in the history of Israel. Rescued from the bondage of slavery in Egypt, Israel returned to the Promised Land (after enduring forty years "in between" wandering in the desert!) only to be captured and forced into slavery again by the nation of Babylon and then other nations. Cycles of rebellion against God, repentance, and salvation repeat over and over.

Yet, through these cycles of rebellion, repentance, and redemption, the people of Israel learned dependence on God. The destructive elements in a cycle are constantly redeemed for good and made beautiful.

The Christian life is a cycle of sin, repentance, forgiveness, and renewal in the Gospel. We must rely utterly on the grace of God. Even after being saved, we fail many times. No matter how deep our understanding of the Gospel, we cannot move forward in a perfect linear path of sanctification.

We live in the "already but not yet" of God's promises, waiting for the complete renewal and redemption of mankind. We are an "in between" people longing for everything to be made right.

> We live in the "already but not yet" of God's promises, waiting for the complete renewal and redemption of mankind. We are an "in between" people longing for everything to be made right.

> The whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies (Rom 8:22–23).

The pain of the "not yet" leads us to Jesus. Jesus is the great "in between" mediator of God and man, the crux of Creation.

Jesus said, "It is finished!" but everything broken is not yet fixed. Jesus wept at the tomb of Lazarus and said, "My time has not yet come," at the wedding in Cana. Jesus expressed His frustration at the brokenness of this world when He said, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem . . . How often have I longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings!" (Mt 23:37).

We live in Holy Saturday, between the suffering and death of Good Friday and the joy and resurrection of Easter Sunday. The cross gives immeasurable meaning to our present "groaning," as we look ahead to the New Creation.

Amidst both healthy and destructive cycles of life, God remains the one and only "still point of the turning world."[6] On earth and in heaven, we are dependent on God alone for salvation and true rest. The resurrection is proof that all God's promises will one day be fulfilled and that He is indeed God over all time, including the time "in between."

> We live in Holy Saturday, between the suffering and death of Good Friday and the joy and resurrection of Easter Sunday. . . . The resurrection is proof that all God's promises will one day be fulfilled and that He is indeed God over all time, including the time "in between."

In cycles of history and the ambiguity of time between one season and another, we can rely only on the unchanging God who "is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow" (Heb 13:8) and live in His promises.

Conclusion

God is the God of the "in between." God of the "in between" of humanity restores our relationships through love. God of the space "in between" connects us to Himself by His grace. God of the time "in between" gives us firm promises in which we trust as we live in cycles of history.

In heaven and on earth, we depend completely and eternally on God alone. Hope comes from faith alone and not by any of our actions.

The Gospel reveals itself in the language, art, and culture of every nation, tribe, and people of this world. May God continue to work through these to deepen our worship of Him.

Endnotes

[1] "Japan the Beautiful and Myself." Yasunari Kawabata. Translated by Edward Seidensticker. (Kodansha International Ltd., 1968), 69.

[2] "Time and Space in Japanese Culture." Shuichi Kato. (Iwanami Shoten, 2007), 34.

[3] "The Pillow Book." Sei Shonagan. Translated by Meredith McKinney (Penguin Classics, 2007).

[4] "Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves" *Manyoshu* I:28.

[5] "Time and Space in Japanese Culture." Shuichi Kato. (Iwanami Shoten, 2007), 34.

[6] "Burnt Norton" from *Four Quartets*. T. S. Eliot. 1935.

The Spirituality of Atheism

Armand J. Boehme

Abstract: An increasing number of people today are saying they are spiritual but not religious. Many new spiritualities have surfaced including atheistic spirituality. Atheists have developed their own creed, Sunday gatherings, Sunday Schools, chaplains, devotional books, Bibles, ethics, Ten Commandments, summer camps, and weddings and funeral services. This raises the question as to whether atheism has become a non-theistic religion like Buddhism Taoism and the Raelians. The American legal system has recognized atheism as a religion. Parallels to attempts at secular religions are also explored, as are ways in which Christians can respond to the increasing secularism of the age.[i]

For some today spirituality and religion are separate, if not distinct, realities. Spirituality exists in many places not traditionally associated with spirituality in past days.

Currently there exist "Eastern and Western spirituality, women's spirituality, New Age spirituality, secular and esoteric spirituality, interfaith and ecumenical spirituality, children's spirituality, even spirituality and aging, spirituality and health, spirituality and gender, spirituality and human well-being. There is also talk of spirituality in management, business, sociology, economics, and geography, even of spiritual capital in analogy to social and cultural capital. . . . This [superfluity] . . . points to the undeniable fact that, in its most inclusive sense, spirituality is so all-embracing that it does indeed touch everything."[1]

In addition are yet other spiritualities: "the individual and communal spiritual experiences of Christianity, sex, science, the New Age, science fiction, technology, humanism, transhumanism, drugs, tattoos, and atheism."[2]

This article will focus on the spirituality of atheism, that is, a spirituality as opposed to religion. A growing number of atheists see a distinction between being

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religious and being spiritual. Daniel Dennett writes that he, like William James, cannot deny the existence of "the lone communicants of what we might call private religions." To distinguish these privately religious people from "the typical religious people who identify themselves with a particular creed or church" of many members, Dennet calls them "*spiritual* people, but not *religious*."[3]

SPIRITUALITY OPPOSED TO RELIGION: Sam Harris, a prominent new atheist, extols the virtues of spirituality in opposition to religion. "Once we have examined the problems inherent to faith, and the threat that even 'moderate' religious faith, however inadvertently, now poses to our survival, we can begin to situate our ethical intuitions and our capacity for spiritual experience within the context of a rational worldview."[4] "There is no doubt that (spiritual) experiences of this sort are worth seeking, just as there is no doubt that the popular religious ideas that have grown up around them, especially in the West, are as dangerous as they are incredible."[5]

Harris believes that there is a range of human experience that can be identified as "spiritual or mystical." He identifies these as meaningful experiences of selflessness and elevated emotion that move one beyond self.[6] He believes that many "results of spiritual practice are genuinely desirable" and that human beings should "seek them out." These spiritual or mystical experiences employ varied techniques, such as meditative practices and "the use of psychedelic drugs."[7]

Like some others, Harris describes the difference between religion and spirituality as that which cannot be proven (religion) and that which can be proven (spirituality): "It is nowhere written, however, that human beings must be irrational, or to live in a perpetual state of siege, to enjoy an abiding sense of the sacred. On the contrary, I hope to show that spirituality can be—indeed must be—deeply rational even as it elucidates the limits of reason. . . . Science will not remain mute on spiritual and ethical questions for long."[8]

Spirituality and ethics "transcend national, religious, and ethnic boundaries," and thus vastly different human beings "converge on similar spiritual experiences and ethical insights. . . . Such is not the case with the 'truths' of religion, however."[9] Harris declares all religious ideas to be "intellectually defunct and politically ruinous." On the other hand "spiritual experience" is a natural work of the rational mind. Clearly "it must be possible to bring reason, spirituality, and ethics together" which would be the beginning of a reasonable approach to "our deepest personal concerns. It would also be the end of (religious) faith."[10] Harris believes that religious faith "is surely the devil's masterpiece."[11]

In line with his emphasis on atheistic spirituality, Harris believes that what he has written in *The End of Faith* was: "written very much in the spirit of a prayer."[12]

Harris wrote *Waking Up: A Guide to Spirituality Without Religion* to further separate spirituality from religion. "Spirituality must be distinguished from religion—because people of every faith and of none, have had some sorts of spiritual experiences."[13] He notes that "Twenty percent of Americans describe themselves as 'spiritual but not religious.'"[14]

Harris writes that many people have a faulty perception of religion as the true repository for the virtues of love, compassion, moral goodness, and self-transcendence. He believes that atheists are able to exhibit these characteristics and urges non-theists and atheists to change this faulty perspective by talking about the full range of human experience in a way that is "free of dogma as the best science already is."[15] Harris sees an intimate "connection between scientific fact and spiritual wisdom."[16]

"A rational approach to spirituality seems to be what is missing from secularism and from the lives of most of the people I meet. The purpose of this book is to offer readers a clear view of the problem, along with some tools to help them solve it for themselves."[17]

When this author first encountered Harris's comments about spirituality, it was as though one were experiencing a new phenomenon—atheistic spirituality. However, further research proved this not to be the case. Harris's writings on spirituality, especially in his latest book, *Waking Up,* are part of a burgeoning spiritualistic trend among atheists.

The atheistic spirituality Harris encourages is being practiced by many atheists, non-theists, humanists, and secular individuals today. As one surfs the net, one will find websites like "Atheist Spirituality: A forum for exploration of the meaning of spirituality for atheists."

This website, edited by Geoff Crocker, states that it exists to explore "the meaning of human spirituality . . . from an atheist point of view but it does not exclude anyone with religious belief. Indeed the site explores some surprising areas of harmony between atheism and religion."[18]

Though there are variations in beliefs, the atheist spirituality website, "Atheist Revolution," provides a good summary of atheistic beliefs about spirituality. This site, subtitled "Breaking free from irrational belief and opposing Christian extremism," is authored by Jack Vance.

> The discussion of atheistic spirituality begins by asking "Can an atheist be a spiritual person, and if so, in what sense?"

The discussion of atheistic spirituality begins by asking "Can an atheist be a spiritual person, and if so, in what sense?" He notes that he does not like using the term "spirituality" in reference to atheists and

atheism. He emphasizes that he does not believe in "spirits, souls, ghosts, demons, or anything else that is not part of the natural world." However he also recognizes that there may be some value and benefit to using the term in relationship to atheist beliefs. What follows is quoted from the "Atheist Revolution" website.

> **"What is spirituality?"** "Spirituality is not the same thing as religion, or even religious belief. One can be deeply spiritual while simultaneously rejecting anything recognizable as religious belief or religious practices. Moreover, not all religious believers are necessarily spiritual." "Many components of spirituality have been posited, and while consensus remains elusive, some of the more popular include vitality, connectedness, transcendence, and meaningfulness. One of the most commonly described experiences of spirituality involves a sense of one's interconnectedness to others and a dissolving of self-other boundaries."

> "**Can an atheist be a spiritual person?**" "Absolutely. If we think of something like spirituality as ranging on a continuum from low to high, atheists can score at any point along the continuum just like anyone else. High scores would indicate someone who seeks spiritual experiences or who experiences the various components of spirituality, depending on how the measure functions." "Practically, we might see a spiritual atheist as highly empathic, aware of his or her connection to others, concerned with equality and social justice, regularly <u>awed by the beauty of nature</u>, etc. Such descriptors apply in varying degrees to all persons, theist and atheist alike. Being spiritual does not require one to believe in spirits, gods, or any other supernatural entities." [emphasis in the original]

> **"Do atheists need spirituality?"** "I think this question might need to be reframed in order to be both palatable and meaningful. Think of it this way: atheists (like everyone else) vary in terms of the importance of spirituality in their lives. Spirituality is vital to some atheists, and we could appropriately label such persons as needing spirituality. For others, the need for spirituality may be low enough that it would be hard to recognize it as such." "In all honesty, I am not sure where I would fall along this continuum. I tend not to think of myself as 'spiritual,' but I certainly find great meaning and purpose in experiences that others describe as spiritual. I have had many intense spiritual experiences in which I experienced connectedness, transcendence, and the like, and not all of them were drug-induced. I suppose I am a fairly spiritual person in many ways, but one who prefers to think of himself in terms of components such as empathy, meaning, and connection rather than 'spirituality.' Does that make any sense? Like I said, I have a bit of trouble with the label."

"Should the secular community increase our focus on spirituality?"
"Probably. I suspect that very little is known about the importance and role of spirituality among nonbelievers, and the scientist in me thinks that improved understanding might be beneficial. To neglect something we do not understand well simply because we lack understanding makes little sense. We know that spirituality is important to a great many people regardless of their religious belief, and I think there is a large potential benefit from better understanding its role in our community. Discussing and potentially embracing an explicitly secular form of spirituality could make it easier for believers to imagine life without belief and could make our community more attractive for those who have come to doubt their faith."[19]

"Tailored Beliefs"[20] is another atheist spirituality site offering the story and blogs of Sigfried Gold, which attempt to reconcile "absolute atheism with a passionate commitment to spiritual engagement in the form of Buddhist meditation and Twelve-Step recovery—including worship of a non-existent God compatible with my atheism—with the hope of providing inspiration for others to find creative, uncompromising spiritual paths that work for them." In this site Gold refers to himself as a "Born-again atheist."

To nourish his spirituality, Gold invented his own God, "Ms. X"—a powerful, rotund, fifteen-foot-tall, black, lesbian goddess with a large afro. Ms. X rides a flying ewe named Butch and is manifested as a small stuffed animal that Gold holds during his prayers. Gold likens this stuffed animal to the icons of saints in Roman and Greek Orthodox churches. He describes his godhead in trinitarian form—"the Mother, the Sheep, and the Infinite Void." If one finds this alternative atheistic Trinity strange, one should remember that *The Shack* envisioned a Trinity of a black housekeeper, a Hebrew handyman, and a mystical Asian gardener.[21] Gold offers a long and extended exposition of his spirituality and his journey to atheism. His understanding of a good life would parallel that of the Golden Rule Christians.[22] He talks about his atheistic conversion experience in much the same way that evangelicals speak about their conversion experiences. He encourages everyone—the religious and non-religious alike—to explore the meaning of spirituality in order to discover that which is "universal to all religions" and non-theists and to see those spiritual beliefs and practices which transcend dogma, in order to find a "spiritual commonality."[23]

Yet another website entitled "The Center for Spiritual Atheism" purports to unify spiritual atheists regardless of their differing spiritual views. This site stresses that each person is responsible for his or her own "spiritual philosophy."[24]

Richard Packham's website includes an exposition of his conversion to atheism: "How I Became an Atheist,"[25] and his article on "Atheist Spirituality."[26]

Another site, "The Spiritual life of An Atheist," authored by S. Anne Johnson states, "My spiritual practice centers around a love of nature and knowledge and a commitment to a pragmatic compassion. . . . Spirituality, for me, is about cultivating my better impulses, nourishing my better nature. My atheist spirituality is founded in a deep appreciation for the privileged stance I have been granted for the briefest moment in our little corner of the Universe by the mechanical forces that be."[27] More sites like this could be found.

In addition to Harris's *Waking Up* are many other books on the subject of atheistic spirituality.[28]

ATHEISTIC MONISM: Ninian Smart writes that one of the alternatives to theism is monism.[29] The monistic view—that all is one—entered Western theology from Eastern religions, such as Hinduism and Buddhism, and was manifested in New Age spirituality. Christianity on the other hand is dualistic, emphasizing a distinction and separation between God and the creation and creatures He has created.[30]

The concept of monism or nonduality is part of an atheistic view of the world.[31] Sam Harris has great praise for the Eastern religious emphasis on non-duality and faults Christianity, Islam, and the Jewish faith, which are dualistic (God is other than human beings), for the vast spiritual difference he sees between Eastern and Western spirituality. This non-duality is "a fundamental insight of most Eastern schools of spirituality" and the removal of the lines between self and other breaks the "duality of subject and object." Harris holds that duality leads to "feelings of separateness" that need to be corrected.[32] In his book on spirituality, Harris makes extensive use of monistic Eastern thought.[33] Richard Dawkins believes that "children have a natural tendency towards a dualistic theory of mind," and from his perspective he emphasizes the fact that religious belief is a "by-product of such instinctive dualism."[34] In the atheistic view, dualism is tied to religiosity, Christianity, feelings of separation, and many of the world's problems. Thus a number of atheists believe that Christianity and other religions need to be eliminated.

> The concept of monism or nonduality is part of an atheistic view of the world.

"Almost every problem we have can be ascribed to the fact that human beings are utterly beguiled by their feelings of separateness. It would seem that a spirituality that undermined such dualism, through the mere contemplation of consciousness, could not help but improve our situation. . . . There is clearly no greater obstacle to a truly empirical approach to spiritual experience than our current beliefs about God" [that He is totally other–a dualistic view].[35]

This monistic view is widespread. "Evolutionary biologists such as Ernst Haeckel and Julian Huxley attempted to make evolutionary biology a religion by advocating a monistic, naturalist world-view without supernatural revelation. The participants of this study affirm many of the tenets of Haeckel and Huxley, particularly the monistic, naturalistic aspects."[36] For a refutation of Haeckel's monism and an exposition of the incompatibility of monism with Christianity, see Frank Ballard, *Haeckel's Monism False*.[37] Further evidence that monism is incompatible with religion, especially Christianity, is seen in an article stating that atheistic "Marxism has been one of the most influential monistic systems in the Modern Times."[38]

ATHEISTIC DEVOTIONAL SPIRITUALITY: Atheistic spirituality is given public expression in a number of ways. An example of a secular, atheistic devotional spirituality would be A. C. Grayling's *Meditations for the Humanist: Ethics for a Secular Age*. These brief devotional articles were written to encourage the non-religious to a "life enriched by thinking about things that matter."[39] They are designed to extol virtues to which the non-religious but spiritual person should aspire. The author writes that he believes "passionately in the value of all things spiritual" by which he means the "things of the human spirit, with its capacity for love and enjoyment, creativity and kindness, hope and courage."[40]

These meditations place religion in the category of "some of the things that are enemies to human flourishing." Thus religion is put in the same category with evils like poverty, racism, revenge, depression, and capitalism. The meditations state that religion is "an affliction in human affairs" and is "an irrational hangover from mankind's ignorant and fearful infancy." These meditations state the desire that humanity be liberated from "tyrannies of belief" and be educated in better ways of human affections, in tolerance, and in the wisdom that comes from "individual experience."[41]

Religious morality is not only stated to be "irrelevant" but that it is also declared to be "anti-moral" and "immoral."[42] The same sentiments about religion are also found in the articles titled sin, repentance, faith, miracles, prophecy, virginity, paganism, blasphemy, obscenity, and reason. These meditations ask: "Does religious superstition any longer deserve a place in the intellectual economy of the world? The history of human knowledge shows that it does not."[43] The God of traditional religion (specifically Christianity) is described this way: "God, accordingly is the name of our ignorance."[44]

ATHEISTIC PATTERNS OF SPIRITUALITY: In spite of the above sentiments, atheistic spirituality has borrowed many things from religion, especially Christianity. Atheists have their own creed.[45] They have gatherings entitled the

"Sunday Assembly," which serve as a "full-fledged spiritual community" patterned after typical religious services. There are songs, talks, and the readings of poems or books. Births are recognized. These songs, talks, readings, and birth recognitions are patterned after hymns, sermons, Scripture readings, and baptisms/child dedications in Christian worship services. Atheistic Sunday assemblies even have chaplains like Greg Epstein, who is the Humanist Chaplain at Harvard. Epstein is also one of the organizers of the Sunday Assembly movement in the U.S.[46] Atheists have borrowed other aspects of religion, such as prayers,[47] devotional books,[48] Bibles—*The Good Book: A Humanist Bible*,[49] *The Atheist's Bible*[50]—and atheistic Bible commentaries on the Scriptures of major religions.[51] They also have written their own Ten Commandments.[52]

Like neo-Pentecostals, spiritual atheists often speak at length about their conversion experiences from religion to atheism and are often militantly evangelistic.[53] Atheists also have their "sacred" texts, such as the writings of Harris, Dawkins, Hitchens, Dennet, Onfray, Dewey, James, Darwin, Freud, Jung, Fox, and Flew. However, Anthony Flew renounced atheism and became a theist before his death.[54] Some atheists profess their own version of the Trinity.[55] Many are now running atheistic Sunday Schools.[56] They have written books to help in the moral training of children and adults.[57] Atheistic humanists run their own system of summer camps for freethinking, non-believing children.[58] Some atheists and humanists have devised orders of service for non-religious weddings and funerals.[59] They also have begun writing their own hymns.[60]

> Atheistic gatherings, actions, and rituals have been directly patterned after their counterparts in organized religion.

These atheistic gatherings, actions, and rituals have been directly patterned after their counterparts in organized religion. This copying of the forms of religion has come about because of the need to replace religious forms with similar spiritual forms that have a humanistic, atheistic, secular bent.

Andre Comte-Sponville writes about the need atheists have to gather in worship settings:

> But we need ritual. When we are confronted by the death of someone close, you have to say that purely civil funerals have almost something poor and flat about them, like a copy which wouldn't be able to make one forget the original. Perhaps it's a question of time; you don't replace 2000 years of the imaginary in a flash..[stet] religious ceremony allows horror to be tamed: you don't bury a man like a beast: you don't burn him like a log. Atheists are looking for equivalents, with varying degrees of success. Civil marriage, when it's not botched up, seems today to offer an acceptable substitute. It

allows us to officialise what is intimate, the most secret, the most savage, to include family, friends, and society . . . it's another way of being united.[61]

MORE THAN JUST SPIRITUAL? This atheistic copying of the outward forms of religion raises a question: Is atheism a religion?

Stephen Prothero lists four functional characteristics of all religions. They "have statements of beliefs and values (creeds); ritual activities (cultus); standards for ethical conduct (codes); and institutions (communities)."[62] Ninian Smart provides a longer list, which includes these characteristics or dimensions of religion: the "ritual or practical," the "doctrinal or philosophical," the

> This atheistic copying of the outward forms of religion raises a question: Is atheism a religion?

"myth or narrative," the "experiential or emotional," the "ethical or legal," the "organizational or social," and the "material or artistic."[63]

As noted above, atheists have created their own creed, have their own ritual activities in Sunday assemblies and other gatherings, have compiled their own Ten Commandments, and have formed communities and institutions, such as Camp Quest, and numerous other organizations like the Atheist Alliance International, American Atheists, and the National Council of Ex-Muslims.[64] In addition, atheists have their own narrative stories, basic teachings and beliefs, texts regarded as scripture, and an ethical worldview that is often claimed to be superior to that of religion. They speak openly about their spiritual experiences and have their own chaplains or clergy, all earmarks of religion.

Some may claim that atheism cannot be classified as a religion because it is not theistic and rejects the existence of any god. It is important to note that there are non-theistic religions: Confucianism,[65] Taoism,[66] and Buddhism.[67] As the Dali Lama said, "We Buddhists are atheists."[68] Other movements have been defined as religions: humanism,[69] the Unitarian Universalists,[70] and the Raelians.[71] American Civil Religion is built on four core ideas: "personal freedom (often called liberty), political democracy, world peace, and cultural (including religious, racial, ethnic, and gender) tolerance."[72] American Civil Religion is a non-theistic "real religion" that exists alongside and outside of more readily recognized theistic religions like Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.[73]

Don Cupitt was an advocate for religion without God and saw religion as "an experiment in selfhood."[74] Chapter 3 of his book, *After God: The Future of Religion*, is entitled "Religion After God."[75] Ronald Dworkin stated that the phrase "'religious atheism'. . . is not an oxymoron; religion is not restricted to theism."[76] Further he wrote that the word religion "does not necessarily mean a belief in God."[77] Billington

wrote a book with the desire "to rid religion of theology, to rescue it from God, to declare God redundant." He also stated that "religious experience is . . . potentially available to everyone" whether they believe in God or not.[78]

Alain de Botton advocates a "'religion for atheists' that incorporates religious forms and traditions to satisfy our human need for connection, ritual and transcendence."[79] Einstein, though an atheist, considered himself a religious person. Dworkin also stated that religion "does not necessarily mean a belief in God."[80] Richard Dawkins has described himself as "a secular Christian."[81] Dawkins' self-designation as "a secular Christian" and Dworkin's statement about "religious atheism" remind one of the Christian Atheism/Death of God movement of the 1960s.[82]

Other atheists also state that atheism is a religion or can be part of a religion.

Austin Cline has written that people need

> to keep in mind that atheism is nothing more than absence [of] belief in the existence of gods. Atheism is not the absence of religion. . . . Because of this, there is no inherent barrier preventing atheism from being part of a religious belief system. . . . So, yes, atheists can be religious. There are not only very old and traditional religions like Buddhism which are accessible to atheists, but there are modern organizations as well. Some humanists call themselves religious, and many members of Unitarian-Universalism, and Ethical Culture societies are also nonbelievers. Raelians are a relatively recent group which is recognized as a religion legally and socially, yet they deny the existence of gods. . . . There is some question as to whether such forms of humanism do qualify as religions, but what is important for the moment is that atheist members themselves believe that they are part of a religion. Thus they do not see any conflict between disbelieving in the existence of gods and adopting a belief system which they consider a religion—and these are atheists in the Western sense of scientific, philosophical atheism. The answer to the question is thus an unequivocal yes: atheists can be religious and atheism can occur in conjunction with, or even in the context of, religion.[83]

Don Cupitt's book, *The Sea of Faith*, and his TV series of the same name supplied the title for the Sea of Faith (SoF) Network, an association of individuals who believe that religion is "a human creation."[84] While having no formal creed or doctrinal statement, the Sea of Faith Network associates itself with "the non-realist approach to religion. This refers to the belief that God has no 'real,' objective or empirical existence independent of human language and culture; God is 'real' in the sense that he is a potent symbol, metaphor, or projection, but He has no objective existence outside and beyond the practice of religion. Non-realism therefore entails a rejection of supernaturalism—miracles, afterlife and the agency of spirits."

This is "a voluntarist interpretation of faith," which is also "a fully demythologized version of Christianity." Though its adherents have "given up the idea that religious beliefs can be grounded in anything beyond the human realm, religion can still be believed and practiced in new ways." Sea of Faith members are free to dissent from the above positions, but almost all adhere to them while remaining members of their respective religious traditions.[85]

The Sea of Faith Network publishes a journal titled *Sofia*. The June 2016 issue contains articles on Jesus as the Son of God. The editorial for this issue states that "God and the Christ Epic" are "creations of the human poetic genius," which means that they are "myths" that demonstrate the fact that "Jesus can't really be God because God is not real." But with a "poetic faith" people "can celebrate the dramas of Christmas, Easter and Pentecost—indeed the Eucharist itself—with all their wealth of liturgy, music and treasures of wisdom" so that religion rises above simple ethics to embrace "a fuller humanity." People (whether believers or not) are thereby able to "keep the feasts in good faith."[86] An article by Edward Walker in the same issue states that Jesus' divine sonship is a "myth expressing the disciples' experience." He further states that because Jesus is not really divine, "Jesus does not have a superior, 'divine' status above that of Muhammad or the Buddha."[87]

The above examples illustrate that the meaning of the word "religion" in current use does not necessarily include belief in a god or higher power. Thus it cannot be argued that atheism is not a religion because atheism believes that there is no God.

Understanding the word "religion" as inclusive of both theistic and non-theistic beliefs is in accord with common definitions of the word.

Dictionary.com defines religion in its second definition this way: "2. a specific fundamental set of beliefs and practices generally agreed upon by a number of persons or sects:"[88]

The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* gives as one of the definitions of religion "an interest, a belief, or any activity that is very important to a person or group."[89]

> The supposed gap between faith and reason is a false dichotomy.

Steve Donaldson has written that the supposed gap between faith and reason is a false dichotomy, for faith is operative in both the secular and religious parts of life whether it is the scientist who believes that her experiment will be successful because she believes in the laws of science, or the quarterback who believes that his receiver will catch the pass in the end zone, or the student who believes that his diligent studies will be worth the effort, or the person who believes that God exists or the one who doesn't.[90]

The court system in the United States has begun to recognize atheism as a religion.

In ruling on a case, the 7th Court of Appeals in Wisconsin stated that "Atheism is [the inmate's] religion, and the group that he wanted to start was religious in nature even though it expressly rejects a belief in a supreme being."[91]

"In 2005, the Supreme Court reiterated its view that religion should not be defined narrowly, and the Seventh Circuit likewise observed that 'the Court has adopted a broad definition of "religion" that includes non-theistic and atheistic beliefs, as well as theistic ones.'"[92]

The status of atheism in the legal apparatus and court systems of American and Canada seems to be the basis for this post on Richard Dawkins' website:

> Do Atheists deserve religious protection? The Ontario Human Rights Tribunal says yes, declaring Atheism is a creed that deserves the same religious protections as other recognized faiths. Last year a secular church opened in Calgary. There's a push to have atheist chaplains in the Canadian and American military. Next month is "Super Secular September" in Manitoba. To discuss whether Atheism is becoming an organized religion of its own, Day 6 is joined by René Choinard. He brought the case to the Human Rights Tribunal. Catherine Dunphy is a former Roman Catholic Chaplin and the executive director of The Clergy Project, and Margaret Somerville is the director of the McGill Centre for Medicine, Ethics and Law.[93]

Another indication that some atheists and humanists consider atheism a religion comes from England, where the High Court ruled that all non-faith schools in England will be required to teach atheistic humanism in their religious education classes required for the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) diploma. This ruling was prompted by humanist parents who objected to the absence of atheistic humanism from the course on religion and brought suit to force its inclusion.[94]

HISTORICAL PARALLELS: Atheistic attempts at displacing religion with non-theistic spirituality and religious belief systems have similarities to previous historical patterns which arose during the French Revolution and the Soviet era. The governments of France and Russia copied and secularized the outward forms of religion in an attempt to displace religion.[95]

The following is a summary of what came after the French revolution of 1789:

> The French revolutionaries . . . established a form of "secular religion" [and] . . . numerous churches and monasteries were closed and hundreds of clerics were executed. . . . Revolutionary songs were substituted for church hymns, a new civil calendar took the place of the one previously imposed by the Church. . . . All churches in Paris, including Notre Dame, were turned into Temples of Reason. . . . Within these Temples of Reason, representations of saints were replaced by those of revolutionary martyrs as Marat, Lepelletier, and Chalier became the symbolic focus of a new secular

Trinity. The Jacobin clubs placed man at the center of their "secular religion," but their practices were clearly influenced by Christianity in terms of rites and vocabulary: a day in the new revolutionary calendar, decadi, was even reserved for sermons. . . . Catholicism was replaced by a religion worshiping a God of Reason."

The French revolution produced a secularism which gave rise to "Comte's new religion which deified man. . . . After his death, a secular church . . . was founded; it included rites for baptism, marriage, and burial. . . . Secularization . . . filled the void left by the Church's narrowing role by establishing new forms of ritual that constituted 'secular religion.'"[96]

The French were not alone. The Bolsheviks attempted their own secular spirituality and religion.

The Bolsheviks . . . suppressed the Christian churches and began to establish a secular religion. . . . That same year [1918], the Soviet legislature issued the "Proletarian Ten Commandments". . . . Secular rites, often mimicking those of Christianity, have been applied to the life cycle from birth to death. "Octobering," instituted during the Civil War, is a form of baptism, which can take place at communist party offices or at special baby palaces. . . . Godparents play a role in the ceremony. . . . For teenagers, the equivalent of confirmation is the rite for receiving an internal passport at the age of sixteen. "Red weddings" originated during the twenties. . . . They gave way to civil wedding ceremonies. . . . A funeral rite was initiated . . . in which candles are lit at the graveside and dirt is thrown on the coffin. . . . The communists have parodied church rites by conducting "red masses" at which Christian hymns were sung with the words altered. . . . An anti-religious counter-Christmas was staged in Moscow which featured Komsomol carols based on Orthodox hymns, skits ridiculing God and the clergy, and the burning of the effigies of Jesus, Mohammed, Buddha, and other religious figures. . . . The New Year's holiday has been enhanced in importance to compete with Christmas as trees are decorated and Grandfather Frost replaces Santa Claus. . . . Easter, which has particular importance for the Russian Orthodox, is challenged by rites honoring spring. . . . Thus communism has assumed the function of religion as its earthbound and non-theological rites provide both celebration and solace for the masses.[97]

The Soviets even produced their own Bible: Yaroslavsky's *Bible for Believers and Nonbelievers.* It engaged in "a rational demystification of religion" and attempted "to undermine its legitimacy."[98]

After Lenin's death, the Soviets mimicked the Russian Orthodox home icon corners by encouraging godless corners or Lenin corners. Lenin's body was preserved in his mausoleum, which mimicked the Russian Orthodox thinking that a true saint's body would not decay after death. Stalin shaped events after Lenin's

death to portray his death as the departure of the "atheist Messiah, the God Lenin." Stalin's wish was realized, as a mausoleum was built for Lenin, a building which was the place for the "immortal" and "imperishable God," Lenin.[99] At his mausoleum, Lenin was proclaimed "Savior of the world." Lenin's enduring presence with the Soviet people was encouraged by the phrase "Lenin lived! Lenin lives! Lenin will live." Lenin's writings became the new scripture of Soviet scientific atheism.[100]

There are other similarities between Christianity and Communism even though the perspective of Christianity is that of faith in God and of Marxism is scientific atheism. Both desire the betterment of human beings. Both share "a concern for history," have a concern for social justice, are messianic, and have "a predestination of historical moment" and "missionary zeal." Both share a historical focal point and have a sense of communalism. Each has a specific worldview, a concept of salvation, an understanding of evil, and dogmatic beliefs. Both attempt to deal with alienation, have their own social ethics, and look forward to a better world.[101] "In general we can say that Marxism follows Christianity step by step in the meta-narrative of creation, fall, redemption and final salvation. Marxism offers Christianity's history of salvation, yet without God or the Kingdom of God."[102]

Soviet scientific atheism's attempt to portray itself as separating religion from spirituality began with Marx. "Unless we see that for Marx, as for Hegel, man's needs are more than biological, that they are what may, indeed, be called spiritual, we shall not, I think, fully appreciate the depth of his analysis of religion as a fantasy of alienated man."[103] Marx attempted to describe human activity, as well as human spiritual and cultural achievements, "in naturalistic terms."[104] The Soviet journal, *Science and Religion*, emphasized the fact that Soviet scientific atheism was an "ideological and spiritual alternative" to religion. In its later years the journal did not overtly battle against religion, but rather battled "for Soviet spiritual life."[105] Showing how far the Soviet attempt to separate religion from spirituality went, Soviet ideology stated that "the observance of religious rituals" would leave "people spiritually desolate."[106]

In the late period of Soviet scientific atheism, the "Soviet state and Communist ideology came to be discussed in explicitly spiritual terms." Because religion had not disappeared as the Soviets expected, they began "to see spiritual fulfillment" as an obligation the state had in relationship "to its citizens."[107] A number of Soviet leaders saw that the success of their revolution ideologically was dependent on transforming their overtly violent atheistic battle against religion into a spiritual movement because people wondered what the state would provide for them as it took away their religious spirituality. The pseudo-scientific nature of scientific atheism could not provide adequate answers to questions about spirituality and religion. More and more the Soviets saw the need for a secular spirituality to replace religion and the need to address "the moral world of the Soviet person."[108]

This Soviet spirituality closely resembled actual religion, and many have said that the spirituality of Soviet scientific atheism was or became a secular spiritual religion. As one author noted, the Bolsheviks attempted to develop "a new communist secular religion divorced from Christianity, but with rites that echoed Christian themes."[109] Others have described Soviet scientific atheism as a civil religion similar to American Civil Religion.[110] The Soviet experiment to eradicate religion and replace it with a secular form of atheistic spirituality was not totally successful.[111] The Soviets failed to achieve the "transfer of sacrality" to their alternative rituals which had also "been the goal of the French revolutionaries in their own festivals."[112]

CONCLUSION: The atheistic movement to spirituality with the attendant borrowing of the forms of religion noted above could be described as the spiritual and religious evolution of atheism.

These trends indicate that human beings have an innate need for something spiritual that transcends reason and that can be empirically measured. Human beings possess a natural knowledge of God that has resulted in worldwide manifestation of religion.[113] Currently some atheists are moved by this natural knowledge of a god or higher power to produce their own brand of spirituality and religion. There are Marxists and others like them today who believe that Marxism is "the legitimate secular successor to the Christian religion in Western Europe."[114] They believe that they actually did "create a modern secular faith."[115]

> The atheistic movement to spirituality with the attendant borrowing of the forms of religion noted above could be described as the spiritual and religious evolution of atheism.

TO RESPOND: Today "sensitive Christians cannot fail to identify themselves with unbelievers, in the awareness that both are sinners in need of God's forgiving love. All alike are included in 'the ungodly' for whom Christ died." Many outside of faith have serious and thoughtful questions about matters of faith. Thus, Christians need to proclaim the Gospel and lovingly "speak and act out of concern for the atheist" so that the love of Christ is shared.[116]

Christians have an important task: to proclaim the reality of God and salvation in Christ to the world today (Mt 28:18–20). To do that in an informed and holistic way, Christians must have an understanding of the "questions, doubts, objections, and rejections" that are held by many "thoughtful people" today.[117] Thus Christians need to be engaged in diligent sociological study of the world and culture in which they currently live in order to address the spiritual needs of all. There are resources that can be employed by Christians in preparing for fraternal conversations with non-theists, for example, reading their works to understand their thinking.[118]

Christians actively engaging in friendships with non-theists enables diverse people to build bridges of understanding. The type and quality of friendship and respect that can and should exist between people, including those with very opposite views, such as an atheist and a Christian, is illustrated by the friendship of Christopher Hitchens and Larry Alex Taunton.[119] Such positive relationships are part of loving one's neighbor and are an important part of the Christian's response to the grace of the Gospel and witness to the love of Christ for the world.

Unfortunately, due to the labors of those whose faith is law-based and who see anyone without belief negatively, some outside the faith see believers in a less than positive light and see God as a God of vengeance and judgment. Loving, Gospel-motivated friendships with people outside the faith give a very different and positive picture of believers and of the love and concern of God for all (Jn 3:16; Jn 13:34–35; Mt 22:35–40; Gal 6:10).

Because believers have friendships and relationships with non-theists, there will be many opportunities for reasoned evangelical conversations of a spiritual and religious nature; they should be pursued. In order to do so in an informed manner, Christians should have accurate knowledge about their faith, the Scriptures, and the world in which they live, hence the importance of sound catechetical training and continued religious education throughout the Christian's life. These educational endeavors should include training in Christian apologetics.

Sociological surveys and other studies of the beliefs of Christians in America indicate the need for sound religious education, for many have little knowledge of the tenets of their faith. Some of what is believed is inaccurate, even contrary to the orthodox Christian faith, such as believing that Christ is sinful or that sinners are justified by a combination of faith and works or by simply being good.[120] An inaccurate view of the faith has led some to leave the faith and others outside the faith to reject it or speak ill of it. Christians have diligent work to do in this area.

> Apologetic training needs to address the faulty idea of the eternal conflict between science and religion.

Apologetic training needs to address the faulty idea of the eternal conflict between science and religion.[121] Another idea that needs addressing is that belief in God (religious faith) is unreasonable and lacks empirical evidence. Christian education needs to avail itself of the apologetic books and videos that address these and similar issues so that parishioners are equipped to witness to their faith in sound, biblical, and rational ways.[122] One such resource is THRED.org.[123] Apologetic training should lay out reasoned argumentation for the Christian faith.

Today, Christians need to be actively engaged in the public square's marketplace of ideas. If they are not, something is missing in culture and society. This need was expressed by Jurgen Habermas of the neo-Marxist Frankfurt School,

who paid "tribute to religious convictions and their profound historical traditions as powerful cognitive and motivational 'potentials' which we cannot dispense with." Concern was also stated to prevent "secular reason" from setting "itself up as the judge concerning truths of faith." There is a great need for the religious and secular parts of the world to communicate clearly with one another to help address the "urgent challenges confronting humanity." Habermas stated that "the Judeo-Christian and Arabian traditions" are an integral part of the inheritance of civilization.[124]

Christians are to be actively pursuing works of social ministry (Mt 25:31–40). Active engagement with the world in which they live illustrates the Christian's love and concern for the well-being of others. Helping at neighborhood food-shelves, serving as an elected government official, volunteering at a teen shelter, and supporting Lutheran World Relief are examples of things that can be done. The love of Christ constrains us to do these things because we are our brothers/sisters keepers (Gn 4:9).

Christians also need to cultivate loving and caring relationships in their congregations and in other forums.[125] A Christian community into which people outside the faith can be warmly welcomed provides a loving witness to the Christian faith. Thus, Christians are to be actively involved in their congregations and in their communities.[126]

Christians should avoid thinking that all atheists are immoral and incapable of good. Our Confessions praise the civic righteousness of those without faith in God—people who attempt to live moral lives, be good parents to their children, honest citizens, diligent workers, individuals who are concerned about helping others, protecting the environment, and the like (Ap IV, 24, 27; XVIII, 4). Christians should commend such good works whenever they are found.[127]

Not all atheists desire the eradication of religion or religious belief. There are those atheists who believe that religious faith is a positive in society and who also defend religion and its existence.[128] Furthermore, Christians should understand that atheists are engaged in apologetic discourse to win human hearts and minds for their position. Thus, Christians should be actively engaged in the apologetic enterprise as well.

> Christians have stood and continue to stand before an urgent task: to understand the biblical message as a whole, as a work of one God of history—the Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer/Sanctifier of all reality. One must gain a complete picture about God's actions, about His work of redemption and sanctification, about His will for the redeemed people of God and the whole world. One must make sure that he or she comprehends where the essence of the Gospel lies, and who exactly is this glorious and gracious Lord that the Gospel witnesses to. This fulfills the task of systematic theology, Christian apologetics, homiletics, and Christian witness in general.[129]

Christians should be taught to understand that God's Holy Spirit is their helper in all that they do. They are not living and witnessing using only human power. God's Holy Spirit helps us to live our faith and witness it to the world. Christians should also remember that reasoned discourse will only go so far. The primary message that the Church has for the world is the saving Gospel of God's love for all sinful human beings in Jesus Christ. This blessed Gospel of justification by grace through faith without the deeds of the Law is the only thing that will change hearts from unbelief to faith. Neither human reason nor the Law will change anyone's heart or mind in matters religious.

Christ died for all. Christ loves all. Christ desires the salvation of all. Christ wants His followers to show love and respect to all. God encourages His people to engage in loving reasoned dialogue and discussion: "Come let us reason together" (Is 1:18). Christians are to love their neighbors as much as they love themselves (Mt 22:39). Christians are also encouraged to always be ready to share the reason for the hope in Christ that exists within them: "Always be ready to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give a reason for the hope that you have. But do so with gentleness and respect" (1 Pt 3:15). Christ's love and salvation are for all people. As Christians live the spirituality of their religious faith in their daily lives, the love of God in Jesus Christ is communicated by their words and their actions, so that living in the light of Christ, people give glory to the Father in heaven (Mt 5:16).

Endnotes

[i] This is an exhaustively annotated essay. For that reason, we have posted these valuable resources on the Lutheran Society for Missiology's Web site (http://lsfm.global).

Saccidananda and the Trinity: Hindu-Christian Conversations on the Supreme Reality

Sam Thompson

Abstract: In a religiously plural world, building bridges with our neighbors belonging to different faiths is a desirable task. Such an effort often requires us to make an earnest effort to understand our neighbor's worldview and religious faith. To a Lutheran whose worldview shaped by Luther's two realm perspective, such knowledge is beneficial in living out our calling in both realms of life. The effort taken in this essay is to explore into the Hindu understanding of God as *Saccidananda* in relation to the Christian understanding of God as Trinity. This essay suggests that, although both those concepts of supreme reality emerge to be fundamentally different, they could provide a common ground for a Hindu and a Christian to engage in conversation.

Introduction

The role of dialogue and conversation across religious boundaries is vital in a religiously plural world. A better understanding about each other's religious thought is no doubt helpful in engaging one's neighbor. To a Christian whose worldview is enriched with Luther's theology of two realms, an understanding about neighbor's faith finds distinctive purpose in each realm of life. Two-realm theology affirms a Christian's existence in two respective realms of life, not separate but distinct. The concerns of each realm, though distinct, find their purpose and cohesion under one God, who is the Lord and sustainer of both realms of life. The right hand realm, concerned with God's salvific purpose, finds a Christian concerned with evangelism and sharing of the Gospel in an intelligible way to one's neighbor. In a religiously plural world, a basic understanding about our neighbor's religious vocabulary and

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God talk will no doubt help us to share meaningfully without confusion or distortion our distinctive way of looking at the ultimate reality. In the left hand realm, we are concerned about the well-being of all in the areas of peace, justice, and common good. This requires people coming together beyond religious and cultural boundaries to find better ways to organize their collective existence under law in the temporal realm of life. However, ethical teachings of different religions do offer some positive value in ordering the moral lives of people. In this regard, understanding each other's faith in relation to one's own is a beneficial task to undertake. This effort would provide a window into our neighbor's religious world which shapes his moral thinking.

> In a religiously plural world, a basic understanding about our neighbor's religious vocabulary and God talk will no doubt help us to share meaningfully without confusion or distortion our distinctive way of looking at the ultimate reality.

In continuation with this rationale, the purpose of this paper is to undertake a brief conversation with the Hindu concept of Supreme reality as Saccidananda (Being, Consciousness, Bliss) and the Christian understanding of God as Trinity. Do these differently named concepts point towards the same understanding of God, or are they fundamentally different? What are some of the points of continuity and discontinuity? For our purpose, the Christian understanding of the Triune God, as articulated in classical Christianity, and the Hindu understanding of Saccidananda in classical/philosophical Hinduism, as found in the Upanishads[1] and interpreted by Sankara[2] are employed. The main thesis of this paper is that the Trinitarian doctrine present in Christian tradition and the Hindu understanding of Supreme reality seem to bear some similarities, but they are to be understood differently.

Hindu Understanding of the Supreme Reality: The Saccidananda[3]

In Hinduism, the Upanishads name the supreme reality as Brahman. According to Sankara, Brahman cannot be correctly described as this or that; thus, it is often described more as *neti neti* meaning "not this, not this." Therefore, this absolute unitary being in the Upanishads is mainly described in negative or apophatic terms. Brahman is described as infinite and limitless.[4] As a being infinite and temporal, spatial limitation does not apply to Brahman. The supreme reality is therefore ageless and deathless. Thus, this unitary being is believed to be incorporeal and incomprehensible. Brahman is also thought to be a conscious principle. The supreme reality is understood to be stable among the stable, "unmoving, the one swifter than the mind," best, all-knowing, all-wise, the blissful, without equal or superior, immutable and steadfast. Brahman is free from all evil, ageless, deathless,

hungerless, thirstless, and does not experience any emotions, such as sorrow, suffering, and pain. In other words, the Upanishads teach Brahman to be beyond the experience of the temporal world and unrelated to all empirical experiences.[5] Sankara teaches that the real Brahman, who is attributeless and formless (*Nirguna Brahman*), has a triune nature. This triune innermost mystery of Brahman could be best described by the Sanskrit word, *"Saccidananda"* (merging *sat*—infinite truth + *cit*—infinite consciousness + *ananda*—infinite bliss).[6] It is regarded as the highest point reached by natural reason in classical Hinduism in search for an understanding of the real Brahman.

Sat as being points towards the "is-ness" of God. All that we can say about God is that "He is" because He simply "is." The *Sat* is also *satyam,* which means truth. Thus, *Sat* expresses the fact that Brahman alone is the true real being. Apart from Brahman there is nothing that is true or real. Thus, Brahman is the sole reality, and nothing beside the absolute reality exists.[7] *Cit* is the pure consciousness or the self-awareness of the supreme being. *Cit* is not the attribute of *Sat*; it actually is in itself *Sat*. Thus, "In Being's presence to itself, I am present to myself, aware of myself; there I am, and I am aware that I am."[8] *Cit* is also understood to be pure knowledge, wisdom or intelligence. Thus, Brahman, being the supreme being, is absolute knowledge. He is not the knower, but the knowing; not the cognizer, but the cognition; otherwise it would involve objects of cognition and duality.[9] *Ananda* is the infinite bliss or the pure joy. It is a true joy and peace, complete felicity, which cannot be impaired by the passage of time and is in itself without end. It is bliss without the fruition of happiness. Negatively, Brahman's bliss means being free from mutations and from the world of birth, suffering, and death.[10] To conclude, the doctrine of Saccidananda points towards the Brahman, who is "pure life (with nothing to live for), pure thought (with nothing to think about), and pure joy (with nothing to rejoice about)."[11] This trilogy of attributes—Being, Consciousness and Bliss—leaves Brahman undefined and without attributes.

The impassible transcendent nature of Brahman does not mean that supreme reality is not relational, distant, and far. Robin Boyd points out that in the doctrine of Saccidananda the unity of Godhead as one is preserved; yet it takes the "the supreme felicity of self-colloquy" into the Godhead.[12] Thus Brahman as Sat-Cit-Ananda points towards a relational being, which may be "unrelated without" but certainly is "related within." Philosophical Hinduism also affirms that in various ways the supreme being is immanent yet distinct in relation to its creation. In this regard, Sankara understands the presence of Brahman to the world and life as their soul or true self. Thus, there is no real soul for a human being, and one's real self is the Brahman. Once a person realizes that his real self is Brahman, he will be liberated from this world of flux and change and return to be one with Brahman.[13]

To conclude this part of the discussion, classical Hinduism talks about a supreme unitary being called Brahman, who is impassible, distinct, and different from its creation. Yet this supreme being in a unique way is related and immanent to its creation. The inner mystery of this unitary being is triune, the Saccidananda.

> Classical Hinduism talks about a supreme unitary being called Brahman, who is impassible, distinct, and different from its creation.
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The Christian Concept of the Triune God: The Trinity

The doctrine of the Trinity affirms its supreme being to be one divine being, or one Godhead, existing in three distinct persons, namely Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Each one of them is a distinct person, but one and only God. There is also no subordination among the persons in the Trinity; thus, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are equally eternal, omnipresent, omnipotent, infinitely wise, infinitely holy, infinitely loving, and omniscient.[14]

Two important words that would provide much clarity to our discussion concerning the doctrine of Trinity are *ousia* and *hypostatis.* The Greek term "*ousia*" means essence, nature or substance.[15] Robert Preus notes that *ousia* "used of God signifies the one (in number) and undivided essence common to the Three Persons of the deity which is not partly in the Three Persons in the sense that part is in the Father, part is in the Son and part in the Holy Spirit; but the whole is in the Father, the whole is in the Son and the whole is in the Holy Spirit."[16] The word "*hypostatis*" means a person. The technical meaning of the word means "a subsisting individual, intelligent (conscious), incommunicable, and not subsisting in another."[17] When it is applied to the divine persons in the Trinity, three things should be affirmed. (1) A divine person subsists in Himself and not in the subject; (2) a divine person is Himself a centre of consciousness; (3) a divine person is distinguished from another by specific characteristics.[18] To define the Trinity from these key discussions means "The divine essence which is absolutely one and therefore absolutely single is also Three Persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit-Persons who are distinct from each other, each according to an incommunicable personal characteristic."[19] Thus, to conclude, "the Father, Son, Holy Spirit are 1) truly such Persons 2) distinct Persons from each other and 3) Divine Persons who are in their essence the one true God."[20] This means that in the Trinity God is not divided into three persons, but the three persons, distinct from each other, participate in the one essence, which is unique and indivisible.[21]

This Triune God is also affirmed to be impassible but having divine emotions. The affirmations of the Church Fathers are very significant in this regard. Irenaeus understands God as the uncreated Creator, who made the heaven and the earth by His own free will. Being the Creator, He transcends all that He makes and thus is ontologically separate from His creation. Thus, unlike creatures, who grow in perfection and suffer desires and passions, God is wholly perfect in Himself and so is immutable and impassible in perfection.[22]

Similarly, Clement of Alexandria understands God as one indestructible, unbegotten, and with an existence that is true and real. As Creator, God is unborn, immortal, and in need of nothing, for He neither grows or changes. Moreover, He is neither genus, nor difference, nor species, nor individual, nor number. According to Clement, it is difficult to express God, since He is beyond all conception, although we may refer to Him as One Good, or Mind or Absolute Being, or Father or God, or Creator. He also insists that God, unlike human beings, is immutable and impassible.[23] But these affirmations do not mean that God does not have emotions. The Fathers understood that God possesses emotion, but in a divine manner, since the nature of man and the nature of God are totally different. God's emotion is different from man's emotion. Thus "these sensations in the human being are rendered just as corrupt by the corruptibility of man's substance, as in God they are rendered incorruptible by the incorruption of the divine essence."[24] Thus God's impassibility does not prevent Him from being loving and compassionate, but these emotions are totally different from human emotions, since they are divine emotions. Moreover the incorporeality of God and ontological difference of God's nature makes God's emotions different from human emotions.[25] Thus, classical Christianity understands the Trinity to be impassible but yet personal, loving, compassionate, and having emotions in divine a manner.

Engaging the Hindu Concept of Saccidananda from a Christian Trinitarian Perspective

In the previous two sections, we have discussed the concept of Saccidananda and the Christian perspective of God as Triune. Our discussion suggests that both Christianity and Hinduism seem to talk about God in a triune way. The purpose of this section is to engage, compare, and/or contrast the triune concepts employed in both these traditions. In doing so, I shall also briefly refer to some of the Indian Christian theologians, who tried to use the concept of Saccidananda to articulate the doctrine of Trinity to Hindu mind.

To begin, it could be affirmed that both philosophical Hinduism and classical Christianity seem to be committed to the notion of the impassibility of God. The language employed by both these traditions to describe God is apophatic in nature. Thus, Sankara described the supreme reality as "not this, not this." The concern that

God is beyond any description is the reason that led him to describe God in negative terms. We have seen that Christianity also employs apophatic qualifiers. Like classical Hinduism, they are meant to signify God's perfection and to affirm the fact the God is beyond all human description. In Christianity, the apophatic theology of impassibility is used as an ontological term. It is meant to express God's unlikeness to everything created, His transcendence and supremacy over all.[26] However, in patristic negative theology, an affirmation of God's impassibility is not intended to rule out all emotionally colored characteristics of God or God's involvement in creation.[27] But it is meant to affirm a creature-creator separation and/or distinction. Also, in a Christian concept of Trinity, although God is impassible, the supreme reality is personal, loving, compassionate, and has emotions in divine manner.

However, one fundamental difference between the Hindu and Christian concept of supreme reality is that, as Saccidananda stands for the trilogy of three attributes (sat, cit and ananda), the Christian tradition understands Trinity in terms of three distinct persons in the Godhead: the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. At this point, it is worthwhile to mention the effort of Brahmabandhab Updhyaya (1861–1907), a famous Indian Christian theologian who tried to relate Saccidananda with the Trinity. In his attempt, he equated God the Father to the Sat, the "is-ness" or I AM. The Cit, the wisdom or intelligence of Brahman, he equated with the Sophia and Logos and with the Word, by which the world was created, and specifically to God the Son, Christ. Finally, he equated Ananda or joy to the Holy Spirit, since it emphasizes one of the most characteristic aspects of God the Holy Spirit.

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The main problem with this articulation is that Saccidananda (which is understood as a trilogy of three attributes of the Supreme unitary monad) cannot stand for the inner mystery of the Godhead existing in persons. Thus, assigning Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit to Sat-Cit-Ananda is to superimpose the Christian Trinitarian understanding on a Hindu concept that does not have the same categories to understand a supreme Godhead in three Persons yet united by one substance. Moreover, in classical Hinduism, personality is a limitation; thus applying it to the Godhead is to limit the Being who includes and excludes all that is.[28] As Indian philosopher S. Radhakrishnan rightly notes: in classical Hinduism, "The personal God is a symbol, though the highest symbol of the true

living God. . . . The moment we reduce the Absolute to an object of worship, it becomes something less than the Absolute."[29]

Keshab Chandra Sen (1838–1884) was another noted Hindu theologian, but also a person well informed about Christianity who tried to relate both these concepts. Chandra Sen notes:

> The Trinity of Christian Theology corresponds strikingly with the *Saccidananda* dananda of Hinduism. You have three conditions, three manifestation of Divinity. Yet there is one God, one Substance and three Phenomena. Not three Gods but one God. Whether alone, or manifest in the Son, or quickening humanity as the Holy Spirit, it is the same God, the same Deity, whose unity continues indivisible amid multiplicity of manifestation.[30]

A careful analysis of Sen's theology points towards a modalistic framework for his articulation. Words like "conditions and "manifestations"[31] clearly point towards this. The Christian doctrine of Trinity does not understand Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as three manifestation of one Godhead, but rather three distinctive persons of one essence in the Trinity.

The soteriological implication embedded in the doctrine of Trinity in the Christian tradition is another feature that makes this doctrine different from Saccidananda. The doctrine of the Trinity is so fundamental to Christian orthodox because "To be saved it is necessary to know that God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit."[32] Although none of us can ever have an exhaustive knowledge about Trinity but "Still a distinct knowledge and confession of three persons is necessary for salvation."[33] In this regard, the Athanasian Creed asserts that "whoever desires to be saved must above all else hold the Catholic faith. Now this is the Catholic faith that we worship God in Trinity and Trinity in unity."[34] And adhering to a Trinitarian faith means to take the story of salvation seriously and to believe Jesus as true God and Savior and the only way to God and salvation.[35] Hinduism does not find a soteriological implication in holding onto the trilogy of Saccidananda.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper has been to engage the Hindu concept of supreme reality as Saccidananda with the Christian concept of God as Trinity. Our discussion suggests that although both these concepts seems to bear some similarities still they are fundamentally different. However, this does not mean that these fundamentally different concepts can't provide a common ground for a Hindu and a Christian to engage in conversation. Thus, a Christian who seeks to live out his calling in the right hand realm to clearly and intelligibly communicate God's Word will certainly find that "The conception of *Saccidananda* cannot exhaustively define the nature of the Trinity. But when imaginatively used it could provide a 'stepping stone' towards

the understanding of the Christian doctrine."[36] Moreover, we can affirm that the Saccidananda understanding of ultimate reality certainly provides a mind prepared for a triune understanding of God and that Hindus are more open to a Christian explanation of God as Triune than Muslims or Western Unitarians.[37] From a left hand perspective, where we are called to build bridges with our neighbors, a better understanding about our neighbors' conception of God can help us to understand their world as we seek to cooperate with them for the common good of all.

Endnotes

[1] One of the basic sources of authority for philosophical Hinduism is the Upanishads. The word "Upanishads" comes from Sanskrit words *upa* (close by), *ni* (down), *sad* (sit). It implies a form of teaching from the teacher's mouth to the student's ear. The context is a highly academic and abstract philosophical setting and a teaching that was not common knowledge of the ordinary people. The Upanishads number thirteen lengthy works dating from 4000 BCE and 600 BCE. The Upanishads mention many names in the text as their authors, but no precise information about the authors' identity can be given. There are two major schools of interpretation of the Upanishads, formed after their respective teachers, Adi Sankara (788–820 AD) and Ramanuja (1017–1137 AD). In this paper, we shall follow the interpretation of Adi Sankara. For more discussion, see Klaus K. Klostermaier, *A Survey of Hinduism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 185. And for more discussion on Sankara's theology, see Venkataram Iyer, *Advaita Vedanta According to Sankara* (New York: Asia Publishing House, 1964) and for Ramanuja's Theology John Braiste Carman, *The Theology of Ramanuja: An Essay in Interreligious Understanding* (London: Yale University Press, 1974).

[2] As noted, Sankara is an eighth-century Hindu philosopher–theologian from South India. He is known for developing the Advaita philosophy, a doctrine that identifies the individual self (atman) with the Ultimate reality (Brahman). Some of his important works include commentaries on the Brahma Sutras, commentaries on the chief Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita.

[3] The task to derive at a single concept of God in Hinduism is impossible. Hinduism does not have a "unified system of belief encoded in declaration of faith or a creed"; rather, it is an umbrella term comprising a plurality of religious phenomena. The diverse system of beliefs present in Hinduism includes monotheism, polytheism, panentheism, pantheism, monism, atheism, agnosticism, Gnosticism, and the like. Thus, the concept of God is complex and depends upon each particular tradition and philosophy. Since Hinduism conceives the whole world as a single family and accepts all forms of beliefs and dismisses labels of distinct religions, it is devoid of the concepts of apostasy, heresy, and blasphemy. For more discussion on Hinduism, see Klaus K. Klostermaier, *A Survey of Hinduism*, Gavin Flood, *An Introduction to Hinduism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), Gavin Flood, ed. *The Blackwell Companion to Hinduism* (Cornwall: Blackwell Publishing, 2003) and "Hinduism" in http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hinduism.

[3] Steven Tsoukalas*, Krishna and Christ: Body Divine Relation in the Thought of Sankara, Ramanuja, and Classical Christian Orthodoxy* (London: Paternoster, 2006), 72–74.

[4] Tsoukalas*, Krishna and Christ,* 72–74.

[5] Bharatan Kumarappa, *The Hindu Conception of the Deity: As Culminating in Ramanuja* (London: Luzac & Co*,* 1934), 4–56. Although Sankara conceptualizes Brahman in abstract terms as pure non-differentiated substance or characterless thought, Ramanuja portrays the highest self in personal terms and with positive attributes. Thus, according to him, Brahman is characterized by the six attributes of wisdom (jnana), strength (bala), lordship (aisvarya),

might (virya), energy (sakti), and glory (tejas), thus filled with an infinite number of excellent and perfect qualities, abounding in love and free from all imperfections. Moreover, according to him, Brahman, the eternal personal Lord, possesses a personal bodily divine form (divya rupa) which is different from a changing material body. For more discussion see Kumarappa, *The Hindu Conception of the Deity,* 192–93. And Tsoukalas*, Krishna and Christ*, 98.

[6] Swami Abhishiktananda, *Saccidananda: A Christian Approach to Advaitic Experience* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1974), 166–170.

[7] Abhishiktananda, *Saccidananda,* 167–168.

[8] Ibid., 169–170.

[9] Mariasusai Dhavamony, *Hindu-Christian Dialogue: Theological Soundings and Perspectives* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1994), 70.

[10] Dhavamony, *Hindu-Christian Dialogue*, 68–71.

[11] Ibid., 69.

[12] Robin Boyd, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology* (Madras: Christian Literature Service, 1969), 235–237.

[13] Kumarappa, *The Hindu Conception of the Deity*, 25–32.

[14] For more discussions, see Edward W. A. Koehler, *A Summary of Christian Doctrine* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1939), 29–33.

[15] Karl Rahner, *The Trinity* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2010), 2.

[16] Robert D. Preus, The *Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, Vol II (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House 1972), 122.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid.*,* 124.

[20] Ibid.*,* 124.

[21] For more discussion, see Thomas G. Weinandy, *Does God Suffe*r? (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000), 19, 121–127.

[22] Ibid, 90–94.

[23] Ibid., 95–96.

[24] Ibid., 100—103.

[25] An important question could be asked here: If emotions entail change, how can we affirm God to have emotions and still be impassible? Or what makes God's divine emotion reconcile with this impassible nature? A helpful insight in this regard is Thomas Weinandy's clarification of the triune God as *actus purus* (pure act). Drawing insights from Thomas Aquinas, Weinandy argues that since God's nature is *ipsum esse*. He has no self-constituting potency that needs to be actualized in order for Him to be more fully who He is. So God is act, pure and simple. Thus he is *actus purus*. God as *actus purus* is fully in act in his intra-Trinitarian relationship and also in all His relationship to His creatures. Thus, there is no way He could be more loving, more kind, more compassionate, than He already is. Since He is fully in act, He cannot be affected by any outside forces so that He changes His mind or His emotional state, because a change would mean a move from perfection to imperfection in one who is the complete actualization of all perfection. Moreover, the possibility of a change means unactualized potentiality, which is impossible in one who is fully in act. Thus, in this understanding, God can be fully personal, loving, and compassionate, yet be impassible. The persons of the Trinity are impassible not because they are devoid of passion, but because they are entirely constituted as who they are in their passionate and dynamic fully actualized relationship of love. For example, the Father is the pure act of paternity, for He is the act by which He begets the Son in the perfect love of the Holy Spirit. The Son is the pure act of sonship, for He is the act by which He is wholly the Son of and for the Father in the same perfect love of the Spirit. The Spirit is the pure act of love, for He is that act by which the

Father is conformed to be the absolutely loving Father of the Son and the Son is conformed to be the absolutely loving Son of the Father. For more discussion, see Weinandy, *Does God Suffe*r?, 120–46.

[26] Weinandy, *Does God Suffe*r?, 48.
[27] Ibid..
[28] Boyd, *Indian Christian Theology*, 236.
[29] Ibid., 236–37.
[30] Ibid., 35.
[31] Catherine Mowry Lacugna, *God For Us: The Trinity and Christian Life,* 47.
[32] Preus, *Post-Reformation Lutheranism,* 116.
[33] Ibid.
[34] John H. Leith, ed., *Creeds of the Churches: A Reader in Christian Doctrine from the Bible to the Present (*Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1982),704 .
[35] Preus, *Post-Reformation Lutheranism,*117.
[36] Boyd, *Indian Christian Theology,* 71.
[37] Ibid., 235.

Reading the History of MELIM
(the Missouri Evangelical Lutheran India Mission) in Context 120 Years Later

Joseph Rittmann

Abstract: Archival research on MELIM (Missouri Evangelical Lutheran India Mission) invites contextual reading on the co-religions of Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity, on the social situation of outcaste or pariahs of whom MELIM reached most of its followers, and the political transition from nineteenth- to mid-twentieth-century colonial and monarchial rule of subjects to the governance of citizens post Independence in 1947. How MELIM advanced God's Mission in this context from 1895 amidst human rights, information diffusion, and identity politics, stems from the prior 190 years of Danish and German Pietist Lutheran mission which started in Tranquebar in 1706.

In 2014, I found almost no information on the internet to read about MELIM. This was surprising when I considered all that I knew from having grown up in MELIM and from the extent of activities of the men and women missionaries I knew. My memory about my past is murky, but I maintain contact in the present with India and with many of my peers who grew up with me in India. My father and mother, Rev. Dr. Clarence and Emma Rittmann, were missionaries in Travancore and Tamil Nadu for 42 years (1928–1970). My brother and his wife, Dr. John and Lorraine Rittmann, were medical missionaries in northern Kerala for five years (1965–970). I studied at Loch End and graduated from Kodaikanal School in 1966. I completed my undergraduate education at Concordia Junior College, Ann Arbor, and Concordia Senior College, Ft. Wayne.

Recently, at my St. Paul, Minnesota, congregation's adult forum, we engaged in discussion of "God's Mission Statement: Good News to the Poor (Luke 4:16–21)."

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After a lifetime of working for human development and being concerned about human rights, I was pleased to find an ecumenical sense that, in addition to the classic Lutheran emphasis on confession and baptism that led to MELIM proselytizing and conversion, there can be a biblical basis for the holistic sense of the MELIM mission, despite the LCMS debate on a divide between confessional and humanistic tendencies. I consider that the 1965 LCMS Mission Affirmations were an earlier vision of "God's Mission Statement," even if the LCMS and MELIM held for the first half of the twentieth century a sense that a caring or healing or mercy ministry was secondary.

After two years of hunting for MELIM sources, I am grateful that I have gained access to original and other documents for archival research on the MELIM mission through the Concordia Historical Institute, St. Louis. Most of these sources are not found by a quick search on Google, quick being the operative term. I know some missionary names and titles based on publications that others with a MELIM background have shared with me. I have found many published articles by Rev. Dr. Herbert Hoefer and Rev. Dr. Roland E. Miller and others in *Missio Apostolica*, in other publications, and in formal libraries.

What was most prominent for me was that I met church historians educated in India whose doctoral dissertations and research are focused on the MELIM mission. These include Rev. Dr. Christudas at Concordia Seminary, Nagercoil; Dr. Victor Raj and Dr. Stanish Stanley at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis; and Dr. Daniel Jeyaraj, now at Liverpool Hope University. The Concordia Historical Institute archives the original MELIM meeting minutes from 1925 to 1985, the letters from and to the Honorable Board of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States, who commissioned missionaries to MELIM, as well as photographs and the accessions of individual missionaries.

I reached out to 150 MELIM friends for whom I had e-mail addresses. Now in 2015, 120 years from the start of MELIM in 1895, I count the names of about 560 first-, second-, and third-generation missionary men, women, and children. Of the original 250 commissioned men, women, and wives, I count about forty who are still living. Some served as short as a few days and some as long as 42 years.

Some of those friends I contacted sent me or pointed me to several important works they had in their personal libraries and pictures they had on hand. The works of Rev. Dr. Herbert M. Zorn (1970), Rev. Dr. Luther W. Meinzen (1980), Rev. Earl Mueller (1974), Rev. Norbert Hattendorf (2001), Dr. N. Mitchell (1976), Rev. Dr. R. Miller (1964) were important. These documents pointed to other personal collections in storage but lacking lists of what is contained. By reading these works, I located in the archives at CHI and at Concordia Seminary Nagercoil unpublished theses, letters, and minutes of a thousand meetings that MELIM held until 1984.

Three Contextual Frames of MELIM History

My reading to date suggests three lifelong contextual frames for MELIM; these may be viewed as dynamic, interactive, and organic (see also D. Jeyaraj, 2006) challenges for archival research http://missionstudies.org/archive/rescue/jeyaraj.htm). These shaped the missional Gospel that MELIM preached in India and shared with its members.

The first frame is India, its religions, and its life under the British Raj and other ruling Maharajahs, where humans were subjects or slaves, until 1948, when India became democratic and its constitution changed human status to citizens. Bound hand and foot with this civil status in India is the identity given by caste and the non-identity of being non-caste or Pariah, which continues as a crucial current crisis today in the politics, economics, and society of India (Doniger, 2010). MELIM offered a unique ministry to the Pariah non-caste in Travancore (Meinzen 1981, Christudas 2015). Religion in India has a long co-eval history, documented from before the Hindu Vedic and Purana texts, which embraces Buddhism, Jainism, Christianity, Islam, and Sikhism, as well as primitive religions (Frykenberg 2014, Doniger 2010).

Readers will find extensive writings by Dr. A. J. Lutz, MELIM missionary, on caste and theology in the *Concordia Historical Quarterly* (Vol. 20, p. 95 and others). Caste and non-caste considerations determined much of MELIM's direction from its earliest times, underlining its progress in gaining members (Meinzen 1984, Christudas 2014). Criticisms of mission generally are related to enticing converts from their natural identity with material incentives. In India, however, Hinduism itself had, through its own development of Brahminism across its centuries, cast out the Pariahs from joining the Hindu religion to avoid polluting the caste Hindus. Thus, there was no conversion per se by Christianity, but rather a first human recognition of the Pariahs' universal humanity, an uplifting of their group, and an expression of their voice.

The second frame of how MELIM advanced its own mission is what we will consider a continuing discussion of human rights, information diffusion, and identity politics, reviewed in Meinzen (1981) and elsewhere. Mission in general focuses on the person and on his or her group (as in a society, a congregation, or a church) and involves a diffusion of innovation, knowledge and information, which by rights a person may adopt, or not. Men and women from many societies have long traveled from their home lands to new lands to learn new things and share the knowledge they brought with them. The spread or mutual sharing of Indian and Chinese experience (Doniger, 2010) and the movement of Islamic knowledge to Medieval Europe is fundamental in human development history (Frankopan, 2016). The adoption and adaptation of ideas, or diffusion of innovation (Rogers, 1962), was evident in India at the time of Buddha, which predates the formation of Hinduism. Every historical

development brings with it new ideas, benefits, and advantages, separate from the political and economic exploitation that is characteristic of history as well.

When MELIM started in India in 1895, it entered at the end of almost two centuries of royalist mission work, first of the Danish King and then German King, and then in India, which was ruled by the British monarchy. Most of the population of the world for this period was subject to a monarch (rajah, king, emperor), except in the United States, or was a slave.

Violation of human rights continues throughout history. Slavery of subjects was abolished by Great Britain and its Empire in 1833, though India was exempt. Status by caste and non-caste continued and was not abolished in India, despite the efforts of Dr. Ambedkar (1936). The German trained MELIM missionaries had been working in India for as many as 10 years before continuing under an American mission. They arrived in India just 50 years after slaves were emancipated in the United States in 1860, which was just about the time that the pietistic German Lutherans fled to the U. S. and formed the new synods that supported MELIM just 40 years later. MELIM's approach to mission, caste and non-caste, and identity politics is reviewed through a subaltern lens by Dr. Christudas from Concordia Seminary Nagercoil in his 100-year historical dissertations (STM 2014 and Dr Th 2016). MELIM's accommodation of Indian independence at the end of World War II coincided with the 1948 UN Declaration of Human Rights—a culminating document replete with liberal, humanitarian, and democratic values. These events preceded the establishment of the India Evangelical Lutheran Church in 1959 and later the reduction of MELIM by 1980.

The third frame is the peculiar history of MELIM that stemmed from 190 years of Danish and German mission in India, beginning with Ziegenbalg and Pluetshau coming to Tranquebar in 1706 to 1895. This long mission presence in India led the first two MELIM missionaries, Rev. Naether and Rev. Mohn, to exit the Leipzig Mission in India in 1984 and to return to India in 1895 for the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States, later known as The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

Curiously, the distinctive issues faced by MELIM throughout its history, that is, separation from other Christian missions as well as internal steps to limit unionism or fellowship, such as with Rev. Dr. A. A. Brux (1929), reflected the disputes between the first MELIM missionaries and the Leipzig Mission. F. Dean Lueking's *Mission in the Making* (1964) also suggests that the mission of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States in St. Louis generally struggled with pietism and scholasticism.

Holistic Mission of MELIM

At the same time that MELIM and its pietistic, scholastic origins focused on doctrinal rectitude (Meinzen 1981), MELIM missionaries also offered a holistic, caring ministry, which included medical mission, Muslim missions, mission to tribals, urban ministry, literacy and communication ministry, music, education and training ministry, sometimes livelihood and social assistance, even identity and freedom from the oppression of the caste system. Ziegenbalg is well-known for his commitment to education ministry and his unwillingness to subject his ministry to differentiation by caste. The extent of MELIM holistic ministry is discussed extensively in the MELIM General Conference minutes from the outset of mission.

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F. Dean Lueking's *Caring Ministry* (1968) offers again some background on the American LCMS approach. However, the Lueking review ends before the 1965 Detroit LCMS Convention presentation of Mission Affirmations which summarized the Synod's view of holistic ministry. In the decade following, the LCMS experienced changes in its focus on social ministry as an aspect of mission work. In 1967 the name of the Department of Social Welfare was changed to the Board of Social Ministry. The latter was merged in 1969 with the Board of World Relief into the Board of Social Ministry and World Relief. These changes related to criticism of mission in the context of colonialism and imperialism and hinged on the extent to which mission was holistic, to the whole person and their identity, and not only a person's belief and confession.

After initial efforts by Nurse Ellermann in 1913 in medical missions, MELIM extended itself for medical missions in 1921 with the commissioning of Nurse Angela Rehwinkel, who was instrumental in establishing Bethesda Hospital in Ambur, North Arcot District, Madras Presidency. MELIM also conducted other caring ministries, including school education, communication, literacy work, deaconess and livelihood work with women, famine relief, and missions to minority groups, including Muslims, tribal communities, and hearing impaired. Due to the historical gender structure of MELIM, the volunteer caring work of wives of the male missionaries is generally underreported (Brauer, 1996). Often caring ministries are viewed as incentives to attract followers, but MELIM missionaries viewed this as

a natural extension of their Gospel mission, as noted in their General Conference minutes.

Summary of Chronology of MELIM

From 1895 to 1909, MELIM brought 17 missionaries and wives to India. One died in service, and his wife left India. From 1910 to 1919, another 20 entered service and 16 ended service. From 1920 to 1929, another 95 missionaries entered MELIM service and 16 ended service. From 1930 to 1939, another 30 joined before World War I and 31 ended service. From 1940 to 1949, 27 more joined and 35 ended service. From 1950 to 1959, 35 more joined and 49 ended service. From 1960 to 1969 38 more joined and 44 left service. From 1970 to 1979, 4 joined and 51 left service. From 1980 to 1986, 4 joined and 16 left service. The total of 270 who entered service is matched by 260 who left plus 10 who were married in India.

Figure 1. Summary of MELIM Missionary Entry and Exits by Decade.

MELIM Decade	Notable Event	Entered Service	Exited Service
1895–1909	Start of MELIM	17	2
1910–1919	World War I	20	16
1920–1929		95	16
1930–1939	• Great Depression USA • MELIM registered under India Societies Act.	30	31
1940–1948	• World War II • Indian Independence • UN Human Rights Declaration	27	35
1950–1959	IELC established	35	49
1960–1969	Loch End School closed	38	44
1970–1979	• IELC Trust • Kodaikanal School, Orissa Tribal Mission	4	51
1980–1989	Decline of MELIM	4	16
	Total of Missionaries 1895–1989	270	260

MELIM was charged with a democratic organizational structure of a conference and elected officers, typical of the German Lutheran church tradition in the USA, and conveying reports to the Honorable Board in St Louis. MELIM began as a handful of independent men, learning to work in the Tamil language under the Nawab of North Arcot District of the Madras Presidency in 1895, near the location where they had worked earlier. In 1907, MELIM was invited by a non-caste

Christian in Nagercoil, several days journey to the south, to commence work in the Kingdom of Travancore. In 1912, a similar invitation by a non-caste Christian was made for MELIM to commence work in Trivandrum in the Malayalam language. During these first ten years, the missionary structure was more akin to Indian host and missionary friend, while literature was translated and worship took place before church buildings were built.

In 1912, MELIM settled on Kodaikanal as its mission health retreat, which in time became the MELIM "citadel." Loch End contained the largest concentration of purpose-built homes for missionaries, with a church, boarding home, and primary school for their children. Developing and managing this compound required that MELIM organize its corporate structures, beginning with the Bergheim committee that later became the General Conference of MELIM and constituted the general order for MELIM. The gentleman's agreement was no longer adequate for a mission with over one hundred units, conferences in three territories, and a general conference overall.

After three decades of management by privilege, MELIM was registered in India under the India Societies Act of 1880, and the General Conference meetings were conducted under legal stipulations. By 1925, MELIM had held 14 general conferences and the Mountain Home Committee became the Hill Station Committee. These conference meetings were the corporate forum for MELIM management. They were democratic and transparent, and all actions were documented in the minutes, which stood as policy for the missionaries. They were copied to the Honorable Board in St. Louis, but the time lag between the general conference and the Honorable Board Secretary review was so great that the review had little effect on MELIM policy. The Concordia Historical Archives has copies of the 32 MELIM General Conferences held up to 1960, when the IELC was established. In addition, CHI has archived minutes from 206 conferences of the Ambur District, 130 conferences of the Nagercoil District, and 136 conferences of the Trivandrum District to the time that MELIM was transformed by the establishment of IELC in 1959. From 1960, the count of conferences started again from one for the each of the following 25 years, at which point CHI has no more accessions from MELIM.

It is hard to imagine that there were no conflicts in priorities and decisions that arose in the triangle of individual missionaries, the Honorable Board, and the General Conference. These are referenced in some of the missionary writing, but I did not find sources in the archived minutes. The individual missionary was commissioned by the Honorable Board and assigned to work according to the missionary General Conference. The General Conference was the democratic structure for managing all of the affairs of MELIM in India, including assignment and administration of missionaries. With the establishment of the IELC in 1959, 60 years after MELIM began, MELIM stood in the shadows while it defined a new role.

However, Indian nationalism led to visa restrictions, so that by 1980 MELIM had been reduced to fewer than 5 missionaries in 20 years.

The end stage, from 1960 to the present, coincided with the establishment of the India Evangelical Lutheran Church and then the formation of the IELC Trust in the 1970s, for the purpose of transferring land ownership from MELIM to the IELC. Due to Indian visa restrictions, MELIM shifted its focus to international education through Kodaikanal School and towards tribal or Adivasi groups in Orissa with missionaries from the Commonwealth (from Australia). At the last from 1990, MELIM continued in the person of one retired former missionary, Dr. Nurse Alice Brauer, still living in India and who carries with her the final stage "gentleman's agreement" between MELIM and the IELC and is a member of the defunct IELC Trust.

Figure 2. Chronology of MELIM (adapted from Dr. H. M. Zorn (1969, 1970) and L. W. Meinzen (1981). Dates may be approximate. Apologies that missionary wives not named in source lists.

1706.   Ziegenbalg and Pluetschau land in Tranquebar, first Protestant missionaries of German descent abroad with Danish Halle Mission.
1840.   Leipzig Mission takes over Danish Halle Mission.
1874.   Willkomm (in India since 1873), C. M. Zorn (1871), Zucker (1870) break from Leipzig Mission and enter into fellowship with the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States in St. Louis, Missouri.
1875.   Naether (1887) enters MELIM mission in Krishnagiri, North Arcot District, met by Kempff (1885). Died in India in 1904.
1896.   Mohn (1889) enters Ambur and Kellerbauer (1893) enters in Bargur.
1897.   Freche (1891) enters Vaniyambadi.
1900.   First MELIM member. Heubener enters, first US trained.
1902.   Eight MELIM members in all. Forster and Naumann enters.
1904.   Naether dies of bubonic plague.
1905.   Nau enters.
1906.   Fifty-nine MELIM members.
1907.   Invited by Jesudason (later ordained), a Pariah Christian, to work in Nagercoil. Huebener moves to Nagercoil. Gutnecht enters. 209 MELIM members. Comity with LMS.
1909.   Huebener brother enters.
1910.   Zucker, Kuechle enters. 350 MELIM members.
1911.   Eleven MELIM missionaries in India.

1912.   MELIM invited by Paulose (later ordained), a Pariah or Sambavar
         Christian, to work in Malayalam in Trivandrum. Loch End, Kodaikanal
         purchased. Stallman, A. J. Lutz, and Harms enter.

1913.   Nurse Ellermann begins medical work. Ehlers, Goerss, and Williams enter.
         675 MELIM members with 15 missionaries in 7 stations with 96 Indian
         national helpers.

1915.   German descent missionaries exit due to World War I and British rule. Five
         missionaries present and Hamann and Ludwig enter (died in India in 1919).

1916.   Roman Catholic members request MELIM to begin mission in
         Vadakkangulam in midst of caste and non-caste issues to be revisited in
         1927. 1,378 members with nine missionaries and 2,315 students in MELIM
         schools with 128 Indian national helpers.

1919.   Ludwig dies of malaria and typhoid. 1,681 members with five missionaries
         and 1,681 students in MELIM schools with 179 Indian national helpers.

1920.   Nurse Georgi (Resigns in 1926), Heckel, Noffke, Kauffeld enter.

1921.   Rev. Jesudasan, first Indian national pastor. Boriack, A. C. Fritze, Jank,
         Levihn, Oberheu, Nurse Herold (later marries Noffke), Nurse Rehwinkel,
         Schroeder, Strasen, Nurse Ziegfeld (later marries Strasen), and Dr.
         Doederlein enters.

1922.   Bachmann, first Boarding parent at Loch End. Blaess and EH Meinzen
         enter.

1923.   Nurse Rehwinkel establishes Bethesda Hospital, Ambur. Brux, Kuolt, and
         Strieter enter (later marries Heckel).

1924.   Concordia Seminary, Nagercoil established. Brux documents prayer
         controversy.

1925.   Caste issue re-emerges at Vadakkungulam. Lutz documents controversy.
         R. Brauer and Schulz enter.

1926.   Brux established printing press. Christensen, Eckert, Gnuse, Lang, Rasch,
         Nurse Rathke, Stelter enter.

1927.   Ezhavan mass conversion movement in Travancore. Hattendorf, Nurse
         Mahler (later marries Hattendorf), Knoernschild Mueller (later marries
         Lang), Schrader (later marries Leckband), Meyer, Mueller, von Schlichten,
         and K. Zorn enter.

1928.   Buehner, Burrow, Landgraf, Luedtke, Manns, Miller, Mueller, C. Rittmann,
         and Wyneken enter.

1929.   Evangelist Duriam posted in Ceylon. Dr. Bohnsack, Chuvala, J. Naumann
         (son of George Naumann), Peckmann, Nurse Oberheu (later marries
         Stelter), Wetzel, and R. Zorn enter.

1930.   145 IELC congregations with 7,170 members with 52 missionaries
         (Meinzen 1981). Dukewits, Hahn, Kraemer, and Kretzmann enter.

1931.   Bertram, Kline, and Reiser enter.

1932.   Mt. Zion Church, Loch End, Kodaikanal dedicated. Doctor (deaconess, nurse), Feddersen, Grumm, and Prange enter.

1933.   Brux dismissed while on furlough. Koehne School, Loch End built.

1935.   Lutz (later marries Reiser) and M. J. Lutz.

1936.   Lachmann and Dr. Leckband enter.

1937.   Loch End Teacher Mueller, Sieving, and Steinhoff enter.

1939.   World War II.

1940.   205 MELIM congregations with 14,388 members with 47 missionaries. 15 national pastors and 177 other leaders.

1945.   Wynaad, Travancore mission opened. Michalk, Griesse, and Graf enter.

1946.   Krafft (wife Winifred 2nd generation daughter of Schrader), Koepke and A. J. Lutz (son of A Lutz) enter.

1947.   Indian Independence. Ziemke (deaconess) and H. M. Zorn enter.

1948.   UN Declaration of Human Rights. MELIM joins National Christian Council (NCC). Heinlein, May, L. W. Meinzen (2nd generation, son of E. H. Meinzen) enter.

1949.   Ambur District Synod established. J. Mayer and Trautmann enter.

1950.   Muslim mission re-commenced. Dr. Bulle Gall, L. E. Meinzen, Nau, Otten, and Smith enter.

1951.   Bombay urban mission established. Nurse Gronbach enters.

1952.   Rink (deaconess) enters.

1953.   A. Fritze (son of A. C. Fritze), E. Hahn, Luecke, and R. E. Miller enter.

1955.   M. Philip first Indian national seminary professor. Engelbrecht enters.

1956.   Nagercoil and Trivandrum District Synods established. Mitchell enters.

1957.   283 IELC congregations with 29,185 members with 41 missionaries. 105 national pastors. (Meinzen 1981). Loch End Teacher Hennig, Nurse Kropp, and Nurse Leo enter. Suehs enters Ceylon.

1958.   IELC (India Evangelical Lutheran Church) established. MELIM focuses on mission personnel. Fergin enters Ceylon. Dr. Langsam enters.

1959.   Concordia Seminary affiliates with Serampore Seminary. LCMS accepts IELC as sister church. Dr. Crimm (formerly Bohnsack enters).

1960.   Dr. Pueschel enters.

1961.   Nurse Math and Nurse Sorenson enter.

1962.   Gundulupet mission opened. Dr. M. McCreary (3rd generation, daughter of J. Naumann) enters.

1963.   Nurse Kitzmann (later marries Howe) enters.

1964.   IELC joins national Federation of Lutheran Churches (FELC). MELIM plans new missions. Nurse R. Meyer and Nurse Patzschke enter.

1965. Mission Affirmations at LCMS Detroit Convention. LCMS accepts freedom of sister churches in fellowship matters. Howe (Loch End boarding parent), Pollex, Schirmer (dies in India from car wreck), and Vidler enter.

1966. MELIM commences 'adivasi' mission in Orissa with JELO-Breklum. Nurse Anderson. Bjornstad (Kodaikanal School), Kleinig, Nurse McNabb, Nurse B. Mayer, Noack (Loch End teacher), and Dr. J. Rittmann (2nd generation, son of C. Rittmann) enter.

1967. 326 IELC congregations with 38,148 members with 21 missionaries. 117 national pastors and 99 other leaders. 66 primary school and 5 high schools, 2 hospitals and 2 clinics. 1 seminary, 1 teacher training, and 1 printing press. (Meinzen 1981). LaDassor enters Ceylon. Dr. Thude enters.

1968. Nurse A Brauer (2nd generation, daughter of R Brauer) and Hoefer enter.

1969. IELC joins LWF. Koehne School, Loch End closed. MELIM in fellowship with other Lutherans, ALC and LCA. Dearmun and Riemer (teacher Kodaikanal School) enter.

1970. Missionaries excused by IELC from privilege status on committees. IELC Trust established. Loch End and Trewin properties not included.

1975. Kessler (Loch End boarding parent)

1976. M. Engelbrecht (Kodaikanal International School, 2nd generation, son of L. Engelbrecht)

1977. T. Engelbrecht (Kodaikanal International School, 2nd generation, son of L. Engelbrecht)

1988. Paul (wife Alice, 2nd generation, daughter of A. J. Lutz, Loch End boarding parent)

1989. Loch End taken over

1999. Loch End returned for Kodaikanal International School use. A. Brauer last MELIM missionary. Retires but lives in Ambur.

2015. 120 year anniversary of MELIM.

MELIM Transitions

MELIM transitioned through the profound political and social transformations occurring in India and globally during the past 120 years. The first MELIM missionaries were European borne and educated under the German monarchy, while India continued as a monarchical society until 1947. The American educated missionaries that populated MELIM after World War I entered India with a stronger sense of their own German heritage

> MELIM transitioned through the profound political and social transformations occurring in India and globally during the past 120 years.

than consciousness of India's traditions, ethnicity, or religions. Yet their missional commitment to "disseminate the innovation" that all people are equal before God and have a right to voice their love of God motivated them to recognize and give voice to all persons they touched, regardless of caste and non-caste, health status, and gender through holistic ministry.

At the end of the two great World Wars, Indian Independence, and the UN Declaration of Human Rights, MELIM transitioned to a mission for the whole person with a sense of human rights, citizenship, and nationalism. The IELC continues as a legacy of MELIM mission, with a diverse membership, property and buildings, and institutions, including Concordia Seminary and other educational institutions. Many of the holistic missions, such as medical services, literacy and communication services have not continued.

My challenge remains to continue reading and to disseminate the considerable, even vast, MELIM mission and work, digitally on the internet. I also hope that considering MELIM in context will help me understand the short-term outcomes of MELIM as well as the long-term effect of sharing the Gospel in India holistically.

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Church and Development in Ethiopia: The Contribution of Gudina Tumsa's Holistic Theology

Samuel Yonas Deressa

Abstract: There has been much debate in the church over the relationship between evangelism and development. In past decades, the involvement of the church in God's mission has been defined with emphasis on either evangelism or development. The church, however, is called to participate in God's ongoing creative work of nurturing the whole aspect of life (physical and spiritual) without separation. This article explores the challenges to the holistic understanding of mission in the Ethiopian context and attempts to show the contribution of Gudina Tumsa's holistic theology in the context of the ministry of the Lutheran church in Ethiopia. The two challenges explored are the Western missions' emphasis on development and Pentecostal teaching that downplays the public role of the church.

Introduction

Evangelical Christianity was introduced to Ethiopia over a hundred years ago. Through their ministries, Evangelical Christians have been playing a major role in shaping the values and attitudes of individuals and societies in terms of social behaviors and political and economic activities. In the past few decades, however, religious instructions (particularly by Evangelicals) have largely been absent from the agenda of development. As studies indicate, this absence is due to teachings and practices that separate between the spiritual and physical realms.[1]

The Ethiopian Evangelical churches' approach to development is influenced by two major factors: the Western missions' emphasis on social and physical development over against evangelism and the Pentecostal teaching and practice that minimize all except the spiritual activities of the church. These two approaches to missions have resulted in mission activities in Ethiopia suffering a longstanding

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dichotomy between evangelism and development "which have been considered as mismatching pair that exist and operate in their own differing worlds."[2]

Development activities of faith-based organizations in Ethiopia have either been used as a vehicle for evangelism or considered to be the sole purpose of Christian mission. Both these approaches are problematic, since faith and development belong together. Based on Gudina Tumsa's understanding of holistic theology, this article proposes a holistic approach to development from a critical perspective and as an alternative to the above-mentioned one-sided and partial practices of service in a society.

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Challenges to a Holistic Approach to Mission

Ethiopia is one of the oldest Christian nations. Christianity was introduced to Ethiopia in the fourth century. Adopting the Eastern Orthodox tradition, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC) was established as a national church. The history of Evangelical churches in Ethiopia, however, begins with the first attempt of Lutheran missionaries to reform the EOC in the seventeenth century followed by the first successful mission endeavor of the Swedish Evangelical Mission (SEM) which happened at the end of the nineteenth century.[3]

The first three missionaries (Lars-Johan Lange, Per-Eric Kjellberg, and Johan Carlsson) of the SEM were sent to reach Ethiopians, particularly the Oromo tribe, via the Sudan in 1866.[4] However, when they arrived at Kunama (a town in today's Eritrea), they were faced with two major problems. First, the missionaries learned that the River Nile was too unstable for the expedition. Second, the Ethiopian emperor, Emperor Tewodros, had closed all the ways to the Oromo territory out of suspicion of the missionaries' desire to connect with that part of the country. Therefore, the missionaries were forced to remain in Kunama and work among the people of that area until the situation changed.[5]

Because of local wars among the Kunama, the SEM missionaries had to move to a new location, Massawa, in 1870 and later build their mission station at Imkulu. According to Eric Virgin, Imkulu, "the territory around and to the west of Massawa, was at the time a no-man's-land" divided between Ethiopia and Egypt.[6] This situation created a favorable context for the SEM to freely engage in mission, which would be a strong foundation for the start of Evangelical churches in Ethiopia. Here,

the SEM had to wait for a period of twenty-eight years to realize their primary mission of reaching the Oromo territory.

The SEM's understanding of mission at the time can be understood from the general policy they adopted in 1871, which reads "mission should not only be a mission of preaching, but also a mission of service which in the beginning lays more stress on caring for those in need."[7] At Imkulu, they opened a fully equipped school that provided a Western form of education to the local community. Carpentry and metalwork were also part of the curriculum. Additionally, they established a printing press and began to publish Scriptures translated into local languages.[8] In this way, the SEM founded a mission station that provided holistic service to the community. This approach helped the SEM to win souls around their mission station. As a result of mutual interaction between the SEM and the Reformed EOC clergy, the Eritrean Evangelical Church (EEC) was also founded. However, as Halldin Norberg explains, "the work [of the SEM] in Eritrea was regarded only as a station on the way to the Oromo."[9]

The work of the SEM in providing religious as well as other forms of education at Imkulu resulted in a different, but fruitful, strategy to reach the Oromo with the Gospel. It was this little seed planted by the SEM at Imkulu that would grow like a tree throughout Ethiopia as indigenous converts trained at this institution became pioneers of Evangelical faith among the Oromo. These converts were freed Oromo slaves, poor fugitives, and exiled Reformed Eritrean clergy who were in conflict with EOC for adopting the Evangelical faith. The SEM's holistic approach to evangelism became a strong foundation and a viable strategy for indigenous missionaries who, following their footsteps, reached out to other parts of Ethiopia. From this time on, evangelization was linked with the holistic services that the church provides for the community it serves: education, health services, shelter and food, and advocating and providing a voice for the poor and the marginalized.

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Gebre-Ewosatewos Ze-Mikael (1865–1905) and Daniel Debela (1866–1904) were the two indigenous missionaries (both trained at Imkulu) that reached the Oromo for the first time in 1898. They were engaged in evangelism and development work from the day they started ministering among the people. In addition to religious instruction and changing the livelihood of the community, both Ze-Mikael and Debela organized a team and together started an elementary school where they introduced modern education to the local community and where "students who were

born by landless parents were encouraged to take up manual crafts which promoted local economy and social change."[10] They also discouraged slavery and paid from their own pockets to free as many slaves as possible.[11] They were later joined by Onesimos Nesib, and the two women Aster Ganno, and Feben Hirpe, all freed slaves trained at Imkulu by the SEM.[12]

Indigenous pioneers have also contributed to the indigenization of the EECMY by using local languages in worship, by translating Scriptures, liturgies, and hymn books into local languages, and by using cultural concepts in translating and evangelizing the communities. It was Nesib who played a major role in 1887 in translating hymn books that contained one hundred songs, which he named *Galata Waaqayyoo Gooftaa Maccaa* (Glory to the Everlasting God). He also translated the New Testament (1893), the whole Bible (1899), Luther's Small Catechism, and Dr. Barth's *Bible Story* with the assistance of Ganno and Hirpe. In addition, he wrote a book, *Jalqaba Barsiisaa,* also known as the "Readers" (1894), with the assistance of Ganno and Hirpe.[13] One may ask what translation has to do with helping the Christian community in becoming active in the socio-economic life of their country. As Andrian Hastings rightly argues, translation of the Bible and other literature into vernacular languages results in the building of the national consciousness.[14] It was the availability of these translations, coupled with other forms of indigenization (as mentioned above), that has continued to shape congregational ministries (which is holistic) and in how the EECMY continued to be engaged in the nation building.[15]

When the door was opened for missionaries to work in Ethiopia, Evangelical Christianity was already an established movement following the tradition of the SEM. What the missionaries did upon their arrival was to strengthen the work and help in the establishment of congregations. This took place until the Italian occupation (1936–1945). Upon Italy's invasion, European missionaries were expelled, and indigenous leaders continued to plant congregations and provide holistic service to the communities they served. As Eide states, "from the very beginning of the evangelical enterprise in Ethiopia, we see that wherever there is a congregation there is a school. Wherever a group of evangelical Christians gathered they established a school."[16]

Following Ethiopia's liberation from the Italian occupation in 1941, Western mission organizations started to come back to Ethiopia after Emperor Haile Selassie I permitted them to freely work in the country. The freedom, however, was given with certain restrictions. One was on the work of evangelism, which limited the missionaries' spheres of evangelistic work to the so-called "mission-open" areas, i.e., areas not designated to the EOC.[17] According to the Emperor's autobiography, this permission was granted to missionaries because of their contribution to education and health services. The emperor's goal was to modernize the country using mission organizations as a means to introduce modern education, social services, and medical services in all parts of the country.[18]

What the missionaries did was to provide modern education coupled with theological training, which enhanced the ministry of the church. They played a major role in providing modern education to the communities they served. The training centers, hospitals, schools, and other institutions planted by missionaries were meant to meet the spiritual and physical demands of the community. As Eide emphasizes, this approach "led to a re-establishment of the dignity and the identity of ethnic groups, which in turn came to play a role in the Ethiopian revolution."[19]

The shift in the missionaries' approach to mission, however, started to change in the early 1960s. This shift was from a holistic approach to mission to a new emphasis on social action and community development.[20] This shift was preceded by the new concept of development that emerged in the West after the Second World War, particularly in the 1950s "to describe the wellbeing of the poor."[21] During those years, the intellectual discourse was focused on economics, mainly because it was the time when Western nations were under pressure to grant political independence to their respective colonies in Africa.[22] In this discourse, the term "civilization" was equated with "Christianization," which led to the promotion of economic prosperity as a means of redeeming Africa to Christ.[23]

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This shift resulted in an imbalance in funding received from the West for development projects over against projects that supported the evangelistic outreach of churches in Africa, particularly the EECMY. The Western mission organizations were "readily prepared to assist in material development, while there seemed to be little interest in helping the church meet her primary obligation to proclaim the Gospel."[24] As Megersa Guta also noted, there were also labels put on machinery used in development projects of the church, which read, "Not for evangelism work."[25] This stipulation was required by some governments that were able to contribute resources to church programs—for example, agricultural development—but not to church programs in evangelism. Even though the EECMY was not convinced by the new approach of the Western mission organizations, its traditional holistic approach to mission was challenged. To the present time, Western partner churches of the EECMY hold on to similar theological positions that give little or no attention to the evangelistic mission of the church. Therefore, how the church continues to uphold its holistic theology and practice remains to be a challenge.

Besides the theology and practice introduced by Western missionaries, the EECMY's understanding of mission, particularly related to development, was also

influenced by the Pentecostal movement that began in the early 1950s.[26] This movement was started by the Swedish Philadelphia Church Mission and the Finnish mission. In the 1960s, many young Ethiopians were attracted to the movement, and the first Pentecostal church, the Ethiopian Full Gospel Believer's Church, was established in 1967. Their application to be registered as a national church was rejected the same year by the Ministry of the Interior, which entailed the closure of the church's meeting places.[27] This action resulted in the influx of a large number of Pentecostal believers into the mainline denominations, including the EECMY, until they were allowed to have their own worship places in 1991.

> Besides the theology and practice introduced by Western missionaries, the EECMY's understanding of mission, particularly related to development, was also influenced by the Pentecostal movement that began in the early 1950s.

As Gemecho Olana states, "one of the dominant features of the [Pentecostal] movement in Ethiopia is their reluctance to engage in social action or prophetic ministry. [They] are indifferent to the social implication of the gospel and take no interest in politics."[28] They emphasized the "otherworldliness" of Christians, which encouraged political and economic passivity. In their teaching, they discouraged members from having commitment to anything other than the spiritual aspects of life. According to Mamusha Fanta, one of the main Pentecostal leaders, "the major reason that made [Pentecostals] passive when it comes to economic and political things was that [they] perceived that the government [that persecuted them] was anti-Christian."[29]

The teaching of the Pentecostal movement that emphasizes the spiritual aspect of life and gives little or no value to social, economic, and political matters has influenced most of the EECMY members. Its major impact was on creating two separate worldviews about reality: the sacred (good) and secular (evil). Spiritual practices (worship, preaching, and so on) are considered as heavenly, and other activities (in the social, economic, and political realms) are described as evil or other-worldly.[30]

The EECMY on Holistic Ministry (Evangelism vs. Development)

The EECMY's theology, commonly described as "holistic theology," was developed by Gudina Tumsa, the General Secretary of the EECMY (1966–1979) in response to the two challenges mentioned above: the Western emphasis on development over against evangelism and the influence of the Pentecostal movement on members of the EECMY (which highlighted the spiritual aspect of mission). For

Tumsa, God's mission cannot be dichotomized between the spiritual and physical, because it is holistic in nature.[31]

Tumsa's distinct contribution to the church worldwide can be viewed from his perspective on holistic ministry. He was a holistic thinker who believed in the undivided human reality. Tumsa's concept of holism is built on the African's view of life in its totality. This became most obvious in the context of international church and development work through the EECMY's 1972 document "On the Interrelation between the Proclamation of the Gospel and Human Development."[32]

> Tumsa's concept of holism is built on the African's view of life in its totality.

This document addressed the theological basis of human development involved in the development efforts of the EECMY in collaboration with partnering churches, established the EECMY's theology of "serving the whole person," and has guided its development programs ever since. The core of this theology is the notion of "holistic ministry," which serves both the spiritual and material needs of the human person. This particular brand of "holistic ministry" is deeply rooted in an African concept of the place of human beings vis-à-vis God's creation, and it centers on the idea of "integral human development," which views proclamation of the Gospel and human development as having the same objective—transforming the human being in society.

In the document, Tumsa and EECMY's leaders define development from a Christian point of view as "a process of liberation by which individuals and societies realize their human possibilities in accordance with God's purpose."[33] This process starts with being freed from one's own "self-centered greed" by the liberating power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.[34] It is this freedom that leads to "development of the inner man [which is] a pre-requisite for a healthy and lasting development of [the] society."[35] The spiritual freedom and maturity is basic for lasting development because it "enables [individuals and the society to] responsibly handle material development."[36] Otherwise, "what was intended to be a means of enhancing the wellbeing of man can have the opposite effect and create new forms of evil" that result in the destruction of the society.[37]

Tumsa and other EECMY leaders articulated this theological statement at the height of the so-called "golden age" of development and presented these ideas as a critique of the dominant ecumenical debate over the nature of the relationship between the new independent churches in the developing world and their missionary counterparts in the West. The leaders were trying to communicate to their Western partners that in the church's involvement in God's mission there exists no dichotomy between the sacred and the profane, the physical and the spiritual, the religious and

the moral. In the main, the religious and the moral permeate the physical, material, political, and social concerns of the people. They emphasized that churches should strive to promote the well-being of the members of society, and Christians must promote the well-being of community and restore it when it is disrupted.

In this document, Tumsa and other leaders of the EECMY addressed the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) with the following statement:

> We believe that an integral human development, where spiritual and material needs are seen together, is the only right approach to the development question in our society. . . . The division between witness and service or between proclamation and development is harmful to the church and will ultimately result in a distorted Christianity. . . . The development of the inner person is a prerequisite for a healthy and lasting development of society.[38]

According to Johnny Bakke, the EECMY letter of 1972 "accused the missions and the Western churches in general of splitting the task of the church into an evangelism and development ministry, distorting its vocation to serve the whole person."[39] This letter indicates that "to strip development activities of the evangelistic aspect means to accept that man can be treated in parts"—which is incompatible with an African worldview. Therefore, according to Bakke, "the main purpose of the letter was a reminder to the donor agencies that man may not be divided arbitrarily as soul, body and mind and ministered to in sections."[40]

For Tumsa and other EECMY leaders, both aspects of the church work, mission and human development, must not be separate—they are part and parcel of the church's responsibility in carrying out God's mission in this world. This was an absolute challenge to the mission organizations that are shaped by ideologies that believed in compartmentalization of the dualistic Western worldview and organizational structures.

Tumsa's concept of holism is built on the African view of life in its totality. His argument was focused on challenging both the Western churches to help them understand the holistic nature of the gospel and his fellow Africans to adopt a theology based on an African holistic worldview which is compatible to the Gospel. This is mainly reflected in his letter to Carl-J. Hellberg, Director of the LWF Department of Church Cooperation in 1992, where he stated that "an African view assumes the totality of man which is not in line with the Western ways of thinking,"[41] and that it is such an understanding that should guide the way African theology is to be developed.

For Tumsa, a theology shaped by an African holistic view is what enables the church "to rededicate itself to living for others, serving the whole human person, meeting the spiritual as well as the physical needs."[42] Such an understanding of Christian ministry is compatible with the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Gospel that not

only sets us free from the spiritual bondage or "eternal damnation," but also from "economic exploitation, political oppression, etc. Because of its eternal dimension the Gospel of Jesus Christ can never be replaced by any of the ideologies invented by men throughout the centuries."[43]

In his address to the Lutheran World Federation consultation held in Nairobi Kenya in 1974, Tumsa states:

> In the Ministry of Jesus we note that forgiveness of sins and healing of the body, feeding the hungry and spiritual nurture, opposing the dehumanizing structures and identifying himself with the weak were never at anytime divided or departmentalized. He saw man as a whole and was always ready to give help where the need was most obvious.[44]

For Tumsa, the church's role in the society is to serve as a means through which God provides healing. This healing, according to Tumsa, is not simply a question of medical care, but "has to do with the restoration of man to liberty and wholeness."[45] This ministry of the church is founded on the understanding that in the ministry of Jesus, "forgiveness of sins and healing of the body, feeding the hungry and spiritual nurture, opposing dehumanizing structures and identifying himself with the weak were never at any time divided or departmentalized. He saw man as a whole and was always ready to give help where the need was most obvious."[46]

Tumsa, in his "Report on Church Growth in Ethiopia" presented in Tokyo 1971, two years before the EECMY letter was written, had also argued that "central to the proclamation and witness of the believers is the idea that Jesus saves." As he contends, "[From an African point of view,] there is no distinction between curing from malaria, pneumonia and saving from sin. 'Jesus Christ saves' means that he literally cures from physical diseases as well as from the burden of sin. The simple preaching of the Gospel was very often accompanied by healing, exorcism or by some other signs that were interpreted to be the new God demonstrating His power."[47]

One can argue that the EECMY's understanding of holistic theology is mainly informed by Luther's distinction between the two kingdoms or realms. According to Luther, on his "left hand," through secular governors, God rules over the whole universe. On his "right hand," through the church, God provides mercy and grace.[48] As Luther indicates, God's kingship is not limited to the spiritual spheres of life. He is the Lord of the whole universe.[49] Through these two kingdoms, God provides holistic ministry to His creation.

Holistic theology adopted by the EECMY is also founded on the Scriptures. A closer look at the ministry of Jesus and His disciples, particularly in the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts, reveals that their ministry was holistic. It was holistic because their focus was "a wholehearted embrace and integration of both evangelism and social ministry so that people experience spiritual renewal, socioeconomic uplift,

and transformation of their social context."[50] Jesus has come to this world to restore His people (Lk 4:16–21). This restoration is to be manifested in the lives of the poor and the oppressed as compassion and justice prevail.

A closer look at the ministry of Jesus and His disciples, particularly in the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts, reveals that their ministry was holistic.

In the Book of Acts, the disciples' life and ministry is described as a continuation of this liberating ministry of Jesus Christ—which is holistic. Holistic ministry in Acts is three-dimensional: *evangelistic*, *fellowship* (communion), and *prophetic*. The *evangelistic* aspect of the church's ministry is vividly expressed in Acts, where the disciples are described as those committed to teaching and preaching—"preaching the word of God" (Acts 6:2) and "the ministry of the word and sacrament" (Acts 6:4). In Acts, Luke gives emphasis to the actual story of the lives of the Apostles, focused on teaching in the ongoing life of the Christian community. In Ephesians, Paul continually taught for two years (Acts 19:8). Apollos, after being instructed by Priscilla and Aquilla, was also engaged in teaching the Word of God (Acts 18:24–28). These and other similar stories about the commitment of the Apostles to teach and instruct the church show the intention of Luke to illustrate to his readers that this particular characteristic of the church is needed for the nourishment and guidance of the believing community.

The social ministry of the church is described in Acts within the *fellowship* and communion shared among believers. One of the areas on which Luke focused while describing the life and ministry of the apostles in the Book of Acts is that they devoted themselves to *fellowship*, the breaking of bread, and helping the needy (Acts 2:42ff; 4:32ff). They had "everything in common" to the extent that they were "one soul" (Acts 2:44; 4:32).[51]

The socioeconomic and transformational ministry of the church, which others describe as the *prophetic* role that the church plays among the community it serves, is demonstrated in the life and ministry of the Apostles of Jesus Christ—in that the mission for which they are being commissioned is the same as that attributed to Jesus: healing the sick, casting out demons, and preaching the kingdom of God (Lk 4:43; 8:1; 9:11; 11:20).

Balancing the Church's Ministry in a Society

In this section, I will discuss the implication of Tumsa's holistic theology for understanding the church's role in society. As stated in the above sections, the Lutheran church in Ethiopia has been deeply involved in development, especially in the areas of education and health. This involvement is due to its longstanding

understanding of God's mission, which encompasses all aspects of life. This understanding, however, is being challenged by two different views held by Western missionaries and the Ethiopian Pentecostals.

The Western missionary's emphasis on development and the Pentecostal's emphasis on spiritual ministries resulted in the distorted or "unbalanced" understanding of mission. Tumsa's holistic theology responds to this challenge by indicating that the church's mission has to be holistic. For Tumsa, both positions are unacceptable because they "are equally harmful to the local churches in Developing Countries, which see it as their obligation to serve the whole man."[52]

> The Western missionary's emphasis on development and the Pentecostal's emphasis on spiritual ministries resulted in the distorted or "unbalanced" understanding of mission. Tumsa's holistic theology responds to this challenge by indicating that the church's mission has to be holistic.

The Western missionary's emphasis on development results from an understanding that separates the spiritual and physical domains of life. This approach, according to Tumsa, should be criticized because it is "a threat to the very values which make life meaningful if carried out without due attention to a simultaneous provision to meet spiritual needs."[53] It also has the capacity to "weaken the spiritual life of the church and turn away those who long for the Gospel."[54] This assumption not only controls the intellectual inquiry and practice of missions, but also affects the ministry of non-Western churches working in partnership with them. The EECMY, as indicated above, is a case in point. Many members of the EECMY and other Evangelical churches in Ethiopia have succumbed to this Western worldview and have allowed themselves to be relegated to the spiritual world.

The Pentecostal emphasis on the spiritual aspects of ministry is another challenge that results in a focus on spiritual activities (evangelism) over other ministries. Other ministries, such as development and advocacy, are considered as non-essential for salvation and are therefore considered secondary or supportive ministries. This understanding has also influenced many members of the EECMY and other Evangelical churches in Ethiopia, resulting in their withdrawal from all kinds of development activities.

Tumsa's holistic theology challenges these two understandings by interpreting the Scripture from various dimensions and considering God's mission as concerned with all aspects of human life. As Tumsa articulates in the 1972 document, God's mission, in which all churches are invited to participate, is holistic in nature in that it encompasses all dimensions of life. The significance of adopting a holistic approach

(holistic theology) is that it provides us with a profound foundation to critically engage all forms of complacency and silence of such congregations. It provides us with the tools to stand alongside persons struggling to break free from multifaceted oppression. More importantly, the concept of holistic ministry in the EECMY is mainly focused on people's development (both spiritual and physical), not just on material or economic development.

As Tumsa contends,

> [The problem among Ethiopian Evangelicals is that] the Gospel was not understood as the Good News for the whole man, and salvation was given a narrow individualistic interpretation, which was foreign to [Africans] understanding of the God-Man relationship. God is concerned about the whole man, and this concern is demonstrated in the Gospel. [Therefore], the imbalance created by some Missionary [and Pentecostals] attitude has been harmful to the Church in its consequences.[55]

Conclusion

The majority in Ethiopia live under conditions of economic deprivation. Hundreds of millions live in utter poverty and experience inhuman conditions. This economic condition also affects members of Evangelical churches. Evangelical churches, however, are being challenged by non-holistic approaches to mission, which minimizes their contribution to changing the lives of the community they serve. As I tried to argue in this article, Tumsa's holistic theology can serve as both a critique and foundation for further development of theology and practice in African context.

The interplay between theology and development is not new to Ethiopian churches, as the African worldview is also dominated by a holistic view of life. The problem, however, is that in Ethiopian Christian studies the issue of the contribution of Christian faith to development has been ignored for so long and there is a long way to go to introduce this subject in Ethiopian Christian and academic traditions.

Endnotes

[1] "Strategic Plan Presented to the Eecmy General Assembly," (Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus, 2013); Johnny Bakke, *Christian Ministry: Patterns and Functions within the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1987).

[2] See http://egst.edu.et/workshop-on-redefining-development-from-faith-perspective-conducted/#more-1559, accessed 2/13/17. According to Misgana Mathewos, "one of the major hurdles that exacerbate such dichotomy in Ethiopia is the policies of the successive governments that do not recognize religious/theological education on the basis of separation of state and religion in the past four decades and the churches' unqualified reception of those policies."

[3] These missionaries were Peter Heyling from Germany (1607–1652), missionaries sent by the Church Mission Society such as Gobat from Switzerland and Christian Kugler, Johann Ludwing Krapf, and Karl William Isenberg from Germany and several missionaries from the German Hermansburg Mission. For detail, see Gustav Arén, *Evangelical Pioneers in Ethiopia: Origins of the Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus* (Stockholm: EFS Förlaget, 1978); Tibebe Eshete, *The Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia: Resistance and Resilience* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2009); Debela Birri, *Divine Plan Unfolding: The Story of Ethiopian Evangelical Church Bethel* (Minneapolis: Lutheran University Press, 2014); Fakadu Gurmessa, *Evangelical Faith Movement in Ethiopia: Origins and Establishment of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus*, ed. Ezekiel Gebissa (Minneapolis: Lutheran University Press, 2009).

[4] Arén, *Evangelical Pioneers in Ethiopia*, 30.

[5] Gurmessa, *Evangelical Faith Movement*, 128–129.

[6] Eric Virgin, *The Abyssinia I Knew* (London: Macmillan, 1936), 109.

[7] Arén, *Evangelical Pioneers in Ethiopia*, 163.

[8] Richard Pankhurst, "The Role of Foreigners in Nineteenth Century Ethiopia Prior to the Rise of Menelik," (Boston: Boston University Papers on Africa, 1966), 164.

[9] Viveca Halldin Norberg, *Swedes in Haile Selassie's Ethiopia, 1924–1952: A Study in Early Development Co-Operation* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1977), 105.

[10] Gustav Arén, *Envoys of the Gospel in Ethiopia: In the Steps of the Evangelical Pioneers, 1898–1936* (Stockholm: EFS Förlaget, 1999), 62–63.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Gustav Aren, "Onesimos Nesib: His Life and Career," *EECMY Information Release*, 1981, 8; Øyvind Eide, *Revolution & Religion in Ethiopia: The Growth & Persecution of the Mekane Yesus Church, 1974–85* (Oxford: J. Currey, 2000), 51.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Andrian Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood, Religion, and Nationalism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 12; Willie Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 209.

[15] There is a significant number of studies describing how Nesib adopted Oromo patterns of thought in his translation and how that impacted the ministry of the EECMY. See Bakke, *Christian Ministry*, 42, 127–128; Eide, *Revolution and Religion in Ethiopia*, 74–76; Arén, *Evangelical Pioneers in Ethiopia*, 396.

[16] Eide, *Revolution and Religion in Ethiopia*, 51.

[17] Staffan Grenstedt, *Ambaricho and Shonkolla: From Local Independent Church to the Evangelical Mainstream in Ethiopia, the Origins of the Mekane Yesus Church in Kambata Hadiya* (Uppsala: Uppsala University, 2000), 79ff.

[18] Selassie Haile and Edward Ullendorff, *My Life and Ethiopia's Progress, 1892–1937: The Autobiography of Emperor Haile Sellassie I* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 69.

[19] Øyvind Eide, "Political Dynamics in the Wake of Missionary Efforts within the Realm of Human Rights: The Case of Ethiopia," *Swedish Missiological Themes* 89, no. 4 (2001): 473–474.

[20] Gudina Tumsa, *Witness and Discipleship: Leadership of the Church in Multi-Ethnic Ethiopia in a Time of Revolution*, vol. 1 (Hamburg: WDL, 2008), 62.

[21] Bryant L. Myers, *Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational Development* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2011), 26.

[22] Ibid., 27.

[23] This is also a well-established fact in African mission history. See Robert Addo-Fenning, "Christian Mission and Nation-Building in Ghana: An Historical Evaluation," in *Uniquely*

African? African Christian Identity from Cultural and Historical Perspectives, ed. James Cox and Gerrie ter Haar (Trenton, New Jersey: Africa World Press, 2003), 193–212.

[24] Tumsa, *Witness and Discipleship*, 83.

[25] Megersa Guta, "A Reflection Paper on the 1972 Eecmy Letter: 'On the Interrelation between Proclamation of the Gospel and Human Development,'" in *Serving the Whole Person: The Practice and Understanding of Diakonia with the Lutheran Communion*, ed. Kjell Nordstokke (Minneapolis: Lutheran University Press, 2009), 183.

[26] For a detail history of Pentecostalism in Ethiopia, see Haustein Jörg, *Writing Religious History: The Historiography of Ethiopian Pentecostalism. Studien Zur Aussereuropaischen Christentumsgeschichte.* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag 2011).

[27] Ibid., 2–7, 138–151.

[28] Social concern, according to Olana, refers to social actions such as "politics, and social and economic developments." Gemechu Olana, "An Empowering and Reconciling Presence: Public Ministry in the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus, a Brief Historical Perspective Review with Some Prospective Remarks," in *Emerging Thelogical Praxis: Journal of Gudina Tumsa Theological Forum*, ed. Saamul Yonas Deressa (Minneapolis Lutheran University Press, 2012), 65.

[29] Quoted in Emanuele Fantini, "Transgression and Acquiescence: The Moral Conflict of Pentecostals in Their Relationship with the Ethiopian State," *PentecoStudies* 12, no. 2 (2013): 214. According to Eide, the Pentecostals were also accused of being "dangerous for the nation" because they adopted a pacifist position. See Eide, *Revolution and Religion in Ethiopia*, 62.

[30] According to Rich Hansen, the dualistic worldview among evangelical Christians in Ethiopia is caused by the Ethiopian Orthodox tradition, Protestant missionaries, and the ideology of the socialist government (1974–1991). See Rich Hansen, "Transforming the Dualistic Worldview of Ethiopian Evangelical Chrstians," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 39, no. 2 (2015). Though the argument of Hansen may have some merits, other studies indicate that the dualistic worldview adopted by many evangelical believers is the result of Pentecostal movements in Ethiopia. See Olana, "An Empowering and Reconciling Presence."; Tumsa, *Witness and Discipleship*; Eide, *Revolution and Religion in Ethiopia*; Bakke, *Christian Ministry*.

[31] Tumsa was the former general secretary of the EECMY (1966–1979) who was murdered in 1979 by a communist military junta that ruled Ethiopia from 1974 to 1991. When he was named general secretary of the EECMY in 1966, the church leaders faced multiple challenges relating to establishing the EECMY as a national evangelical church. Before his death, Tumsa wrote papers of global significance while leading an exemplary life. Many scholars have called him the Dietrich Bonhoeffer of Africa. See Øyvind Eide, "Gudina Tumsa: The Voice of an Ethiopian Prophet," *Svensk MissionsTidskrift* 89, no. 3 (2001); Paul E. Hoffman, "Gudina Tumsa's Ecclesiology: His Understanding and Vision of the Church," in *Church and Society* (Hamburg: WDL Publishers, 2010); Samuel Yonas Deressa, ed. *Emerging Theological Praxis: Journal of Gudina Tumsa Theological Forum* (Minneapolis: Lutheran University Press, 2012).

[32] Tumsa, *Witness and Discipleship*, 85ff.

[33] Ibid., 89.

[34] Ibid., 90.

[35] Ibid., 89.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Bakke, *Christian Ministry*, 230.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Tumsa, *Witness and Discipleship*, 115–116.

[42] Ibid., 82.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Ibid, 112.

[45] Tumsa, *Witness and Discipleship*.121.

[46] Ibid., 122.

[47] Ibid., 135.

[48] John Dillenberger, ed. *On Secular Authority* Martin Luther: Selections from His Writings (New York: Doubleday 1961), 368. As F. Pieper reiterates, God's "right hand" is the church "which is truly the kingdom of Christ." For him, "the Kingdom of Grace is synonymous with the church of God on earth." See F. Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, vol. II (St. Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 1951), 385.

[49] For more details, see Robert Preus, ed. *The Church and Her Fellowship, Ministry, and Governance* (St. Louis, Missouri: Luther Academy, 1990), 174ff.

[50] Ronald J. Sider, Philip N. Olson, and Heidi Rolland Unruh, *Churches That Make a Difference: Reaching Your Community with Good News and Good Works* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2002), 17.

[51] For more reading on this particular aspect of the ministry of the church, refer to David Lyon Bartlett, *Ministry in the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 134ff.

[52] Tumsa, *Witness and Discipleship*.

[53] Ibid., 88.

[54] Ibid.

[55] Ibid.

Encountering Mission

Paul's Greatest Missionary Sermon:
A Lesson in Contextualization from Acts 17

James Tino

Abstract: What is "contextualization"? Is it really necessary? Is it a biblical concept or an unwanted invasion of social science into the territory of Gospel proclamation? This article explores the concept of contextualization by looking at the example of the apostle Paul, specifically at his sermon in Athens (Acts 17). Contextualization is compared to translation with an emphasis on how meaning is communicated. We are challenged to consider what we really mean by "Gospel proclamation" and how the Gospel communicator may begin the task of bringing God's Good News to people of other cultures.

"We are all sinners," I said. And that's where I lost them. I was teaching a class on Lutheran doctrine to a group of four young adults in Venezuela. They were the first fruits of a new evangelistic ministry in the city of Barquisimeto, and I had high hopes. Each of them had come to faith in Christ during my first year of ministry there, and I thought they showed great potential. Their first real exposure to the Gospel had come through an evangelistic Bible course. Eager to learn more, we continued our studies with Luther's Small Catechism. Now, nine months later, we were engaged in a deeper study of the Lutheran faith.

"Pastor," one student said, "you always say that we are all sinners. But I have to say, I am not." The others around the table nodded their heads in agreement.

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Clearly, we had a crisis of understanding. How could it be possible that after several months of intensive Bible study and catechesis, my students did not understand sin? Was I that bad of a Bible teacher? I began to sweat. Desperately casting around for a life ring, I took a Socratic approach.

"What is 'sin'?" I asked.

"'Sin' is murder. Or armed robbery," the student responded. "I understand that God offers His forgiveness to all of us in Jesus, even to murderers. But I personally have never killed anyone, and I always try to help others safeguard their personal possessions, like we learned in the Small Catechism. If someone drops even a *locha* (a worthless coin) on the ground, I don't keep it, but I pick it up and give it back to the person."

With that explanation, things began to make sense to me. Although I had provided a biblical definition of sin many times over the past several months, it was clear that those efforts had been insufficient to replace the culturally-infused Venezuelan definition of sin. The problem was compounded by the Venezuelan manner of speaking, which can seem very indirect. For example, if a person is going to confront a mistake, it is common to speak in such general terms that it is not clear (to the outsider, at least) who is the subject. When I said, "We are all sinners," my students drew the conclusion that I was confessing to being a murderer, or a thief—or both! With that in mind, their decision to continue studying the Bible with me was an act of faith of truly heroic proportions!

That little anecdote illustrates both the challenge of contextualization and the danger of ignoring the need to contextualize a message. When dealing with the relatively minor interactions of daily life, inadequate contextualization doesn't make much of a difference. Aside from generating sometimes-humorous misunderstandings and sometimes-avoidable frustrations, no real harm is done. But when tasked with the eternally important job of teaching or preaching the Word of God, contextualization becomes a critical issue. As Lutherans, we have a robust regard for the power and efficacy of the Word. We know that the Spirit of God works through the Word to produce repentance and faith in the hearts of the hearers. If our cross-cultural teaching and preaching were limited to simply reading the Word in the heart language of the hearers (with proper pronunciation!), then we would not have to concern ourselves with contextualization. But we don't simply read the Word. We teach, expound, explain, apply, and amplify. We want things to make sense, and that means contextualization.

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Contextualization involves language, culture, and worldview. Like the water in which the fish swims, our culture and corresponding worldview are so natural to us as to be invisible. We don't easily realize how much we are a product of our culture, which has shaped not only external elements such as our behaviors, dietary habits, and clothing, but it also profoundly impacts the way we process information and make decisions. The cumulative effect of all the elements of culture is to provide us with a "lens" or worldview through which we perceive and understand ourselves, others, and the world around us. Among other things, one's worldview establishes evaluative categories such as better and best, acceptable and unacceptable, rude and polite, and even right and wrong. In other words, culture teaches us how to think.

> The transmission of meaning from one cultural context to another (contextualization) also involves presenting the ideas or thought-chain in a way that fits into the mental framework of the hearers.

Communication is, at its core, the transmission of meaning. More than the relatively simple matter of presenting the right words in the right order, the transmission of meaning from one cultural context to another (contextualization) also involves presenting the ideas or thought-chain in a way that fits into the mental framework of the hearers so that the words can be processed without distorting the message—in other words, framing the message in the way that people think.

Luther understood this. When reflecting on his efforts to translate the Bible into colloquial German, he said:

> We must not, as these jackasses do, ask the Latin letters how to speak German; but we must ask the mother in the home, the children on the street, the common man in the market place, how this is done. Their lips we must watch to see how they speak, and then we must translate accordingly. Then they will understand us and notice we are talking German with them.[1]

As Luther points out, for the Gospel communicator, it's not enough to be technically correct. Effective proclamation requires the right words, but also the right speech patterns and thought patterns. This is hard enough to do in one's own language and culture. Communicating cross-culturally only compounds the difficulty, as missiologist Detlev Schulz affirms: "The translation of the Christian message is bound to context. However, the task of contextualizing the Gospel is a challenging endeavor. . . . The attempt of conveying the meaning of the biblical truth to a given context as effectively as possible becomes an incredibly difficult and challenging one."[2]

If it is so difficult, then why attempt it at all? Why not let each people group concern themselves with witnessing to their own kind? The answer, simply put, is that boundary-crossing witness is the heart of mission, and mission is the heart of God. Ever since God divided the one language of mankind into many languages in order to separate sinful humanity at the Tower of Babel (Gn 11), communication with those who do not share our language, life-ways, and worldview has required intentional, boundary-crossing efforts. When a person shares the Gospel with people of their own geography, culture, and language, i.e., our own kind of people, we call that "evangelism." But when one is required to cross boundaries in order to share the Gospel, we have entered into the territory of "mission." Missiologist James Scherer calls such boundary-crossing witness, "the heart of mission":

> *Mission* as applied to the work of the church means the *specific intention* of bearing witness to the gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ at the borderline between faith and unbelief. Mission occurs when the church reaches out beyond its inner life and bears witness to the gospel in the world. . . . The heart of mission is always making the gospel known where it would not be known without a special and costly act of boundary-crossing witness.[3]

The "boundaries" that Scherer speaks of include the things that separate the peoples of the earth, such as geography, language, and culture. As one or more boundaries are crossed, contextualization becomes necessary in order to avoid distortion or misunderstanding of the message. With my fledgling Christians in Barquisimeto, I used the word for "sin" (*pecado*) that was 100% linguistically correct, yet the message was completely distorted.

The primary mission boundary is the "borderline between faith and unbelief." In order to be "mission," the witness of the Church must be proclaimed at that boundary. Yet different from the other kinds of boundaries, this one is not crossed by the missionary. Rather, as the Spirit of God creates faith, those living in the darkness of unbelief cross the boundary to belief in Christ. The missionary message, therefore, is that which is proclaimed across the boundary of unbelief, to those who are unbelievers. If no unbeliever hears the message, can it then be considered to be a "missionary" message?

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These realities establish the parameters in which contextualization takes place. While challenges of contextualization may seem insurmountable, the apostle Paul

provides a God-breathed description not only of *what* it is, but also of *how* to do it. First, what it is:

> For though I am free from all, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may win more. To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, so that I might win those who are under the Law; to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I might win those who are without law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some. (1 Cor 9:19–22, NASB)

Over and over, Paul says that he has "become" (Gk: γινομαι). Commonly used throughout the New Testament, the word means "to be made" or "come into existence." Paul *made* himself to be like those he was trying to reach; he very intentionally identified as closely as possible with the people to whom he was sent. To "become as a Jew" doesn't simply mean to speak Hebrew; it would include adopting their clothing styles, dietary restrictions, customs and habits, as well as patterns of thought and speech. In the same way, to become "as (those) without the Law," i.e., Gentile, was not limited to use of the vernacular (likely Greek), but would mean setting aside the distinctives of the Jewish culture in order to enter more fully into the life-ways of the receptors of the message.

That's the *what*; now for the *how*. Paul leaves us a wonderful example of a contextualized witness to the Gospel in his sermon to the Athenians in Acts 17:22–31, but in order to find the treasure, we need to do a little excavation.

In a doctoral-level class that I taught regularly, one of the assignments was for each student to make a list of ten "non-negotiables" of the Christian faith. That is, what are the ten most important doctrines or teachings that a person must know if they are to be considered Christian? Not all of the students in the program were Lutheran, and so the answers varied, although even among the Lutherans there was quite a bit of variety! Yet, a typical list of the "essentials of the Christian faith" looked something like this (not in any particular order):

1. There is only one God, the creator of all.

2. The Bible is the Word of God.

3. All people have sinned.

4. Jesus was born and is true man.

5. Jesus is true God.

6. Jesus died on a cross to forgive our sins.

7. Jesus rose again from the dead.

8. God will judge the world.

9. There is a heaven and a hell.

10. We will all be raised, either to eternal life or to eternal condemnation.

After some discussion and debate, the class was usually able to settle on ten statements, which often adhered pretty closely to the Apostle's Creed.

Next, we analyzed Paul's message at the Areopagus in Athens and attempted to identify the Christian teachings or doctrinal points from that sermon. Our collective list often ended up looking something like this:

1. God is knowable (v. 23, "what therefore you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you"; and v. 27 "seek God, if perhaps they might grope for him and find him, though He is not far from each of us").

2. God is the creator of all things (v. 24, "God who made the world and all things in it"; v. 25, "He Himself gives life and breath and all things"; v. 26, "He made from one, every nation of mankind").

3. God is supreme (v. 24, "since He is Lord of heaven and earth"; v. 25, "neither is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything").

4. God is spirit (v. 24, "does not dwell in temples made with hands").

5. We are God's children (v. 28, "in Him we live and move and exist . . . for we are also His offspring").

6. God is uncreated (v. 29, "we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man").

7. God is merciful (v. 30, "having overlooked the times of ignorance").

8. God calls us to repentance (v. 30, "God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should repent.").

9. God appointed One to judge (v. 31, "He has fixed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness through a Man who he has appointed").

10. The resurrection (v. 31, "furnishing proof to all men by raising Him from the dead").

Upon analyzing Paul's sermon, one who is accustomed to Lutheran-style preaching might well ask, "What is going on here?" His message in Athens can be frustrating to us, not because of what he says, but because of what he does *not* say. Chief among these omissions is the name of Jesus, which is not mentioned even once in the sermon. Neither do we find the crucifixion, heaven, or hell. Paul quotes no other Scripture, though he does quote an Athenian poet. Sin is not specifically mentioned, but it is at least implied by the call to repentance in verse 30.

Some commentators explain away these omissions by asserting that we have here only a summary of Paul's message.[4] Yet, these are the words that God has

preserved for our "teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim 3:16–17)—including the "good work" of proclaiming God's message of salvation across the boundary to unbelievers. Certainly, Paul was capable of presenting a much more complete message, as evidenced by his sermon in the synagogue at Antioch (Acts 13:16–41), among other examples. Knowing that, we must conclude that we have everything God wanted us to hear from this particular message, which is the only sermon to Gentiles recorded in the New Testament. We agree with Lutheran commentator R. C. H. Lenski, who says, "Paul's address is a masterpiece in every way: in its introduction, in its line of thought, in its aptness for the audience, in its climax."[5]

Much has been written about the context of Paul's sermon.[6] Athens had a reputation as a center for religion and philosophy, being the home of the great Parthenon, the temple of the goddess Athena. Athens was also the home of famous Greek philosophers, such as Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. The Areopagus itself was a sort of council or tribunal, originally established to render verdicts on criminal matters. Though Paul was not formally on trial in Athens, his teachings were being evaluated by some of the most learned people of Athens. It was critical, therefore, that Paul present the Christian faith in a way that would make the most sense to the hearers.

Paul, who "become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some" (1 Cor 9:22), here "becomes" as a Greek philosopher, as an Athenian, in order to communicate God's message in a way that the Athenians will hear and understand. In other words, he contextualizes the message. The clear emphasis of Paul's sermon is the sovereignty of God, emphasizing a number of His attributes: knowable, creator, supreme, spirit, uncreated, merciful, and just. One could even provide a title for the sermon: "Who is God?"

There are two important contextualization questions that are raised by this text. The first is this: Could anyone come to faith through the hearing of this particular message? The second: Why is this sermon a good example of contextualization?

The first question has the potential to make us squirm. Scripture tells us that "faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ" (Rom 10:17), and "that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved" (Rom 10:9). We

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are pretty confident that this means that a clear proclamation of Christ crucified and risen must therefore precede faith. But in Paul's sermon in Athens, the crucifixion is completely absent, and Jesus is referred to simply as the "Man." The effect of the sermon on the hearers, however, is recorded for us: some were derisive and "began to sneer," and some wanted to hear more later, "but some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them" (Acts 17:34).

According to God's Word, some people believed, and that's a win. Whenever the Word of God is proclaimed and the Spirit produces faith, then that is a great victory over Satan. Some may contend that those who came to faith must have heard Paul speak about Jesus more explicitly, either before the Areopagus when he was speaking in the marketplace or afterwards. However, I stand with Lenski on this one: "But now comes the glorious result. Some men were drawn closely to Paul. . . . And Luke at once adds that they believed, believed already on the strength of what Paul had said. The aorist[7] is historical."[8] They began to believe at the conclusion of this very sermon. While it is possible that those who believed may have heard more about Jesus prior to the message, it is also possible that they had not and that this was the only Christian message they had ever heard. There simply is no firm evidence to say that Dionysius and Damaris and the others with them had listened to Paul or to any other Christian on a previous occasion.

Is this sermon lacking the Gospel? Or, is it the Gospel contextualized for this audience? Dr. William Schumacher makes the incisive point that "each of us hears the saving gospel in a cross-cultural communication. The word of God is not native to my tribe, or to yours. With the help of lots of people who were listening to that word of God before I was, the gospel was brought to bear in my life in specific ways that I could *hear*."[9] So . . . maybe the Gospel is there, but we are not "hearing" it in this sermon because we are not first-century Athenians.

As American Lutherans, we have a formula by which we believe the Gospel is best heard: first preach the Law to afflict the conscience and bring the hearer to repentance, then proclaim the Gospel (life, death, and resurrection of Christ) to bring life-giving faith. Of course, we understand that the creation of saving faith is entirely the work of the Holy Spirit, yet it seems to us that a proclamation which follows the Law-Gospel order will somehow give God's Spirit His best chance of working faith.

At the risk of appearing anti-Waltherian,[10] I wonder if our "first the Law, then the Gospel" outline for presenting God's message of salvation is perhaps at least partially due to our American cultural preference for pragmatism and a reliance on formulas. After all, we believe, teach, and confess that "the Holy Spirit has called me through the Gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, and sanctified and preserved me in true faith."[11] What about if one were to present first the Gospel, and then the Law?

Would the Spirit of God be prevented from working? Or how about starting with Sanctification, then the Gospel, and then the Law?

Dr. Herbert Hoefer makes a compelling case for rethinking the way in which the Gospel is presented in non-Western societies, especially among Hindus or Muslims. In his enticing article, "Gospel Proclamation of the Ascended Lord," Hoefer first distinguishes between guilt-based and shame-based societies:

> In the guilt-based society, individuals have internalized a set of moral standards, and they feel personal guilt if they fail to live up to those standards. In the shame-based society, individuals are very aware of the judgment of their social peers and authorities. If they violate these people's expectations, they feel great shame.[12]

Hoefer contends that the Western presentation of the Gospel appeals specifically and particularly to people from a guilt-based culture:

> The Western evangelistic appeal has been based on the values of a guilt-based society. People are warned that God has set the absolute standards, and we know them in our individual hearts. When we violate these standards, our conscience itself informs us that we deserve God's eternal judgment and punishment (cf. Rom 2:15–16). Because of our moral failures, we do not deserve eternal life. However, Jesus Christ took the punishment on the cross that we deserved, and so we are set free and receive eternal life as God's gracious gift because of Christ.

> This Gospel proclamation addresses one's fear of God and His judgment, but leaves unaddressed the crisis of lifelong shame and exclusion that one would face in a shame-based society. In the shame-based society, the great spiritual anxiety is "What will people say?"[13]

To summarize the rest of Hoefer's article in a very general way, he goes on to say that shame-based peoples seem to "hear" the Gospel better when the starting point is Jesus who is alive and active today. Later, when a person believes in Jesus, one can address the questions of why He died in the first place (crucifixion and atonement) and how He came to be alive again (resurrection). While I think the Areopagan audience was probably more guilt-based in their outlook than shame-based, Hoefer's observations are relevant. The Spirit of God works through the Word—all of the Word, and not just from our prescribed starting-points.

Any number of people have written (sometimes extensively) on the ways in which Paul's command of the culture and mindset of the Athenians are reflected in this sermon—the thought progression, choice of vocabulary, and so on.[14] We won't belabor that point. As a missionary, stumbling along in the footsteps of Jesus, I can only hope that one day I will be able to "become as one" with those to whom God has sent me. Though my attempts at contextualization may be imperfect or

incomplete, the lesson from this text is clear: Contextualization of the message begins with the people's misconceptions of God. Paul's audience had many mistaken notions of God; and so, throughout the sermon, Paul emphasizes again and again the theme of "who God really is." Any attempt to contextualize the message of the Bible must begin with an understanding of what the people already believe about God. Do they think there is one God or many gods? Is God arbitrary or predictable? Is He vindictive or merciful? Is He petty, disinterested, and distant, or is He approachable, loving, and engaged? Once we understand the misconceptions, we can address them with God's own revelation of Himself in the inspired Word.

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The essence of Gospel contextualization is incarnation. Christ Himself is the most perfect example of the contextualized Gospel because He "became flesh and dwelt among us" (Jn 1:14). Jesus did not come in the form of a god-man, an angel, a supreme being, or a foreigner, but rather was "made like his brethren in all things" (Heb 2:17). Those who received His message did not do so based on outward appearances, the lure of novelty, or financial inducements, but rather because the Spirit of God worked faith in their hearts. In the same way, those who rejected His message did not do so because the messenger was too different or because His words were unintelligible, but because the Gospel itself was offensive to them.

The goal of contextualization should be that the messenger disappears—in other words, that the person who presents the Gospel witness is no longer a consideration in the reception or rejection of the message. "He must increase, but I must decrease" (Jn 3:30), until all they see is Christ.

Endnotes

1 Martin Luther, cited in Ewald M. Plass (compiler), *What Luther Says: A Practical In-Home Anthology for the Active Christian* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), 107.
2 Klaus Detlev Schulz, *Mission from the Cross: The Lutheran Theology of Mission* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009), 176.
3 James A. Scherer, *Gospel, Church, and Kingdom: Comparative Studies in World Mission Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1987), 37.
4 For example: "In such an obviously abridged report of a speech by Paul as that found in Acts 17, one should not expect the whole of his gospel message to be reproduced." in C. Gempf, "Athens, Paul At", *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 1993), 53. Or, "Though the cross is missing in this summary report of his talk, the death of Christ must have been mentioned for him to mention the resurrection." in Ajith Fernando, *Acts: The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1998), 477.

[5] R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles, 15–28* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1944 and 2008), 720.

[6] See, for example, *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, pp. 51–54. Or Richard N. Longenecker, *The Ministry and Message of Paul* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1971).

[7] "aorist" is a Greek verb tense indicating past, completed action.

[8] Lenski, op. cit, p. 740.

[9] William W. Schumacher, "Theology for Culture: Confrontation, Context, and Creation," *Concordia Journal*, 42:3 (2016), p. 217.

[10] C. F. W. Walther, a founding father of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, wrote a book entitled, *The Proper Distinction between Law and Gospel*. This work has shaped the Lutheran approach towards understanding an applying the Word of God in preaching and teaching for generations of Lutherans.

[11] Luther's Small Catechism, II:6 in Theodore G. Tappert, ed., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), p. 345.

[12] Herbert Hoefer, "Gospel Proclamation of the Ascended Lord," *Missiology: An International Review*, Vol. XXXIII, No. 4 (Oct. 2005), p. 436.

[13] Hoefer, op. cit., p. 437.

[14] See, for example, Lenski, op. cit., pp. 720–739.

Is Contextualization a Bad Word in the Mission Field?

Tom Park

Abstract: Many scholars have different ideas about contextualization. That sophisticated sounding word brings with it unintended meanings which can be perceived both positively and negatively. Is contextualization a bad word in the mission field? The author will look at this word through his experience working with the Hmong and others of different social and economic background as a pastor.

As a Korean Lutheran pastor, contextualization has played an important part in the mission work among the Hmong and university students. Does contextualization have to be reevaluated? The author believes that missionaries, pastors, DCEs, DCOs, and laypeople need to revisit and (re)define what contextualization is. In order to reach out to people of other cultures, one is faced with the difficult decision and dilemma to distinguish what is cultural and what is theological. This article will highlight the necessity of the critical contextualization.

In this author's personal experience, going to a Lutheran worship service initially was a very challenging experience. The congregation, it seemed like, was a plane on autopilot; the members were responding, standing up and sitting down, and singing in four-part harmony, meticulously, but without much effort. Unfortunately, no one was there to help and guide this hopelessly lost soul both figuratively and literally. Since my initial experience, this newcomer completed a confirmation class, graduated from a Lutheran high school, a Lutheran college, and finally a Lutheran seminary. I have transitioned from outsider to an insider, understanding insider language and able to navigate the "Lutheran World" without any problems. In terms of liturgical worship, I have become like those of the Lutheran congregation members who can follow the liturgy without having to think much about it.

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One important lesson that was gained through all these years of assimilation into the Lutheran world was that contextualization should be bilateral rather than unilateral. The proclaimers of the Gospel and the receivers of the *Vox Dei* (Voice of God) inevitably shape one another.

When one looks at the differences between the mission approaches of the Old Testament and the New Testament, one can clearly see the methodological change. The Old Testament demanded that the people of Israel, the chosen nation, had to attract others to Yahweh by their exemplary way of life. The newcomers had to conform to the Hebrew/ Jewish ways. One of the signs of transformation was circumcision, which became the badge of the Chosen People. Walter Kaiser, a well-known Old Testament scholar, coined this as the "centripetal mission" approach.

On the other hand, in the New Testament, one can see the shift in the approach to mission. The Lord Jesus commanded His disciples to go out and proclaim the Gospel.[1] The "going out" kind of mission work is also known as the "centrifugal" approach.

Obviously, one can clearly see the centrifugal mission approach in the Old Testament, especially in Isaiah's asking the LORD to send him out.

After being sent out by God, the missionary or the apostle had to adapt to the worldview of the hearers of their message. When we talk about worldview, we are not talking about changing theology or the Word of God.[2] Just as the apostle Paul approached the mission field,[3] Christian missionaries followed the footsteps of the messenger to the Gentiles. Terry Wilder says, "Christ-followers engaged in missions and evangelism ought also to look for similar items to pique the interest of their hearers, i.e., ways to connect, conversation starters if you will, as they present the gospel to those who do not know Jesus."[4]

Without actually noticing, the messengers and the audiences are mutually changing; hence, contextualization occurs with both parties. In this writer's experience, Lutheran pastors and members adapted their messages based on my spiritual conditions. As Luther stated, "Hence, whoever knows well this art of distinguishing between Law and Gospel, him place at the head and call him a doctor of Holy Scripture."[5] As a receiver, I had to "adapt" to the speech patterns and unique vocabularies of the Lutheran messengers. I still vividly remember looking up difficult theological terms that I encountered during the church service, especially in the hymnal.

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Having once been a newcomer, this author can assert that the insiders expect the visitors and new Christians to embrace both the Word of God and the external

trappings of their heritage and culture.[6] There is a story about a missionary to India during the 1800s who demanded that Indians dress like Westerners and drink tea. When Indians became "fully civilized," then finally the missionary could share the Gospel with those contextualized Indians. Unfortunately, this is not an isolated occurrence. Cecil Rhodes, a wealthy British business man, wanted to provide funding to help people of other continents become like Europeans.

Some of the pioneer missionaries to Native Americans also embraced a paternalistic approach to missions. In order to be "civilized" many young Native American children were sent to dormitory schools[7] without their family. The primary goal of their Caucasian teachers and caretakers were to expunge "savagery" from the Native American children. Whenever the teachers would catch children speaking their native languages, they were punished harshly.[8] Because of the harsh and inhumane treatments, many Native Americans not only despised the European Americans but began to view Christianity as the religion of the "oppressor." One can view this type of "mission" approach as *passé*, but this Eurocentric and paternalistic methodology is alive and well. When I was visiting one of my classmates' home for a winter break, we were discussing mission work around the world. My classmate's father sincerely stated, "We need to go around the world to teach those people to be civilized, which is our number one mission. When they can physically take care of themselves then we can share the Gospel with them."

On the other hand, we have seen some negative examples of contextualization. In order to find out what would be a healthy and godly contextualization in the mission field, one needs to answer the following questions. What is the Word of God? What are the sacraments? What are the elements that are purely cultural? Which is the non-negotiable item in the mission field? Harold Taylor quotes Dean Gilliland's definition of contextualization, "That goal is to enable, as far as is humanly possible, an understanding of what it means that Jesus Christ, the Word, is authentically experienced in each and every human situation."[9]

There are many different flavors of Lutheranism. There are some who would prefer to eat sauerkraut, while some enjoy lutefisk. We love certain things that make us stand out. However, it is imperative and critical to always examine why we do and say certain things. Are we doing certain things because they are cultural things and not a theological matter? When we start to put a priority on our cultural and human elements, even placing these elements above the Word of God, we are erecting a Tower of Babel in our lives.

> It is imperative and critical to always examine why we do and say certain things. Are we doing certain things because they are cultural things and not a theological matter?

In my early years as a Lutheran, I belonged to a notoriously "conservative" Lutheran church body, where the fellowship principle was emphasized a great deal. I understand that unionism and syncretism are problematic and that we should not give the impression that there are no theological differences when, in fact, significant differences exist. However, I have come to believe that there were some times that we expected non-Christians and those with weaker faith to be just like us Christians, and do so in an instant. I got the impression that some were making the fellowship principle more important than justification. As an example, a young pastor brought casuistry to his circuit *Winkel*. He asked, "Is it okay for me to join my local Rotary?" Without a beat, fellow pastors asked, "Is it against our fellowship principle?" I do believe that we tend to be impatient when it comes to other people's sanctification. I am the first to admit that I want others to be like me and demand others to embrace the application of the fellowship principle quickly without patiently instructing others. A Haitian pastor compared sanctification to cooking black beans; if you rush the process, you are going to ruin the beans. I do agree that fellowship principle is very important. However, it is not beneficial to demand that people follow the application without really explaining the reasons for it. When we are in the mission field or when we are confronting new believers, it is necessary for the proclaimers to patiently teach why we do certain things or to give up doing some things when we realize that they are not essential.

Granted, we have seen some negative examples of the "contextualization." I consider these to be a kind of pseudo-spiritual colonization. We have a misconception that colonization always involves the color of skin—Europeans oppressing people of color. The reality is that it is about power, that is, the group perceived to be the dominant culture forces the minority to do the things against their interests. Based on my own experiences, the dominant groups needs to focus on the Word of God rather than trying to maintain power or *status quo*. As soon as people perceive the minority to be a threat, the dominant group will be on a defensive mode, making the mission work to be a tool of limiting the Gospel recipients.

> We have a misconception that colonization always involves the color of skin—Europeans oppressing people of color. The reality is that it is about power.

What is a good example of successful contextualization in the mission field? This might be a textbook example, but it was Jesus. "And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."[10] Our Savior took the form of a servant by becoming a man. He learned the culture and language of the land. Jesus became a part of culture. One critical difference was that Jesus rejected sinful behaviors, even though people wrongly labeled some to be cultural things. The religious group in charge, the Pharisees, tried

to force Jesus to operate under their system. The Jewish leaders, in a way, tried to colonize Jesus with their brute power, but Jesus used the Word of God to reveal the true way of the Lord. He practiced a concept called "Critical Contextualization," coined by late missiologist Paul Hiebert. The true Messiah did not accept the typical view of the anointed one. The Jewish people were expecting and demanding that the Messianic figure be militaristic and use His power to destroy the oppressive force known as the Romans. Even Jesus' own disciples were steeped in this popular, but misguided idea. The mother of James and John unabashedly asked Jesus to place her sons on His right and left hand.[11] Peter used a sword to actualize his deep seated ambition and to grab onto the fast evaporating dream of power.[12] Jesus consistently fought against the Zeitgeist and emphasized His *raison d'être* on this earth.

Theologically, if not historically, mission work is never about power. One of my seminary classmates lauded Spanish conquistadors for spreading the Gospel to Incans and Mayans by force. My classmate's reasoning was that the end justifies the means. After all, many became Christians through this extreme measure. I cannot read the hearts and minds of Mayans and Incans, but some probably claimed to be Christians in order to spare their own lives.

As a missionary to Hmong people who had resettled in Minnesota, I was keenly aware of the power dynamic between dominant and minority groups within a congregation. The Hmong were victims of perpetual tyranny, an ethnic group who never possessed a land of their own. Wherever they pitched their tents—whether in China, Cambodia, Vietnam, Laos, or Thailand—the dominant or host racial group mistreated the Hmong. Over two thousand years of persecution did not squelch their identity. Hmong were able to preserve their culture and language. To a group victimized by the abusive of power and tyranny by various racial and cultural groups, Christianity should not be another force trying to destroy their identity by coercion. Some of the zealous Christian mission efforts have been detrimental because many young Hmong are reverting back to their traditional religions.

When I was working with the Hmong, it was necessary to practice the "critical contextualization." What made Hmong a Hmong? Wilder emphasizes the importance of not compromising the Gospel, "Believers in Jesus do not accept or acknowledge, even for a short period of time, the false ideas or designations of worldviews contrary to the gospel. . . . Believers in Jesus need to learn to expose false ideas that are contrary to the gospel. This is indeed bold preaching."[13] It was a challenge to walk a fine line between honoring and respecting the Hmong culture while speaking out against syncretistic practices. For example, in order to appease their friends and family members, some Hmong Christians participate in ancestral worship and wrist string tying ceremonies (*Khi Tes*)[14]. When there are occasions to celebrate life events like weddings, graduation, and wedding anniversaries, family members and friends come together to wish people good luck by tying normally white cloth string around the wrists.

In the Hmong culture, funerals and weddings are most important events. During these events, participation of family members and friends are crucial. Within these cultural events, a religious worldview is injected. It is a real challenge to distinguish between what is cultural and what is religious. Many Hmong brothers and sisters in faith have been ostracized for not participating the "Old ways" or Shamanistic rituals.

In order for Westerners to reach populations deeply influenced by the Eastern worldview, contextualization is crucial. As was stated before, one should not contextualize the Scriptures and theology, but it may be necessary to adapt the message to the particular audience.

When the apostle Paul went to Athens, he did not start preaching to the erudite crowd by saying, "Believe in Jesus right now and be baptized!" But rather, Paul said, "'Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: 'To the unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.'"[15] It is crucial to find the common ground, how can we do this? As a Korean person reaching out to the Hmong population, I tried to find the common denominator between myself and the deeply persecuted group. The key that connected us was *Hallyu*, also known as the "Korean Wave." Hmong, like many others, were amazed by and infatuated with Korean dramas, movies, and pop songs. Coming originally from South Korea, I found that Hmong were very curious about Korean culture and language. Because of my shorter stature, Hmong usually assume that I am Hmong; but as soon as I revealed my true heritage, "*Kuv yog Kaolee*" (I am Korean), then people would smile and ask about Korea. The initial barrier was broken, thanks to Korean movie and music stars! Just the way that Paul moved from something concrete and tangible to spiritual, I was able to make that leap without much resistance.

> As was stated before, one should not contextualize the Scriptures and theology, but it may be necessary to adapt the message to the particular audience.

As I came to appreciate the Hmong culture and people, I began to notice the practices contrary to the scriptural ways. After gaining Hmong people's trust, as an outsider I was able to address my concerns. Paul Hiebert stated, "Contextualization must mean the communication of the gospel in ways the people understand, but that also challenge them individually and corporately to turn from their evil ways."[16] I do not claim to be an expert missionary to Hmong and, in fact, very far from being one; but it is clear that contextualization happened mutually. I became aware of Hmong culture and languages. As a pastor, I was able to diagnose their spiritual ailments. For example, some of the Hmong were fighting against spiritual battles like demon

oppression and possession, very similar to what Jesus' disciples were facing in the first century AD. As I was learning Hmong culture and language, the Hmong were observing me and the contextualization was taking place. One of the evidences of this was that my Hmong members started to trust me as their Korean pastor serving at a traditionally German congregation. Without realizing it, I became an honorary Hmong.

Based on my experience as a Korean missionary among the Hmong, I urge future and current missionaries to please be aware of their surroundings. In order to contextualize properly, we need to be aware of materials and practices to contextualize. In order to find them, missionaries and pastors must be in the trenches listening and observing the people to find the opportunity to share the transcultural and transracial Gospel. Contextualization itself is neutral, but the way we use it determines whether it is positive or harmful. As it was addressed numerous times in this article, one should not tamper with and change theology or the Scriptures for the sake of contextualization.

> In order to find them, missionaries and pastors must be in the trenches listening and observing the people to find the opportunity to share the transcultural and transracial Gospel.

Endnotes

[1] We know this to be the Great Commission based on Matthew 28:18–20. Missiologists looked at the nature of Trinity and Jesus' command to "send" out His workers in the harvest field; some came up with the concept of "*Missio Dei*." *Missio* is rooted in the Latin word *Mitto* which means to send.

[2] Gailyn Van Rheenen, *Contextualization and Syncretism: Navigating Cultural Currents* (Evangelical Missiological Society Series, No. 13 William Carey Library, 2006), 120–121. In this work, it is emphasized that there is a fine line between contextualization and syncretism. More "conservative" Christians tend not to meddle with theology or the Bible because these are considered to be very sacred. The matters of outward practices are subject to change to accommodate others with different background.

[3] M. David Sills, "Paul and Contextualization," in *Paul's Missionary Methods: In His Time and Ours*, eds. Robert L. Plummer and John Mark Terry (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2012), 197.

[4] Terry L. Wilder, "A Biblical Theology of Missions and Contextualization," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 55, no. 1 (Fall 2012): 10.

[5] Martin Luther, Dr. Martin Luthers Sämmtliche Schriften, St. Louis ed. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, N.D.), vol. 9, col. 802. WA 33:429.33–430.41; LW 23:270–271.

[6] Dana L. Robert (ed.), *Converting Colonialism: Visions and Realities in Mission History, 1706–1914* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008).

[7] "Boarding Schools," *Indian Country* accessed February 27, 2017, https://www.mpm.edu/wirp/ICW-41.html

[8] Native American Exhibit at Minnesota History Museum.

[9] Harold Taylor, "Contextualized Mission in Church History," in *Encountering New Religious Movements: A Holistic Evangelical Approach*, eds. Irving Hexam, Stephen Rost, and John W. Morehead II (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2004), 45.

[10] Philippians 2:8 (ESV)

[11] Matthew 20:20–21 (ESV), "Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favor of him. 'What is it you want?' he asked. She said, 'Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom.'"

[12] Matthew 26:51 (ESV), "And behold, one of those who were with Jesus stretched out his hand and drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his ear."

[13] Terry L. Wilder, "A Biblical Theology of Missions and Contextualization" *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 55, no. 1 (Fall 2012): 12.

[14] "Hmong Rituals," *Shamanism* accessed February 27, 2017, http://www.pbs.org/splithorn/shamanism1.html

[15] Acts 17:22–23 (ESV)

[16] Paul G. Hiebert, Anthropological Insights for Missionaries (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 185.

Review

BIBLEWORKS 10. Product of BibleWorks, LLC. www.bibleworks.com. $389.00

Great Tool for Serious Exegetes and Language Students at a Cost

Pros: Excellent morphological search tools. Excellent training videos and customer support. Access to extensive original language resources including original language manuscripts.

Cons: Price. Complicated to use because of the richness of the tools it offers. For less serious students many simpler tools are available for free online.

Bottom Line: This is an excellent tool for the serious student of biblical languages. It is a bit expensive for those who are not interested in the advanced technical tools available in this program.

My first introduction to BibleWorks was in 1996 when I was a young missionary on my first furlough. I traded my brother-in-law a little 486 Windows computer for a copy of BibleWorks. I loved it. I had studied Greek, but I really could not read it fluently at the time. I became fluent by reading the Greek text while hovering the mouse over the words I read. The information window at the bottom of the screen would show the words' meanings and syntax. It wasn't long before I could read the Greek New Testament fluently.

I kept that old BibleWorks program. I still have it on my old Windows XP laptop that sits on my desk for occasional non-internet use. Last summer, I was visiting our Alaska Mission for Christ booth at the LCMS National Convention in Milwaukee. The booth next to us was the booth for BibleWorks 10. I was excited to see that my old BibleWorks program had been updated and expanded. At my request, the man at the booth offered to give me a copy of BibleWorks 10 if I would write a review for *Lutheran Mission Matters*.

BibleWorks 10 is an incredible tool for people who are interested in deep exegetical searches in the original languages or in any of the two hundred Bible translations in the forty-plus languages that come installed in the program. While it takes a little time to master the search syntax, once you do, you will have the ability to search any version for any combination of words, phrases, or grammatical forms. You can also work in parallel windows in multiple languages or translations at the same time.

I was disappointed that the Filipino languages that I use were not available due to copyright issues. However, additional languages can be privately added to BibleWorks. The instructions to add additional languages are very clear on the

BibleWorks website. This feature is an excellent tool for missionaries that do translation work but do not have access to Translators' Workplace.

BibleWorks 10 has some excellent tools for learning Hebrew and Greek. Not only can you automatically parse and define words by holding your cursor over them, but there is also a very helpful flash card mode for those who are just beginning their language learning.

One of my favorite features is the maps feature. It allows you to search for places mentioned in a specific book of the Bible. For example, if you are studying the Book of Luke and want a map that shows all of the places mentioned in Luke, a click of the mouse will provide the map for you. You can easily measure the distance between geographical locations with the ruler tool.

BibleWorks 10 also includes a variety of lexicons, dictionaries, and a few commentaries valuable for language learners, serious students of the Bible, and missionaries. One interesting tool allows the user to view and study digital images of original manuscripts. There are also links to helpful resources through a feature called External Resources Manager.

All of these valuable Bible study tools help with only half of the missionary's task. According to the Rev. Dr. Eugene Bunkowske, the missionary's job is both to exegete the Word and to exegete the culture to which we are proclaiming it. BibleWorks 10 can be a valuable tool to help us understand the riches of God's Word. The real work, however, is to understand in depth the people whom Jesus loves so that they can hear the wonderful message of God's love in terms they can understand.

<div align="right">

Todd Roeske
Missionary to Alaska and Asia
Alaska Mission for Christ/Office of International Mission

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Sermon

The Father's Heart

Specific Ministry Pastor Program Call Service
Sermon by Todd Jones

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, MO
April 8, 2017

There has been a great deal of discouraging talk about the church in North America. The ominous shadow of statistics has cast the pall of doubt. We know that less than 20[1] of people in any given community in the U. S. are in church on any given Sunday. That number drops dramatically if we consider only those under the age 35.[2] All major denominations are reporting declines in membership.[3]

In the state of the Synod report, it was reported again that the congregations of our denomination have experienced a decrease in membership, a decrease in baptisms, and a decrease in adult confirmations. It is estimated by some districts that as many as two-third of their congregations will have fewer than 75 in worship services in the next five years.

It has become very discouraging for many.

- Some justify the decline by saying we choose faithfulness over fruitfulness.
- Some call for our members to have more babies.

Professor Todd Jones grew up in the Dallas area where he was first challenged with the Father's love for His lost children through the preaching of pastor Stephen Wagner. He has been involved in evangelism and outreach since he was fourteen years old. He graduated from St. John's College in 1985 and received his first call into the parish ministry from Concordia Seminary St. Louis in 1989. God has blessed him with opportunities to revitalize congregations, participate in the church planting process, in the U. S. and overseas. He is currently a faculty member of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, MO where he teaches in the practical department and is the Director of the Resident Field Education Program. jonest@csl.edu

These common responses to the "crises" on the church in North America reveal an incredible ignorance of our heavenly Father's heart. Yes, we sing, "Jesus loves me, this I know." We even, though at times grudgingly, acknowledge that God loves the people in the pews around us. He even loves that annoying person who tends to sing a little off key or the person who complains just a little too loudly in the church. After all, we all have issues. What seems to be missing for many is an awareness that our Father is crazy in love with all people.

We see the people of the world as the enemy, the problem. If they are not trying to kill us, they are trying to bend our theology so that we might be ripped from the loving arms of faith. They call us names. They mock our beliefs. They do not respect our traditions, like Sunday morning worship or Wednesday evening confirmation. They are attacking the institution of marriage. They are challenging gender identities.

And there is truth in the perception; there is an increase in anger and hatred for Christianity in North America. There are attempts to force us to compromise on the truth so that our message might be more palatable to the culture.

However, the people of the world look very different when viewed through the Father's eyes. As when Jesus quoted Is. 61:1, He reveals the Father's heart for the lost:

> The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners (Lk 4:18).

Our heavenly Father is like a parent anxious to rescue a child that has been taken captive. God sees the people of this world as they truly are, captives, living a dismal life that will end in eternal darkness if they are not rescued.

The concept of captives as used in Scripture can be helpful. You see, one might be a captive because of foolish choices made. One might be a captive because of a crime that was committed. However, the captives described in Isaiah refer to those taken captive by a conquering force. They are more closely aligned with kidnapped victims than convicted convicts.

A young boy was kidnapped in a neighboring town from my first parish. Search parties were immediately organized. Everyone searched the ditches, searched the fields, searched the quarries, searched the wind breaks, the farm out-buildings, and even the cabins that were vacated at the close of the season. He was not found. A few months after the kidnapping, the pastors in our town gathered for the National Day of Prayer breakfast. The boy's mother was the keynote speaker.

I happened to sit across from her, and we only had a brief chance to speak. After I shared the concern of my congregation and assured her of our prayers and commitment to help find her son, I shared my fears for my children. I told her that I

couldn't imagine the anxiety of not knowing where my child might be. She responded something to the effect, "I have trouble getting to sleep at night. I wake early in the morning. All I can think about is my child in the hands of an evil man." Her words describe our heavenly Father's heart.

The people of this world are God's children. They have been abducted by the enemy. As with any parent who has lost a child due to kidnapping, the Father has launched an all-out search and rescue operation. He will not stop until every last one of His lost ones has been freed. He has invited us to join in the mission and share in joy that accompanies the release of the captives. This rescue operation is why we exist. This rescue operation is priority number one for God.

Peter tells us about the Father's heart (2 Pt 3:9): "He is patient, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." Paul spurred on Timothy (1 Tim 2:4–5) to do the work of an evangelist saying, "God wants all people to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. Paul adds that Jesus "came to give himself as a ransom for all people" (1 Tim 2:6).

In response to the decline of the church in North America, some have retreated into their theological fortress and claimed, "We have chosen faithfulness, that is why we are not fruitful." But how can we be faithful to the truth when we fail to be faithful to God's call to seek and save the lost? Some have responded to the decline by suggesting that the church needs to have more babies. It may be true that babies bring life into the church. However, it is not an answer. It ignores the Father's anguish over the billions of His children in captivity today. We cannot turn from them and focus on procreation. The mission field is ripe; Jesus mourned over the lost children and said, "Pray to the Lord of the harvest for more workers" (Mt 9:38).

I want to challenge all of you to consider your call to the church. No doubt there are many who have felt the call into ministry but have not answered the call because they question the viability of the church. Many are discussing the possibility that in the near future there will not be opportunities for pastors to serve the church and earn a living in the church. Some have questioned whether we need churches at all. No doubt, there will be many congregations that will close in the coming years. Economic factors and an aging membership will hit many churches hard.

Perhaps part of the problem is the confusion we have about the call to public ministry. No doubt men and women who receive a call from a congregation, are called to the public ministry by the congregation, but the call is not just to the congregation, it is to the kingdom of God. Our call is a call to those being held captive in sin, as much as it is a call to the gathered, the redeemed.

I'm not sure we have always thought through the image of "shepherds" under Christ. The shepherd is not the owner. The shepherd is the one who cares for the flock; he manages the flock. Now the owner does not keep the sheep as pets. The owner does not keep the flock because they make a beautiful statement on his front

lawn. The owner hopes to see profit through the flock. As shepherds, it is our call to tend the flock so that it might be productive.

We've already talked about the productivity that God desires to see in His flock, the saving of souls. Our call into the ministry is a call to the congregation to remind them that God's heart is for His children who remain captive in sin. Our call is to work alongside our brothers and sisters in Christ as we share the Gospel, which is the power of salvation. In short, our call is above all a call to serve the kingdom of God, by serving the congregations and ministries to which we are being called.

C. F. W. Walther preached the opening sermon at the first convention of the Synod. He began his sermon by recognizing that the unity that was achieved by the various church bodies coming together as one synod was the result of a great deal of debate and fighting. He pondered how the new church body could find unity in the wake of the divisions. He asserted in the sermon that true unity could only be found in the saving of souls. He asks, "What would happen if we really would make the saving of souls the ultimate purpose, the end and aim of our joint work?," and posits,

> What an influence. . . upon our dear congregations and their ministers, and on their relationship to each other, if all acknowledge the salvation of souls as the one chief object of our joint labor. Then they will all work together peacefully and industriously. Even if controversies of all kinds should arise, the question: What serves best for the saving of souls? will then always give the right solution.[4]

Walther outlined three benefits of being a church body that focuses on saving of souls. He said that we would keep our doctrine pure because we cannot save souls through false doctrine. We would not get caught up in the egotism of building a kingdom for ourselves. We would not become discouraged if our congregation should not grow as we would like, because souls were still being saved by the church at large.

The church body was small. There were not a great number of Lutherans to collect. The German-speaking population was not the majority population by far. Walther could have pointed out those facts and opened the convention with a call to consolidate their efforts in a few mission endeavors while minimizing the risk to the church. He did not. Because the Father's heart is for His lost children, Walther called for the scattering of the shepherds and the flock so that they might be more effective in the chief work of the church, the saving of souls. Mike Newman, in his book, *Gospel DNA,* reminds us that what followed was an unprecedented church planting movement with the LCMS planting an average of one church a week for the first one hundred years of its history.[5]

The growing number of people not attending church or identifying as people having no religion, called the "nones" in our culture in North America, argue for the need to start more churches and increase the mission focus of existing churches. The

desperation and difficulties of this age underline the truth that though our life may be challenging, and we may struggle in the hardship of this world, we have been called to a noble task. We have been called to bring home the captives, to place the frightened and abused child into the arms of our loving heavenly Father, and to share in the joy of our heavenly Father, who says, "My child was lost, now he is found, come let us feast."

My prayer is that that joy be multiplied among you as you answer God's call to be servants of the Word—shepherds, pastors and deaconess, under Christ. Amen.

Endnotes

[1] http://hirr.hartsem.edu/research/fastfacts/fast_facts.html#attend

[2] Author's results obtained using Missioninsite to analyze 2016 population percentages for the U. S. filtered by age, http://missioninsite.com/.

[3] http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/

[4] Walther, C. F. W. (1872). Opening Sermon. Lutheran Standard. 30:19

[5] M. W. Newman, *Gospel DNA: Five Markers of a Flourishing Church.* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2016), 37.

Lutheran Mission Matters Call for Papers
500 Years of Lutheran Mission: From Where, To Where?—Nov. 2017

Dear Colleagues,
This message comes to you as an invitation to contribute an article to the publication *Lutheran Mission Matters* in November as it joins the celebration of the 500th Anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation.

Outreach to those who were not already a part of the kingdom of God has been a Lutheran concern from the beginning as Luther expresses it already in his treatment of the "Second Petition" in the Large Catechism.

> We ask here at the outset that all this may be realized in us and that his name may be praised through God's holy Word and Christian living. This we ask, both in order that we who have accepted it may remain faithful and grow daily in it and also in order that it may find approval and gain followers among other people and advance with power throughout the world. (Kolb-Wengert, p. 447, par. 52)

Under the theme, "500 Years of Lutheran Mission: From Where, To Where?" *LMM* will publish articles dealing with the theology and practice of Lutheran missions as well as the outcome of Lutheran work. Articles dealing with the past as well as the present and the future of Lutheran mission are welcome.

The Lutheran Society for Missiology with its publication *Missio Apostolica*, now entitled *Lutheran Mission Matters*, has been in existence for more than 25 years. Its peer-reviewed publication is indexed in the EBSCO ATLAS database, and copies of past articles are online at lsfm.global.

LMM articles are generally about 3,000 words in length although longer and shorter articles will be considered. The stated deadline for submission is September 1, 2017, although other arrangements may be made through the editor.

Lutherans have a long and distinguished history in mission. In this day and age when challenges to Christian faith seem so pervasive, we hope that you will join us in the quest to find the ways to be faithful and effective now.

Please let us know of your willingness to be a part of this publishing effort. You can address further comments and questions to me (kolbr@csl.edu) or to the editor of the journal, Dr. Victor Raj (rajv@csl.edu).

Sincerely,
Dr. Robert Kolb
LMM Editorial Committee

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.

Book reviews: LSFM also welcomes book reviews. Submit reviews of no more than 500 words. E-mail Dr. Joel Okamoto (okamotoj@csl.edu) if interested in writing a review.

Mission Statement
Lutheran Mission Matters serves as an international Lutheran forum for the exchange of ideas and discussion of issues related to proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ globally.

Formatting and Style

Please consult and use *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 16th edition for endnotes. See basic examples below and/or consult the "Chicago-Style Citation Quick Guide" (http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html).

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

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

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

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

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

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[5] Augsburg Confession V (Concerning the Office of Preaching) in T*he Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran* Church, ed. R. Kolb, T. J. Wengert, C. P. Arand Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 40.

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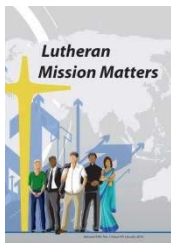
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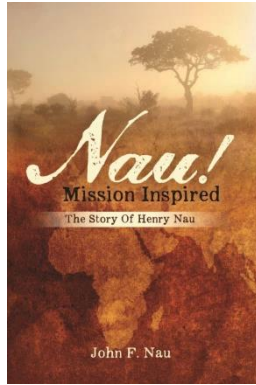
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