Lutheran Mission Matters

Volume XXVII, No. 2 (Issue 55) November 2019

LUTHERAN MISSION MATTERS

Journal of the Lutheran Society for Missiology

Volume XXVII, No. 2 (Issue 55) November 2019

https://lsfm.global

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

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

Lutheran Mission Matters is published twice a year in the spring and fall by the Lutheran Society for Missiology, Inc. (LSFM), and special issues may be published occasionally. *Lutheran Mission Matters* serves as an international Lutheran forum for the exchange of ideas and discussion of issues related to proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ globally. The views expressed by the individual writers, however, are not necessarily the views of the editors, Editorial Committee, or the Board of Directors of LSFM.

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

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

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Inside This Issue

Lutheran Mission Matters is missional at its core. This journal is committed to be Lutheran and missional at the same time. The one without the other is unimaginable for Lutherans. Christian theology is for proclamation of the Gospel of God so that it may have free course throughout the world, especially through Lutheran theological discourse. A major emphasis of this journal is to present the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the eternal truth of the one true God and Savior of all, in contextually meaningful and applicable ways to each generation across nations and peoples. Inside this issue readers will find that this is most certainly true.

This issue has three layers or tiers, as it were. The introductory essays discuss some of the sociocultural and behavioral challenges that Gospel proclaimers and their audiences encounter when Jesus Christ is presented, particularly to people and communities that do not share a stereotypically Western worldview. The second layer deals with the challenge of relating the core doctrines of the Christian faith to people and communities that are not accustomed to thinking in categories that many Christians think are universally sensible. This certainly is a sensitive issue. It is scandalous and conflicting since there is no one-size-fits-all method for communicating Christ and His Means of Grace to all people in a uniform manner. The third layer consists of several narratives that illustrate real-life missional challenges. They demonstrate that Gospel proclaimers must be sensitive to the culture and religions of the communities to which they reach out with the Good News of Jesus Christ.

This issue certainly is a forum for salutary conversations with the specific goal of calling all people to the obedience of faith in Jesus Christ (Rom 1:5). Not every contributor inside this issue is identified by name on this page. Rather, essential themes pertaining to the three layers are recapped as examples. They relate to the context, the substance, and the practical ways in which Christian witnessing takes place across cultures. They embody the contextual realties that Gospel proclaimers and administrators of the Means of Grace constantly confront as they serve God and people as partakers in the mission of God.

Eric Moeller introduces the first layer. Moeller argues that, whether in the United States or elsewhere, the Gospel of Christ brings honor to an otherwise shameful people wrought with sin and the wrath of God. The honor/shame dynamic is a helpful tool for ministering to Americans and others in the wide world, since shame reigns as an engrained human experience after the fall. Nevertheless, guilt and shame lie beneath the American rugged individualism as they stigmatize social class and status and polarize the powers and influences that affect the life and ministry of the church. Christian faith, on the other hand, calls for kinship and community, engendering a greater sense of extended family, community, and fellowship.

Having experienced the cultures of forty different countries and served as minister of the Gospel in five of them, Paul Muench admits that he needs to change his American worldview because "it distorts my Christian faith and this includes musical patterns and orders of worship, requiring knocking down the boundary walls that hinder the proclamation of Gospel witnessing equally to our neighbors and in faraway lands." A missionary's assignment is ultimately to communicate the word of God across cultures. Scripture warrants living under the Gospel focused on relationship. Christian communities are expressions of a shared experience.

Essays by Michael Newman and Robert Newton represent the second tier. As district president and a regular contributor to LMM, Newman sets the next steps for Lutherans to march forward, reigniting our theological potential for expanding missional territories. Lutherans must become more cognizant of the new realities of our time, which are mission opportunities that God is bringing to our doorstep.

As a seasoned missionary, professor of mission and district president emeritus, Robert Newton presents the challenge of understanding Holy Communion as a means for the church to reach out to cultures that treasure communal eating as the centerpiece of their life together. In the New Guinean context, for example, communal eating is foundational for building community relationships. Proper instruction on Holy Communion is pivotal to Christian worship and the celebration of the Savior's body given to eat and His blood to drink for our salvation may serve to present Jesus Christ as Savior to those who value communal life as fundamental and foundational for their existence.

A case in point for the third tier is introduced in Nathan Rinne's article. Rinne explores ways of combating overt racism in church, in-group preferences, and what he calls "auto segregation." Instead, fostering healthy inclusivism by way of building trusting relationships with the strangers among us is God's way of building communities of faith. It entails reaching out effectively to minorities, especially the black communities in the US most of whom descended from those who first came to this land of freedom and opportunity as slaves and hired hands.

Other articles and short essays in this issue show how befriending friends and neighbors who belong to other religious traditions and cultures and caring for the strangers bear much fruit once done in the service of the Gospel. Attending to the physical and spiritual needs of people will help grow in the Christian faith under local and indigenous leadership and minimize dependency. The Body of Christ thus grows and expands, taking deep roots in cultures and communities throughout the world.

These narratives are real-life examples that show that the God we believe, teach, and confess is a missionary God, and His word never returns void.

Victor Raj, Editor, *Lutheran Mission Matters*

Editorial

Theology for Mission

Victor Raj

From Nairobi to Neema Lutheran College in Matongo, Kenya, is a good seven-hour drive from point to point. Our exceptionally skilled driver, Sami, was navigating cautiously to our destination through some highways and mostly gravel and dirt roads. Sami was careful to avoid harm and danger to passengers, pedestrians, and beasts on the road. Herds of animals, mainly cows and goats, crossed the road at their own pace, claiming right of way and forcing automobiles to stop abruptly. Travelers noticed on the sidewalks men and women training for the Marathon. Sami, nevertheless, was full of energy and in good spirits, explaining to us the panorama of the land and, as an excellent tour guide, recounting the history and culture of the people who lived there for ages in their communities.

Sami was keen on keeping his eye on the clock, nevertheless. He was on a sprint. Dropping us off safely at our destination was his priority, but he was also conscious of his next assignment to rush back to the Nairobi international airport and receive two other missionaries who were arriving six hours hence on British Airways from England. I suggested to Sami that he might have time to spare, because international passengers generally would take longer to clear customs and come to the passenger pick-up area. Sami said that was not the case. These two men were by birth Kenyan citizens, coming home for a short break from their missionary service in Europe.

Missional innovations in our generation are reminders that our lives are larger than we ever thought, and the mission the Lord has entrusted to His Church is evermore local as well as global. Christian ministry and mission are assuming new definitions, deflating traditional presuppositions and preconceptions. Mission is the heart of God, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim 2:4). What Christians do in His name flows from the very heart of God. Wherever God has called to Himself a people by His Word and gathered them at the font in His name, from there His mission spreads to friends and neighbors throughout the world, to those still outside His kingdom.

God's people engage in His mission, keeping in step with their Lord and Savior. Jesus went from village to village, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom (e.g., Lk 4:42–44). He began with the synagogue, reaching out to Jews and Gentiles alike. He sent His disciples ahead of Him to places where they would normally not go—like lambs amidst wolves—as proclaimers of His kingdom, e.g., Luke 9 and 10. With no money in the bag and no clothing to change and eating and drinking what the villagers offered, the disciples were continuing in God's mission (Lk 10:16). Those who were

unwilling to receive the disciples and the message they proclaimed were, in fact, rejecting Jesus and the Father's heart that was reaching out to everyone for their life and salvation.

Jesus' popularity continued to grow so much that both the Pharisaic strongholds of the Jewish religion and the Roman government that wielded political power over Israel perceived Him and His disciples as a threat to the establishment (Jn 12:19; 11:47, 48). Hyperbolic as it may sound, the Jews and the Romans could not subdue Jesus and His followers or foresee how this movement would so quickly turn the world upside down. Little did they care to know that Jesus' kingdom was not of this world and that His singular purpose for coming to the world was to offer Himself as the ransom for all so that by believing in Him everyone will have life and salvation. Repentance and faith in the promises of God were the only way to enter His kingdom. Christian mission is a divine mandate. Jesus Christ is the Lord's Sent One. He is sending His people into the world on His mission as the Father has sent Him (Jn 20:20).

The Gospel of God inherently has the power to transform peoples' lives and the cultures in which God has put them to live and make a living. Missional life in the majority world, to a great extent, is like lambs living among wolves. Christians literally take up their crosses and follow the Lord. In a world of religious fundamentalism and the tendency to associate Christianity with Western culture and politics, Christians in non-Western countries suffer serious consequences on account of the Gospel. Christians are falsely accused as evildoers, and their lives are threatened on account of Christ, especially since the bulk of these families belong at the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder and are fragile, vulnerable, and insecure in every way. Yet the Word that is sown among them grows and bears much fruit beyond measure on rocks, among thorns, on pathways, and in good soil as a living testimony for all people. God's kingdom remains.

The Gospel recreates for God a people wherever He sends His word of life and salvation through His disciples, apostles, and faith communities. Relative to this sending is the revelation given to Ananias to go look for Paul, who would be God's chosen vessel to "carry" (ESV) His name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel (Acts 9:15). Paul's commissioning included much suffering as a missionary among Jews and Gentiles for Christ's sake. Elsewhere, Paul spoke of his calling as bearing the marks of Christ on his body, signifying perhaps his sufferings as the signature of the Crucified One. Paul knew that he received his apostleship purely on account of God's unbounded grace (Rom 1:5). The cross has always been at the center of the apostolic proclamation. Whether in Corinth, Colossae, Philippi, or Thessalonica, the faith that was confessed took root and grew into congregations amidst conflicting ideologies, competing operations, and partisan spirit.

Robert Rosin's essays on "confessing" make this point crystal clear.[1] When the Reformers confessed the faith, they perceived it as making known to others the

inexhaustible treasury of the Gospel. "To confess," Rosin says, is first a personal action, verbalizing what a person believes with the heart and confesses with the mouth, beyond all doubt. Confessing certainly flows from the individual's intellectual commitment to what he or she is given to believe by the Holy Spirit's enabling.

Confessing is also a corporate/collective matter, Rosin points out. It is "a matter of individuals who confess finding others who confess the same thing, read the same thing, understand and believe the same thing from the Scriptures, and then those who find themselves with this in common stand together and confess as a group, as a community, as the church" (49). Initially, the Reformation was not so much about making larger changes in the church, says Rosin, but for preaching the Gospel, that is, making the biblical message today's news and tomorrow's hope (75).

Paul, the greatest theologian of the church, certainly was also the matchless confessor of the Christian faith. In the familiar Romans 10 text, Paul asks a series of questions on confessing the faith, causing the reader to concur that the ultimate purpose of confessing is to invite those outside the faith communities to come to faith in Jesus Christ. Gospel proclamation outside the church walls and its hearing and reception are prerequisites for new believers to come to the saving faith. The Lord of the Church has put His people in place in each generation to confess the faith publicly for the salvation of all who are yet to believe in the Gospel promise. Faith comes from hearing, and "How are they to hear without someone preaching?" asks the Apostle.

Mission is confessing the faith. Confessional theology is inherently missional. Christian missionaries in our world today come from the four corners of the earth and have tasted and seen that the Lord is good in Christ the Savior. God surprises the church of our generation with missionaries who may not fit the traditional patterns. They may well look, speak, and behave differently from us; and their missionary methods may be different from ours. They nevertheless are missionaries of the God who came to our world to save sinners like us, inasmuch as they proclaim in word and in deed Christ and Him crucified. For there is one Lord, one faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is over all through all and in all. He is our faith, hope, and love. Reminiscing Rosin, "the point is not to look inward, but to make the group of holy people larger" (59).

God's mission is our mission. Conversation about God is already theology, and the ultimate purpose of theology is missional. Missional theology matters for *Lutheran Mission Matters*. This journal participates in the mission of God within its confessional Lutheran framework and underpinning.

Endnotes

[1] *Concordia Journal,* Spring 2019 (46–75), reprinted two essays on Confessing that Robert Rosin first presented at the twenty-first International Lutheran Council that met in Berlin, Germany, in 2005 and printed in the April 2006 issue of *Concordia Journal*.

Articles

Honor and Shame in the Context of Culture and the Church in the United States

Eric Moeller

Abstract: This paper is based on the presentation, "Honor and Shame in the Context of US Culture: The 'Sticks and Stones' Fallacy," given at the Multiethnic Symposium on April 26, 2019 at Concordia Seminary. This paper will examine two issues: (1) to what degree the categorization of certain cultures as "honor/shame cultures" and others as "guilt cultures" is valid with respect to the culture of the United States; (2) how the understanding of the honor/shame dynamic can be a helpful one for ministry in the US context today. The paper suggests that perhaps the most important dynamic in the investigation of this issue is not primarily one of honor/shame versus guilt but rather the dimension of collectivism versus individualism in the culture. After exploring this dynamic in the experience of honor/shame versus guilt, it will look at shame as a fundamental dimension of human experience after the fall, with deep and continuing relevance for understanding social life and human psychology in the US. It will also broaden our analysis to look at the dimensions of social class, status, and stigma as they shape the context of people's lives and affect the life and ministry of the church.

One of the half-truths that I imbibed as a very small child was contained in a rhyme we used to cite amongst our friends on the street or playground: "Sticks and stones will break my bones, but names will never hurt me." It was a brave assertion that what others think or say about me is unimportant and can be ignored. It claimed that they are powerless to actually hurt me unless I allow them to. As a tactic for

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handling the social pressures of a child's life, it was a useful statement; but as a factual claim about the power of others' opinions of me to hurt or deeply affect me, it was just not true at all. What others think and say about us is very powerful as we go through life. In fact, some of the most painful experiences of human life are due precisely to what others think and say about us. For this reason, God gave us the Eighth Commandment to protect the good name and reputation of our neighbor. So as we consider the concept of honor and shame, we should not be deluded into thinking that this dynamic is significant and important only in certain kinds of cultures to which we give the label, namely, honor/shame cultures, in contrast to guilt/innocence cultures that we associate with America and the modern West.

As we consider the concept of honor and shame, we should not be deluded into thinking that this dynamic is significant and important only in certain kinds of cultures.

If you are in New Jersey and you want to get a nice view of the towers of Babel in the modern Babylon, New York City, an excellent place to do so is a small public park in the town of Weehawken. There, on a bluff over the Hudson River, you can gaze eastward across the river to midtown Manhattan, where you will see the Empire State building rising as a twentieth-century monument to modern American business. You will also see a sign telling you that, just below this bluff, Alexander Hamilton had the duel with Aaron Burr that brought about his untimely death. The practice of dueling, though common for about three centuries among the upper classes in English culture and across Europe, is now regarded as foolish and barbaric; but Hamilton's unfortunate death by dueling gives evidence that codes of honor and shame were very much a part of the early history of American culture and that the willingness to die for such a code ties the eighteenth-century American with the twentieth-century Japanese general's committing *hara-kiri* in response to disgrace on the battlefield. Honor and shame were very real in eighteenth-century America and continued to exert considerable power well into the nineteenth century and even to the present.

Considering what changed in American society and its social mores, and why, can give us an understanding of what it is that makes honor/shame a powerful dynamic in certain social contexts, as opposed to guilt and innocence. As American society made the transition from a more caste-like agrarian society to a more fluid and egalitarian commercial society, codes of honor and shame seem to have lost some of their power. Other influences bringing about this change can be traced to religion and to the democratic ideals and governance given birth by the American Revolution. People's perspective on themselves and their relationship to others underwent great changes. America became a kind of bellwether society, pioneering changes that would be taking place throughout the Western world as the nineteenth century unfolded.

Alexis de Tocqueville, the nineteenth-century French observer of American life, commented extensively on some of these changes in his 1835 work, *Democracy in America*.[1] In it he provided observation and analysis about the new ways that Americans interacted with one another. He described the development of individualism, as the hierarchical and corporate society of Europe gave way to the egalitarianism and individualism of the American Revolution. People were freed from some of the constraints of social hierarchies and encouraged to be self-reliant. This change, however, did not mean that social opinion ceased to be significant in the lives of these individuals, only that the nature of social influences was altered. With respect to the dimension of guilt and innocence versus honor and shame, Tocqueville argued that in American democracy, the constraints of conscience grew stronger and the influence of religion more powerful and necessary because the context of individual freedom made it necessary for internal controls of behavior to be strengthened. We can associate this change with the shift away from codes of honor and shame, as a means of social control, to guilt, as the individual judged his conduct according to a moral code inculcated as a matter of inner conviction.

The context of individual freedom made it necessary for internal controls of behavior to be strengthened.

The changing context of the individual's relationship to society during this period has also been implicated as a powerful factor in the shift in religious institutions from more traditional hierarchical churches to voluntarist and egalitarian denominations, a shift that also contributed to changes in theology. Jonathan Edwards accommodated Calvinism to the more individualistic and voluntarist behavior of the eighteenth-century revivals. And the upsurge of the Arminian Methodists in the Second Great Awakening, with their doctrine of free will in conversion, should certainly be seen in the light of the increasingly democratic, individualistic, and egalitarian ethos of early nineteenth-century American life.

This transformation brings us to one key factor that must be taken into account as we compare societies where the dynamic of honor and shame play a greater role in comparison with those in which it seems to play a lesser role. It may be helpful here to think of societies as existing on a continuum with two poles. One pole is that of the honor and shame dynamic, and the other is that of the guilt and innocence dynamic. As a general rule, we can associate an emphasis on honor and shame with societies that are more collectivist in their orientation and those with less emphasis on honor and shame with societies that are more individualist. Societies that use honor and shame as a primary modus of social control are societies where the individual is tightly enmeshed in his or her social group, that is, his or her identity is bound to that of the group, and individual behavior and choices are more closely regulated by the group. Along with the tendency towards collectivism, these societies also tend to be more

hierarchical or less egalitarian in the way social relations between its members are regulated.

For example, if we compare a Hispanic society, say that of Mexico, with that of Anglo America, we see these three components linked together. Mexican society puts a higher emphasis on an individual's belonging in a family of extended kinship. Thus, individuals pay more attention to their social ties within the network of family and close friends than is typical in Anglo-American society. The freedom of individuals within the family network to make decisions without criticism or pressure from members of the group tends to be lesser than in Anglo America. Childrearing and patterns of authority within the family also differ accordingly. The authority and prerogative of parents over children is more highly emphasized and is assumed to have more importance throughout the life cycle. Likewise, the idea of honor and shame is more strongly emphasized in the behavior and values of the group, and to be *sin vergüenza* (without shame) is considered to be a very strong insult. One's behavior is considered to reflect strongly on one's family, and there is pressure to behave in accord with courtesy and proper respect.

Ruth Benedict's landmark study of Japanese culture shaped the terminology we use to discuss these matters. She described Japanese culture as a "shame culture" and American culture as a "guilt culture." Likewise, Japanese culture is much more collectivist and hierarchical than is the culture in the United States, and it governs the relationships of women to men, family members to each other, and employees to employers. Japanese society weaves a particularly tight web through the lives of its members with specific rules of conduct having to do with one's social position and relationship to others. Benedict put it this way: "The Japanese, more than any other sovereign nation, have been conditioned to a world where the smallest details of conduct are mapped and status is assigned."[2] The sense of honor and shame is a primary dimension of social control and is a reflection of the strongly collectivist orientation of the society.

Whereas many Americans take for granted the idea that the individual is the starting point for understanding society, in a collectivist society the group is much more powerful and individuals are apt to understand themselves primarily in terms of their relationship to the group. To some degree, when we say that a society regulates behavior through a mechanism of honor and shame as opposed to guilt and innocence, we are simply recognizing the power of the social group over the individual.

Whereas many Americans take for granted the idea that the individual is the starting point for understanding society, in a collectivist society the group is much more powerful.

Benedict linked the concept of a shame culture to the degree to which sanctions for good behavior were external as opposed to internal. In other words, we behave in a certain way due to social pressure and the shame that deviance from norms would bring upon us, as opposed to an internal sense of guilt created by violation of an internally held moral norm. She stated, "True shame cultures rely on external sanctions for good behavior, not, as true guilt cultures do, on an internalized conviction of sin."[3]

The idea that in "shame cultures" one behaves because of what people may think and that in guilt cultures one behaves because of an internal conviction of right and wrong has often been viewed ethnocentrically and pressed too far. It is more helpful to view this difference as a matter of collectivism versus individualism rather than one of amoral socialism versus asocial morality. Morality in a collectivist society is understood in social terms, while morality in an individualist society is understood with regard to individual responsibility to adhere to an objective standard.

The idea . . . that in guilt cultures one behaves because of an internal conviction of right and wrong has often been viewed ethnocentrically and pressed too far.

Kwame Bediako, the Ghanaian theologian, argues against the idea that a "shame culture" is somehow less biblical or moral in Christian terms than a "guilt culture." In his book, *Jesus and the Gospel in Africa*, he writes, "Some suggest that ours is a 'shame culture' not a 'guilt culture,' on the grounds that public acceptance determines morality and consequently a 'sense of sin' is said to be absent. However, in our [African] tradition, the essence of sin is in its being an antisocial act. This makes sin basically injury to the interests of another person and damage to the collective life of the group."[4] Jayson Georges puts it this way: "Honor-shame cultures define right and wrong relationally and communally, not abstractly and legally."[5]

Millie Creighton, an anthropologist whose expertise is in Japanese culture, has criticized the notion that an emphasis on honor and shame versus guilt should be understood in terms of external versus internal sanctions. She points out that in terms of psychosocial development all of our understandings of both shame and guilt are shaped by our experience with others as social beings. Thus, it is difficult to make a clear distinction between shame and guilt on the basis of internal versus external sanctions. She argues that "the internal/external criterion cannot be used to distinguish guilt from shame, since at some point in the development process both are internalized."[6]

Donald Nathanson, American psychiatrist who has specialized in the study of shame, argues that shame is one of nine basic affects which are wired into our nervous system since infancy. Two of the basic affects are positive: interest-excitement and enjoyment-joy. One is neutral: surprise-startle. Six are negative: fear-terror, distress-

anguish, anger-rage, dissmell (human reaction to disagreeable smells), disgust (reaction to disagreeable tastes), and shame-humiliation. As learning takes place, the child is seen to attach new experiences, memories, etc., to these basic affect responses.

These fundamental affects are displayed by infants behaviorally, especially by facial expression. For example, the shame affect is characterized by the reaction of directing the gaze downward. Thus, Nathanson sees the feeling of shame as rooted in a basic neurological response that is wired in us. He understands this basic affect of shame as being a response to the interruption of the positive affects: interest-excitement and enjoyment-joy.

When these positive affects are not allowed to continue for some reason, the affect of shame kicks in. In the development of the child, this response becomes primarily a social experience. The child's interaction with parents and other caregivers shapes the child's experience of this affect and gives to it a set of memories and understandings that go along with it.

In sociology, Charles Cooley described the development of self-concept as deriving from social interaction. He coined the term, "the looking glass self," to describe how one becomes conscious of oneself through the eyes of others. We become aware of how we are perceived by others through their reactions to us, and in this way we become observers of ourselves. The "looking glass self" leads us to think of ourselves and evaluate ourselves on the basis of how others have reacted to us.

We become aware of how we are perceived by others through their reactions to us, and in this way we become observers of ourselves. . . . Shame becomes a powerful factor in our inner development.

In a sense, we see ourselves through the eyes of others. Our self-consciousness is basically a social consciousness; our inner dialogue is something that emerges on the basis of our interaction with others. Cooley understood this "looking glass self" to be shaped by the emotions of pride and shame and the reactions that are due to these emotions. The evaluations of others have their power in the development of our own self-consciousness.

In theological terms, we could think of it this way. We are social creatures created by God to need, and thrive by means of, bonds to others. Consequently, we have a strong desire for the approval of others and a fear of their disapproval or rejection.

Shame becomes a powerful factor in our inner development because it so effectively corrects or blocks impulses and inclinations that we might otherwise pursue. Thus, shame becomes one of the most important shapers of our inner self.

Silvan Tomkins, whose research identified these nine basic affects in infants, describes shame in the following way:

> If distress is the affect of suffering, shame is the affect of indignity, of transgression and of alienation. . . . While terror and distress hurt, they are wounds inflicted from outside which penetrate the smooth surface of the ego, but shame is felt as inner torment, a sickness of the soul. It does not matter whether the humiliated one has been shamed by derisive laughter or whether he mocks himself. In either event, he feels himself naked, defeated, alienated, lacking in dignity and worth.[7]

If Tomkins and Nathanson are correct in their contention that much of our emotional and mental life is powerfully shaped by these basic affects, then, from a psychological and developmental perspective, guilt is a derivative of the more original experience of shame.

In Genesis 3, we see both shame and guilt alluded to. God asks Adam and Eve why they have broken His command. Adam and Eve's knowledge that they have violated an explicit command, as well as their response of shifting blame, addresses the dimension of guilt and innocence; but their attempt to hide and cover their nakedness points to the centrality of shame in the consequences of the fall.

Cain's subsequent reaction when Abel finds favor in God's eyes also points to the dimension of shame. His reaction to God's favor towards Abel, described as "his countenance fell," could be viewed as a description of the physical reaction of the shame affect. Dietrich Bonhoeffer identified shame as being more original than guilt or remorse, stating the following:

> Shame and remorse are generally mistaken for one another. Man feels remorse when he has been at fault; and he feels shame because he lacks something. Shame is more original than remorse. The peculiar fact that we lower our eyes when a stranger's eye meets our gaze is not a sign of remorse for a fault, but a sign of that shame which, when it knows that it is seen, is reminded of something it lacks, namely, the lost wholeness of life, its own nakedness.[8]

In recent years, exegetical scholars, using anthropological concepts of culture, have been demonstrating the importance of honor and shame in the cultures of the Bible and in the biblical texts themselves. Missions scholars have been arguing persuasively that we must take the dynamics of honor and shame into account as we proclaim the Gospel in the

Both shame and honor are fundamental components of human social life and should not be overlooked, even in the US context.

contexts of communal cultures with a strong honor and shame dynamic.

It seems true to say that the culture of the United States is a more individualistic culture with a stronger dynamic of guilt and innocence as opposed to honor and shame. Nevertheless, both shame and honor are fundamental components of human social life and should not be overlooked, even in the US context. Many observers are arguing that US culture is becoming increasingly shame oriented. Though the kinds of cohesive communities which create a context where honor and shame operate strongly to regulate behavior are increasingly rare in our individualistic and highly mobile culture, nevertheless, the human need to belong and to experience the affirmation of others cannot be erased.

In that regard, the existence of an individual in a more impersonal and less communal society may be particularly vulnerable to the experience of shame and isolation. In recent years, the development of social media has added a new dimension to the quest for affirmation and the power of shame in social life. Facebook has become a pervasive presence in the lives of many, especially the young. Kara Powell, of the Fuller Youth Institute, suggests: "On Facebook, others' perceptions of us are both public and relatively permanent. People tag you, people talk about you. And if no one comments, that can be just as much a source of shame."[9]

Modern secular thought and our theological tradition have both tended to view shame as more primitive and less connected with a truly moral existence than guilt. Some of those who study the role of shame in human life are suggesting that this is an oversight and a distortion of the role of shame and honor in human affairs. As Anthony Appiah has suggested, "We may think we have finished with honor, but honor isn't finished with us."[10]

Modern secular thought and our theological tradition have both tended to view shame as more primitive and less connected with a truly moral existence than guilt.

Because post-Enlightenment Western thought has become strongly individualistic in its understanding of the social world, there has been a tendency to underestimate the centrality of the interpersonal dimensions in human existence. This tendency has led to minimizing the role of honor and shame. Yet we cannot dispense with this dimension in our understanding of human life. It is too fundamental to our relationships with one another. Scripture, of course, commands us to honor our father and mother and those who exercise authority in our communities. We are also taught by the apostle Paul to outdo one another in showing honor to one another (Rom 12:10).

A strong argument can be made that honor and shame are pervasive in human life in all societies, not just collectivist ones. Erving Goffman, a prominent twentieth-century sociologist, devoted considerable attention in his writing to the individual's efforts to present the best face possible in the social world. He stated, "One assumes

that embarrassment is a normal part of social life, the individual becoming uneasy not because he is personally maladjusted but rather because he is not. . . . Embarrassment is not an irrational impulse breaking through social behavior, but part of this orderly behavior itself."[11] Every human interaction can thus be seen in some way to be governed by shame.

Those of us who are pastors could be asked to reflect on our earliest days of preaching and how we dealt with the social anxiety of standing in front of a crowd and delivering the Word. It might be piously flattering to say that we were anxious because of the awesome responsibility that had been placed upon us in being called to be the bearers of God's Word to His people (though certainly that may have increased the feeling of pressure and anxiety), but it would be very disingenuous if we were to deny that the primary source of our anxiety was that of the fear of shaming ourselves. We wanted to make a good impression and were fearful that we would not.

Every social encounter is fraught with this dimension of honor and shame and leads us all to experience some kind of tension in our interactions with others. Collectivist societies acknowledge the centrality of honor and shame in human life with their codes of conduct and their very conscious concern not to lose face. The power of the group over the individual is strong and is readily perceived.

Emile Durkheim, one of the pioneers in the field of sociology conceptualized what he called the "collective conscience," which he saw as a dimension of every society. The collective conscience was a description of how the core beliefs and values of a society imposed themselves on the members of the society and how the collective life of the society in a sense took on a life of its own. Society, as he said, was a reality *sui generis*, not to be reduced to being merely the agglomeration of the individuals of which it is composed.

In his first work on the Division of Labor, Durkheim suggested that, in the development of modern society, the collective conscience weakens in both strength and scope, allowing for greater diversity of thought and behavior.[12] In modern society, he argued, one of the core values in the collective conscience becomes that of tolerance, a necessary result of the increasing complexity and diversity of the society. In the modern West, an ethos of individualism gives great scope for individuals to make choices free of the constraints of the social group.

The marketplace becomes, increasingly, the primary mediator of human social life. Obedience to codes held internally substitutes for the constraints of a web of relationships. Sometimes this obedience is seen as the result of the influence of Christian faith and its call for us to stand individually before the judgment of God and His Law. However, one could also argue that the conception of the individual as autonomous derives more from other dimensions of modern social life than from the Christian faith.

As a number of biblical scholars have demonstrated, the Bible itself is written within the framework of collectivist cultures with their attendant moral framework of honor and shame. One could argue that the moral idea of an autonomous individual answerable to an abstract moral code owes more to the Enlightenment values epitomized by Immanuel Kant than to the Bible.

Thomas Scheff, an American sociologist who has focused his work on the social psychology of shame, argues that the emotion of shame has to do with the fear of social disconnection. He writes: "If . . . shame is a result of threat to the [social] bond, shame would be the most social of the basic emotions."[13] He argues however that our individualistic society tends to overlook and deny the importance of this social emotion. It exalts the idea of an autonomous self as normal and optimally healthy. Even though serious reflection on this concept demonstrates its falsity, it tends to be a background assumption of much of the thought of our society. We deny the significance of shame. In some ways, we are ashamed to admit the role of shame in our life and consciousness. Scheff writes:

> The emotion of shame, in the broad sense, is a constant reminder of the crucial significance of social bonds. Western societies, because they emphasize the self-reliant individual, mask bonds and shame by having few relational terms and by ignoring or disguising shame.[14]

If this is true, a culture like that of China, with seven or more distinct terms to describe guilt and shame, may in some ways be more in touch with the realities of our social existence than we in the modern West.[15]

To return to the idea with which this essay began, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me," the very individualistic orientation that I developed by growing up in the US has been challenged in the course of my years living and working in Latino cultures with their stronger dimension of collectivism and a greater emphasis on honor and shame, both collective and individual. I still have a tendency to revel in the idea, "Why should I care what others think?" On the other hand, I have also come to value the social rituals and attention to the details of honoring and recognizing my relationships to others that I have learned in Latin American societies.

Guilt and shame are to a great extent overlapping in their significance, and it is clear that Scripture teaches that both are a consequence of the fall. In our efforts to follow the mission philosophy of St. Paul that we "should be all things to all men so that by all means we might save some," we do well to pay close attention to both dynamics.

Guilt and shame are to a great extent overlapping in their significance, and it is clear that Scripture teaches that both are a consequence of the fall.

One particular area of social life to which the church needs to pay closer attention is the dynamic of social class. Individualistic assumptions lead us to overlook the ways in which our social environment, including economic factors, powerfully shapes both our collective and inner lives.

However, we fail to address adequately the mission challenges we face when we do not look seriously at how even our inner lives are shaped by the economic dimension of life. The way we relate to one another in America, our individualism, is highly correlated with the dominance of the market in the organization of our social life. This factor also leads to the great significance of social class in shaping our lives. Though we do not have the same historic tradition of hereditary aristocracies that many societies do, our socioeconomic position exerts a strong influence in our lives.

When it comes to the dimension of social honor and dishonor, the competitive nature of economic life exerts a strong pressure on people's sense of themselves. People are highly conscious of their place in the social pecking order. Though our society makes claims to be a meritocracy, often times it is better at passing on privilege than it is in truly providing equal opportunity for all.

We would do well in the church today if we would take socioeconomic realities more seriously and pay close attention to how they shape our communities and practices.

We would do well in the church today if we would take socioeconomic realities more seriously and pay close attention to how they shape our communities and practices.

I have noticed over the years how Richard Niebuhr's book, *Christ and Culture,* has received a great deal of attention in our circles. His description of Lutheranism and Luther as having a view of Christ and culture in paradox has flattered us and has given us a framework within which to think about our Lutheran legacy.

However, as a sociologist of religion, I have found more meat to chew on in his book entitled, *The Social Sources of Denominationalism.* As we seek to be faithful in proclaiming the Gospel in our day, when it is imperative that we break out of our demographic middle and upper middle class ghetto to share the treasures of the Gospel of grace with our diverse society, Niebuhr's reflection on the importance of social class and status on the life of the church can alert us to some of our weaknesses and help us see how we might take better advantage of the opportunities that we have to proclaim the Gospel to the lost and make disciples of all nations and conditions of people.

Niebuhr does two things that are very important for us to do. First, he takes seriously the fact that we must understand how the life of our communities is

powerfully shaped by economic and material factors. To deny this is to engage in a form of Docetism in our thinking about the Church as the Body of Christ in the world. Economic and material life would be irrelevant to our connection with one another and to our traditions and our practices if we were disembodied spirits floating in the air; but since we are flesh and blood human beings and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, we must recognize that socioeconomic factors have a huge impact on the life of the church, its forms, its practices, and even on some level its teachings.

Secondly, his sociologically realistic perspective takes very seriously how human beings are influenced by the dimension of honor and shame on the collective level in the way social class and status shape our religious responses, both individually and as groups. He uses a perspective in the sociology of religion developed by Ernst Troeltsch and by Max Weber which has been given the moniker, "sect-church" typology, and which has been prominent in the study of religious movements both within and outside of Christianity. Such movements cannot be understood without looking seriously at their connection with socioeconomic stratification and consequent understandings of prestige and social status existing in the society as a whole.

Niebuhr described how many working-class folk in Lutheran societies, particularly in Scandinavia, gravitated to different expressions of faith primarily due to factors related to social class and class culture. He wrote, "As the poor found their spiritual needs best supplied in the conventicle of dissent, official Lutheranism became an established church, predominantly an aristocratic and middle-class party of vested interest and privilege."[16]

Niebuhr's description of state church Lutheranism in Europe in the centuries following the Reformation is less flattering for Lutheranism than his discussion of the Christ-and-culture-in-paradox motif, but I believe it may be more important for us to reflect upon.

If there is any truth at all in this description, what can be learned from it? Can a critical reflection on our social reality today help us to be more in tune with people in differing segments of society and especially the less privileged? In what ways might our thinking and practices be shaped by or even warped by dimensions of our economic life, such as our social class position? These are self-critical questions that we might prefer to avoid; but, since we believe in the power of sin to deform our social life and relationships even within the church, faithfulness to God's Word and truth requires us to engage in this very self-criticism. In what ways do our perceptions of social status influence our religious profession and associations?

The current missiological discussion over the importance of taking into account the cultural dynamic of honor and shame is useful not only as we deal with so-called honor/shame cultures; it is also of great importance as we engage in reaching and understanding our own culture and society.

At times in the life of the church, we fall into a temptation of thinking that we can operate in a realm of pure theology, somehow isolated from the real social world in which we live. When it comes to honor and shame versus guilt and innocence, we assume that focusing on the problem of guilt and innocence is a more biblical and theological way to shape our message and practice.

At times in the life of the church, we fall into a temptation of thinking that we can operate in a realm of pure theology. . . . All dimensions of human life and culture should be taken into account as we reflect on the mission God has given us and how to address the human heart.

It is certainly true that the dimension of guilt and innocence is at the core of the Gospel message and the doctrine of justification by grace through faith by the blood of the cross; nevertheless, all dimensions of human life and culture should be taken into account as we reflect on the mission God has given us and how to address the human heart with its needs, both felt and unfelt. It is not either/or but rather both/and that should govern our approach to these matters across cultural contexts, both in the individualistic society of North America as well as in more collectivist cultures. It seems to me that this is also the approach of Scripture.

To conclude, I turn to 1 John 1, which clearly expresses both concerns, the issue of shame and guilt, as well as the justification of the individual before God and his/her incorporation into the people of God. "This is the message we have heard from Him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in Him there is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; but if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin" (vv. 5–7). These words bring together the issue of guilt and shame, forgiveness, and the restoration of fellowship. They are not two wholly separate concerns but rather two dimensions of our life with God and with one another transformed by the Gospel. May God guide us in these complex and important matters to faithful and authentic proclamation and life!

Endnotes

[1] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Henry Reeve (New York: D. Appleton, 1899).
[2] Ruth Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2005), 70.
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[15] Olwen Bedford and Kwang-Kuo Hwang, "Guilt and Shame in Chinese Culture: A Cross-Cultural Framework from the Perspective of Morality and Identity," *Journal for the Theory of Social Behavior* 33, no. 2 (2003): 135.
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Lutheran Mission Matters

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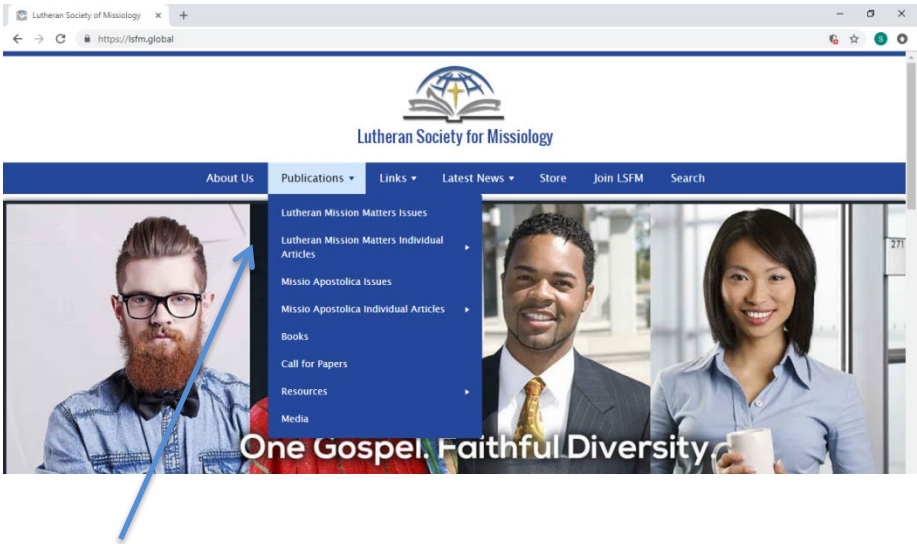

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Centered in Christ

Paul Muench

Abstract: To be doctrinally correct, a church body must have both correct doctrine and correct practices that support the correct doctrine. From ancient times, the culture of the Western church has pushed the church away from practices that were consistent with the doctrine of the church. The Hebrew worldview was what anthropology named a "centered set." In a centered set, most everything is defined by relationships. Greek and Roman cultures defined their world by what anthropologists call a "centered set." In a centered set, the world is defined by intrinsic qualities. This quickly led the church into false practices some of which are still being used.

During my life journey, including working as a missionary, seminary teacher, and college professor, God has stimulated me to ask some questions about my own culture. As I experienced different ways of understanding the world in the more than forty countries in which I have traveled, especially the five countries where I spent extended time, I came to be thankful for many blessings in my American worldview. However, I also learned that there are parts of my American worldview that I should change because it distorts my Christian faith, especially the living out of that faith.

How we view the cultural practice of bride price is an example that demonstrates a worldview difference. A story[1] about an anthropologist's experience in Africa demonstrates contrasting worldviews.

Price or relationship?

> An American anthropologist doing research in Africa was puzzled by what he learned about Louie. He was told that Louie was a very wise and well-respected young man; however, what he was told about Louie did not picture him as wise.

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> The anthropologist was told that Louie was interested in marrying the king's daughter. Louie and the king's daughter had been friends all their lives. When it became known that Louie intended to bargain with the king to set an appropriate bride price for his daughter, the king's advisors cautioned the king not to demand the normal bride price. A normal bride price for non-royalty would have been one cow; however, for the king's daughter it might be two cows or perhaps even three cows if the lady were very healthy and beautiful. In this case there was a problem. The king's daughter was sickly and not that appealing to the eye.
>
> The king's advisors cautioned the king that this might be his only chance to get an acceptable marriage for his daughter so they advised him to accept a bride price of only one cow. But the anthropologist learned that Louie offered and the king accepted a bride price of eight cows.
>
> Now the anthropologist had a problem with the fact that the people thought Louie was wise. He could have gotten by with a bride price of two cows and perhaps even one if he had been good at bargaining. What is wise about offering eight cows?
>
> The anthropologist felt he needed to talk with Louie to get an answer to the dilemma so he arranged to visit Louie. The anthropologist was welcomed by Louie and given the usual courtesies, a place to sit and a glass of the local brew. When a very beautiful and vibrant lady brought the drinks, the anthropologist stared and asked, "Who is this?" Louie answered, "This is my wife."
>
> When the anthropologist's jaw dropped, Louie explained, "When you realize a great price has been paid for you, you are changed."

In addition to the theological lesson that could be learned from this story, the worldview difference is seeing bride price as an economic exchange as opposed to a cementing of relationships. Many cultures around the world view relationship building as the motivation that drives the exchange.

Our lifestyle, our decision-making, our self-image, and many other things basic to living are driven by our belief system, our worldview. Whether we call it religion or worldview, what we believe about our world drives our decision-making and, therefore, our actions. Because we in American culture divide between religious and non-religious, between sacred and secular, in this paper I will use the term *worldview* as a more inclusive term. I mean it to include all of our belief system. I begin by contrasting freedom-oriented cultures with relationship-oriented cultures. Freedom-oriented cultures tend to create bounded-set categories to describe their world. Relationship-oriented cultures are more inclined to describe their world via centered sets.

Freedom-Oriented Cultures

The dominant American culture thinks primarily in bounded-set categories. "In English our nouns, such as apples, oranges, pencils and pens, are basic building blocks of our reality. Most of them are intrinsic well-formed sets. A dog is a dog because of what it is, and a cat is a cat. Moreover, there is no half-dog-half-cat, or three-quarters-dog-one-quarter-cat."[2]

The dominant American culture thinks primarily in bounded-set categories.

> Bounded sets are fundamental to our understanding of order. We want uniform categories. In the kitchen we put forks in the fork bin, knives in the knife bin and spoons in the spoon bin. We want our walls to be uniform in color. In the yard we want grass lawns with no dandelions, tulips, or other "weeds."
>
> We use bounded sets in classical music. There are seven notes, and five half-steps in the scale. Each has a fixed pitch, defined in terms of lengths of the sound waves it produces. Good musicians can hit the note precisely and make clear runs.
>
> Maintaining boundaries is essential in a bounded-set world, otherwise categories begin to disintegrate and chaos sets in. We do this by using borders. We put frames around pictures, windows, doors and blackboards. We use moldings to cover cracks between panels on walls and to mark the boundaries between walls. . . . We edge our sidewalks so the grass does not creep onto the cement. We use curbs to mark the edge of the street. On our highways we have solid lines to separate traffic lanes and to differentiate between traffic lanes and shoulders.[3]

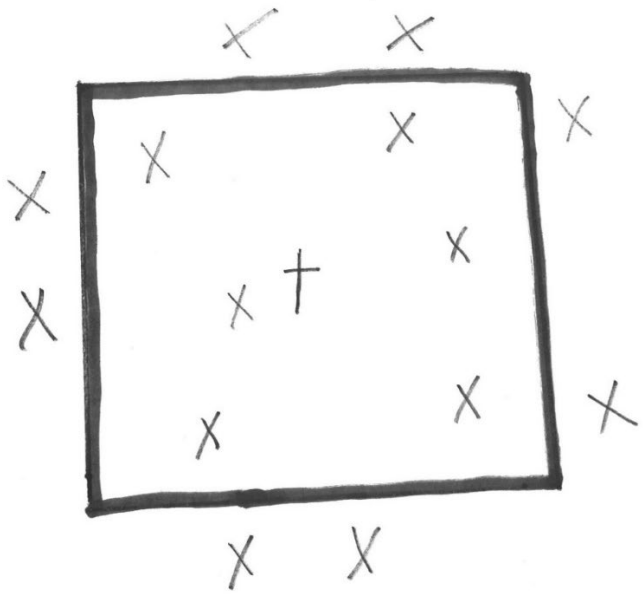
With this bounded-set thinking, we tend to divide our world into opposites: good versus bad, rich versus poor, friends versus enemies, Republican versus Democrat. "We separate objective knowledge from feelings and values, and exclude the latter because they are relational in nature."[4] When a good person does something wrong, we tend to move them to the bad category because we don't have a defined middle ground. We feel betrayed when the senator from our party votes for something sponsored by the other political party.

> Westerners view law as an impersonal set of norms that apply equally to all humans. Lying is wrong, not because it undermines a relationship, but because it violates a universal principle. The offender is guilty of breaking the law and must be punished, even if punishment destroys relationships and harms other innocent people. We define justice and righteousness as living within the law, not as living in harmony with others.[5]

This bounded-set view of reality is based on a Greek worldview. Greek philosophers were interested in the intrinsic nature of things and the ultimate, unchanging structure of reality.[6] Our American way of defining our world as sharply defined categories comes to us from the Greeks.

We can picture bounded-set thinking by highlighting the boundaries. There will be a center, a definition, a value that brings a person or thing into the category, but it is the boundary that marks the entry and exit point. The boundary determines belonging.

We can picture bounded-set thinking by highlighting the boundaries.



We can picture a bounded set like this:

The key to understanding the bounded set is determining on which side of the boundary an object or person is. Often the boundary overshadows the center.

The Impact of Bounded-Set Thinking on the Christian

Because we cannot look into the hearts of people to know if they are Christian, our Western bounded-set way of thinking focuses on external things. Our attitude toward Christian instruction is often a test of orthodoxy. Can the potential Christian recite the proper doctrines? However, then we run into the problem of knowing and establishing the boundary. Is it enough to be able to recite the Lord's Prayer and the Apostle's Creed? How much of the creed must the potential Christian be able to explain? Must they know and be able to recite and explain the whole of the Catechism? Just where is that boundary?

However, with bounded-set thinking, it is important to maintain the boundary. Without clear boundaries, it is feared the church will become polluted. We must be sure of who is a Christian and who is not. You are one or the other. There is no in-between. There is no "on-the-way."

We see the impact of bounded-set thinking in many of the church practices, such as practices related to adult baptism, confirmation, worship, and outreach. The Lutheran Confessions are biblical in how these topics are presented; however, I believe our practice is often shaped by our cultural background, which can cloud the doctrine.

We profess that Baptism is clearly a gift God gives (cf. Article IX of Augsburg Confession and Apology). Children should be baptized because it is God who creates faith and through Baptism gives the Holy Spirit. Yet, when an adult acknowledges the gift of faith, our usual practice is to require a lengthy period of instruction before Baptism. The adult must cross the intellectual boundary before earning the "gift" of baptism.

> There is a broad misunderstanding among many of how one becomes a Christian—so deeply rooted in individuals, cultures and religions is the idea that we have "free will" in spiritual matters and must thus participate in our salvation by doing something, even if merely making a decision for Jesus. But wherever man must do something to be saved, salvation is rendered uncertain because the human mind, will and actions are always unstable, and such ideas are diametrically opposed to the cardinal teaching of the New Testament, that salvation is a "gift of God" (Eph. 2:8).[7]

In many cases confirmation practices are also perceived as crossing an intellectual boundary. The reward for amassing the correct information is the privilege of receiving the Lord's Supper.

May my 42-year-old handicapped son receive the Lord's Supper? He confesses a faith in Jesus but doesn't have the mental ability to verbalize much in the way of correct doctrine. Our bounded-set way of thinking would rule him ineligible. Does God want to use the Lord's Supper to strengthen my son's faith or should he be denied this gift because he hasn't earned it?

Our worship is also often shaped by our culture's bounded-set way of thinking. We often draw thick, clear boundaries describing what is proper worship. While teaching a university course on the New Testament, I explained to students that the prayer postures described in the Bible are hands raised or lying prostrate. Without raising a hand, a student exclaimed, "In the Bible Jesus says, 'When you pray, fold your hands and say: Our Father . . .'" Calmly, I asked that student to find that quote for me in Scripture.

Our worship must communicate correct biblical doctrine; however, often the worship boundary we are guarding is our tradition.

While working in Papua New Guinea, I discovered that just as there is no world-wide language, there is no world-wide music. What a sound means in one culture can mean something very different in another culture. For the Duna people, what I thought to be a happy tune was sad; and what I thought was a sad tune, for them was a happy tune. Martin Luther apparently had the same experience when dealing with another culture. Luther said:

> I hate to see Latin notes set over the German words. I told the publisher what the German manner of singing is. That is what I will introduce here.[8]

Certainly, our worship must communicate correct biblical doctrine; however, often the worship boundary we are guarding is our tradition. Martin Luther was not concerned about guarding boundaries. (Also, note that he wasn't sure all of the audience was Christian.)

> But such orders are needed for those who are still becoming Christians. . . . They (orders of worship) are essential for the immature and the young who must be trained and educated in Scripture and God's Word daily so that they may become familiar with the Bible, grounded, well versed, and skilled in it, ready to defend their faith and in due time to teach others and to increase the kingdom of Christ. For such, one must read, sing, preach, write and compose. And if it would help matters along, I would have all the bells pealing, and all the organs playing, and have everything ring that can make a sound.[9]

Luther was trying to knock down the boundary walls of tradition in favor of communicating the Word of God in ways his people could best understand.

The attitude of Luther toward worship transfers well to outreach. Luther said that orders of worship could be different "when, where and how you find it to be practical and useful."[10] From the context, it is obvious that Luther thought an order of service useful when the order of worship accurately communicates the Word of God.

Our boundary setting also hampers our outreach communication. Often, we do not communicate the Word of God effectively to people because we evaluate them

according to our own cultural criteria or understanding. Whether the boundaries we set are conscious or unconscious, we set them via a reward/cost analysis. Our culture teaches us that it is very unwise to establish or continue a relationship that will cost us more than the rewards it brings.

Most often in relating to people we want to use our way of communicating, our form of friendship, our customs for interacting. The apostle Paul's "all things to all people in order to win some" costs too much. And, if the person would like to join us in worship, it must be using our forms, our music, our traditions. If the worship practice is difficult for us, we quickly identify it as outside the boundary.

The Movement from Centered Set (Hebrew) to Bounded Set (Greek) in the Church

Tracing the history of the movement of the Christian Church from centered-set to bounded-set thinking is outside the scope this paper. I will, however, point to a few practices that may be helpful to our discussion.

The practices of the Jewish religious leaders of New Testament times show the influences of Greek bounded-set thinking. The emphasis on rules is quite clear. (How many steps are allowed on the Sabbath?) Jesus' reply to the synagogue ruler who objected to His healing on the Sabbath is informative (Lk 13:10–17). Jesus points to a relationship that the Jews would understand when he calls the woman a daughter of Abraham, while at the same time showing the hypocrisy of their application of rules.

As the church grew and became more formal, it also took on many of the forms of the culture around it. By the third century, the church had left behind its Jewish context. For a church more and more influenced by the Greco-Roman culture, this meant more bounded-set thinking. This change in thinking is seen in the practices related to adult Baptism.

As the church grew
and became more formal,
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> Things had changed by the beginning of the third century. Origen explains that after an initial testing period, future Christians entered the catechumenate, during which they received instruction and practiced the Christian life; then, when they had shown that they were sufficiently prepared, they took the second step and received direct preparation for baptism.[11]

The catechumenate generally lasted three years. Preparation for Baptism began after the three-year catechumenate "with an examination of how far each catechumen has led a Christian life during the catechumenate."[12]

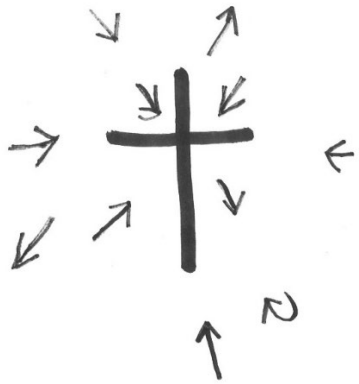
If the rules passed down to us in historical documents were followed, the examination was presided over by the bishop. He would ask the godparent and neighbors of each candidate: "Does he lead a good life? Does he obey his parents? Is he a drunkard or a liar? If the person was accepted, the bishop approved the person for baptism. If denied, the bishop would say: 'Let him amend his life and when he has done so, let him then approach the baptismal font.'"[13] Some people were automatically excluded from Baptism because of their occupation.

Relationship-Oriented Cultures

Relationship-oriented cultures think in terms of a Centered Set.

> A centered set is created by defining a center or reference point and the relationship of things to that center. Things related to the center belong to the set, and those not related to the center do not. Kinship groups, such as families, clans, tribes, are relational categories. The Smith family consists of John and Mary Smith, who define the family, as well as their children, grandchildren, and those brought into the family through marriage or adoption; all bear some relationship to John and Mary Smith.[14]
>
> The worldview of Scripture, I believe, is based primarily on a centered-set approach to reality. Relationships are at the heart of its message: our relationship to God, as well as our relationships, therefore, to one another. This is the essential message that God so loved the world that he gave his only Son to redeem it. This is the message of Paul in Galatians when he argues that the heart of Christianity is our relationship to God, not the keeping of the Law. The Bible is primarily a book about the history of relationships, not a treatise on the intrinsic nature and operations of reality.[15]

A Centered Set can be pictured like this:



> While centered sets are not created by drawing boundaries, they do have sharp boundaries that separate things inside the set from those outside it—between things related to or moving towards the center and those that are not.
>
> Centered sets are well formed, just like bounded sets. They are formed by defining the center and any relationship to it. The boundaries then emerge automatically. Things related to the center naturally separate themselves from things that are not.
>
> In centered-set thinking, greater emphasis is placed on the center and relationships than on maintaining a boundary, because there is no need to maintain the boundary in order to maintain the set. [16]

In the illustration above, it is easy to determine which arrows are moving toward the center and which are moving away from the center. There is also an arrow that has changed directions. It therefore is now related to the center; it was converted.

Relationship in the Old Testament

Why do the Old Testament writers say that the Law is beautiful when it is the Law that accuses us of sin and condemns us (Ps 119:97)? God is a God of grace. The Law certainly condemns us because of our sin; however, God, in His loving way, gave the Law to His people to show them His intentions for them. The Law is a description of the perfect life. The Law tells us of the wonderful life God intended for us. Keeping the Law helps us to avoid hurting ourselves and others. Most of all, we keep the Law because of our relationship to God. We trust that God is correct in telling us this is the way to live.

Moses instructs the people of Israel in the consequences of not living according to God's plan for life. Physical, psychological, and material destruction come about when we break the relationship with God, our center. Moses also points out what happens when the relationship is restored.

> The Lord will again delight in you and make you prosperous, just as he delighted in your fathers, if you obey the Lord your God and keep his commands and decrees and turn to the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul (Deut 30:10).

In the Old Testament, obeying and relationship are thought of as a combination. Obedience happens because of one's relationship. The Law is beautiful when it is observed as God's plan for life, as God's loving guidance keeping us from hurting ourselves and hurting our relationship with God.

Relationship in the New Testament

The New Testament also follows the centered-set relationship cultural pattern. Paul uses the relational term reconciliation to show our relationship to God in Christ.

> Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Cor 5:17–21).

Like the Old Testament, the New Testament sees a positive side to God's Law. In Matthew 18, we read of the lengths to which Jesus would like us to go to restore a right relationship with another person. We are applying Law, but the purpose is to restore the relationship. Paul asks the church in Corinth to follow the instructions in Matthew 18 (1 Cor 5:1–5). The obvious purpose was to restore the fallen Christian (2 Cor 2:5–8).

Following the pattern of the Old Testament, in the New Testament, we are shown the close correlation between relationship and obedience. Jesus says, "If you love me, you will obey what I command" (Jn 14:15). By obeying, we are showing we trust that God knows life and what is best in life. Because God created human beings, we trust God's instructions as to how human beings ought to live.

We Love Because God First Loved Us!

"We love because God first loved us" (1 Jn 4:19) is a wonderful summary of the impact of God's relationship with us, His children. It is also an excellent starting point to describe outreach and worship in the Centered-Set Relational Church. Outreach is motivated and empowered by God's love for us. Worship is a recognition and celebration of God's love for us.

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Because public worship is usually when and where Christians are most noticed and most visible to the public, there ought to be a relationship between outreach and worship. There is also a natural relationship between outreach and worship, because in worship we celebrate the love of God that motivates and empowers us to love others.

Not only are we returned to the proper relationship with God through Christ, we are also given a relationship responsibility (2 Cor 5:17–21). We are to relate to unrestored people so that we can communicate the message of God, which can restore their relationship with God.

Paul describes the work of an ambassador when he explains his outreach methods to the Corinthian Christians. Paul says:

> Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law though I myself am not under the law, so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I might share in its blessings (1 Cor 9:19–23).

Paul adjusts his way of relating in order to best communicate the love of God in Christ to the people with whom he is communicating.

Paul apparently is following Jesus' instructions. "If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles" (Mt 5:41). The advice of Jesus is meant to change the dynamic of a relationship. Jesus wants you to try to change the attitude of the person imposing their will on you. A positive relationship makes communicating the love of God in Christ more probable.

The relationship-oriented church concentrates on building relationships in both outreach and worship. Obviously, to communicate well, you must make the adjustments Paul modeled. Because God sent His Son into our world, we are empowered to adjust to the cultural world of those who need to hear the message of God's love in Christ.

The relationship-oriented church concentrates on building relationships in both outreach and worship. . . . Our worship forms should be easily understood by new and potential Christians.

As Luther modeled, we ought to also adjust our worship forms for those who need the most help. Our worship forms should be easily understood by new and potential Christians. Mature Christians are empowered by God's Spirit to make cultural adjustments. We love because God first loved us. Cultural adjustments to language, forms of music, and worship postures need to be made so that new and potential Christians can exclaim, "Surely God is here!" (1 Cor 14:23–25).

We need to modernize our language, we need to use music our people understand, we need to adjust worship to meet the needs of the people in front of us; but that adjustment must be for the sake of hearing and understanding Scripture, not for entertainment or simply to be modern. And, following Paul's advice to the Corinthians, we need always to keep in mind the potential Christian we want to join us.

A Relational Approach to Right Doctrine

In many places in the New Testament we find the leaders of the church dealing with those who taught false doctrine. Certainly, we must deal strenuously with those who persist in weakening the faith of Christians or even leading them away from a relationship with Christ. However, we ought always to start dealing with the false or inadequate teaching by following the Priscilla/Aquila model in Acts 18:24–28. Frontal attacks from a distance by uninvolved people is certainly not modeled in the New Testament.

Peter dealt with false teachers. His guidance is a blessing for the church today.

> His [Jesus'] divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.
>
> For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But if anyone does not have them, he is near-sighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins.
>
> Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things you will never fall, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Pt 1:5–11).

We see in Peter's advice a centered-set way of thinking. Peter's focus is on relationship to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He tells his readers how to strengthen and preserve that God-given relationship.

Ambassadors for Christ

As individuals, as congregations and as a church body, we need to fight against the tendencies forwarded by our American cultural bounded-set thinking, returning to a more biblical centered-set way of thinking, focused on relationship. This adjustment will help bring our practice into conformity with our doctrine.

Endnotes

[1] The story was adapted from Patricia McGeer's "Johnny Lingo's Eight Cow Wife," *Reader's Digest* (February 1988): 138–141.
[2] Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1994), 113.
[3] Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections*, 113–114.
[4] Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections*, 114.
[5] Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections*, 114–115.
[6] E. J. Dijksterhuis, *The Mechanization of the World Picture: Pythagoras to Newton*, trans. C. D. Dikshoorn (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), chapter 2.
[7] Matthew C. Harrison, "New CTCR report: 'An Inexpressible Treasure: The Theology and Practice of Holy Baptism,'" email from the LCMS Office of the President, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, February 14, 2019.
[8] Martin Luther, "The German Mass and Order of Service" in *Luther's Works*, Vol. 53 ed. Helmut T. Lehmann and Ulrich S. Leopold (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965), 53–54.
[9] Luther, "The German Mass and Order of Service," 62.
[10] Luther, "The German Mass and Order of Service," 61.
[11] Jean Danielou, *The Christian Centuries: A New History of the Catholic Church,* vol. 1, "The First Six Hundred Years" (New York: McGraw Hill, 1964), 159.
[12] Danielou, *The Christian Centuries,* 160.
[13] William Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1953), 53.
[14] Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections*, 23.
[15] Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections*, 134.
[16] Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections*, 124.

Effective Christian Outreach to Minority Communities: What Does It Take?

Nathan Rinne

"Only the church, entrusted with the message of God's reconciling Gospel, can bring ultimate resolution [to this problem]. . . . The opportunity to share Christ with as many people as possible, celebrating diversity and fostering unity by the power of God's Spirit, is the finest expression of Christian identity and purpose."
– CTCR, Racism and the Church, 28, 39

Abstract: As Lutherans in America look at their past interactions with people from minority groups, particularly American blacks, they are greatly challenged. We are challenged even more when we realize that it is not only overt racism that makes it difficult to recognize and rejoice in the familial bonds that we share with all the sons and daughters of Adam and Eve. The issues of "in-group preference" and "auto-segregation" also present themselves to us as well, even as these are challenges which Christians are uniquely equipped to address through God's Word. As we look forward to the full reconciliation that Jesus Christ will bring in the life to come, we can also work even now with hope—within the two kingdoms that God has established—to know a more "heavenly culture" in our present.

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Introduction

In his 1977 book, *Roses and Thorns: The Centennial Edition of Black Lutheran Mission and Ministry in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod* (CPH), Richard Dickinson writes the following:

> The priceless treasures and riches of God's grace in Christ Jesus our Savior are the roses which the Lord has entrusted to the Lutheran Church. . . .
>
> The thorns appear when Black people strive to partake of these precious jewels of salvation, these priceless riches of God in Christ Jesus. If one views the Lutheran Church as a ship carrying this precious cargo and the world as the raging sea, the picture becomes clearer when Blacks are seen as the unsaved, in the water and pleading for help. Lifelines are thrown overboard, but they are rose vines with many thorns. Some persons, with guilty consciences, perhaps, throw some lifeboats overboard, and many Blacks climb into them . . .
>
> The people on the ship sing cheerful songs to the people who are in the lifeboats and hanging on the lifelines. They also pass down to them choice portions of the riches on board, but they will not lend a hand to help them on board. If they want to come aboard, they must climb the vines, striving to avoid the dangerous and deadly thorns."[1] (Dickinson 1977, 11–12).

After quoting this in his 1989 book on missions, *Joy to the World*, Phil Bickel went on to say:

> Is this illustration an overstatement? There are too many cases which prove its truthfulness. Many white congregations in changing neighborhoods have dragged their feet in reaching out to blacks, for fear that the whites would leave. In the end, most of them fled anyhow, leaving a once thriving congregation decimated and ill-equipped to minister in its changed community.[2]

Clearly, when we intentionally and deliberately speak about reaching out to neighbors of other racial and ethnic backgrounds with the love of Christ, *we must become those who really listen to the hopes and concerns of those not just like us—both as individuals and congregations*. This is particularly true when it comes to the painful racist history that our African-American brothers and sisters have endured.

We must become those who really listen to the hopes and concerns of those not just like us—both as individuals and congregations.

How can such things not challenge us Christians?!

It Is Not Only Racism That Matters Here!

In the 1994 LCMS CTCR (Commission on Theology and Church Relations) document on race, we read: "biological homogeneity and/or cultural uniformity—often more implicitly than explicitly—become a justifying rationale for not proclaiming the Gospel to certain individuals and groups, or at least not proclaiming it with equal fervor." It goes on to state that "in its more subtle form, racism may also manifest itself in the limited focus of Christian mission activities."[3]

The CTCR document is certainly correct to say that, in some circumstances, racism is the most reasonable explanation for this. At the same time, most people also prefer to be with others who are like them in race, ethnicity, or culture and find it easier to be with them, "spend time" with them, etc. This inclination is something "systemic" and is called "in-group preference" by sociologists.[4] Furthermore, this phenomenon is also connected with what sociologists call "auto-segregation."[5]

This is precisely why the major "church growth" proponents of the 1970s and 1980s, C. Peter Wagner and Donald McGavran, believed that each ethnic and racial group should "evangelize within their own group for the greatest effectiveness"![6] It is easy to see why Wagner's and McGavran's ideas were so incredibly popular, and appeared to be such a good idea.[7]

On the one hand, the "in-group preference" is simply natural and "built in" to a large degree. It is an undoubtedly good thing that we have a special disposition to prefer our own family members, exercising a kind of discrimination in their favor when it comes to expressions of love.[8]

On the other hand, this kind of "discrimination" can become something that does us little good when it comes to creating, repairing, restoring, or even just recognizing familial bonds with all the sons and daughters of Adam and Eve!

Hence the sadness we might experience when reading David Lawrence Grant's essay, "People Like Us." In it he recalls the pain he felt when he recognized why, in a news reporter's words, so many Minnesotans had reacted much differently to the murder of a suburban white woman than they did to the many "poor and black or brown folks" who had been murdered up until that point: "This time," the reporter said, "it's someone like *us.*"[9]

We are all too human; or, to be more scripturally specific, we are fallen. Is the unity

> Is the unity of all God's offspring (see Acts 17:29), all people groups, in a godly harmony something that we will know only in the future (for this will no doubt happen)—or can real progress actually be made on earth now that we can know and experience . . . as it is in heaven?

of all God's offspring (see Acts 17:29), all people groups, in a godly harmony something that we will know only in the future (for this will no doubt happen)—or can real progress actually be made on earth now that we can know and experience . . . as it is in heaven?

The answer is "yes," but there are some relatively specific things that are necessary to reach this destination.

Addressing the Matter of Racism, In-Group Preference, and "Self-Segregation"

First and foremost, Christians must deliberately and explicitly address these issues by means of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and good Christian theology.

Looking again to the 1994 LCMS CTCR document, we note that, "the apostles' solution to this problem [of uniting Christian Jews and Gentiles] was not the removal of differences, but the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ who through his work on the cross made Christians one." And when it goes on to say that "no one particular group is the best or more effective medium through which God can communicate to his creatures,"[10] there is little in this that we should find objectionable.[11] God means for all races, ethnicities, and/or cultures to be transformed by the message of Jesus Christ and to be His witnesses to the ends of the earth.

Our very big elephant in the room, of course, is racism. As I noted in a recent blog post,[12] Benjamin Isaac argues that a kind of racism or a kind of "proto-racism" (falling short of the "scientific racism" which took hold in Western nations in the eighteenth to twentieth centuries), which holds that certain people groups are "born to be slaves," has been with us since early antiquity in empires such as Greece and Rome. In any case, in our American context, the elephant is particularly big, given our nation's blight of race-based chattel slavery, even among those who appeared to be Christians by any other external evaluation. The CTCR document chooses to bring to our attention that racism has been defined as "the theory or idea that there is a causal link between inherited physical traits and certain traits of personality, intellect, or *culture and, combined with it,* the notion that some races are inherently superior to others" (italics mine).[13] On page 16 it is further explained that:

> Racism also has a certain coherence to it. It draws conclusions about the nature, purpose, and/or destiny of the human family that are based on the theory that because of biological, hereditary, or cultural differences, other members of the human family are socially or morally inferior . . . inferior in human or social value.[14]

The critical point is that by making comments such as, "honor and esteem for all people will be reflected in the church's public witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 2:17; Gal. 6:10; 2 Cor. 6:3)," and adding a battery of other strong statements, as

well,[15] the CTCR makes it clear that racist attitudes declaring some human beings to be of inferior worth are utterly unacceptable before God.

Jesus Christ destroys the barriers of separation (see Ephesians 2)! Knowing this, and also having Paul's description of the Body of Christ, as well as the picture of Revelation 7 vivid in their minds,[16] who among the redeemed will not say "Amen!" to this?[17]

At the same time, just what does this mean for our lives now? What should this look like on the ground? How should damage done be repaired? Here, opinions and strategies will differ, and we also must get more deeply into issues of "in-group preference" and "self-segregation."

As with all things in the "Kingdom of the Left," where we must enter the political realm—where boundaries, force, and coercion are part and parcel of our actions and considerations—these matters can be very complicated. One need only look at how the influential twentieth-century Lutheran theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, handled issues of ethnicity and culture in the Christian church.[18] In the *Bethel Confession*, largely written by Bonhoeffer to counter the Nazis in the early 1930s, we obtain a strong measure of clarity: "[Christians] must reject all attempts to place the natural phenomenon of race on the same level as the institutional orders that are grounded in a direct divine commandment to man." Furthermore, the church does not belong to nations (think here of various ethnic groups), nor is it really there for the nations, but *it exists for Christ.*[19] It is precisely for reasons like these that it is never acceptable for churches, for example, not to welcome any human being who comes through its doors and, in repentance and faith, seeks formal membership in the Body of Christ.[20]

The church does not belong to nations (think here of various ethnic groups), nor is it really there for the nations, but *it exists for Christ*.

From this understanding, all kinds of truly good practices will follow: a genuine desire to respect all those whom God has made in His image, a desire to talk with them and get to know them, and a desire to walk side-by-side with them, to help and even be helped, as the Lord grants the opportunity. We will be ready to continue to listen, think, learn, grow, and act when we hear or read hard words like these from Darryl Scriven:

> The black church position amounts to a call for solidarity externalized and enacted. This imminent demand emerges from the empirical data of the past. It is easy to chastise black people for holding onto the pain of history but appeals for blacks to release this pain will not do. Black Christians understand this well. So, first, the rhetorical black questions to white evangelicals are:

> Where were you? Where were you when Emmett Till was killed? Where were you when Martin Luther King was slain? Where were you when Sixteenth St. Baptist Church was bombed, and four baby girls were killed in the blast? Where were you when Amadou Diallo was shot forty-one times and murdered at the hands of a brutal abuse of police power? Where were you when it was proven though DNA evidence that scores of innocent black inmates have been falsely accused and sent to death row or life in prison? Where were you when Klan activity led to lynchings, and vituperative speech in white circles targeting poor black and brown people as lazy, shiftless, and immoral? Where were your bodies and where were your voices crying against the demonic being perpetrated on your black brothers and sisters? Where were you, where are you now, and where will you be in the future?[21]

Really Loving the Neighbor Means Avoiding Marxist Types of Thought

Christians desire unity and oneness for all in Jesus Christ (see Eph 1:10–11). At the same time, what might happen if there were a teaching that imitated Christian concern for the poor and/or marginalized while seeking to undermine the natural institutions of marriage and the family?

There are popular teachings, such as those of Karl Marx, that borrow concepts from Christianity while excising faith in Jesus Christ and the Scriptures. In fact, it is important to note how many of today's contemporary movements share ideas with the Marxist worldview.[22] These have also affected the church.

Surely, a great and awful challenge confronts us here, and yet we must be careful about how we talk and about the ideas that have currency among us. Clearly, few today dispute that systemic/structural/institutional racism was once endemic to wide swathes of American culture. At the same time, is there not room for caution when it comes to contemporary accusations of the same?

Should not demonstrable social injustices (not just powerful individual anecdotes, along with vague insinuations about systemic, structural, or institutional racism) be meticulously identified and clearly shown[23] so that those against racism can address matters with concrete plans and actions? In noting the great difficulties of reconciling races in America, Scriven understandably notes that "from the black church perspective, Sunday morning interracial worship is mostly a symbolic gesture if not combined with mutual cooperation in the face of injustice."[24]

The point is well-taken, even though I would respond in the following way: When Christians today hear about the white LCMS Lutherans who, back in 1957, wanted to deny a burial plot in the church cemetery to a young black boy from one of their congregations,[25] their disapproval, sadness, and great ire will rightly be aroused. This is important, and it is an indication of where things were at one time and how far things

have come. And yet, note an incident like this is a clear injustice in a very concrete and particular circumstance, where the conscious intent to exclude (for whatever reason) was not in dispute and was clearly discernible to all. It is for this reason that righteous indignation arose among some at that time, and today arises among most all of us!

Letting the Heavenly Culture, with God's Eternal Law, Form Our Cultures

At this point, it will be helpful to look at how the CTCR document handles the issue of culture. It states that "culture consists of a group of assumptions about the world and according to which one organizes that world, defines, values, manipulates, and responds to that world," raising this point because "racist thinking often diminishes or even rejects altogether the role of culture in defining the differences between human groups."[26]

Culture therefore finds its way into the CTCR understanding of racism: "Racism, as we have seen, is a *belief system* founded on the supposition that inherent, biological differences (or, in some cases, ethnic or cultural differences) among various human groups not only determine social or human achievement, *but also the value of individual members of the human family*"[27] (italics mine). Hence, on page 32 we read:

> Racism in the church poisons and cripples all sincere efforts "to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3). Physical characteristics *or cultural customs* are made to serve as "a dividing wall of hostility" that separates brothers and sisters in Christ—to which the only appropriate response must be "Is Christ divided?" (1 Cor. 1:13). (italics mine)

We note that the definition of racism offered by the CTCR certainly has the potential to confuse.[28] Why? Because in many cases it is, in fact, *cultural* differences that will most certainly influence social and human achievement.

As the CTCR document later points out, "all cultures, of course, contain structures and practices that are evil."[29] Such cultural practices, of course, will inevitably create hostility and strife between groups *or even within groups*. In order to overcome the confusion here, it is helpful to argue for, in a sense, a "heavenly culture"[30] (including an "alien politics"![31]) that must trump every earthly culture. It is precisely because each member of the human family, "God's offspring" (Acts 17:29), is valuable and someone God intends to save (and hence make a member of the Body of Christ) that the church must "challenge all those aspects of culture that express the demonic and dehumanizing forces of evil, while affirming and celebrating the positive values of that culture."[32]

One must go beyond the culture that God creates in the church (the "Kingdom of the Right," where forgiveness rules through God's Word and Sacraments) to discuss

the questions of the wider culture that the church inhabits and the politics thereof (the "Kingdom of the Left," where coercion is always a factor, culminating in the wielding of the sword, literal or metaphorical, by the rulers of a society).[33]

Is it simply wrong for a dominant culture—even a culture that many find highly attractive on a number of levels—to attempt to maintain and sustain itself though time? Can this necessarily be the case?[34] This is one reason why I think that the contemporary focus on the victimization of minorities, "institutional racism" on the part of "white culture," and even the sin of things like "white flight" (which the CTCR document also decries) are often, in the final analysis, unhelpful. In order for true reconciliation and peace to take hold, one must, while calling for realistic assessments in the communities of others, also acknowledge the problems in one's own communities.

Conclusion

Hopkins and Koschmann encourage us with the words that "It might be a surprise to some, but how to do effective urban ministry is well-established" . . . "love the people and build trusting relationships . . . [going] everywhere the people [go, live, work, or play]." This would not necessarily include a fervent activism, but it would undoubtedly include the need and desire to confront systemic injustices that God throws in one's path, that one's congregation, for example, may encounter in its own neighborhood and particular circumstances.[35] Indeed, there are all kinds of examples that we can look to and learn about that assure us that this is a hopeful and not futile route.[36]

Beyond the issue of racism, effective cross-cultural outreach is, above all, a matter of commitment and real sacrifice—of time (including family time or time with those one generally desires to associate with!), treasure, and talent—that will not flag.

The church must also always proclaim the critical importance of the natural family, even as it offers help, including all kinds of other "social services," to carry out the will of the Lord, as well as to gain friends, brothers and sisters in Christ. There is no need of any secularized "social gospel"; rather, what is needed are advocates who will counter all sin and injustices from deep Christian love. This means fighting injustice and hatred because it's the right thing to do—not something that needs to be done for the sake of an abstract and Christ-less "social justice" or even just for the church to "survive and thrive" in its neighborhood and beyond.

As Dietrich Bonhoeffer put it in the *Bethel Confession*, decidedly against the currents of our contemporary world: "Struggle is not the basic principle of the original creation, and a fighting attitude is therefore not a commandment by God established by the original creation." Indeed. We need not doubt that the good fruit will come in God's time, as Christ grants it.

Endnotes

[1] Quoted in Philip M. Bickel, *Joy to the Word: God's Global Mission for Local Christians* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1989), 11–12.

[2] Bickel, *Joy to the Word*, 69. Interestingly, I am sure that it is statements like this from LCMS pastors that contributed to the disappointment I felt years later when reading about how those who started the LCMS had come to America so that they and their children could receive the Word and Sacraments. I thought: "*How could they not be thinking about Christ's love for all people?"* I think at this stage in my life, I had fallen off the other side of the horse, as Luther had discussed.

[3] Commission on Theology and Church Relations, *Racism and the Church: Overcoming the Idolatry* (St. Louis: LCMS, 1994), 31.

[4] In CTCR, *Racism*, 22, footnote 53 and 26, footnote 71, an author is quoted who speaks about "white supremacy" in the context of "assimilation"; see page 39, as well, which speaks of persistent "institutional and cultural racism."

I think that this conversation is lacking in not also treating these concepts in light of other universally recognized phenomena, such as "auto-segregation" and "in-group preference." On the other hand, I think statements such as the following found on page 41 are more immediately helpful:

> great sensitivity must be exercised so that certain people and/or groups are not categorized as people to be continuously "acted upon" by others in a way that implies that they are second-class members of the kingdom of God. Similarly, when we approach members of "minority" or "majority" groups with the Gospel of Christ, we must view them as people who are being called to full participation in the life and mission of the institutional church at all levels—local, national, and international.

[5] See: Wikipedia contributors, "Auto-segregation," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia,* https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Auto-segregation&oldid=912266259 (accessed September 12, 2019). This and similar subjects are also discussed a good deal by George M. Fredrickson in his book *Racism: A Short History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

[6] Curtiss Paul DeYoung, Michael O. Emerson, George A. Yancey, and Karen Hwee Kim Chia, *United by Faith: The Multiracial Congregation as an Answer to the Problem of Race* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 130. These authors also state "while local congregations may in fact be basically homogenous, in no case whatsoever should their doors be closed to those of other homogenous units, either for worship or membership" (124).

The perspective of the authors of *United by Faith* is well encapsulated in the following quote:

> To become an integrated multiracial congregation, the members must consider the main barriers that congregations face. Even for a willing congregation, a fundamental barrier is that multiracial churches labor against sociologically natural leanings. A church that does not aim to become multiracial almost never does. Churches that aim to do so fail most of the time. Those that become multiracial often revert to being uniracial. As discussed in detail in *Divided by Faith*, even apart from racism, a number of sociological factors—such as the need for symbolic boundaries and social solidarity, similarity principles, and the status quo bias—constantly drive

> religious congregations to be racially homogeneous. These factors work similarly regardless of the racial group that predominates in the church. (170)

[7] To get a sense of how compelling the Church Growth movement led by these men was for many mission-minded Christians, one need only consult this short article from the more liberal *Christian Century* praising this "conservative" movement: C. Wayne Zunkel, "Countering Critics of the Church Growth Movement," *The Christian Century* 98, no. 31 (1981): 997–98.

[8] See, e.g., 1 Timothy 5:9 and Romans 9:1–5. While uniting all persons in Christ, Christianity also counters the extreme cultural and political left, which would downplay the natural family and things like male headship, for example. These texts also leave us with a very positive picture of what we call ethnicity—a term that has both culture *and family ties* in mind. The fact that mothers have a natural inclination—and equipment—to nurture their young, that we might speak of our "fatherland," and that "Nature produces a special love of offspring" (Cicero)—*these are all good things*. Men like Karl Marx, on the other hand, saw the natural family—and hence nations—as something to be overcome. I think that Marxism seeks to do these things to the family for the same reason it seeks to eliminate natural marriage: these are *living icons of the church*.

[9] David Lawrence Grant, "People Like Us," in *A Good Time for the Truth*, 196. Grant's pain is also seen in his frustration regarding Minnesotans' attitudes towards immigrants: "the unspoken rules that the newcomers are supposed to intuit include these: 'Assimilate, and do it quickly; understand that, if you're still having problems after you've had a couple of years or so to settle in, then we're going to start seeing your very presence here as a problem'" (199).

[10] CTCR, *Racism*, 31, 33.

[11] Even if one might argue that this is not the case now, there is nothing in nature that would make this intrinsically so.

[12] See https://www.patheos.com/blogs/justandsinner/is-andres-manuel-lopez-obrador-the-moral-shakedown-artist-of-mexico-city-or-is-he-right/.

[13] CTCR, *Racism*, 10. Italics mine. Note that the second part of the definition is critical, as evidenced by this further comment by the CTCR in a footnote on page 15 of that document:

> Not all stereotypes, of course, are false, nor do they necessarily have a negative function or purpose. Blacks may well jump higher than Asians and Norwegians are probably taller than Mexicans, but such generalizations are harmless as long as they involve no judgment as to the relative worth or merit of groups being so compared.

Elsewhere, on page 29, we helpfully read, "in racist ideology the worth or value of an individual or group is determined principally, if not solely, by genetic origin and/or biological characteristics." By way of contrast, note this definition from dictionary.com: "a belief or doctrine that inherent differences among the various human racial groups determine cultural or individual achievement, usually involving the idea that one's own race is superior and has the right to dominate others or that a particular racial group is inferior to the others." The word *usually* is important here—*in this definition it is not necessary for there to be racism.* This is clearly wrong, given that persons are glad to talk about the prevalence of certain natural, inherent, intrinsic characteristics in different racial and ethnic groups—of course usually positive ones!—in certain contexts. For example, outside of the context of discussions of racism, most are usually happy to admit that things like intelligence, personality, temperament, etc., appear to run in families.

[14] CTCR, *Racism*, 16, 17. For more thoughts about this important definition, see Cameron A. MacKenzie, Norman E. Nagel, Ken Ray Schurb, and James W. Voelz, "Racism and the Church: A Minority Report" (April 9, 1994), [St. Louis]: [publisher not identified], 1994, and George Frederickson, *Racism: A Short History,* 1–12, 154–155.

[15] CTCR, *Racism*, 39. Also: "Racist lines of demarcation between human beings declaring some to be lesser members of humankind are . . . a blasphemous affront to our Creator" (28); likewise, "if anyone should claim superiority over others and treat them as inferior because of racial origin or characteristics, we may add, that person, too, has a god, but not the one true God" (9); "Self-indulgent pride in 'race,'. . . must be regarded as idolatry in one of its crassest forms. It is an attempt to be 'like God'" (30); "Deeply problematic . . . is any claim that one particular culturally shaped response to God's goodness and grace is in and of itself superior to others" (34); "The unity of the church transcends every race and culture and is to be manifested in the full acceptance and inclusion of all peoples" (38); "No one particular group is the best or more effective medium through which God can communicate to his creatures" (33).

[16] See also Rev. 5:8–9; 7:9, 10; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6; 17:15 (verses noted in the CTCR document).

[17] It is not only Christians who want to create a picture like this, *or at least find some utility in promoting it*, but many non-Christians as well. In the works of Tacitus (Annals 11.24.1) from the first and second century AD, we pick up on his statement in the debate over whether or not to allow men from Gallia Comata to attain public office and hence membership in the Senate. According to Tacitus himself, the emperor Claudius held the following position, which I have the impression was rather unique it its day:

> The oldest of my ancestors, Clausius, was originally a Sabine. He was adopted at the same time into the Roman state and into the patrician class. These ancestors encourage me to follow similar ideas in governing the Republic, by relocating here anything of excellence. You are not, of course, ignorant of the fact that the family of the Julii come from Alba, the Coruncanii, from Camerium, the Porcii, from Tusculum, and—to pass over ancient history—men have been accepted into the senate from Etruria, Lucania, and the whole of Italy. Then, the very expansion of the state to the Alps united not just individual men but whole lands and tribes under our name. There was a firm peace at home and our influence abroad was strong at the time when the people living beyond the Po were given citizenship, when we accepted the strongest provincials to support our weak empire under the pretext of spreading our legions over the world. Are we truly sorry that the Balbi have come to us come from Spain? That no less remarkable men have come from Gallia Narbonensis? Their descendants are still with us and their love of our country is no less than ours.

[18] For a very thoughtful article from a pastor of an ethnic church, see the following: https://veritasdomain.wordpress.com/2018/08/30/ethnic-churches-a-more-better-way-than-bashing-them/.

[19] A more complete part of the quote from that document, was made possible by the author's friend, Pastor Holger Sonntag, translator:

> Christ is sent as the Redeemer of the ***whole*** world. This is why he commissions the church to bring the gospel to ***all*** nations. As it carries out this commission, it enters

> into the forms and structures of the nations of their time. It can live among a multitude of nations as the ***one*** church regardless of political boundaries. It can be a national church within the boundaries of a realm regardless of ethnicity. It can be church within a certain ethnicity while transcending political boundaries. It can be church within a certain ethnicity without transcending political boundaries, but within the boundaries of this ethnicity. Its external form is not subject to duress, but is determined by the only rule, namely, "by all means to gain some" [1 Cor. 9:22]. This is why it becomes a Jew to the Jews, a Greek to the Greeks, a Chinese to the Chinese, a German to the Germans. The manner and extent of such entering into time can be determined only based on the commission of the church. The proclamation of the church always remains the alien grain of seed that is planted in the ground. Where the content of a specific time becomes the content of the proclamation the gospel is betrayed, because it is no longer said ***to*** the time, but absorbed ***by*** it. . . .
>
> We reject the false doctrine that the church belongs to the nation, or that it is there for the nation. The church does not belong to the nation, but to Christ. He alone is its Lord. Only in intrepid obedience to him it truly serves the nation in which it lives. It is there for every member of the nation, to gain it for the congregation of Jesus. (italics in document)

[20] In an unfortunately high number of cases, this kind of core truth was not learned by many American Christian churches until the 1950s and 1960s. In our American context, what the 1994 CTCR document goes on to say makes the point effectively for this time and place: "There is no 'Anglo-Caucasian,' 'African-American,' no 'Hispanic-American,' no 'Vietnamese-American,' or other 'hyphenated' citizen in the sight of God, as if to imply that some are more worthy than others to join the company of those who call on his name" (38).

What about when one's neighborhood changes? Christians really should have a desire to be a neighborhood congregation, whatever the community is (and, perhaps, when it comes to one's national politics, supporting an approach of slower and more limited immigration in the Kingdom of the Left, if one thinks that is necessary). This is not an *adiaphoron.* The local Christian congregation should indeed be connected to its local community. There is nothing wrong with following members who leave the neighborhood, but, ideally, they should all be followed *with additional church plants*. Note that all of this also demonstrates, arguably, just how important it is to have theology and worship practices that are consistent throughout a church body so that members do not feel like they cannot attend their local, neighborhood church because of a "worship style" they find to be "beyond the pale."

[21] Darryl Scriven, "The Call to Blackness in American Christianity" in Hawkins, J. Russell and Phillip Luke Sinitiere, *Christians and the Color Line: Race and Religion After Divided by Faith* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 257.

[22] See, for example, the blog post that I wrote here: https://www.patheos.com/blogs/justandsinner/is-todays-christianity-increasingly-filtered-through-marxist-categories/.

[23] This is not to insist that there is nothing to the idea that "the achievement gap in education, job equality, racial profiling, police brutality against people of color, and the U.S. prison system" derive from "institutional forms of racism in America's cities" (Mark Koschmann, *Finding Their Footing in the Changing City: Protestant and Catholic Congregations Adapt to the New Urban Environment in Post-World War II Chicago* [dissertation, St. Louis: Saint Louis University, 2018], 37), but simply that for many, this is

hardly obvious and even *appears very wrong.* Therefore, *great* patience and a concern to present strong evidence may be required to convince many that this is, in fact, the case. One of the more recent and highly publicized attempts to do this is Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crowe* (2010), even as Jason Riley offers criticism versus Alexander in his book, *Please Stop Helping Us* (2016), pages 64–66. (See also pp. 70–74, where he also sums up Manhattan Institute scholar Heather Mac Donald's work, at odds with Alexander's, to that point.)

[24] Scriven, "Call to Blackness," 261.

[25] Koschmann, *Finding Their Footing in the Changing City*, 32–33.

[26] CTCR, *Racism*, 15.

[27] CTCR, *Racism*, 28. Italics mine.

[28] Again, the introduction of culture into the sentence above can certainly leave a very confusing impression. The CTCR goes so far as to say the following:

> Racism may also manifest itself at the level of *culture.* This is the view that all cultures are inferior to one's own culture, and that those inferior cultures consistently produce inferior results. Viewed from a historical perspective, cultural racism is sometimes referred to as "cultural imperialism or cultural colonialism." (17)

Concerns that a given community might have about the prevailing cultural customs of another group should not, and really *must not*, *necessarily* be related to racism in any way. More careful language, I think, is needed. After all, the apostle Paul is certainly not wrong to urge Timothy to confront the Cretans, whom he administers with a stinging, "politically incorrect," proverb.

In like fashion, minority groups certainly speak of cultural customs of dominant cultures, which they see as less than helpful. In fact, these customs are not superior to their own, *but are really and truly inferior*, producing as they do inferior results: real hostility between different groups. In the book *Aliens in the Promised Land: Why Minority Leadership Is Overlooked in White Christian Churches and Institutions*, editor Anthony B. Bradley speaks of a church that is "culturally captive to white Western norms" (16). Bradley also quotes Elizondo, maintaining that "Whites set the norms and project the images of success, achievement, acceptability, normalcy, and status" (24–25). Implicated along with racism are "white, Western, cultural norms" such as *individualism, consumerism, materialism, comfort, ease, professional success, and comfortable church buildings* (21, italics mine). This is "idolatrous worship" (21). Furthermore, there are those who do attempt to be "culturally white," who some call "sell-outs" or "tokens," participating in a system of "white privilege." They never really have any authority or power (23–25). Whether one considers this kind of talk a species of "cultural Marxism" or not, *the point here is that this particular criticism of "white culture" is not seen as coming from any racist impulse, but rather, it appears, from some kind of objective moral standard.*

[29] Nevertheless, these kinds of statements are in some real tension with the sociologically-based practice of "emic analysis" praised in CTCR, *Racism,* 14. This practice states "the principle that every culture must be analyzed and understood in terms of itself, not on the basis of another culture." This raises, for example, the following question: Do the Ten Commandments represent an aspect of a "heavenly culture" that is applicable trans-historically and trans-culturally or not?

[30] The phrase "heavenly culture" applied in this way, as far as I know, is mine. And far be it for a "heavenly culture" to be a "dominant group's oppression" that includes "racism, economic exploitation, discrimination, and ethnocentricism," (117) which the 2004 Oxford University Press book, *United by Faith,* mentions. To be sure, in the first three hundred years of the church, it was no "dominant group" in the Roman world! In describing the unique theology of Latin America, the book says in this view of "liberation theology," "only dominant groups are in a position to say that faith and politics are unrelated, or should be" (116). Also, interestingly, the authors state that "according to liberation theology, the gospel must be contextualized to cultural groups and their situations. Ultimately, for each cultural group, the gospel must be liberated from dominant group interpretations" (117). All of this information is found in the chapter that puts forward the best case for uniracial or uniethnic churches, where cultural groups "self-segregate" in the midst of a dominant culture. One of the core arguments is that in these churches minority groups can find refuge and shared meaning, escaping the oppression and racism of the majority culture (the context for this discussion is America), and find positions of leadership and other means of exercising their God-given gifts. (Attaining some kind of status is particularly important here, as well as a more comfortable place to find relationships, including marital ones, and social connections.)

Interestingly, a highly regarded new book by a man whose parents were Bangladeshi-born immigrants, *Melting Pot or Civil War: A Son of Immigrants Makes the Case against Open Borders* (2018), argues that any immigrants brought to America should, in part, be, in short, assimilated as soon as possible. (He also argues that they should, generally speaking, be those who will be capable of becoming middle class). This means, for instance, that their opportunities to be around their own previous cultural groups should be more limited. Perhaps, if this were to be a nation's policy, an exception could be made for immigrant group churches, which can also continue to maintain aspects of the immigrant's previous cultural heritage. In fact, we read in *United by Faith* that "Illsoo Kim . . . sees the [Korean] churches as 'the substitute for ethnic neighborhoods' for Korean immigrants, who tend to be residentially assimilated" (119). Regarding "Asian Americans" in general, the authors note that "Latinos . . . are technically still able to worship together in Spanish-speaking monolingual congregations. Asian Americans, on the other hand, can claim no unifying common language other than English." Indeed, "the large degree of ethnic separatism among Asian American congregations is simply due to the enormous number of internal differences," (121) even as the longer one resides in the United States, the ethnic attachment weakens and "is replaced by a stronger racial identification" (122).

[31] Theodore Hopkins and Mark Koschmann, "Faithful Witness in Wounded Cities: Congregations and Race in America," *Lutheran Mission Matters* 24, no. 2 (2016): https://www.lsfm.global/uploads/files/LMM_5-16_HopkinsandKoschmann.pdf.

[32] CTCR, *Racism*, 41.

[33] This culminates in the wielding of the sword, literal or metaphorical, by the rulers of a society. God works in both ways here, and we must call them both good, even if, to take the most extreme examples, things like the death penalty for those doing evil and even "just wars" could possibly be good only *in a fallen world.*

[34] In the section explaining "ethnocentrism," we read these helpful words: "*The term 'ethnocentrism' refers to what may be a positive appreciation of and preference for one's own culture.* From birth human beings are generally led to believe that their own cultural ways are the best, if not the only way of going about life. People are not only aware of their native culture, but they are also emotionally attached to it. *In fact, it is doubtful if any cultural system*

could survive without some degree of ethnocentrism" (13, italics mine). See also the remarks on page 38: "to affirm a particular race and culture does not imply separatism. Rather, such affirmation is a way of identifying those persons whom the Lord has given to his church, together with their special gifts, for the benefit of all."

Immediately following these words, however, we read this:

> But ethnocentrism may easily degenerate into that "view of things in which one's own group is the center of everything, and all others are scaled and rated with reference to it." This way of thinking becomes problematic when *the standards of one culture become the basis for making selections and determining opportunities for people from a variety of racial, cultural, and ethnic groupings*. When institutions sanction and implement these standards, forced assimilation and/or exclusion result. (14, italics mine)

Page 26 speaks of "racial disadvantage" stating "often more difficult to recognize are the subtle and varied forms by which the heritage of racism continues to disadvantage members of minority groups." The CTCR goes on:

> By virtue of the historical realities of racism, racial minorities do not have the same legacy of advantage as do white Americans. Therefore, in our increasingly pluralistic and diverse society, to insist upon mere access to already existing institutions or to advance "equal opportunity" in those institutions may be only a way of perpetuating the disadvantage of a prior inequality. *Racial disadvantage becomes increasingly intense and offensive if access to society's institutions demands conformity to ethnocentric norms unrelated to the common goods and services for which these institutions exist*. We may cite, for example, the case of the California judge who prohibited the use of the Spanish language anywhere in the courthouse, not only in the performance of official duties, but during coffee breaks. (27, italics mine)

Is this kind of thing necessarily racism? What has happened to the evidently valid concern that a cultural system will survive (perhaps with some of its evils purged?), as expressed earlier by the CTCR? Truly, all of the above examples leave more questions than answers. In my mind, being a part of a culture entails happily learning its language and its expected norms—at the very least so as not to tax and burden those opening up their doors to you! What, specifically, is wrong with "When in Rome do as the Romans do"?

See also the related discussion on pages 14 and 15 of the CTCR document of the different possible meanings of words like "majority" and "minority" when it comes to groups. Frederickson also notes that "the struggle against racism requires that stigmatized groups have . . . political empowerment in proportion to their numbers," (147) which suggests that even as he identifies racism with power, any power a majority group holds over a minority group is not necessarily racism, and in fact, seems to be what he expects to be the case, even justifiably so.

[35] Hopkins and Koschmann, "Faithful Witness in Wounded Cities," 248, 249, 251, 259.

[36] See the work cited in the previous footnote. Also, there are well-known books titled *Divided by Faith* (2001) and *United by Faith* (2004), where one can get some helpful ideas and practical examples, such as the importance of ethnic ministers and representation in other positions of leadership, visiting persons in homes, compromising in congregational decisions, and recognizing that there are strengths and weaknesses in each culture. Also, in *United by*

Faith, we read that "multiracial congregations need to embrace the important [social] functions provided in the context of uniracial congregations" (144).

I diverge a bit from the main thesis of *United by Faith*, namely, that Christian churches *should*, when possible, be multiethnic. "While racial separation may be sociologically comfortable, we do not accept it as ordained by God" (131). While I agree that it is not ordained by God, I also think we should nevertheless think critically about *the relative stability* of nations, which derive from the Greek word "*ethnos*" (see Acts 17) and prayerfully wrestle with the implications of this.

The authors make it clear that one of the main reasons they say what they say is that Christian churches can help reduce racial strife and division increasingly present in the country (see 1–3). Here, the church should lead in the process of cultural integration, not follow. At the same time, however, might not one also suggest that Christians might feel led politically to, for example, drastically slow the rate of immigration in their nation in such a situation? By way of contrast, the authors of *United by Faith* give every impression that the United States—or any political state or nation at all?—should not seek to preserve its basic cultural and ethnic heritage by requiring assimilation, i.e., by being "dominant." This is exemplified in the fact that, while talking about ethnic churches, they say "some congregations can provide ways to meet the particular needs of these [ethnic] groups while *integrating* them into a multiracial community" (132; see 135), later even commenting that "people of color must effect social change *by working against all dominant group members* . . . [and that] structures must be created that give equal voice to nondominant groups" (137).

To clarify, I have no trouble with preparing persons for *assimilating* into the decidedly multiracial society that is America; however, when I read "dominant group" in this context, for example, I note that it gives every impression that something labeled "white culture" is being equated with "majority American culture." The problem here is that "majority American culture" includes many minorities who, for the most part, align with it (for example, American ideals of small government and those freedoms outlined in the Constitution). What this means is that I do have real concerns about a "multicultural" or "multiethnic" society. Again, an honest and perhaps very difficult conversation about passages like Acts 17 needs to be had.

Getting back to churches, specifically, my own thesis is that multiracial churches are indeed a greater blessing than uniracial churches. As *United by Faith* says, multiracial congregations "possess the potential for drawing individuals who are comfortable with a multiracial social atmosphere and individuals from a uniracial social atmosphere who become interested in surrounding themselves with persons from other races" (86). Further, I agree heartily that this blessing is one that willing individuals and even congregations should be encouraged to vigorously strive after—but maintain that by introducing the word *"should,"* one can potentially introduce an unnecessary and unwarranted burden on churches free in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is one thing to say that they must welcome those who come in their doors *and another to say that they must take the path of extremely vigorous multicultural and multiracial outreach.* Again, see this article from a pastor of an ethnic church: https://veritasdomain.wordpress.com/2018/08/30/ethnic-churches-a-more-better-way-than-bashing-them/.

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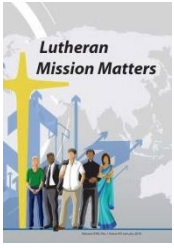

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Next Steps for LCMS Multiplication: Two Actions to Reignite a Gospel Movement

Michael W. Newman

Abstract: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) experienced two robust periods of growth in its history. During the late 1800s and from the late 1930s to the early 1960s, the LCMS saw significant expansion. Two common threads of ministry action during these seasons of growth were the planting of new churches and the development of new Lutheran church bodies around the world. This essay will examine the history of LCMS Kingdom multiplication and propose two solutions consistent with our history that will address our current decline. The solutions will help energize efforts to bring the important message of grace alone, faith alone, and Scripture alone to an increasingly secularized and searching culture, and to new generations as we approach the two hundredth anniversary of the LCMS in 2047.

Be Fruitful and Multiply

Starting new churches is one of the best ways to reach new people with the Good News of Jesus. A 2018 study by the Pinetops Foundation, called *The Great Opportunity: The American Church in 2050*, reinforced the fact that planting churches is essential to seeing new people receive the gift of new life in Christ:

> New church plants on average are more effective at reaching the lost than long-established churches. Based on recent Lifeway research, we know that the average well-trained, equipped church plant will grow to an average of 250 weekly participants within four years. Of those, 42 percent, or almost half of the congregation, will come from the previously unchurched—many of those the previously unaffiliated as well. New church plants are perhaps the most effective method for reaching the unchurched.[1]

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Lethargy in multiplication, however, has gripped the American church. *The Great Opportunity* points out that "*Church planting in the US will need to double to triple from current rates* to address population growth and anticipated church closures of older congregations. The American church needs to plant more than 215,000 churches in the next 30 years to maintain status quo, and to meet the needs of the unaffiliated an additional 60,000 churches."[2]

Lethargy in multiplication, however, has gripped the American church.

God's will to see His Kingdom be fruitful and multiply is very clear. Acts 6:7a says, "And the word of God continued to *increase*, and the number of the disciples *multiplied* greatly in Jerusalem" (emphasis added). Acts 12:24 recounts, "But the word of God *increased* and *multiplied*" (emphasis added). These verbs are the same verbs used by the Septuagint in Genesis 1:28 when God commanded the first man and woman to "be fruitful and multiply." God's intent was not merely biological multiplication. He desired Kingdom growth. Malachi 2:15 articulates that fact when the prophet stated that one of God's intended outcomes of marriage was the procreation of "godly offspring." Being fruitful and multiplying is wrapped in God's love for all people and His desire to receive disciples into His eternal Kingdom.

Kingdom increase and multiplication are also God's gift. God desires all people to be saved (1 Tm 2:4). He has given us a living Word (Heb 4:12) that accomplishes His purpose (Is 55:11). Baptism pours out salvation (1 Pt 3:21), and the Lord's Supper delivers the forgiveness of sins (Mt 26:28). The Savior who has been given all authority in heaven and on earth includes us in the beautiful blessing of proclaiming His Good News of salvation to all people, making disciples of all nations by baptizing and teaching.

But the LCMS has been fading in increase and multiplication for nearly four decades. This is in stark contrast to the church multiplication track record of the LCMS during most of its history. For its first 120 years, the LCMS exhibited a healthy church planting temperature. An analysis of the LCMS trends in starting new congregations and preaching stations reveals some profound insights and direction for the future of the church body. Let's take a look.

LCMS Church Multiplication Trends

By the end of 1847, the year of the LCMS's formation, the LCMS reported 37 congregations and preaching stations. This number included congregations not yet chartered as member churches but preparing to be chartered. Eight years later in 1855, the LCMS reported 136 congregations. Over the period of eight years, every existing congregation, on average, gave birth to nearly three new faith communities. A remarkable procreation rate had begun.

In the sixty years that followed, congregations continued to be fruitful and multiply at a healthy rate. Below, listed in ten-year increments, is the total number of faith communities in the LCMS at the start of the ten-year period, the net gain over the decade, and the number of congregations it took, from the start of that period to the end of that period, to give birth to one new faith community during that ten-year span. These statistics take into account congregations that closed and preaching stations that dissolved. The decade-by-decade numbers do not provide precise information about how many congregations or missionaries were responsible for the expansion. The statistics simply indicate the trajectory of growth and provide a valuable glimpse into the overall church multiplication activity of the LCMS during these time periods.[3]

> Over the period of eight years, every existing congregation, on average, gave birth to nearly three new faith communities. A remarkable procreation rate had begun.

1865
254 total congregations in the LCMS
A gain of 118 since 1855
It took 1.15 congregations to start one additional faith community.

1875
704 total
A gain of 450
Each congregation started nearly 2 new faith communities.

The 1885 statistical yearbook of the LCMS—the first year it was published—included chartered congregations, those about to charter, and "preaching stations" in the statistical totals of LCMS faith communities. These categories show the mission development of the LCMS and are reflected below.

1885
1,739 total congregations and preaching stations
A gain of 1,035
It took 1.47 congregations to start one additional faith community.

1895
2,514 total
A gain of 775
It took 2.24 congregations to start one additional faith community.

1905
3343 total
A gain of 829
It took 3.03 congregations to start one additional faith community.

1916 (There were no statistics available in 1915.)
4,171 total
A gain of 828
It took 4.03 congregations to start one additional faith community.

In its first seventy years, it took, on average, just under two LCMS churches to start one new LCMS congregation. During that time period, the LCMS experienced a net gain of just over 59 churches per year, growing from 12 congregations at its founding to 4,171 churches and preaching stations in 1916. Reaching new communities and starting new faith communities was a normal part of holistic ministry for LCMS churches. The people and pastors of the church always asked, "Where do we need to bring the Gospel next?" They answered with devoted energy and efforts to reach new communities with the unique and life-transforming message of grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone based on Scripture alone. And the Word did not return empty, but prospered in that for which it was sent (Is 55:10–11).

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Challenging Times

The early 1900s saw seemingly insurmountable challenges erupt for the church. A worldwide flu pandemic ended 50 million lives around the world. Anti-German sentiment abruptly discontinued the LCMS's mode of discipleship and evangelistic outreach in the United States. Immigration laws changed and the economy began to falter. The post-World War I years of the twentieth century saw church multiplication begin to wane in the LCMS. It took an increasing number of congregations to start one new faith community:

1925
4,431 total congregations and preaching stations in the LCMS
A gain of 260 in the decade
It took 16.04 congregations to start one new faith community.

1935
5,029 total
A gain of 598
It took 7.4 congregations to start one new faith community.

By 1945, preaching stations were no longer being listed in the LCMS statistical yearbook, and so the statistics below capture the change with a slight adjustment in the total number of congregations to take into account the altered statistical tabulation method.

1945
4,268 total congregations
A gain of 433 congregations over the 1935 number of 3,835
It took 8.85 congregations to start one new faith community.

Throughout these years, the Missouri Synod remained undaunted in its mission and outreach focus. Leaders prayerfully devoted themselves to being a church for the purpose of God's mission. And God, in His grace, opened new doors for the LCMS to bless others with the Good News of Jesus. The LCMS transitioned from being an outreach to German-speaking immigrants to a uniquely American church and outreach movement. From the late 1940s to the early 1960s, the ministry multiplication rate showed great promise. Even with more than 5,000 congregations, churches were still committed to giving birth to new churches.

Throughout these years, the Missouri Synod remained undaunted in its mission and outreach focus.

1955
5,130 total
A gain of 862
It took 4.95 congregations to start one new faith community.

1965
5,948 total
A gain of 818
It took 6.27 congregations to start one new faith community.

A Startling Change

During the late 1960s and early 1970s, the distractions of theological arguments, doctrinal waywardness, and ministry fear began to strangle church multiplication momentum in the LCMS. Combined with complex social and cultural shifts during

this era, the intense focus needed on attending to the truth of the Scriptures and rightfully reinforcing this truth had the unintentional impact of "birth control" in a church body that was hurting and afraid.[4]

In addition, church planting began to shift from being the grass-roots responsibility of every congregation to becoming a programmatic emphasis of LCMS districts using "expertly trained" missionaries who could get the job done. Over time, multiplication momentum weakened, congregations continued to age, and new outreach was severely curtailed. The result was a precipitous slide in church multiplication. The decline was unprecedented in the history of the Missouri Synod. The numbers tell the challenging story:

1975
6,160 total congregations and preaching stations
A gain of 212 in the decade
It took 28.06 congregations to start one new faith community.

1985
6,236 total
A gain of 76
It took 81.05 congregations to start one new faith community.

1995
6,175 total
A decline of 61
Any churches started did not offset churches closed.

2005
6,144 total
A decline of 31
Any churches started did not offset churches closed.

2015
6,101 total
A decline of 43
Any churches started did not offset churches closed.

2017
6,046 total
A decline of 55
Any churches started did not offset churches closed.
(For a summary, see Figure 1, Gain/Loss Efficiency Decadal Ratio.)

Many factors contribute to a church's decline, but one key factor in the deterioration of the LCMS over the past forty years has been the decrease in church

multiplication. Not starting new faith communities has become a pervasive habit in the LCMS. The mindset that propelled church workers and laypeople to multiply ministry has faded from consciousness.[5]

But there is hope! With our risen Savior Jesus and His Church, there is always hope. The Word of God is living and active (Heb 4:12). The Word of God does not return empty (Is 55:11). The gates of hell will not prevail against the advance of Christ's Church (Mt 16:18). God desires all people to be saved (1 Tm 2:4). Jesus has called His followers to go into all the world and proclaim the Gospel to all creation (Mk 16:15).

Many factors contribute to a church's decline, but one key factor in the deterioration of the LCMS over the past forty years has been the decrease in church multiplication. Not starting new faith communities has become a pervasive habit in the LCMS.

Allow me to propose two actions that may reignite a Gospel movement in the LCMS.

Two Proposed Actions

Action One: Twenty Percent of LCMS Congregations Team Up to Plant Churches.

At its 67th regular convention in July of 2019, the LCMS adopted a bold resolution "To Encourage the Planting of Churches":

> *Resolved*, That the Synod in convention reaffirms its first mission priority to "plant, sustain, and revitalize Lutheran churches" (2013 Res. 3-06A); and be it further
>
> *Resolved*, That congregations and circuits be encouraged and supported by their respective districts to investigate and identify new mission plants; and be it further
>
> *Resolved*, That congregations, circuits, and district leaders be encouraged to think strategically and plan collaboratively when establishing these new mission plants; and be it further
>
> *Resolved*, That congregations and circuits be encouraged to make use of [Office of National Mission (ONM)] resources in the establishment of these new mission plants; and be it further
>
> *Resolved*, That the ONM, in partnership with the districts, issue a report telling the stories of new mission plants prior to the 2022 Synod convention; and be it finally

> *Resolved*, That the congregations and workers of the Synod regularly pray that the Lord of the Harvest would bless these efforts and enlarge His Kingdom.[6]

The synod in convention has resolved not to be hearers of the Word only and so deceive ourselves, but to be doers of the Word (Jas 1:22). How might this be accomplished during a season of fatigue and decline in the LCMS?

Twenty Percent of LCMS Congregations Team Up to Plant Churches.

What if 20% of the congregations in the LCMS seriously and tenaciously committed themselves to multiply Gospel ministry?

What if those 1,200 congregations joined together in teams of three to start two new preaching stations/new churches every decade?

Let's add up the numbers: 400 congregational teams make the commitment to start just two new faith communities every decade—one every five years. The result would be 800 new missions by 2029. With the current decline of just under 500 churches over a ten-year period (481 congregations and mission stations closed between 2009–2018, according to LCMS Rosters and Statistics), *the first effort of just 20% of the congregations of the LCMS would turn the congregational decline in the LCMS around.* But wait, there's more!

What if half of the 800 newly birthed missions joined with the original 1,200 in a commitment to team up in sets of three to start two new ministries between 2030–2039? The result would be 1,066 new mission stations by 2039 (1,200 congregations plus 400 new missions, divided by three, equals 533 church planting groups. Two new starts per decade equals 1,066 new faith communities.). Once again, that modest effort of 20% of congregations joining with just half of the newly planted faith communities offsets the current rate of losses in the LCMS, thereby injecting even more health into the Church. But let's push farther.

What if the same pattern took hold between 2040 and 2049? That would mean 710 teams of three would launch 1,420 new missions during the decade. Even if the number of closing congregations doubled to 1,000 during that time period, the new mission development would overtake and offset the losses AND many new people would be receiving the precious gift of grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

A healthy and committed twenty percent of the LCMS can turn the declining church around—if the people of God commit to prayerful, self-sacrificial, soul-winning collaboration.

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prayerful, self-sacrificial, soul-winning collaboration. True, the overall membership of the LCMS might not grow. The new churches may be smaller than the ones that close. But the Gospel would be proclaimed! New people would be reached as we stretch into new communities.

The rate of multiplication would look like this:

2019
6,000 congregations in the LCMS
1,200 congregations band together in threes to start 800 new faith communities over the decade. 500 existing congregations close.

2029
6,300 total congregations and preaching stations
A gain of 300 in the decade
It took 20 congregations to start one new faith community.

2039
6,866 total congregations and preaching stations (1,066 were added, but 500 closed)
A gain of 566 in the decade
It took 11.13 congregations to start one new faith community.

2049
7,286 total congregations and preaching stations (1,420 were added, but 1,000 closed)
A gain of 420 in the decade
It took 16.35 congregations to start one new faith community.

Notice the trend. Notice the church multiplication rate. Notice the number of new people reached with the Gospel (see Figures 2 and 3, LCMS Growth Percentage and LCMS Decadal Growth Ratio).

The big question is: Will 20% of the congregations in the LCMS have the resolve to actively pursue collaborative church multiplication?

And what if *more* than 20% of LCMS congregations resolved to reach into new communities, new demographic groups, and new cultures with the intent to share the Gospel and start new congregations? What if these church planting collaboration groups started *more* than two new faith communities every decade?

From a small number of committed congregations, many new people could receive the opportunity to hear the Gospel and experience the beauty of Christ's Church.

It will require Gospel-passion from laypeople and clergy alike. It will require the use of both simple models of outreach and more involved systems for planting churches. It will call for a focus on outreach efforts that reach both larger and smaller

groups. It will necessitate innovative approaches to new cultures, new demographic groups, and new neighbors. It will take time and commitment. But it is not impossible. In fact, it is what the Gospel does! Commenting on the eternal Gospel mentioned in Revelation 14:6, Dr. C. F. W. Walther noted that Luther did not proclaim a "temporal, transitory message of vain human doctrine . . . but an *eternal* Gospel, the pure, clear, unalterable, and imperishable Word of the Most High. [Luther's] calling was not to give this bread of life to the little parish in Wittenberg, but *'to every nation and tribe and tongue and people.'"*[7]

Action Two: The LCMS Starts a New Church Body in the Third Largest Mission Field in the World.

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod has demonstrated biblical Kingdom multiplication for nearly 175 years:

- Believers reached out to new people. By God's grace, through the Word and Sacraments, disciples made new disciples.
- Churches planted new churches; sometimes a single congregation heroically and faithfully birthed multiple new churches in many communities.
- Districts of the Synod launched new districts. For example, the Southern District gave birth to both the Texas and Florida-Georgia districts, as missionaries were sent to new places in order to expand the reach of the Gospel.
- AND, the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod started new church bodies around the world.

Resolution 2-01 from the 2019 LCMS convention was titled, "To Thank God for 125 Years of International Mission through The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod." That resolution articulated one facet of LCMS church multiplication: "WHEREAS, The planting of churches and raising up of pastors and church workers has resulted in the formation of 35+ partner church bodies. . ."

The LCMS has actively started new Lutheran church bodies in different places and cultures, among people of different languages and customs, at opportune times and for the purpose of seeing the Gospel reach new people so that more might confess the name of Jesus and receive the gifts of forgiveness and eternal life.

According to my research, at least ten of those 35+ partner churches were started from scratch by the LCMS through missionary outreach to new places and cultures around the world[8]:

Africa:

- The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ghana: started in 1958, became a partner church in 1971

Asia:

- The Lutheran Church—Hong Kong Synod: started in 1915, post-1949 became an independent synod
- India Evangelical Lutheran Church: started in 1894, became a partner church in 1959
- Japan Lutheran Church: started in 1948, became a partner church in 1968
- The Lutheran Church in Korea: started in 1958, became a partner church in 1971
- Gutnius Lutheran Church (New Guinea): started in 1948
- The Lutheran Church in the Philippines: started in 1946, became a partner church in 1971
- Lanka Lutheran Church: started in 1927, became a partner church in 2001

South America:

- Evangelical Lutheran Church of Brazil (IELB): started in 1900, became a district of the LCMS in 1904, became a partner church in 1980

North America:

- Lutheran Church-Canada: started in 1854, became an autonomous partner church in 1988

What is even more encouraging is that the new church bodies started by the LCMS have continued the pattern of multiplication. Disciples are making new disciples. Congregations are planting new congregations. Partner churches are even starting new partner churches! The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Brazil (IELB) started the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Portugal in 1959. LCMS fellowship with this new body was established in 2019. The IELB is now in the process of starting a new Lutheran body in Mozambique. God's Word multiplies![9]

Where is the next place the LCMS should consider starting a new church body? Where is there a need to reach a new culture in new ways?

What about the third largest mission field in the world behind China and India, the United States of America?

What if the LCMS recognized that, like any long-standing entity, its reach has narrowed? The Missouri Synod has a limited

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connection with new generations. The Missouri Synod is very mono-ethnic. It has structures, costs, and preferences that create barriers to the emerging "new nation" that is developing within the United States. Is it time to send missionaries to launch a new church body in the US? Is it the right season in history to give birth to a new biblical and confessional voice that can speak Christ-centered, grace-focused, sacramental-rejoicing, and Scripture-founded words into the spiritual conversation happening in America today?

I'm not talking about division; I'm talking about multiplication. Might the launch of a new movement, rooted in and founded upon Reformation theology, be just what is needed to reinvigorate the multiplication legacy of the LCMS—and the Lutheran Church in Western civilization?

Might the launch of a new movement, rooted in and founded upon Reformation theology, be just what is needed to reinvigorate the multiplication legacy of the LCMS—and the Lutheran Church in Western civilization?

Picture it:

- A younger, more diverse and nimble church in which Article XIV of the Augsburg Confession ("Order in the Church," "rite vocatus") is unencumbered by European educational structures and Western accreditation requirements. Envision a church that has the option to use the older models of pastoral formation and certification, but also has the ability to be faithful to the Confessions while making use of new technology and new systems that accomplish faithful pastoral formation and sending for greater Gospel outreach.
- A church that is able to practice Article VII of the Augsburg Confession (definition of the Church and true unity of the Church) outside of a Western, European, sixteenth-century overlay, free to use the best of what God has provided in external forms and ceremonies throughout the years, while at the same time incorporating other biblical paradigms that honor God and speak to an emerging generation.
- A church that can meet the chaotic fallenness of today's culture with sound proclamation of Law and Gospel, applying Article IV of the Augsburg Confession (Justification) without being afraid of the "new" sins of this generation.

What if the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod did what it has always done: send missionaries to start a new church body in order to reach a new nation—even the new and emerging "nation" developing in the US?

Doers of the Word

The apostle John exhorted Christians in the first century: "Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth" (1 Jn 3:18).

Can we in the LCMS "remember our first love" and "do what we did at first" (Rev 2:4–5)? Do we have the resolve to take action, to be doers of the Word, to show love in deed and in truth? God has formed the LCMS to be a beautiful church. The LCMS is filled with generous, prayerful, devoted, gifted, and mission-hearted people of God. Together, can we step out in faith to take action?

God has formed the LCMS to be a beautiful church. The LCMS is filled with generous, prayerful, devoted, gifted, and mission-hearted people of God. Together, can we step out in faith to take action?

Might we consider two points of action?

- Action One: 20% of LCMS Congregations Team Up to Plant Churches.
- Action Two: The LCMS Starts a New Church Body in the Third Largest Mission Field in the World.

What would this mean for the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod as it approaches its two hundredth anniversary in 2047?

- By 2047, the LCMS will be active in Gospel outreach and comprise more than 7,000 congregations and preaching stations.
- By 2047, the LCMS will have nearly 4,500 mission-outreaching congregations with more than 2,800 faith communities that are actively planting new churches and reaching new people with the Gospel. This planting and outreach will feature the leadership of the new American immigrant population flourishing in the US. These congregations will start nearly 2,000 new faith communities by 2057.
- By 2047, declining and plateaued congregations, numbering around 2,800, will comprise only 38% of the LCMS. They will be strong in prayer and devotion as they lift up outreach into new areas and among new people. The 2,000 congregations that closed since 2019 will have been encouraged to leave a legacy of prayer, encouragement, and financial resources that help fuel a new LCMS Gospel movement.
- By 2047, the LCMS will have launched a new church body in the United States. This solidly biblical and Lutheran mission endeavor will comprise leaders from new generations and cultures who reach new generations and cultures in the United States with vibrant and meaningful practices, training

systems, language, and focal areas—all rooted in the singular message of grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

This vision does not mean that the LCMS will be perfect. The Missouri Synod will still have its flaws and quibbles. But what if we fell at the feet of our Savior in humble repentance, asked God to vanquish our fear, controlled our disagreements with collegial discourse, and decided to "know nothing except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor 2:2)?

My prayer these days is: "Make [us] to know your ways, O LORD; teach [us] your paths!" (Ps 25:4).

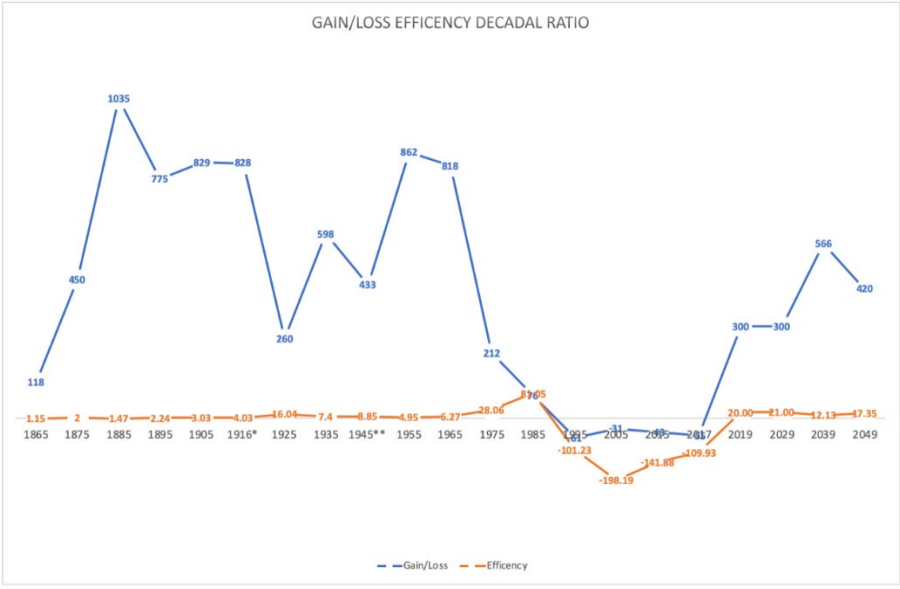

Figure 1. Created by Steven Misch.

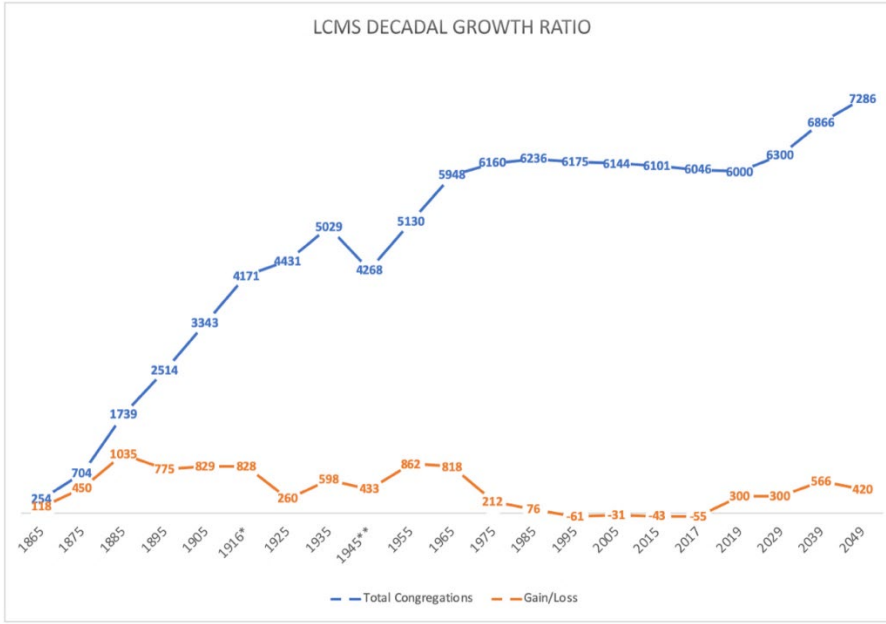

Figure 2. Created by Steven Misch.

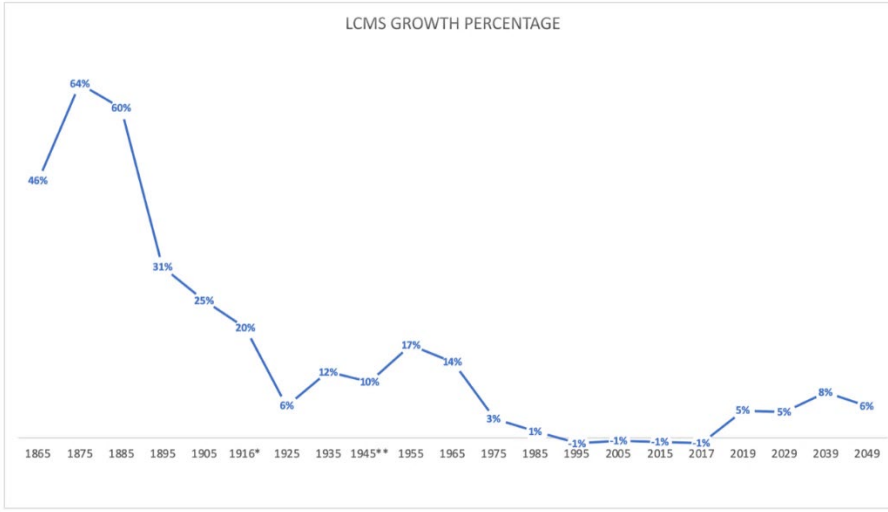

Figure 3. Created by Steven Misch.

Endnotes

[1] Pinetops Foundation, *The Great Opportunity: The American Church in 2050* (Pinetops Foundation, 2018) 33.
[2] *The Great Opportunity*, 10.
[3] Specific factors related to the rapid growth of the LCMS can be found in my book, *Gospel DNA: Five Markers of a Flourishing Church* (Ursa Publishing, 2016), 29–41, 75–91, 171–181. Recounted in these sections are the Missouri Synod's tenacious and innovative efforts to reach people with the Gospel. From an unstoppable love and concern for the lost to determined dedication to mission outreach and the harnessing of new technology, pastors and laypeople engaged in heroic and tireless efforts to reach people with the Good News of Jesus. Growth in the LCMS was not about gimmicks or programs. It was about confidence that the Word of God would not return empty (Is 55:11) and pressing forward to proclaim that living and active Word with as many people as possible. An example of the Gospel-sharing emphasis of the LCMS can be found in Walter Baepler's *A Century of Grace: The History of the Missouri Synod 1847–1947*. As Baepler recounts the most recent developments in the LCMS, the emphases on mission outreach, multi-cultural ministry development, education ministry, and multi-media innovation shine brightly (275–353).
[4] For detailed analyses of social change and the impact it had on the church during the 1960s, "The Struggle for Social Change in 1960s America: A Bibliographic Essay" (David Chalmers, *American Studies International* 30, no. 1 [April 1992]: 41–64) references a number of resources that discuss the trends of that era. *Coming Apart: An Informal History of America in the 1960s* (William O'Neill, Chicago: Time Books, 2004) unfolds the turbulent decade of the 1960s as well. An analysis of the theological struggle of the LCMS in the 1960s and 1970s can be found in *Anatomy of an Explosion* (Kurt E. Marquart, Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 1977, 49–66).
[5] While blame for the decline of the LCMS has, at times, been placed on Church Growth trends and a capitulation of the church to the entertainment culture, the weakening of the LCMS is much more than an issue of shifts in worship style and programmatic methodology. Losses in the LCMS can be traced to distraction and fear. In a swirl of social change and theological challenge, the synod, to some degree, "abandoned [its] first love" (Rev 2:4). You can read more about how the LCMS balanced holding to the truth of God's Word while at the same time propagating that Word of life in *Gospel DNA: Five Markers of a Flourishing Church* pages 105–118, 129–133, 207–212. The heroic accounts of mission sacrifice direct each of us in the LCMS today to "repent, and do the works [it] did at first" (Rev 2:5).
[6] *Today's Business*, Resolution 1-02, 1st ed. (2019), 48.
[7] Herbert J. A. Bouman trans., *Editorials from Lehre und Wehre* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1981), 104. Italics original.
[8] The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, "Partner Church Bodies," https://www.lcms.org/how-we-serve/international/partner-church-bodies.
[9] For information on what factors are affecting the rapid growth of Christianity and Lutheranism in the Global South, see *Gospel DNA*, pages 66–72, for a summary and David Garrison's *Church Planting Movements: How God is Redeeming a Lost World* (Monument, CO: WIGTake Resources LLC, 2012) for a comprehensive analysis of factors that contribute to church planting movements around the world.

Communal Eating and the Body of Christ: Missionary Lessons from the Kankanaey

Robert Newton

Abstract: Through a series of vignettes, the author recalls lessons learned from the Kankanaey Christians in the Philippines that challenged and enriched the author's understanding of the Lord's Supper. He briefly explores the role culture plays in how a people group understands God's Word and faithfully follows it in the formation of its church's doctrine and practice. The reader is asked to consider the interaction of culture with doctrine and practice, both in a "receiving" culture's understanding of God's Word and in a "missionary's" awareness of what he may be communicating about God's Word in his words and actions.

The journey of God's Word from sacred text to our minds and hearts never follows a direct (immediate) path. It passes through several lenses and filters along the way: language, culture, personal or corporate experiences to name a few. Considering the finiteness of our own existence in the flesh, especially our fallen nature, leads us to confess with St. Paul, "For now we see in a mirror dimly" (1 Corinthians 13). Recognizing the limits of our own culture, language, experiences, and, yes, our own flesh serves as a healthy reminder that no one person, church, or group within a church can rightly claim the "pole position" on God's Truth.

At the same time, our Lord in His wisdom chooses to communicate His infinite Word in the finite languages and cultures of people, all peoples. Consider that our Lord's first Words to our world following His ascension into heaven came simultaneously in several different languages, signaling that His saving Gospel was for all peoples and could not (nor would He allow it to) be confined to a single place or people group (Acts 2). Furthermore, the Lord uses our various cultures, languages,

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and experiences (personal and shared) as finely tuned antennae through which He speaks personally and powerfully to us in His Word.

Several years ago, I had the privilege of teaching for a year in one of our seminaries in Papua New Guinea. We were reflecting on the story of Abraham, particularly his faith in following the Lord's command that he leave the safe surroundings of his home in Haran and travel to the land that God would show him (Genesis 12). One of the students burst out, "Em i got no lain!" expressing great dismay over Abraham's actions. "Em i got no lain" roughly translates into English, "He has no line (ancestral line, clan) going with him," with the connotation that Abraham had placed himself in extreme danger by leaving his home turf and traveling "alone" (or unprotected) to a strange land inhabited by hostile tribes.

No New Guinean in his right mind would ever travel to a place far from home without the guarantee that he would have members of his own "lain" awaiting his arrival. Given the several people groups in Papua New Guinea and the long-standing animosity standing between them, traveling or arriving in a place without a protective escort would be suicidal. "Em i got no lain" expressed this student's understanding of the incredible faith required of Abraham to follow the Lord's command and the assurance Abraham possessed from the Lord's Word alone that he and his small family would not only be safe but indeed be blessed.

Most if not all missionaries can attest to how their experiences across cultures greatly aid them in better understanding and believing God's Word. These experiences raise questions or posit ideas that open up entirely new perspectives that can have a profound impact on their study of Scripture and its application to our lives here in the world and in the church.

Most if not all missionaries can attest to how their experiences across cultures greatly aid them in better understanding and believing God's Word. These experiences raise questions or posit ideas that open up entirely new perspectives that can have a profound impact on their study of Scripture and its application to our lives here in the world and in the church.

It was a question from the mission field, "Must a Gentile be circumcised in order to be saved?" that rocked the established Jewish church to its foundations, exploding the boundaries of their finite Jewish worldview. At the same time, it opened the eyes of Jewish believers to a much greater and deeper understanding of God's plan of salvation for them and the world, which brings me to the missionary's question underlying this essay: What might we learn from Lutheran Christians among the Kankanaey people of the Philippines that enriches and expands our understanding and practice of the Lord's Supper? This

case study of sorts also asks us to consider more seriously the role culture plays in the formation of a church's doctrine and practice with the hope that it raises our awareness as Western Christians of the theological messages we may be communicating by our words and actions to our Christian brothers and sisters around the world.

What might we learn from Lutheran Christians among the Kankanaey people of the Philippines that enriches and expands our understanding and practice of the Lord's Supper?

The Kankanaey number over 250,000 and reside in the highlands of the Philippine island of Luzon fifty to one hundred miles north of Baguio City. My wife, Priscilla, and I served as missionaries among them from 1977–1983. Kankanaey culture differs from our Western culture in many ways, but for the focus of this essay, I highlight one: *collectivism* vis-à-vis *individualism*. The Kankanaey organize themselves as a *collectivistic* or a *group-orient*ed people. As such they place higher importance on the well-being, goals, and needs of the community over against their own person. They define themselves in relationship to the community and see themselves primarily as extensions of the community.

Culturally, they more closely reflect Paul's description of the "body of Christ" in 1 Corinthians 12 than we tend to do here in the United States. That is due primarily to the fact that we Americans (at least those from northern European descent) place higher importance on an *individualism* with focus on the well-being, goals, and needs of the individual over those the community. We prefer self-reliance and value the ability to define ourselves independent of the community. Loosely applying Descartes' famous axiom, we in the West say, "I think, therefore I am." The Kankanaey might say, "I belong, therefore I am."

The radical difference in perception and understanding between these worldview values was brought to my attention very soon after our arrival in the Philippines. My language instructor was helping me grasp the meaning of "*mangan*," the Kankanaey word for eat. I was conjugating the verb—*manganak, manganka, mangontaku* (I eat, you eat, we eat)—when he interrupted me. "Robert," he said, "we do not say manganak (I eat). "Is it a word?" I asked. "No," he replied. After an hour of deeper conversation, I learned that "*mangan*" is indeed the Kankanaey word for eating, but its primary meaning is not ingesting food. *Mangan* might be better translated, "We gather around food." Eating had much less to do with nutrition and much more to do with maintaining relationships in community. Thus, "*manganak,*" or "I eat" made little sense to them. Even when individuals had to eat by themselves due to travel or work, they considered their eating in the larger context of the community. In that sense, they did not eat alone.

This early encounter with Kankanaey culture was the first of many that focused on eating and its significance regarding community and personal relationships within

the community, especially reconciliation when relationships became strained or broken. These encounters and subsequent conversations expanded and enriched my understanding and appreciation of the Lord's Supper.

Now We Share the Soup

A few years (and a thousand misunderstandings) later, two elders from one of our station's[1] congregations came to our home with a request. "Missionary, we need you to come soon to our village. One of our brothers was publicly shamed and now he has absented himself from worship. We need you to restore our shamed brother to the community." I was reluctant to come for fear that it would reinforce the notion that only the missionary could exercise the Office of the Keys. Their insistence prevailed, however, and I met with the elders in their village a few days later.

The "shamed brother" was present at the meeting when I arrived. We sat together, and at my request he unfolded the story. "Missionary, about a month ago a number of the elders and other members of the congregation were together studying God's Word. I asked a question about what we were reading, and our leader raised his voice when he answered me. I felt that he scolded me, and I lost face in front of our people. I do not know what to do now."

This problem seemed so simple I did not understand why I was needed to resolve it. Nevertheless, I offered my counsel. "Sabado,[2] you have been a leader in this congregation for a long time. I believe you know what needs to be done. You need to go to the brother who offended you, tell him your story, and give him an opportunity to confess his sin and ask you for forgiveness. Then you share the soup together."

"Sharing the soup," usually the broth of a boiled chicken, was the final step in the process of reconciliation. It was the public sign to the offending parties and the community that forgiveness had truly been extended and that the relationship, once broken through sin, was healed. Though words of apology and forgiveness would have been exchanged, no real reconciliation would have taken place without sharing the soup.

As soon as I had given my counsel to Sabado, two other elders brought a large bowl of soup to where we were sitting, and we were instructed to eat together. "Thou art the man" (2 Samuel 12) thundered in my mind, as I realized that I was the leader who had caused offense. Immediately I turned to Sabado and confessed my sin and sorrow over hurting him. The brothers then explained in more detail how I had caused Sabado to lose face (an unintended cultural blunder on my part that caused deep offense). Sabado forgave me, and we joyfully shared the soup together with the others gathered for the meeting. Sharing the soup restored our relationship to each other and to the larger community.

Sharing the soup was not simply a visible assurance of forgiveness offered and received. It was the sign of assurance that the relationship was restored through forgiveness. Forgiveness of sin (release from debt) was the penultimate step to something greater and deeper that could be expressed only by eating together or, as the Kankanaey would say, "gathering around food." That shed new light not only on my understanding and appreciation of the Kankanaey people but also upon my understanding and appreciation of the Lord's ultimate intention in forgiving sins.

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This episode brought fresh meaning to the stories in the ninth chapter of Matthew's Gospel. The imposition of the paralyzed man in the middle of Jesus' teaching provided our Lord the perfect opportunity to declare His divine authority and purpose for His incarnation. "So that you may know that the Son of Man has authority to forgive sins. . ." This was especially good news for the man who not only suffered the hardships of paralysis but even more the pain of assumed separation from God. The obvious question in everyone's mind, save Jesus, was, "Who sinned, this man or his parents?" Imagine the torment of body and soul this man endured his entire life, pondering this question while knowing that it was impossible for him to do anything about it. Only God Himself could (and would) address his brokenness.

The next story finds Jesus calling Matthew the tax collector to follow Him. Matthew was the first disciple chosen from those who lived "across the tracks" religiously speaking. He was by trade and reputation reprobate. Shortly after meeting Matthew, Jesus was seated at a table with a whole house-full of reprobates and apparently enjoying their company. His actions caught the attention of the Pharisees who correctly concluded that Jesus intentionally identified with those the religious community despised. He was choosing to be seen as an extension of the community of "sinners." "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" (Mt 9:11). Their question revealed more about Jesus and the Kingdom of God than they could possibly have imagined. God Himself was eating with tax collectors and sinners! If that wasn't remarkable enough, none of those sinners were consumed by His presence, a real possibility according to Moses (Ex 24:9–11; Ex 33:20). By placing the story of the paralytic in immediate proximity with Jesus' eating with sinners, Matthew intends that we connect Jesus' divine authority to forgive sins with His divine desire that our personal relationship with Him be restored. Dining with the living God is again possible (Genesis 3) because He has forgiven our sins.

We may not simply equate Jesus' dining with sinners in Matthew 9 with the Lord's Supper. In the Eucharist, Jesus not only serves as host at His Table but He also gives Himself as the meal. However, both accounts connect the forgiveness of sins that He procured through His death and resurrection with the intended result that we dine with Him now and in eternity. Too often we may look at our participation in the Lord's Table individualistically. That is, we look to the Lord primarily to offer each one of us forgiveness for our sins (release of our eternal debt) and assurance of eternal life (deliverance from the death penalty). We leave the Table rejoicing.

That joy is made all the greater, however, when we consider the personal (and corporate) relationship the Lord intends with us and we with Him—a relationship both effected and celebrated in our dining together with Him. Our joy is made even more complete by remembering that we don't eat by ourselves (*manganak*). While personal, dining with the Lord is never individualistic. We are not a conglomerate of individuals eating simultaneously at His Table. Jesus gathers us around Himself; and, in sharing His Bread and Cup together, He makes us one with Him and all other communicants (1 Cor 10:16–17).

On another occasion, the Kankanaey again opened my mind to the corporate meaning and purpose of the Lord's Supper. The congregation in Namagtey was small, numbering fifteen or so households. Just before our worship service was to begin, a few of the elders shared with me that we would not celebrate the Lord's Supper that morning. One of the families was not present due to an altercation that had taken place in their household the day before. The congregation agreed to postpone the celebration of the Supper in order that we re-gather at the family's home later in the afternoon. We would address the family problem, and, if all were reconciled, we would celebrate the Sacrament at their home with all the congregation present. They understood that the Supper was a gift given by the Lord to the entire village, and we should do all that we can to make sure that all are able to gather with the Lord.

The connection forged by the Kankanaey between dining together and forgiveness has caused me to ask hard questions of myself as a steward of the mysteries of God. We are amply blessed as the Lord offers us His grace and forgiveness through several means, as Luther reminds us in the Smalcald Articles:

> We now want to return to the gospel, which gives guidance and help against sin in more than one way, because God is extravagantly rich in his grace: first, through the spoken word, in which the forgiveness of sins is preached to the whole world (which is the proper function of the gospel); second, through baptism; third, through the holy Sacrament of the Altar; fourth, through the power of the keys and also through the mutual conversation and consolation of brothers and sisters. Matthew 18[:20]: "Where two or three are gathered . . ."[3]

While Luther is more likely referring to God's gracious means operative throughout the world, these several means are very present in our Lutheran worship services. As such, some of our pastors comfort themselves with the possibility that worshipers will hear the Gospel and receive Christ's forgiveness in the service even if they are not allowed (for one reason or another) to participate in the Supper. For the Kankanaey, however, forgiveness publicly offered and received without concomitantly gathering around our Lord's Table is difficult to grasp. "How do we express the result of the forgiveness that together we received from the Lord if we do not dine together with Him?"

This connection further raises questions regarding our expectation that all worshipers participate in corporate confession and absolution, yet restrict admission to the Lord's Supper to only those with whom we are in "altar and pulpit fellowship" (closed communion). The Kankanaey could only interpret that phenomenon as Jesus' word of forgiveness being incomplete and, therefore, insincere. They would naturally ask, "What conditions beyond believing His own Words must we meet in order for Him to truly forgive us and invite us to 'share the soup' together?"[4]

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Finally, and most disconcerting of all, Kankanaey Christians would not be able to understand or accept the idea that as brothers or sisters in Christ they are welcome to participate in worship—including corporate confession and absolution; the hearing (receiving) of the Gospel through the readings, liturgy, and sermon; and the offering of thanks, praise and petition through prayers and hymns—but not participate in the Lord's Supper. Such exclusion would only be interpreted as exclusion from the Body of Christ. The congregation is essentially treating them as "tax collectors and sinners" (Matthew 18). They would wonder, "What offense have I caused that I cannot join the community in the Meal?" Because of (1) the deep connection gathering around food has with belonging to the community and (2) the *collectivistic* connection made between personal being and belonging to the community, Kankanaey people would conclude that they are not considered by this congregation to be members of Christ's Body, His Holy Christian Church.

We Westerners might try reasoning with them that exclusion from the Lord's Table at a specific Lutheran congregation does not imply exclusion from His Body. They would likely not understand the argument, given that they wouldn't imagine that there are many *individual* "Lord's Tables," each belonging to a specific people group

or clan within that group. They would better understand that there is one Lord's Table shared by many.

The myriad gatherings of Christians around tables bound by time and space (location) are actual extensions of the one Table of the Lord that transcends time and space. That Table sits at the foot (within the single act) of the cross by which He gathers all people to Himself (Jn 12:32). The many "meals" are the sacred participation[5] with and proclamation of the One crucified Lord at His Table: "Do this, as often as you [eat my Body and] drink [my Blood], in remembrance of Me." And again, "For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim (καταγγέλλετε) the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Cor 11:24b–26).

Sharing Food and Bridging Hearts

Toward the end of our first term on the field, a few lay leaders and I visited a number of villages in a region south of our station with the hope that we would begin proclaiming the Gospel among them upon our return from furlough. On the second day out, we arrived at the small village of Nabsong. As it was near dusk, the elders of the village invited us to stay the night. We were regaled with Kankanaey delicacies (marinated pork), rice and sweet potatoes, roasted chicken, and rice wine. We talked together late into the evening. The next morning the elders of the community invited us to come regularly to their village and to share more stories from the Bible. "You are different from the other people who visited us a few years ago," the head elder confided. "They did not share their hearts with us." Curious, I asked him to elaborate. "We welcomed them as we welcomed you," he explained. "However, they would not share our food or rice wine. They insisted on eating the food that they had brought with them. They were of a different heart."

These visitors thought they were serving the villagers of Nabsong by not imposing upon them. Thus, they carried their own provisions and did not depend on the generosity of the villages they were visiting. As sincere as their motives might have been, their decision not to eat with the villagers communicated that they were superior to the Kankanaey and would never become one in heart with them. They did not understand that there could be no true sharing of hearts without the "gathering around food." I was grateful for their cultural blunder when I later learned that the visitors so described were Jehovah Witnesses.

The deep offense these visitors caused demonstrates the essential role that "gathering around food" plays in the formation and maintenance of personal and community relationships among the Kankanaey (and perhaps among other collectivistic cultures as well). There can be no sharing of hearts without the sharing of food. The connection between sharing food and relationships greatly informs the Kankanaey understanding of Holy Scripture, especially regarding such topics as fellowship, community, Body of Christ, reconciliation, etc. It especially shapes their

understanding of the theology and practice of the Lord Supper in their life together and their relationship with Christians from other Lutheran church bodies.

What might we learn from our Kankanaey brothers and sisters? The above might cause us to ask what we may have lost in our understanding of Christ's Body as the churches increasingly organize around individualistic rather than collectivistic values. At the very least, it might challenge us to examine our attitudes and actions as individualistic Westerners living and serving among collectivistic people groups, especially in regard to eating, relationships, and community. As oft noted, both in ecclesiastical gatherings and official publications, the LCMS is currently privileged to be invited by other Lutheran church bodies to walk alongside them in the area of theological education. Several LCMS pastors, theological professors, and ecclesiastical officers serve as long- and short-term professors and instructors in the seminaries and Bible schools of these church bodies, including some that do not share formal "altar and pulpit" fellowship with the Synod.

The above might cause us to ask what we may have lost in our understanding of Christ's Body as the churches increasingly organize around individualistic rather than collectivistic values.

Due to official opinions and resolutions of the Synod regarding the Lord's Supper (closed communion), LCMS leaders serving abroad have been exhorted to refrain from communing with those Lutheran brothers and sisters with whom we are not in formal fellowship, despite the fact that they daily live and work with them. They proclaim God's Word together and together confess the Holy Christian Church, the communion of saints.

The exhortation not to commune together turns on the understanding of communicants as confessors. The 1999 report of the LCMS Commission on Theology and Church Relations on admission to the Lord's Supper[6] discusses in some detail that communicants participate in the Lord Supper both as participants in the grace of God in Christ and as confessors of the doctrines believed and practiced by their church body. With that understanding, it makes the following observation,

> The teaching of our Synod, which is consistent with historic Christianity, is to refrain from communing Christians who have joined themselves to churches whose public confession differs in important ways from the scriptural and confessional teaching (and thus is heterodox). This has been the case even when those church bodies (e.g., the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America [ELCA]) officially espouse the biblical and confessional teaching regarding the Sacrament of the Altar. Our practice of not communing those who belong to such church bodies does *not* mean that we

> fear that such individual Christians would necessarily commune in an unworthy manner. There is another important consideration besides genuine faith and personal worthiness. We ask at times that those who may have *genuine faith* and who, if they were to commune in our churches might do so *in a worthy manner*, still not commune at our altars because of other doctrinal disagreements between their church bodies and our own Synod.[7]

This quotation, while referring specifically to Christians from other church bodies communing at LCMS congregations, applies by analogy to LCMS members communing at churches not in altar and pulpit fellowship with the LCMS. In good conscience, then, members of the LCMS working with Lutheran churches not in fellowship with the LCMS believe it necessary (for the sake of conscience) not to commune with their Lutheran brothers and sisters with whom together they live, serve, and otherwise worship. They sincerely hope that their brothers and sisters of these Lutheran churches will understand their rationale for not joining them in the Eucharist.

What may be overlooked in their decision, however, is what "confession" they are actually making to these other Lutheran brothers and sisters, particularly regarding the Body of Christ. They would maintain that participating with these believers challenges the "unity of confession" necessary to share the Lord's Supper together. In contrast, the Kankanaey would maintain that by *not* gathering together around the Lord in His Supper we challenge the very Gospel message the Supper proclaims, "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim (καταγγέλεττε) the Lord's death until he comes." Not communing, therefore, undermines the actual unity of the Body of Christ that the Supper effects. The LCMS members might believe that by separating themselves from the local congregation at the Lord's Supper they are confessing that they are not one in doctrine. The local community would see such separation as a statement that they are not members of the Body, made one in and by the Lord Jesus.

In sorting out these differences, it is critical that we avoid wounding the consciences of brothers or sisters for whom Christ died. Here an individual's personal persuasion must not be exercised in any way that brings harm to the Body (1 Corinthians 8). Matters regarding participation in the Lord's Supper are not simply differences in logic or doctrinal understanding; they are matters of conscience and risk alienating from the Lord people for whom He died. Recognizing what is truly at stake in these matters, we, like the disciples of old (Acts 15), must be diligent to come together as brothers and sisters in

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Christ to study God's Word, charitably debate, and humbly listen to the Holy Spirit as He speaks to and through His churches from around the world.

Endnotes

[1] A mission station roughly resembles a geographic "circuit" in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) including several congregations and preaching stations.
[2] Names of people have been changed for the sake of privacy.
[3] Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2000), 319.
[4] Luther asks a similar question in the Small Catechism: [9–10] Who, then, receives this sacrament worthily? Answer: Fasting and bodily preparation are in fact a fine external discipline, but a person who has faith in these words, "given for you" and "shed for you for the forgiveness of sins," is really worthy and well prepared. However, a person who does not believe these words or doubts them is unworthy and unprepared, because the words "for you" require truly believing hearts." Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord,* 363.
[5] Traditional animistic Kankanaey people "remember" past family members or ancestors in an active way. Feasts are celebrated in their honor (memory) where gifts of food and clothing are shared with and for the departed. They believe that the departed are actually present, participating with the community in eating, drinking, and ceremonial dancing. It is normal, therefore, for Kankanaey Lutherans to understand that they participate in the Lord's Supper in the very presence of the Lord. The paradigmatic shift for them is not in recognizing the "Real Presence" of the Lord, but that the Lord provides the Meal for them rather than their providing it for Him.
[6] *Admission to the Lord's Supper: Basics of Biblical and Confessional Teaching.* A Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. (St. Louis: LCMS, November 1999).
[7] CTCR, *Admission to the Lord's Supper*, 41.

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Thy Kingdom Come: Four Key Mission Principles to Help Guide Effective Cross-Cultural Mission Efforts

B. Steve Hughey

Abstract: Based on the author's fifty-plus years as a cross-cultural missionary, mission executive, mission agency director, mission board member, and mission consultant, and applying St. Paul's missionary method, this paper describes important mission principles to help guide effective cross-cultural mission efforts. The article focuses on one key mission commitment, two necessary mission strategies, three desired mission outcomes, and four essential mission values in order to successfully fulfill Christ's Great Commission. The mission principles presented in the article are based on the author's critical reflections of his years of mission service in Venezuela and on the Southwest border and a desire to share a concise summary of key mission principles learned and applied during the author's ten years of service as executive director of the Central American Lutheran Mission Society (CALMS) from 2006 to 2017.

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Figure. 1. Four Key Mission Principles to help guide effective cross-cultural mission efforts

One Commitment: Making Disciples and Growing God's Spiritual Kingdom

As my mission colleagues and I worked in many at-risk Central American communities during the period of 2006–2017, we came to believe that our number one commitment as mission representatives was to help make more committed disciples of Jesus and to help usher in His kingdom of grace to as many people as possible.

God wants to reign in our hearts and to rule over our lives, and He wants His kingdom to come to everyone! And because each baptized Christian is called to help usher in this kingdom, in our cross-cultural ministries, we sought especially to involve gifted laypeople in partnership with Central American partners.

When we speak about the "kingdom of God" and when we maintain that God wants His kingdom to come to all people, we are following Martin Luther's usage and teaching in the Large Catechism. The "kingdom of God" for the Large Catechism is

> Simply what we heard above in the Creed, namely, that God sent his Son, Christ our Lord, into the world to redeem and deliver us from the power of the devil, to bring us to himself, and to rule us as a king of righteousness, life, and salvation against sin, death, and an evil conscience. To this end he also gave his Holy Spirit to deliver this to us through his holy Word and to enlighten and strengthen us in faith by his power.[1]

"The kingdom of God" is, of course, God's kingdom and comes as it pleases God. The coming of God's kingdom does not need our prayer. But we are not praying for the kingdom of God in the abstract. We are praying that it come to us, but not just us—but to the whole world. As the Large Catechism continues:

> 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. In this way many, led by the Holy Spirit, may come into the kingdom of grace and become partakers of redemption, so that we may all remain together eternally in this kingdom that has now begun.[2]

As we pray that God's kingdom might come, our prayer is for God's name to be praised through the preaching of the Word and that it might be received through faith and lived out in faithful, godly living—and not just for ourselves, but all people throughout the world.

Thus, in these passages from Luther's writings, we see the connection between prayer and fulfilling God's mission to bring His kingdom to more and more hearts. As we repeat the words, "Thy kingdom come!," each time we pray the Lord's Prayer, we are in effect declaring that we know and accept that God is in charge of His mission. And yet God is also inviting us to be part of His plan to bring His kingdom to people of all cultures, languages, races, and classes of society. So when we pray, "Thy kingdom come!," we're saying in effect, "Rule over my heart Lord so that I can help usher in Your kingdom of grace by proclaiming Your saving rule to others around me."

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There are many ways to proclaim God's saving rule in Christ; yet, in whatever ways we share the Good News of Jesus, we will want to be both faithful to Scripture and relevant to the target culture. This means not taking it for granted that familiar or long-used ways continue to be appropriate. For example, North American churches do not always clearly distinguish between "congregational membership" and "committed discipleship," as if belonging to a congregation automatically implies committed discipleship. This reality certainly can affect our witness, teaching, and worship.

My eleven-year experience with CALMS helped me and my co-workers to appreciate the importance of constantly asking ourselves about our aims and our efforts. In addition, this experience led to some new mission insights regarding strategies, desired results, and values that may well be helpful to all who pray, "Thy kingdom come" and who are seeking to advance God's mission.

Before turning to these insights, let me share a couple of instances of how an intentional focus on preaching and teaching the Gospel and urging and modeling godly living according to God's Word could change lives, produce new disciples of Jesus, help transform communities, and in the process help usher in God's spiritual kingdom.

In the small, economically challenged village of San Miguel, Guatemala, where as Executive Director of the Central American Lutheran Mission Society, I helped initiate a seven-year partnership between the village leaders and my home congregation, ACTS Church Leander, Texas, we saw a number of examples of spiritual transformation as we worked together.

Perhaps the most dramatic example of transformation in the village was the change in attitude between the religious leaders of a small evangelical church and the larger Roman Catholic congregation which I believe was a direct result of our deliberate approach to fostering healthy cross-cultural relationships. When our mission began working in this village, we could see right away that there were tensions between the leaders of the two churches.

We learned that several years before we arrived in the village, the Roman Catholics had tried to run the evangelical leaders out of town after they moved to their community to start a new church. Many of the Roman Catholics had also forbidden their children from attending the evangelical Sunday School run by the pastor's wife. The evangelicals, for their part, often spoke negatively about their Roman Catholic neighbors and thus helped to fuel an ongoing feud.

Based on previous experiences with similar villages and our focus on our commitment to the kingdom of God, we began our work as we always did in a new village by meeting with the village elders. We explained that we were not there to change their religion or denominational affiliation, but to help them grow as disciples of Jesus. We further explained that we also wanted to help our North American mission

volunteers grow in their commitment to Christ and to develop hearts of compassion and love through opportunities to serve alongside of the village leaders.

We explained that we were not there to change their religion or denominational affiliation, but to help them grow as disciples of Jesus.

Because we knew that both the evangelicals and the Roman Catholic leaders in the village of San Miguel would be suspicious about our motives and concerned about more competition, we assured both groups that our ministry among them was meant to unify the community and not to bring division. Over time, by keeping our promises and focusing on building authentic relationships, we gained the confidence of the leaders in both churches.

We not only offered to help them with leadership training and biblical resources, but in our subsequent visits made sure that we worked closely with both religious groups. By faithfully sharing God's Word and serving alongside the spiritual leaders to bless their communities, in time we gained their trust and, most importantly, we saw the Holy Spirit heal some serious divisions and open the door for spiritual renewal in the village.

By focusing on Jesus and His rule over our lives and theirs, we saw clear evidence of how God was changing their hearts. Today, the son of the Roman Catholic deacon works closely with the evangelical pastor, and many of the children in the village now attend the evangelical Sunday School. The Roman Catholic deacon and catechists have learned to value the message of the Gospel and no longer seek to discredit the evangelical church.

CALMS staff and our short-term team members consistently taught and shared our faith from a Lutheran/biblical perspective without seeking to convert the people to a new denomination. And today in San Miguel, as in a number of other villages where CALMS worked during my time of service, we saw the Holy Spirit move in a powerful way to bring unity and love where before there had been resentment and suspicion. We have also seen evangelicals and Roman Catholics focus more on their common faith in Jesus and serve their communities in unity and peace.

In La Union, a municipal region of Guatemala, where we eventually worked in more than two dozen at-risk communities following a devastating landslide in 2008, we began our ministry by visiting the Roman Catholic priest who was responsible for the large parish in the county seat as well as 72 separate communities spread throughout the mountains of that region. He was the only priest serving over fifty thousand people, and so he had a huge challenge.

By showing respect for his role and offering to serve alongside his village deacons and catechists, we gained the priest's trust. He even publicly encouraged his village

leaders to accept and work with our ministry and volunteers as we helped them study and apply God's Word to their lives.

By focusing on the commitment to help extend the kingdom of God through a focus on teaching and demonstrating the Gospel, we not only defused a potentially conflictive situation, we also saw how God opened doors to help make new disciples and disciple-makers. Significantly, we were also always able to share our Lutheran, biblical perspective focused on God's grace through faith in Jesus with both evangelicals and Roman Catholics and did not have to compromise our beliefs.

Two Mission Strategies

We learned that there were two overarching mission strategies that helped foster our focus on making more committed disciples of Jesus and extending His kingdom of grace: (1) Equipping leaders and (2) Impacting individuals, churches, and communities with the Gospel.

As we developed mission plans for a village, we eventually sought to align all projects and efforts with these two strategies. Anything that was proposed that did not follow one or both of these strategies was discouraged.

1. Equipping leaders

In our work with Central American villages and communities, we came to see that whatever we did as cross-cultural missionaries needed to leave the leaders stronger and more capable than when we found them.

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Missionaries and volunteers need to make a long-term commitment if they expect to see any significant transformation, since eventually they move on. Yet we came to see that moving on after serving for five to seven years in a village was helpful for two important reasons: (1) to reach more people with the Gospel and help the Kingdom of God come to more people, and (2) to avoid harmful dependency and release local people for ministry.

As we followed this approach, we came to recognize that we were more in sync with St. Paul's missionary method and so learned to live in the tension of staying long enough, but not too long.

We can see in the New Testament book of Acts how St. Paul selected and appointed spiritual leaders in each place and then moved on to bring the Gospel to yet another community. Interestingly, Paul also did not insist on working alone, but always had younger leaders working with him as apprentices. We see this mentoring process described in Acts 12:25, where we read about Barnabas and Saul, who, after taking gifts to the church in Jerusalem, returned to Antioch "taking with them John, also called Mark."

St. Paul expected new leaders to act on what they had learned from him and to put into practice what God was already showing them as they ministered. Paul saw younger leaders, like Mark and Timothy, as spiritual sons and trusted them to deal with some very difficult issues in the emerging churches.

And interestingly, Paul did not insist that young leaders be perfect in knowledge and practice before he turned them loose to serve new communities of faith. Rather, he instructed them and expected them to begin serving as leaders from the very beginning of their service. Paul continued to monitor their progress, and much of the New Testament includes letters like 1 and 2 Timothy and 1 Corinthians that share his advice to church leaders to help address ministry issues and challenges and to remind them of what he had taught them when he was with them face-to-face.

In our work with dozens of mission teams over the years in Central America, we always encouraged the volunteers to focus on leadership development as an essential strategy to help make disciples and extend God's kingdom. And by focusing on that emphasis, in community after community, we saw how God blessed our efforts to help leaders grow in their capacity to lead.

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We were committed to respect and work closely with village leaders; yet we often found that our Central American village partners had received very little training in how to lead. So, as often as possible, we provided leadership training for village leaders. These training events always included biblical leadership principles found in Scripture, such as those found in the Book of Nehemiah.

One example of successful leadership development as a mission strategy is CALMS's formal mission partnership with the Ministry of Education that took place from 2011 to 2017 in the country of Belize.

For seven years, volunteers from Concordia University Nebraska and experienced teachers from Lutheran schools in the USA helped us equip approximately seventy-five regional and national supervisors for the Ministry of Education. After receiving their training, the Belizean educators in turn equipped early childhood and high school

teachers in their regions throughout the country. Thus, we were able to multiply our mission efforts as we equipped local leaders who applied what they had learned to their own culture and local realities.

Amazingly also, we were allowed and encouraged to share biblical principles in our annual training events and to incorporate God's Word into our curriculum, including ideas and resources for helping Belizean teachers share the Christian faith in their classrooms. Thus, with a handful of qualified teachers and professors, together with our CALMS staff members, we were privileged to have an impact on the early childhood and high school children and youth of an entire country.

2. Influencing individuals and communities with the Gospel

In addition to equipping local leaders, we learned to be very intentional about making sure that any planned ministry would have an impact on individuals, families, and communities with the Gospel. Such an approach was important, because it distinguished us from secular organizations and helped explain that our motive for serving was to honor God and both to tell and to demonstrate the Gospel.

In the many at-risk communities of Central America, with their typical characteristics of high unemployment, medical challenges, inadequate housing, food shortages, and limited educational opportunities, it was always easy to identify and focus on the physical needs of people. On the other hand, it was often more challenging to identify appropriate ways to integrate intentional sharing of the Gospel with needed community services. In any case, we always tried and were successful more often than not.

Over the eleven years of my ministry with CALMS, the mission agency and our North American partners built over two hundred houses for people who had lost their homes as a result of natural disasters, such as floods and landslides, or who simply could not afford a home. We focused on the very poor who had no or little income, giving priority to widows and single mothers.

As we built homes, we always looked for ways to share the Good News of Jesus with individuals and their families and neighbors. Workdays always began with a Bible reading, devotion, and prayer. North American construction teams, joined by family members, local volunteers, and members of nearby churches, including our own Central American Lutheran churches, always participated in a dedication service. When there was a Lutheran church nearby, we invited the pastor to lead the

We emphasized human care and Gospel proclamation as being intimately connected—and wherever possible, we tried to do this at one and the same time.

celebration to show respect for his role and to encourage ongoing spiritual help for the family that was receiving a new home.

As we followed this principle of making an impact on individuals and communities with the Gospel, in time we came to describe our desired outcomes as "proclaiming and demonstrating the Gospel." With this description, we emphasized human care and Gospel proclamation as being intimately connected—and wherever possible, we tried to do this at one and the same time.

Three Desired Results: (1) Committed Disciples, (2) Dynamic Churches, and (3) Healthy Communities

Through experience, we came to see that invariably communities were healthier when there was a cadre of committed disciples of Jesus present. Local churches were more dynamic when they were made up of committed disciples who were equipped to share the Gospel in word and deed with each other and the rest of the community. And where there were community leaders who served from a deep commitment to Christ and avoided favoritism, those communities invariably demonstrated characteristics such as unity, peace, cooperation, spiritual growth, and more economic progress. Thus, we came to see how the three desired results of committed disciples, dynamic churches, and healthy communities are intimately connected.

1. Committed disciples

A major challenge for the church today in the Western world, including our own Lutheran churches in North America, calls for us to move from a focus on church membership to making and growing committed disciples of Jesus. Such a focus on making and growing committed disciples of Jesus in our congregations will help mobilize God's people for service, whereas focusing on church membership can lead to entitlement, spiritual stagnation, and a consumer mentality. This crucial desired result requires a renewed effort on the part of pastors to help their people understand their baptismal calling as disciples of Jesus and to exercise their spiritual gifts to build up and extend the Body of Christ.

One of the key characteristics of committed disciples is that they make new disciples and are seen by others in their sphere of influence as representatives of Jesus. Yet, it was our experience that this self-evident truth was not always immediately understood by our North American volunteers who had been conditioned to confuse being disciples of Jesus with church membership.

Interestingly, by focusing on making and growing disciples with our Central American partners, we saw new Central American disciples being raised up, as well as evidence of many North American volunteers becoming more mature in the faith.

Many volunteers shared that they had become more committed to Jesus and His mission because of their experiences as short-term volunteers in Central America.

In our Central American ministry that linked partners from North American congregations with at-risk communities for a period of approximately seven years, we also came to see that discipleship is a long-term effort. Transformation generally does not happen overnight; it is a gradual process. Thankfully, by reemphasizing the importance of a deliberate discipleship process, we were usually able to overcome the common temptation of our Western culture to seek immediate results.

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Another important discovery was the fact that growth of new disciples in Central American villages required regular direct contact with other Central American disciples and could not be accomplished solely by volunteers from outside the culture and community, no matter how often they returned and how dedicated to the task they might have been. It had to be a team effort with volunteers from North America complementing the efforts of local disciple leaders.

Through the power of the Holy Spirit working through CALMS's Central American staff and partners as well as North American volunteers, we saw growing numbers of disciples and disciple-makers in Central American villages.

Yet another discovery from our intentional focus on making and growing disciples has been the growing conviction that we've often inverted the process in our Lutheran church-planting efforts. Lutheran church-planting efforts commonly start with a focus on structure before introducing a more relational discipleship process. The typical process includes things like developing a constitution, acquiring a church building, advertising, and inviting the target audience to an inaugural event.

Observing the results of both approaches, I have come to believe that starting with church buildings and a structural approach can actually discourage biblical discipleship, hinder lay leadership, and foster a pastor-centered ministry model that generally leads to less commitment and involvement by the laity, who may end up seeing themselves as the supporters of someone else's ministry instead of as invested participants.

I came to this conviction after seeing many examples in existing Central American congregations where the pastor did most, if not all, of the ministry. This ministry model produced little numerical or discernable spiritual growth. In contrast, as we intentionally helped people understand what it meant to be a disciple of Jesus, connected them with other young Christians, and equipped them to boldly share their

faith with their peers and serve their communities, we saw more people demonstrating the characteristics of committed disciples of Jesus like those described in Acts.

By beginning with disciple-making and focusing the ministry of the missionary pastor on equipping lay leaders to use their gifts to bless others, new disciples can grow not only in faith but in maturity and commitment to make other disciples. As they gather with other growing disciples to study God's Word, pray, and share each other's burdens, a more organic form of the church can emerge that is more often sustainable and replicating. This was our experience working with young disciples in Central America.

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2. Dynamic churches

In CALMS's ministry with at-risk communities in Central America, we always worked with existing local churches. We did this because we saw these churches as God's means to help transform their communities. Furthermore, we realized that they had been in their communities before we arrived and would likely be there after we eventually departed.

To help our North American volunteers work effectively with these churches, we developed resources to assist team members in evaluating the relative health of the Central American churches and determining how they should concentrate their ministry efforts.

For example, knowing that a church was not dependent on outside resources and was able to support its own ministry helped the North American team avoid introducing new resources and programs that could have created unhealthy dependency. If the village congregation did not have trained Sunday School teachers, that discovery suggested the need to develop a plan to help the local church leaders find and equip such teachers from among their own people. Interestingly also, this evaluation process often helped the US leaders to identify aspects of their own North American churches that needed attention.

As we looked at the relative health of Central American churches, we emphasized to our volunteers that, just as there is no perfectly healthy the human body, there is no perfectly healthy church; we are always moving toward or away from health. And just as eating properly and exercising regularly can help keep the human body healthier,

so also with the Body of Christ: A dynamic church that is moving toward health demonstrates characteristics such as, (a) having its own leaders and being able to equip those leaders; (b) making new disciples and demonstrating God's mercy to those in need around them; (c) finding their support from their own congregants and not being dependent on outside resources; and (d) being both biblically-based and culturally relevant in their teaching and preaching.

As noted above, we came to see that inevitably there is a very tight relationship between dynamic churches and committed disciples, since churches with a significant number of committed disciples will more often reflect the above characteristics. Dynamic churches, in turn, invariably tend to influence their communities in positive ways through their service and faithful witness to Christ and the Gospel and by fostering a spirit of unity.

3. Healthy communities

Having worked in dozens of Central American communities for many years, I have found it interesting that some communities with the same economic and social conditions function better than others. Over time, we were able to discover some of the characteristics of healthier communities and to gain insights into the reasons why some fare better than others.

As with more dynamic churches, having healthy leaders was one of the most important characteristics leading to healthier communities. In almost no cases did we find leaders who were totally equipped, yet we did find natural leaders who were eager to serve, who worked well with others, and whom had God-given leadership gifts. Natural leaders were also invariably creative and more eager to learn and grow in their leadership skills.

A major characteristic of a healthy community is the presence of leaders who work together with other leaders and who demonstrate by their actions that they care about their fellow citizens. Healthy communities have leaders who serve the whole community and don't use their role to serve only their own family or a particular group of people.

We saw this characteristic demonstrated recently in the village of Capucalito in the mountains of western Guatemala. Even though there were economically advantaged Americans working with their village, the community leaders, rather than ask outsiders to do the job, took the initiative to fix the drainage of their elementary school that had caused the classrooms to flood every time it rained.

The village of El Progreso had a school with overcrowded classrooms, and they really needed more space. Recognizing the problem, the village leaders on their own initiative organized all the men in the community to dig the foundations and construct a new classroom, rather than wait for months or years for the government to respond

to their requests. While this approach may seem logical to us as North Americans, it is not at all normal behavior for community leaders who are predisposed to seek help from outside their communities instead of looking for solutions within their own community.

Healthy communities also more often than not care for their infrastructure and environment and take initiative to address their water needs, waste management, and play space for their children. Since Central American social structures are top-down and centralized, many communities default to the common approach of petitioning the municipal or state government to address issues instead of exploring ways to resolve their own infrastructure problems. Thus, helping community leaders learn to address their own issues instead of waiting for outside help was a major contribution to helping communities become healthier. This focus, of course, required discipline on the part of CALMS staff and our teams to avoid the temptation to solve their problems for them.

Since a major issue in Central American villages is the use of authority and power to enrich oneself or family, we also came to see transparency and a willingness to identify and incorporate new leaders into the decision-making process as another major characteristic of healthier communities.

More research would be needed to determine if these same results that we saw in smaller (1,000 to 2,500 people) Central American villages might occur in larger cities in Central America and elsewhere around the world. Living in communities where people know their neighbors and commonly work together in their villages and nearby fields no doubt affects community dynamics. I suspect, on the other hand, that where there is less social interaction, trust, transparency, and joint community efforts we could expect a greater challenge with regard to building a healthy community.

Four Mission Values

Invariably in Christian mission work, challenges often result because of conflicts and disagreements about values. Mission partnerships especially depend on an alignment of values, and ministry works best when the partners share the same values. When serving cross-culturally where there are almost always some different values at work, it is important to identify the values of a target audience and to consider the values that should drive our mission efforts as we seek to work together effectively with people of another culture.

Mission partnerships especially depend on an alignment of values, and ministry works best when the partners share the same values.

While there are many good candidates for appropriate values to help guide cross-cultural mission efforts, in our Central America ministry we came to see that the following four are of special importance. By concentrating on the values of strategic mission efforts, authentic and respectful relationships, pursuing biblical mission principles, and looking for and striving toward transformation, we were more often able to see positive results.

1. Strategic value

A strategic mission effort responds to felt needs of the target audience and is based on research, listening, evaluating, and responding to input from local experts. We came to see that activities like starting with thorough research, building the capacity of local leaders, and communicating the Gospel effectively helped us to focus our efforts to remain true to our value of working strategically.

We further came to understand that working strategically includes serving alongside local cross-cultural partners, and not independently. Professors and students from Concordia University Nebraska demonstrated this strategic value while working with Dr. Elry Orozco, a Lutheran medical doctor and pastor, in an economically challenged community in Guatemala to help with health research and as assistants with his medical service brigades.

Another outstanding example of a focus on working strategically was the partnership with the Nursing Department of Concordia University Texas as they served with Dr. Jaime Sanchez, a Christian doctor in Belize, to help provide needed health care to at-risk communities, while helping their students learn new skills and grow spiritually.

A third example of working strategically can be seen in our experience with a very at-risk community: San Miguel village in the dry zone of Guatemala. When we began our ministry there, the community had suffered multiple droughts, and the whole village was left without food or a way to meet their basic needs.

In response, we decided to go beyond relief efforts, since that promised to be a never-ending challenge. After some dialog with the community, local agricultural experts, and conducting our own research, we connected with Guatemalan agricultural and village leaders to introduce a pilot project to help a representative group of four village farmers develop a cash crop.

With proper training, they were able to successfully grow and market aloe vera, used to make sports drinks, medicines, and cosmetics. Since those plants don't require as much water as corn and beans and yet typically last for up to twenty-five years, this new crop made it possible for the farmers to provide for their families. In this way, our ministry was able to replace a less strategic approach, such as providing ongoing food

relief, with a more strategic and better solution: building the capacity of local leaders to improve their own lives and bless their community.

The strategic plan developed with the village calls for helping other farmers. The goal is to help those who have been blessed to "pay it forward" by helping another group of farmers and, in that way, to multiply God's blessings. On a recent visit to the village, we were encouraged to learn that in the last six months they had on their own initiative multiplied the number of farmers growing aloe vera to sixteen and have since committed to raising the number of new farmers to twenty-five during the next six months.

2. Relational value

In cross-cultural ministries—and for that matter, in mono-cultural mission efforts—having authentic and respectful relationships is absolutely necessary to be successful. Since trust comes from working together and keeping our promises over an extended period of time, it's indispensable to have point persons who guide the involvement of both the hosts and visiting servant leaders.

In cross-cultural ministries . . . having authentic and respectful relationships is absolutely necessary to be successful.

I saw this value demonstrated in Belize, where we were working with an experienced dental team on a pilot project. The team demonstrated strong discipline and good coordination among themselves, but they ignored our advice to coordinate closely with a representative of the ministry of health sent to work with them. They also chose to disregard our advice about using local pastors to provide spiritual support as the patients waited for their appointments. We believed this was common sense advice, since the local pastors already knew many of the people and definitely knew the culture better than the visiting dental volunteers.

The dental team's unwillingness to invite local leaders into their ministry led us to discontinue plans for a formal partnership and future service with them. Thus, we see in this example how focusing on our mission values can often help us evaluate potential partnerships and avoid uneven and potentially harmful relationships that can damage our reputation and hurt our witness.

A positive example of focusing on the importance of developing healthy relationships as we work cross-culturally is that of Divine Shepherd Lutheran Church in Omaha, Nebraska. Teams from that congregation regularly worked with their community partners in the village of La Avanzada, Guatemala, to conclude and celebrate their regular periods of service together with a community-wide "potluck" meal. Usually, the North American volunteers provided chickens for the giant

cauldrons of chicken soup, while local people provided the tortillas and vegetables and did their share of the cooking.

A great mission memory and important lesson for me personally was a time I worked in the fields planting corn all day with a group of twenty-five Quiché Indian farmers in a remote Guatemalan mountain village. While we men worked in the fields, women on our training team worked with the village women to learn how to make tortillas and share insights about their family lives.

That day in the fields and kitchens helped me and our team members understand more about the unique culture of these beautiful people than we could ever have learned otherwise. Our time serving with the villagers also helped build a growing trust relationship as we worked side-by-side with our new partners to learn and experience life together.

3. The value of biblical missiology

An outstanding example of following biblical mission principles is the ministry of Concordia University Irvine, California, whose teams coordinated with their various university departments to influence in a holistic way all aspects of life in the village of El Progreso, Guatemala.

Working consistently with a Gospel and kingdom focus during their years of service, they were able to build the capacities of the village health workers, schoolteachers, church leaders, community leaders, and village sports coaches. With all their ministry projects, university professors and students always included a strong spiritual component. By focusing holistically, they were also able to interact with and have an impact on all age groups in the community over time, thereby building very strong relationships with all the villagers.

This university partner prepared the teams spiritually and with disciplined orientation regarding biblical mission principles. Because a number of departments at the university were involved, they were able to share the planning and preparation responsibilities for their teams. This made it possible for them to send multiple teams throughout each year of their partnership—each one focusing on a different emphasis such as health care, biblical equipping of spiritual leaders, children and youth ministry, education, and economic development.

Because Christian professors were motivated and committed to provide continuity and leadership for their long-term relationship with the village, students were able to add their gifts and talents more effectively and in a complementary way than might otherwise have been possible.

4. The value of transformation

Real transformation requires long-term commitment, and so working closely with dedicated leaders from the host culture is very important. In time, we came to understand that short-term workers can function best when they complement and work alongside local leaders to bring about the desired result of spiritual transformation. Frank, a young man from the village of La Avanzada in Guatemala, demonstrates this value in a dramatic way.

Frank began his spiritual journey toward wholeness and service to others by reading a Bible that he had received from a mission team from Divine Shepherd Lutheran Church in Omaha, Nebraska. God's Word convinced him that he should become a more committed partner to the mother of his children. By the power of the Holy Spirit working through His Word and the witness of volunteers from Divine Shepherd, Frank moved from being an unbeliever focused on his own pleasures and vices to becoming a spiritual leader in his own family and in the community.

When he decided to get married, the Divine Shepherd team witnessed his wedding celebration and watched as the Holy Spirit guided him to become more involved in his children's lives. Gradually, Frank grew as a leader and eventually began to serve his village as a Bible teacher and mentor for youth in the community.

A key part of Frank's transformation was the influence of regular spiritual retreats led by Divine Shepherd short-term leaders and participation in regular mentoring and discipleship sessions led by a Guatemalan CALMS discipleship worker who lived nearby.

Evaluating Our Mission Efforts

Finally, as we look for examples of transformation in our outreach efforts, we are also able to evaluate the effectiveness of our mission work.

When our mission endeavors are successful, we should expect to see changed lives, more committed disciples of Jesus, more dynamic churches equipping the whole Body of Christ to serve and to make more disciples, community leaders who serve, and healthier communities that bless their own residents and those of other communities.

In the end, these are some of the things we will want to measure in order to communicate what God is doing through our mission efforts. Such evidence of change will, in turn, likely help inspire our donors and prayer partners to continue supporting God's mission.

Endnotes

[1] Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2000), 446.
[2] Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 447.

"Faithful? Faithless? What Do We See? What Do We Do?"

Armand J. Boehme

Abstract: In the context of declining membership and declining participation in the life of Lutheran churches in America, the article examines the implications for *faithfulness* in Jesus' parable in Matthew 25:15–30, the parable of the servants and their use of their master's talents. It suggests that the well-known Latin theological phrase, *simul justus et peccator*, "at the same time saint and sinner," serves as an accurate description of the work of the church and its members. It acknowledges that the church is challenged internally and externally and offers examples how the church is attempting to respond faithfully to the challenges.

Introduction

Statistically speaking, the Christian Church in America has lost more members than it has gained over the last fifty years.[1] What are the reasons for this decline? Has the Christian Church been faithless in its mission? Does Matthew 25:14–30 have any application in attempting to answer the above questions? Does *simul justus et peccator* have any bearing on the answer to the above questions?

The Parable

Jesus' parable uses the term *talents* in the sense of money. The difference in

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talents indicates a different sum of the master's wealth given to each servant. Before the master departs, he gives each servant responsibility for the wealth he received.

The parable contrasts two faithful servants with an unfaithful one. The faithful servants immediately make use of the talents they have been given. The servant with five talents gains five more, and the one with two talents gains two more. The servant who received the one talent buried it in the ground. He did not use the wealth entrusted to him. The fact that he buried it could symbolize deadness. He did not even entrust the master's wealth with the bankers, from whom he would have received interest.

After a long time, the master returns to settle accounts. He commends the two servants who used the wealth he had entrusted to them. They are described as "faithful" and are told that they have done well (Mt 25:21, 23 NKJV). They enter into the joy of the Lord.

The servant who received one talent gives it back to his master unused. He describes his master as a "hard man" who reaps and harvests where he has not sown (Mt 25:24). This is not a true picture of the master. In addition to speaking ill of his master, he also says that he is "afraid" of his master, which is why he hid his talent (Mt 25:25). The master describes him as a "wicked" and "lazy" servant (Mt 25:26). The talent he had is taken from him and given to the servant who had ten. The wicked servant is thrown into "outer darkness" where there is "weeping and the gnashing of teeth" (Mt 25:30).

This parable appears in the context of Jesus' teaching about the end times and ultimate judgment. The parable of the ten virgins, which comes before the parable of the talents, encourages all believers to be watchful and prepared for the final judgment (Mt 25:1–13). Watchfulness and preparedness are exhibited by a faithful use of the talents God has given to expand His Kingdom, benefit others, and bring glory to the Lord. After the parable of the talents, Jesus taught about the final judgment (Mt 25:31–46). Being prepared for the final judgment includes being faithful. Being faithful does not gain salvation for believers; rather, it is a result of having been saved by God's grace. The master in the parable is understood to be the Lord, who has ascended to heaven and commissioned His Church to spread the wealth of His saving Gospel until His return.[2]

Watchfulness and preparedness are exhibited by a faithful use of the talents God has given to expand His Kingdom, benefit others, and bring glory to the Lord. . . . Being faithful does not gain salvation for believers; rather, it is a result of having been saved by God's grace.

So what is seen? Faithfulness on the part of the Church, faithlessness, or both? This question needs to be asked because the Church is made up of people who are both saintly and sinful at the same time (*simul justus et peccator*). What does the evidence indicate?

Faithful

Christ's Church expresses faithfulness by using the talents or wealth God has given it. That wealth is centered in the spiritual treasures of God's Word and sacraments, which give sinners His justifying grace. Christ desires that His Church be faithful in teaching and preaching God's Word. That teaching and preaching should be done in truth and purity. Those hearing are to live their faith in accord with what has been taught. Faithful preaching, teaching, and godly living are exhibited each day by many Christians. This is evident in the souls that are saved—the infants, children, and adults who are baptized, the youth and adults who are confirmed, the growth of the church especially in the global South, and the growth in faith experienced by Christians each day. Faithfulness is also seen as Christians are moved by the Holy Spirit to help with flood clean-up, operate health clinics, feed the hungry, counsel the troubled in mind and heart, teach children to pray, and love the outcasts and unlovable.

Here it is also important to remember that the Church's faithfulness is imperfect because all Christians remain sinful. As Christ told the apostles, when you have done everything God commands, say that we have only "done what was our duty to do" (Lk 17:10). It is with this reminder that we are to hear Christ's commendation of our faithfulness, "Well done, good and faithful servant," as we enter by grace into His joy (Mt 25:21).

Faithful preaching, teaching, and practice do not always bring success in the eyes of the world, or even in the eyes of the Church. There are many examples of faithful preaching and teaching in contexts of foreign and domestic missions that did not produce the kind of increase seen in the parable. Christ's commendation is also for those who labored diligently and whose faithful use of their talents did not result in an increase.

It is also important to avoid the faulty notion that faithfulness always results in visible, tangible increases. That is a theology of glory. The Bible clearly teaches that the most faithful witness, Jesus Christ, perfectly and faithfully preached and taught God's Word. In the Capernaum synagogue, many people rejected His message. "Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard this, said, 'This is a hard saying; who can understand it?'" (Jn 6:60).

It is also important to avoid the faulty notion that faithfulness always results in visible, tangible increases. That is a theology of glory.

From "that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more" (Jn 6:66). Jesus, the sinless Savior of the world, was ultimately rejected and crucified even though He perfectly preached and taught.

God's prophets in the Old Testament, like Jeremiah and Ezekiel, were faithful in their ministries, yet a great number of the Israelites rejected their preaching and teaching. There are other biblical examples of the rejection of faithful service in the Lord's Kingdom. Thus, it is important to remember that Jesus' parable of the talents encourages faithfulness in one's life and service so that sinners remain in the faith for eternity. Faithful preaching and teaching are not ends in themselves. Faithfulness in faith and living is encouraged so that sinners will know the truth, for only the truth in Christ will set them free from sin and death (Jn 8:30–32). Faithful teaching is necessary to strengthen believers in the truths of God's Word and to combat false teachings.

God tells His Church that His Word will not return void (it will always accomplish its purpose), either in the area of the Law or in the area of the Gospel (Is 55:9–11). God's Word encourages faithfulness in preaching and teaching in accord with the Great Commission. And there is no doubt that there has been faithful preaching and teaching over the last fifty years. Still today, infants and adults are being baptized, sinners are brought to faith in Christ, souls are nurtured by the Gospel, faith is strengthened, sin is forgiven, Christians live their faith in word and deed, and God's saints are translated to heaven's glory. Why then has the church in America suffered loss?

Less Than Faithful

Has the Church also been less than faithful? To answer that question, several matters need to be examined. Here one must look both internally and externally—within the Church and outside of it. The history of God's people in both the Old and New Testaments contains instances of faithfulness, as well as the lack thereof. The Children of Israel were not always faithful during their trek in the wilderness or as they lived in the Promised Land, nor were the apostles perfectly faithful in their lives and ministries. The only one perfectly faithful was and is Christ our Savior, whose grace redeems our lack of faithfulness.

Within the Church

Religious surveys indicate a lack of faithfulness in the beliefs actually held by some Christians today.

Ligonier Ministries Survey (2018)—Ligonier Ministries surveyed three thousand Americans and found that "1 in 3 evangelicals (32%)" hold that "religious belief is a matter of personal opinion [and] not about objective truth." Fifty-two percent of

evangelical Christians believe that most "people are basically good," and 51 percent of evangelical Christians believe that "God accepts the worship of all religions." Astoundingly, 71 percent of evangelical Christians believe that Jesus is "the first and greatest being created by God the Father"—an Arian heresy.[3]

Lutheran Faith Surveys

A Study of Generations (1972)—Fifty-nine percent of the Lutherans surveyed in this study believed that "the main emphasis of the Gospel is on God's rules for right living," and "*two out of five Lutherans believed in salvation by works*."[4]

Lutheran Brotherhood Survey (1998)—Forty-eight percent of the Lutherans surveyed agreed with this statement: "People can only be justified before God by loving others." Sixty percent of those surveyed agreed with this statement: "The main emphasis of the Gospel is God's rules for right living." And 56 percent believe that "God is satisfied if a person lives the best life one can."[5]

The survey concluded by stating:

> Many Lutherans are no longer anchored to a core set of beliefs. On topics ranging from original sin, to the Trinity, to justification, to the Gospel, to the place of Scripture in one's life, many Lutherans tend to either misunderstand or disagree with the historic teachings of the Lutheran Church. . . . The research suggests that more time and attention be given to addressing what it means to be Lutheran not only among those on the periphery of the church, but also among those who regularly participate in Lutheran worship services.[6]

Books like those written by Bryan Wolfmueller, Ross Douthat, Michael Horton, Christian Smith, and others have illustrated this downturn in faithfulness in Christian beliefs.[7] These books and other such materials are evidence of the need for the Church to preach and teach the faith once delivered to the saints accurately and faithfully so that believers know the truth and are equipped to believe, live, and share it.

Outside the Church

A number of societal trends are intertwined with this downturn in adherence to historic Christian doctrine. These societal trends have had an impact on the Church's faithfulness. They include the rise of New Age religious views, Gnosticism, the rise of new religious movements (NRMs), a downturn in respect for authority, the dramatic rise in individualism and of spirituality versus religion, the lack of sound catechesis, scientism, militant atheism, nihilism, globalization, and other factors.[8]

Atheistic antagonism towards religious faith has been on the rise since the time of the Renaissance.[9] This antagonism appears somewhat parallel to the antagonism of the one servant toward his master in the parable of the talents (Mt 25:24–26). Already at

the time of the Renaissance, people exhibited "tolerance toward other religions" and believed "that there is more than one way to God." This view "minimized the historical uniqueness of Christianity."[10]

Renaissance Humanism was a forerunner of the Enlightenment, an era that felt itself to be "superior to" the past and self-consciously turned "to the new." Humanism found its "center" in "man" rather than in God. It "[was] deeply marked by a pronounced spiritual, moral, and . . . religious secularization." It criticized "the ecclesiastical," for the ecclesiastical is "missing the living spirituality" that Humanism "believes it possesses." Today still, Humanism emphasizes an "inner righteousness" centered in human beings rather than a righteousness coming from God.

The impact of Christ's saving work was minimized. Thus, for Humanism, "all the higher religions become more or less of equal value. . . . Grace [was] moved to the periphery."[11]

Antagonism to Christianity has also been fueled by some Eastern belief systems. Buddhism has often depicted Christianity as "violent, intolerant, and irrational," and some have gone further in an attempt to show Buddhism's "superiority over Christianity." This perspective has wide appeal for "countercultural seekers."[12]

A recent article in *First Things* stated that "the prevailing climate of opinion" in our time "regards obedience to the will of God as servility."[13]

Some aspects of globalization are closely linked with other societal trends, including an "increasing emphasis on individual autonomy, self-expression and free choice," and an "increasing emancipation from authority."[14] There are six "interlinked processes of religious change related to globalization." There is the movement (1) away from viewing one's religion or spirituality as exclusively correct, (2) away from dogmatic belief, (3) away from seeing oneself as part of an authoritative religious group, (4) away from seeing religion hierarchically/salvation exclusive to one's religion, (5) away from centering religious belief in God, and (6) away from looking at religion with a view to the afterlife. Globalization influences one to view religion or spirituality (1) eclectically, (2) experientially, (3) individually/privately, (4) in an egalitarian way (salvation in all beliefs), (5) as being radically centered in human beings and secularized, and (6) in an almost pure this-worldly view.[15] As one author noted, NRMs "sprout from globalization like plants from the earth."[16]

These trends have had a significant negative impact on organized religion, including Christianity. A faithful response to the issues seen in this essay would be serious study of the effects of globalization on religion to see both its negative and possible positive effects. Christian theologians, pastors, and laity should also study the trends that have given rise to alternative religions, the teachings of alternate spiritualities, and NRMs. There is also the need for diligent catechesis to ground Christians firmly in the truths of Scripture to offset these negative influences.[17]

Knowledge of these teachings and the underlying philosophy and ideas giving rise to them, as well as further grounding in the truths of Scripture, will be used by the Holy Spirit to enable effective ways for Christians to respond to, and evangelistically engage, those adhering to these religions and spiritualities.

Response

That the Missouri Synod is attempting to respond to these trends is evident in the book, *The Christian Difference* (CPH, 2019). The guide to the use of the book states that it is a "powerful resource" with which to study the faiths of our "neighbors, family members, and co-workers" in order to find areas "where we can more efficiently share the hope" that we have in Jesus Christ with Jews, Muslims, Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Scientologist, atheists, agnostics, the spiritual but not religious, Hindus, Buddhists, Confucianists, Shintoists, and the Sikhs.[18] Knowledge of the basic tenets of different faith systems is gained in order to enable more effective witnessing.

The Christian Difference also contains an extensive chapter on the Christian faith that emphasizes the need for a firm accurate grounding in the truths of Christianity to equip one to witness effectively.[19]

Being knowledgeable about different faith systems is also the emphasis of the Synod's new evangelism effort: *Everyone His Witness*. Specific modules are being designed to help Christians witness to disaffected adult children, Muslims, Jews, adherents of scientism, Buddhists, Scientology, the occult, and other groups.

Addressing the similarities and differences in belief between Christian denominations was also one of the emphases of the Bible studies under CPH's *The Lutheran Difference* series[20] and a book by the same title that turned the Bible studies into essays.[21] The purpose of these resources is to equip baptized Christians with the knowledge and resources that will help them verbalize the love of God in Christ to others, even family members, in their own context, language, style, and circumstance.

The purpose of these resources is to equip baptized Christians with the knowledge and resources that will help them verbalize the love of God in Christ to others, even family members, in their own context, language, style, and circumstance.

Conclusion

The evidence indicates that the Church, comprising justified sinners, will exhibit both faithfulness and a lack of faithfulness in its corporate life until the end of time. That the visible church is *simul justus et peccator* is evident in the parable of the

talents. Thus, Christians need to live daily in contrition and repentance, to see their faithfulness to biblical teachings and practice, and recognize their failures. This self-examination, having revealed the lack of faithfulness, will enable the members of the Church to address that lack in a godly way. This daily exercise is needed to keep the message straight and to get the message out so that souls are saved. It is solely by God's grace that the Church exhibits faithfulness, and only God's grace can forgive our lack of faithfulness. The grace that God gives, He gives for the eternal salvation of lost souls.

It is solely by God's grace that the Church exhibits faithfulness, and only God's grace can forgive our lack of faithfulness.

"Be faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of life" (Rev 2:10 NKJV).

Endnotes

[1] George Hawley, *Demography, Culture, and the Decline of America's Christian Denominations* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2017).
[2] Jeffrey A. Gibbs, *Matthew 21:1–28:20 Concordia Commentary: A Theological Exposition of Sacred Scripture* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2018), 1325–1338; R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1943), 971–986.
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[4] Merton P. Strommen, Milo L. Brekke, Ralph C. Underwager, Arthur L. Johnson, eds., *A Study of Generations* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1972), 369, 289; see also 145–151.
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[6] LBSLBP, 19.
[7] Bryan Wolfmueller, *Has American Christianity Failed?* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2016); Ross Douthat, *Bad Religion: How We Became a Nation of Heretics* (New York: Free Press, 2012); Michael Horton, ed., *The Agony of Deceit: What Some TV Preachers Are Really Teaching* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1990); Michael Horton, *Christless Christianity: The Alternative Gospel of the American Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2008); Christian Smith with Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).
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[14] Liselotte Frisk, "Globalization: A Key Factor in Contemporary Religious Change," *Journal of Alternative Spiritualities and New Age Studies* 5, ix–x, also available at http://files.asanas.org.uk/005Frisk.pdf.

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[17] This is a sample of the many journals, organizations, and books studying alternate religions, spiritualities, and NRMs: *International Journal for the Study of New Religions* https://www.equinoxpub.com/home/journals/ijsnr-parent/; Center for the Studies on New Religions (CESNUR); the International Society for the Study of New Religions (ISSNR); Olav Hammer and Mikael Rothstein, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to New Religious Movements* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); C. M. Cusack, *Invented Religions: Imagination, Fiction and Faith* (Surrey, GB: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2010).

[18] *The Christian Difference: An Explanation and Comparison of World Religions* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2019), xxii.

[19] *The Christian Difference*, 555–621.

[20] For example, Armand J. Boehme and Robert C. Baker, *Angels and Demons: The Lutheran Difference Series* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006).

[21] Edward A. Engelbrecht, ed., *The Lutheran Difference: An Explanation & Comparison of Christian Beliefs* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2010).

A Relevant Evangelistic Appeal with the Unchurched

Herbert Hoefer

Abstract: Typically, we use Acts 16:31 as the model for our evangelistic appeal: "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved." However, our use of it is a faulty interpretation of the passage and is quite incomprehensible to our unchurched audience. The terms in this appeal ("believe," "Lord Jesus Christ," "be saved") make no sense to this audience. Our appeal must be presented differently, in a manner that speaks to their understanding and situation.

"Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved!" This is the conversion call that has been used even to this day. In the original context, it was St. Paul's response to the Philippian jailer's desperate shout, "What must I do to be saved." He was not thinking of eternal salvation, of course. He was considering suicide (Acts 16:25–34).

Irrespective of the original context, we have continued to use Paul's response as our evangelistic call. We use it to talk about eternal salvation. However, that statement had a different meaning then, and it has a different meaning today. In fact, it has no meaning today. Outside of confined church circles, that statement makes no sense at all.

"Believe"

When I was teaching religion classes at Concordia University–Portland, this was a term I had come to avoid when talking about the faith. Outside of the faith community, the term may often mean "blind belief"—a decision to accept something without any evidence as to its truth, even accepting something as true that is contrary to evidence.

When the "James Ossuary" was discovered in 2002, there was a discussion as to

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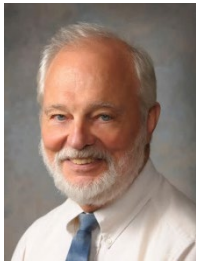

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whether it contained the bones of Jesus. I heard an Easter morning sermon at that time referring to this discovery. The preacher argued that there is a difference between the truth of faith and other truths: We believe in spite of the evidence. The fact is, though, that our faith is a lie if those are Jesus' bones. If people outside church circles heard that preacher's statement, they would roll their eyes in amazement at our willfully blind belief.

So what term did I use in class and what term do I suggest we use? I would say "I am personally convinced" or "I have come to understand" or "It seems clear to me," or "My experience is," etc. The idea is that we have grounds and worthy reasons for our beliefs. In a previous *Missio Apostolica* article[1], I shared how I found the most effective way to witness to nonbelievers is to speak of my experiences with miracles, spirits, angels, etc. They want tangible evidence, and that's a way to provide it.

The idea is that we have grounds and worthy reasons for our beliefs.

"On the Lord Jesus"

Who is Jesus to these unchurched people? What does the word *lord* mean to them?

Many studies have documented how there is rampant biblical illiteracy in our country, particularly among the younger generations. In my experience, most have little idea of the actions and claims of Jesus in Scripture. Most know that Christmas is a celebration of Jesus' birth, but not that it's a recognition of His Incarnation. Many do not realize that Easter is connected to Jesus' resurrection.

Who is Jesus to them? They've heard He was a very loving person, and they like Him for that. But He is interpreted in terms of the desires of the day. Two examples:

- On the first day of a freshman Bible course, one of our Concordia profs asked if the students knew any Bible verses. He reported that the only verse that most could recall was, "Do not judge." That was a saying of Jesus that they could relate to.
- When I was a pastor in Wisconsin, a parishioner related to me what she overheard at a jewelry counter in a department store. A customer had asked about getting a necklace with a cross pendant. The saleslady asked, "Do you want one with the little man on it?"

What, then, does Jesus have to do with me and my life today, they might ask? As James White has discussed thoroughly in *Rise of the Nones*, the unchurched simply do not see any need for religion in their lives. Since my retirement and my increased involvement with unchurched community members, they also admire Jesus but have no need for Him. Jesus was a good man back then, and He could be a good example

for us today. But "lord" is not a word that they would associate with Him, except as a kind of honorific like "fine sir." The biblical sense of lord as focus and director of one's life is far from their understanding, and even further from their need or desire.

What, then, does Jesus have to do with me and my life today, they might ask?

Add to this another term related to Jesus: *Christ*. There is no understanding of Jesus as the Messiah, of course. The term *Jesus Christ* is primarily known as an expletive, certainly not as something publicly sacred and personally meaningful.

What does the evangelistic appeal "Believe on the Lord Jesus (Christ)" mean, then? Nothing. In summary, they understand that He did live and that He was a good man and we might learn something from Him. And here will come some ideas on how we might effectively approach them. But first we have one more phrase in that evangelistic appeal to consider:

"You will be saved."

In the original context of the Philippian jailer, the salvation he sought is quite clear: rescue from the wrath and punishment of his superiors. His immediate salvation was the amazing fact that none of the prisoners had tried to escape. He was saved. His amazement at his prisoners' consideration of his plight led him to respect and listen to them, and the Holy Spirit subsequently worked faith in his heart and with him his whole household. Paul and Silas shared the jailer's experience of being vulnerable and helpless so that they could openheartedly share what the lordship of Jesus means "to those such as us."

But what does "saved" mean to our listeners today? What might they want to be saved from? What might convince them to listen to "the word of the Lord," like the jailer?

The jailer was not thinking of eternal life, and the young people today are not thinking of that either. One context in which the term *saved* has relevance for them is getting saved from addictions. They have seen how addictions can have an insurmountable stranglehold on people's lives. They can resonate with the first two steps of the Twelve Step Program of Alcoholic Anonymous:

> We admit that we are powerless (over alcohol)—and that our lives have become unmanageable.
>
> We come to believe that a Power greater than ourselves can restore us to sanity.

We would call this stranglehold the work of Satan or our sinful flesh. Of course, these are not terms that make any sense to the unchurched and biblically illiterate. However, the content of these biblical terms does make sense. Young people know many friends and family who need to be saved from their addictions.

From my time in India, I know a significant follower of Jesus who came to faith by reading Romans 7. He recognized his own insane and unmanageable struggles of life in the words of St. Paul: "Wretched man that I am! Who can deliver me from this body of death?" (Rom 7:24). He recognized his own life experience in these words of Scripture, came to study more, and accepted Jesus as the lord of his renewed and redirected life, expressing "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (v. 25a).

A Relevant Evangelistic Appeal

We now have gained some clues and ideas on how we might proceed in our evangelical witness. Simply citing the biblical verse will get us nowhere because for people who do not believe, the Bible has no authority. However, the content of Paul's appeal still is relevant to the human condition. How might we convey the content of that appeal to the unchurched around us today?

In the above discussion, we identified three points of contact:

- We might learn something from Jesus.
- Amazement at believers' consideration and understanding
- Powerful help in our insane, unmanageable condition

Those three points might be summarized in an appeal such as this: "Let's discuss together the life and meaning of Jesus for us today, especially when life becomes insane and unmanageable." We do not approach the appeal from a standpoint of one who knows and is now informing. Rather, we recognize our mutual vulnerability and needful condition, and we share what Jesus' lordship has meant to us.

We do not approach the appeal from a standpoint of one who knows and is now informing. Rather, we recognize our mutual vulnerability and needful condition, and we share what Jesus' lordship has meant to us.

This leads to one final consideration in our approach to witnessing among the unchurched today. It must be done primarily by laypeople. The witnesses to the faith must be seen as trustworthy and credible. Unfortunately, the common view of clergy in our country today is not conducive to credible witnessing.

There's always been a question of authenticity when paid, professional clergy share the faith, for "that's their job." However, today many more issues of credibility

and trustworthiness have arisen: from child abusers to protectors of abusers, from views considered anti-scientific and anti-gay and anti-women, from mixing of church with partisan politics, from greedy TV evangelists. And who is the point person for all this disillusionment and distrust?—the clergy.

Peter Marty, in his lead editorial in an issue of *The Christian Century*, quoted a recent Gallup Poll.[2] Since 1977, Gallup has been charting the reputations of different occupations, and high regard for the clergy has deteriorated to the lowest it has ever been, only 36 percent. Even among those who attend church at least monthly, only 52 percent consider the clergy trustworthy.

The point is that effective witnessing mostly needs to be done by laypeople, people whom others consider trustworthy and credible. Clergy need to equip their parishioners (Eph 4:12) to connect meaningfully, discussing openheartedly the meaning of Jesus in the struggles of life.

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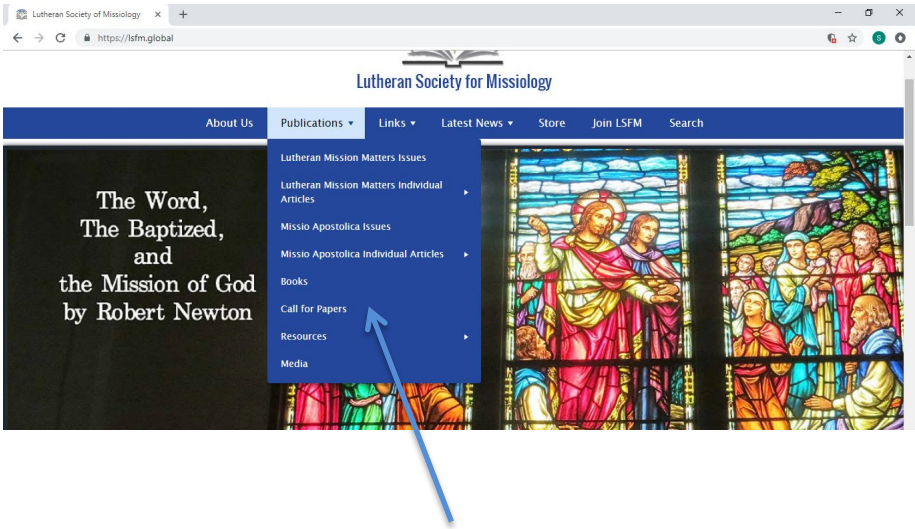
Enter the conversation:
"Why Lutheran Mission Matters."



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If you'd like to write for a future edition, the Note for Contributors has helpful submission information, and it can also be found near the end of this edition.

Sermons

The Blood of Jesus Covered Our Shame

Sermon by Héctor E. Hoppe

Multiethnic Symposium
Concordia Seminary, St. Louis
May 25, 2019

Romans 10:8–13 (ESV)
But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. ***For the Scripture says, "Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame."*** *For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."*

Grace and peace from God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Christ is risen!

Rev. Dr. Héctor E. Hoppe is a native of Argentina. He studied at Seminario Concordia in Buenos Aires and received his STM from Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne, Indiana. He served in several parishes in Argentina, as well as taught at Seminario Concordia in Buenos Aires. He was, for twenty-five years, editor for multilingual resources at Concordia Publishing House. He is the author of Jesus of Nazareth*. Hoppe currently freelances for Lutheran Hour Ministries and Concordia Publishing House. He continues to serve as an adjunct professor at the Center for Hispanic Studies at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. He received an honorary doctorate from Concordia Seminary. He is married to Beatriz García with whom he has three adult children and eight grandchildren. hectorhoppe@gmail.com*

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The passage from Scripture that will guide our meditation this morning is Romans 10:8–13.

We will focus on verse 11: "For the Scripture says, 'Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.'"

"Shame on you!" We may have heard these words from people around us. I know some parents use it, and I heard it from some teachers. "What a shame you got a B when we all know you have the skills to get an A." Maybe we heard a "what a shame" from a pastor? Saint Paul is a little more sensitive, or tactful, in the way he uses the term *shame*. Without pointing to anyone in particular, he writes to the Ephesians that "it is shameful even to speak of the things they do in secret" (Ephesians 5:12). Shame is a very powerful word.

I suspect we use the word *shame* quite loosely and possibly not with the profound meaning that the word actually carries. We say, "What a shame that I missed my child's performance. I should have left home at least thirty minutes earlier."

"Shame" is one of the strongest words in the Bible. It appears in the Bible a couple of hundred times or so, and most of the time, if not always, to convey a very strong message. In Genesis 1 and 2, there are two words or expressions to describe the wonderful world that God created: "It was very good," and, "Adam and Eve were not ashamed." The expression "not ashamed" appears in Scripture before the fall so that everybody would understand how beautiful, how good, how pure everything created by God was. There was no shame in the Garden.

Genesis 3 describes a different world—a world that is not good anymore and a world infested by shame. Moses doesn't use the word "shame" in Genesis 3, but he explains how Adam and Eve felt. They discovered that to be naked was not good. They were exposed, they were disconcerted. They were in a "what do we do now" situation. Adam and Eve might have been near a fig tree, and they picked fig leaves to cover their nakedness. Bad choice. When you are disconcerted, you have a higher chance of making bad choices.

During my childhood, my brother and I would pick figs from the two fig trees that we had in our backyard. We learned that fig leaves are very harsh; our hands, arms, and legs would itch for hours because we touched the leaves. What were Adam and Eve thinking? Then, God provided the right covering, the right clothes, and this is the first sign that God is the only one who can cover our shame with the cloth of righteousness.

The Lord Jesus, who based His ministry and His teaching on His divine understanding of the Old Testament, uses the word *ashamed* in its most profound sense. "For whoever is ashamed of me and my words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in his glory" (Luke 9:26). This means that if the Lord is ashamed of me, I will not be wearing the right clothes to attend the wedding feast of

the Lamb. I will be naked, exposed, and disconcerted, and there will be no use for the question: What do I do now?

Saint Paul, who also based his ministry and his teaching on a God-inspired understanding of the Old Testament, uses the word *shame* a few times, always in contradiction to the Gospel. "I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (Romans 1:16). In other words, because I believe in the Gospel, I am not exposed. I am covered with the clothes of righteousness. No one can point to my nakedness to shame me. I am covered by God's righteousness.

Saint Paul also says: "We rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirt who has been given to us" (Romans 5:3–5). Now I am covered on the outside and on the inside.

And now we come to this statement from Paul: "For the Scripture says: 'Everyone who believes in him [Jesus] will not be put to shame'" (Romans 10:11).

Our shame was transferred to Jesus. "For [the Son of Man] will be delivered over to the Gentiles and will be mocked and shamefully treated" (Luke 18:32). Jesus was treated as one who disobeyed God and fell into sin and was expelled from Paradise. He was stripped of His clothes. He was hanged naked on the cross. He was exposed, that we might be covered in God's love. Jesus did not shout from the cross, "What do I do now?" He was not disconcerted. He died in the assurance that He would rise again, as He certainly did.

I want to leave you with two action items to put into practice as we enter into these two days of reflection on shame and honor.

The first one is that, since we have been covered inside and out by the love of God, we need to be careful not to shame anyone. We need to be intentional in honoring our neighbor because he was created in God's image.

Second, what do we do when those who—because of our accent, or our color, or our race, or our ethnicity, or our culture—intend to manipulate us by shaming us? Will we say, "What do we do now?" or will we, who are covered by the grace of God, imitate Jesus, "who is the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:2)?

"For the Scripture says, 'Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.' For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For 'everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved'" (Romans 10:11–13). Amen.

La sangre de Jesús cubrió nuestra vergüenza

Sermón de Héctor E. Hoppe

Simposio Multiétnico
Concordia Seminary, St. Louis
Mayo 25, 2019

> Romanos 10:8–13
> Lo que dice es: "La palabra está cerca de ti, en tu boca y en tu corazón." Ésta es la palabra de fe que predicamos: "Si confiesas con tu boca que Jesús es el Señor, y crees en tu corazón que Dios lo levantó de los muertos, serás salvo." Porque con el corazón se cree para alcanzar la justicia, pero con la boca se confiesa para alcanzar la salvación. **Pues la Escritura dice: "Todo aquel que cree en él, no será [avergonzado] defraudado."** Porque no hay diferencia entre el que es judío y el que no lo es, pues el mismo que es Señor de todos, es rico para con todos los que lo invocan, porque todo el que invoque el nombre del Señor será salvo.

Gracia y paz de Dios Padre, Hijo, y Espíritu Santo. Amén.

¡Cristo ha resucitado!

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El pasaje de la Escritura que guiará nuestra meditación esta mañana es Romanos 10:8-13.

Nos enfocaremos en el versículo 11: "Pues la Escritura dice: 'Todo aquel que cree en él, no será [avergonzado] defraudado.'"

"¡Qué vergüenza!" Es posible que hayamos escuchado estas palabras de algunas personas a nuestro alrededor. Sé que algunos padres las usan, y las escuché de algunos maestros. "Qué vergüenza que obtuviste una B cuando todos sabemos que tienes las habilidades para obtener una A." Tal vez hemos escuchado un "qué vergüenza" de parte de un pastor. San Pablo es un poco más sensible o discreto en la forma en que usa el término vergüenza. Sin señalar a nadie en particular, escribe a los efesios que "¡Hasta vergüenza da hablar de lo que ellos hacen en secreto!" (Efesios 5:12). Vergüenza es una palabra sumamente fuerte.

Sospecho que usamos la palabra "vergüenza" con bastante soltura y posiblemente no con el profundo significado que realmente tiene. Decimos: "Es una vergüenza que me haya perdido la actuación de mi hijo. Debería haber salido de casa al menos treinta minutos antes."

"Vergüenza" es una de las palabras más fuertes de la Biblia. Aparece en las Escrituras unas doscientas veces, y la mayoría de las veces, si no siempre, transmite un mensaje muy fuerte. En Génesis 1 y 2 hay dos palabras o expresiones para describir el mundo maravilloso que Dios creó: "Era muy bueno" y "aunque Adán y su mujer andaban desnudos, no se avergonzaban de andar así". La expresión "no se avergonzaban" aparece en las Escrituras antes de la caída para que todos entendamos cuán hermoso, cuán bueno, cuán puro era todo lo creado por Dios. No había vergüenza en el jardín.

Génesis 3 describe un mundo diferente. Un mundo que ya no es bueno y un mundo infestado de vergüenza. Moisés no usa la palabra "vergüenza" en Génesis 3, pero explica cómo se sintieron Adán y Eva. Descubrieron que estar desnudos no era bueno. Estaban expuestos, estaban desconcertados. Estaban en una situación que los llevó a preguntarse: "¿Y ahora qué hacemos?" Es posible que Adán y Eva hayan estado cerca de una higuera, por lo que recogieron hojas de higuera para cubrir su desnudez. Mala elección. Cuando uno está desconcertado, tiene más posibilidades de tomar malas decisiones.

Durante mi infancia, mi hermano y yo recogíamos higos de las dos higueras que teníamos en nuestro patio detrás de la casa. Aprendimos que las hojas de higuera son muy crueles, nuestras manos, brazos, y piernas nos picaban por horas porque habíamos tocado las hojas. ¡Qué ocurrencia la de Adán y Eva! Entonces, Dios proporcionó el manto adecuado, la ropa adecuada, y esta es la primera señal de que Dios es el único que puede cubrir nuestra vergüenza con la ropa de justicia.

El Señor Jesús, quien basó su ministerio y sus enseñanzas en su comprensión divina del Antiguo Testamento, usa la palabra "vergüenza" en su sentido más profundo. "Porque si alguno se avergüenza de mí y de mis palabras, el Hijo del Hombre se avergonzará de él cuando venga en su gloria" (Lucas 9:26). Esto significa que, si el Señor se avergüenza de mí, no vestiré la ropa adecuada para asistir a la fiesta de bodas del Cordero. Estaré desnudo, expuesto y desconcertado, y no habrá lugar para la pregunta: ¿y ahora qué hago?

San Pablo, quien también basó su ministerio y su enseñanza en un entendimiento divinamente inspirado del Antiguo Testamento, usa la palabra vergüenza algunas veces, siempre en oposición con el evangelio. "No me avergüenzo del evangelio, porque es poder de Dios para la salvación de todo aquel que cree: en primer lugar, para los judíos, y también para los que no lo son" (Romanos 1:16). En otras palabras, porque creo en el evangelio, no estoy expuesto. Estoy cubierto con la ropa de justicia. Nadie puede señalar mi desnudez para avergonzarme. Estoy cubierto por la justicia de Dios.

San Pablo también dice: "Nos regocijamos en los sufrimientos, porque sabemos que los sufrimientos producen resistencia, la resistencia produce un carácter aprobado, y el carácter aprobado produce esperanza. Y esta esperanza no nos [avergüenza] defrauda, porque Dios ha derramado su amor en nuestro corazón por el Espíritu Santo que nos ha dado" (Romanos 5:3–5). Ahora estoy cubierto por fuera y por dentro.

Y ahora llegamos a esta declaración de Pablo: "Todo aquel que cree en él, no será [avergonzado] defraudado" (Romanos 10:11).

Nuestra vergüenza fue transferida a Jesús. "El Hijo del Hombre . . . será entregado a los no judíos, los cuales se burlarán de él, [lo avergonzarán] lo insultarán y le escupirán" (Lucas 18:31–32). Jesús fue tratado como alguien que desobedeció a Dios y cayó en pecado y fue expulsado del Paraíso. Fue despojado de su ropa. Lo colgaron desnudo en la cruz. Él fue expuesto para que nosotros pudiéramos estar cubiertos con el amor de Dios. Jesús no gritó desde la cruz: "¿Y ahora qué hago?" No estaba desconcertado. Murió con la seguridad de que volvería a la vida, como ciertamente lo hizo.

Quiero dejarles dos ideas para que pongamos en práctica a medida que entramos en estos dos días de reflexión sobre la vergüenza y el honor.

En primer lugar, como hemos sido cubiertos por dentro y por fuera con el amor de Dios, debemos tener cuidado de no avergonzar a nadie. Necesitamos ser intencionales en honrar a nuestro prójimo porque él fue creado a imagen de Dios.

En segundo lugar, ¿qué hacemos cuando aquellos que, debido a nuestra forma de hablar, a nuestro color de piel, a nuestra raza, a nuestra etnia o a nuestra cultura pretenden manipularnos avergonzándonos? ¿Diremos: "Y ahora qué hacemos?" O, ya que estamos cubiertos por la gracia de Dios, imitaremos a Jesús, "el autor y

consumador de la fe, quien por el gozo que le esperaba sufrió la cruz y menospreció [la vergüenza] el oprobio, y se sentó a la derecha del trono de Dios" (Hebreos 12:2).

"Pues la Escritura dice: 'Todo aquel que cree en él, no será [avergonzado] defraudado.' Porque no hay diferencia entre el que es judío y el que no lo es, pues el mismo que es Señor de todos, es rico para con todos los que lo invocan, porque todo el que invoque el nombre del Señor será salvo" (Romanos 10:11–13). Amén.

Disciples Share Their Faith

Sermon by Alex Lahue

Lent Series: "Getting into Discipleship Shape"
Abiding Savior Lutheran Church, St. Louis
March 10, 2019

I was in the parking lot behind the dorms at Truman State University. I lived in Dobson Hall. Fun fact: the mascot of Dobson Hall is a toaster. One night, I was walking back to Dobson Hall, the home of the Toaster, with my friend who lived down the hallway from me. We'll call him Ben. Ben was a non-Christian or, as I like to put it, a not-yet-believer. I don't remember how the conversation started, but Ben started talking to me about the Christian faith. He seemed curious and wanted to know more about what I believed. Unexpectedly, I found myself in the middle of a spiritual conversation. I was surprised that Ben brought this opportunity to me without me ever going around looking for it. Yet, when it was my turn to give an answer for the hope that is in me, I asked Ben, "Have you ever tried reading the Bible?" "A little bit," Ben said. I responded, "Well you should try reading one of the Gospels. Matthew might be a good place to start."

A moment of awkward silence filled the crisp winter air, and we walked back to Dobson Hall as if we were walking out of church on Good Friday. I couldn't believe that I had responded that way. Sure, there are worse ways to share your faith, but this certainly wasn't my best day. Thankfully, more spiritual conversations came up with Ben and God communicated His Word to Ben through me, even with imperfect responses. Sadly, Ben still does not-yet-believe, but I pray that he will someday.

My response in that first spiritual conversation I had with Ben is probably one of my least favorite responses I've ever given to anyone about my faith.

Although, this last fall, I had another conversation with a not-yet-believer. I'll call

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her Sarah. I did not expect this question from Sarah, but one day she asked me, "What does your denomination believe?"

Once again, I was caught off guard. "Umm. . . well we believe the Bible is God's Word, so we take it literally but not literalistically. . . Like, for example, the Laws in the Book of Leviticus . . . some of them say stuff like if you steal from your neighbor you should be punished by death. . ."

Sarah cut me off and said, "It says that?!"

"Uhhh. . . I mean kind of. . . I think so. . . or something like that. . . but those were specific applications of the law for Israel at that specific time. . . and Jesus came and re-explained God's law. . ." I thought, *What in the world am I saying???!!!*

I don't know why I started overexplaining Levitical Law that day and using words like "literalistically." I've learned to just start with Jesus and how He's impacted my life.

I've struggled many times to share my faith, even with fellow believers. I've found myself caught off-guard, not knowing what to say, or confusing myself and other people. I've been embarrassed, afraid of creating conflict, scared of rejection. I've felt inadequate, I've doubted myself and God. I've thought things like, "I don't really want to talk with my family about spiritual stuff right now. It's exhausting or it's not as fun." And sometimes, I just don't even have God on my mind. I'm thinking about when I'm going to do the dishes, whose laundry to do first, what time *This Is Us* or *Walking Dead* is on TV.

In turns out that my experiences match up with that of many American Christians. In partnership with Lutheran Hour Ministries, the Barna Group published a book titled *Spiritual Conversations in the Digital Age*. It explores the trends of sharing one's faith in today's society.

According to Barna's research, the average American adult has only one spiritual conversation per year. That's not too surprising, I think. A spiritual conversation is any conversation in which you talk about God, religion, spirituality, faith, or even the lack of faith, with anyone, regardless of their belief—Christian or non-Christian.

So then, the average American is not talking about spiritual matters very often at all. What about Christians? Seventy-three percent of American Christians have fewer than ten spiritual conversations in a year. That is, Christians on average aren't even talking with other Christians about their faith. Wow! When I saw that, I was blown away, but then I thought about my own life and my own conversations. I realized that most of my conversations aren't about faith or about God.

What about you? How many spiritual conversations do you think you have in a year? Each month? Each week?

Even when we go to church, we can avoid spiritual conversations. We sit, we sing, we listen, we head out the door. Maybe we talk about our lives, but do we talk about God and what He's doing in our lives? Maybe we're not talking about our faith as much as we think we are.

The truth is, sharing our faith can be difficult. It doesn't always end well, and it doesn't always result in someone believing in Jesus, and that can be discouraging and heartbreaking. Perhaps we don't share our faith as often as we wish we did because it only reminds us of how messed up the world is and how broken we are.

Yet, despite our failures and the messed-upness of the world, it's still God's world. He's always working in this world, this nation, this city, this county, this church, and He's working in us too.

God wants us to share our faith with the people in our lives, believers and not-yet-believers alike. Our readings today show how God commanded His people to talk about their faith.

In the Book of Deuteronomy, Moses is clarifying and explaining for a new generation of Israelites the message that God gave to him on Mt. Sinai forty years before. The entire Book of Deuteronomy is one long spiritual conversation with Israel before they enter the Promised Land. It's a conversation that God started with Adam and Eve long ago.

It's the conversation where God said, I made you, I choose you, and I love you. God continued this conversation with Noah, and Abraham, and Moses—and with His people despite all the times they rebelled against Him.

In Deuteronomy 6, God communicates to Israel, "I want you to pass the faith on through the generations and tell stories to your kids about what I've done over and over again. I want you to have spiritual conversations throughout the day as much as possible so that you never forget, I made you, I choose you, I love you."

In verses 20–25, we experience the scene of a child asking his dad an honest question, "Why do you talk about God so much?" Can you imagine if someone asked you that question? The dad answers very simply by telling a story of God's work in their lives. We might call this today a Bible story.

This conversation of God's salvation continued through the celebration of Passover each year as the Israelites retold the stories of how God delivered them from Egypt to the Promised Land. It continued when the angels told the shepherds that a Savior had been born. It continued as a marginalized Samaritan woman spoke with Jesus at Jacob's well. The conversation continued through the Apostles, and the Early Church, and now through us.

So, if you've struggled to carry on this conversation God has brought you into. . . Hear now, O Christian, that for every time you may have bailed on an opportunity to

share your faith, God forgives you because He proclaimed His love perfectly for you on the cross. For every moment you forgot about God because you were thinking about the sports schedules, the recitals, the physical therapy, the student loans, the car payments, the new phone, God forgives you because He thought only about you as He rode into Jerusalem to die. For every time you didn't care about sharing your faith or didn't feel like sharing it so you didn't, God forgives you because He sees you as His perfect child through your Baptism. The God of the universe has begun this conversation with you, and He's not going to stop talking because He wants you to know that your sins and your failures are gone.

God has saved you through this great conversation, the Word, Jesus brought to you. He wants you to know that He values you more than anything else He's ever made, He's staying with you no matter what, and He's going to keep giving you all His grace and all of His Spirit and keep sending you out as His spiritual conversationalist. God says to you, "I made you. I choose you. I love you."

Paul quotes from Isaiah, "How beautiful (or more literally) how timely are the feet of those who bring the good news." God has saved us through the message, the conversation brought to us through Jesus Christ. We have heard and we have believed, and now He chooses us to carry that good news to the people in our lives.

Earlier in Romans 10, Paul mentions that to be saved forever, to be a part of God's family, one has to believe and confess Jesus as Lord, as God Himself. And we know that only the Holy Spirit can create faith. It's not our job to convert people. Only the Spirit can do that. But the Spirit does call us to share our faith with the people in our lives through spiritual conversations. And we've seen in Deuteronomy, in the Old Testament, and now in Romans that God transmits faith by conversation.

Think about the people in your life who told you about Jesus. My grandparents, Frank and Roseanne Lahue, told my dad Tom about Jesus. My mom's babysitter took her to church sometimes, and spiritual conversations and reflections came from those experiences. My parents, Tom and Linda Lahue, brought me to the waters of Baptism. Jim Greenly shared His faith with me the first time I came to Sunday School at Abiding Savior. John and Stacey Gates shared their faith with my family when they invited us to attend Abiding Savior for the first time. If this is how God chooses to preserve and grow His Church, then sharing our faith is critical.

In Romans 10, Paul explains that the ones who trust in God, who are calling on Him regularly, are the ones who are saved by grace through faith. God wants all people to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth, but the Word of God must be shared for this to happen. It's a matter of where someone's eternity will be spent. We don't like to think about hell very often because we can't explain it—it's uncomfortable. But the truth is that people who don't trust in Jesus are headed that direction. God is clear that those who do not believe will be condemned forever.

That's why those who do not yet believe need us to share our faith with them so there are fewer who have not yet heard.

A pastor once shared a story with me about a dear friend of his who was not yet a believer in Christ. This pastor and his friend spent a lot of time together just talking and hanging out and occasionally engaging in spiritual conversations. One day, this pastor's friend said, "You think I'm going to hell, don't you?" The pastor tried his best to explain lovingly that Jesus is the only way. But his friend got angry and left, and the relationship fell out. The conversations stopped, and all the pastor could do was pray for his friend. Years later, the pastor received a phone call. When he answered the phone, he recognized the voice of his old friend from years ago. His friend said, "I just called to let you know that today I was baptized and confirmed in the Lutheran Church." He hung up the phone after he said those words.

I want an ending like that for my friends Ben and Sarah. I want Ben and Sarah to know they are loved by Jesus and Jesus wants that for them too. Who are the not-yet-believers in your life that you desire to know Christ? Keep praying for them. Keep sharing your faith with them. **Keep the conversation going because sharing your faith is serving your neighbor.**

To paraphrase Matthew 28:16–20, "Disciples of Jesus share their faith and engage in spiritual conversations often." - Jesus of Nazareth, 33 AD . . . roughly

With the Spirit living inside of you, you can engage in spiritual conversations more often.

The research shows that people who think about God more, talk about God more. This might seem obvious, but people in America are thinking less and less about God these days. Barna's research shows that people who engage in spiritual disciplines like reading the Bible, praying, and going to church tend to engage in more spiritual conversations. The more you see your primary identity as a child of God, the more likely you are to engage in spiritual conversations. Also, the more you invest time and energy into preparing and expecting these conversations, the more likely you are to have them.

We can begin to prepare for these conversations through a number of resources. One great resource is Lutheran Hour Ministry's Spiritual Conversation Curve. You can learn this approach and more at LHMlearn.org. This Conversation Curve is a tool that helps people respond based on where other people are in their spiritual journey. Jesus did this all the time, and Paul tells us in Colossians 4 that our speech should be gracious and seasoned with salt so that we would know how to answer each person. This conversation curve guides you in deciding whether a person is unreceptive, receptive to the Gospel, or seeking the Gospel.

My friends Ben and Sarah were receptive to the Gospel. So, I was able to share my story of how God has worked in my life and move into telling THE story, which is God's story.

If someone is unreceptive to the Gospel, you just talk about life, your joys and your pains and building trust. **It's important to invest in relationships based on someone's value as a human being not based on their readiness to hear the Gospel.**

That's on an individual level. So, how can we as a body of believers foster environments where spiritual conversations are happening more often? Maybe we can make a point to talk about our faith with others when we attend church. In our homes, we can be willing to explore questions with our children, roommates, or guests—questions to which we might not know the answers. We can be willing to ask childlike questions like, "What's that?" or, as Lutherans like to put it, "What does this mean?" We can be patient with our co-workers and our friends, knowing that spiritual conversations take time. It's God's job to convert someone anyway. We don't have to come up with the best arguments for God's existence. We can simply share our story and God's story because God can defend Himself. We can even use technology to supplement our faith sharing because God can redeem anything—yes, even Facebook.

God has saved us through the spiritual conversation Jesus brought to us. He wants us to continue the conversation by sharing our faith. I want to challenge you to have one spiritual conversation with someone this week. In that conversation answer the question, "How have you seen God at work in your life or struggled to see God at work?" Would you have that conversation? It can be with anyone. Spiritual conversations pass on the faith, they bring good news, and they matter to God. Go forth, in the name of Jesus who started the conversation with you and share your faith more often. Amen.

Encountering Mission

Contemporary Approaches to Weddings, Funerals, and Burial Practices

John P. Juedes

Abstract: Church members and unchurched Christians have traditionally looked to the Church for help with milestone events such as funerals and weddings. However, people increasingly choose informal memorials, cremation and venue weddings instead of church-based ceremonies, reducing the opportunities for pastors to share the Gospel and connect people to the Church. Families who choose cremation are less likely to hold burial services or to invite pastors to lead informal memorials. Couples who choose venue weddings often use officiants who are not pastors. The transfer of milestone events from churches to secular settings and the increasing numbers of unchurched people call for contemporary approaches to ministry. Pastors may welcome funerals of unchurched people as evangelistic opportunities rather than approach funerals in the traditional way, primarily as Christian burials. Support groups provide a means to meet emotional needs. Deacons as well as pastors can officiate at memorial services and venue weddings when unchurched families feel more comfortable with this alternative. Churches may accept cremation as a godly Christian option and install columbariums for cremains, rather than dismiss cremation as a pagan practice. As people change how they commemorate rites of passage, the Church can adapt its ministry to bring Christ to people in times of need.

Funerals, weddings, and other milestone events have long been occasions for people to seek God's blessing upon important transitions in their lives, as well as for pastors to share the Gospel and connect people to the Church.

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However, the trend is that people are giving faith and the Church smaller parts in life's transitions. Meanwhile, some pastors and churches seem satisfied with being less involved with people at these times, especially if they have little or no church involvement. Both people and churches may be allowing societal fashion to influence how they show faithfulness to God and to ministry.

Many funerals and weddings have "moved" from the church to secular settings. People increasingly prefer to hold weddings and funerals outside the traditional church setting. Some people choose other venues because they offer things the church doesn't, or because of church restrictions on music or activities. The changes in where and how weddings and funerals are performed implicitly reduce the public place God has traditionally had in these transitions and hinder the Church's ability to incorporate people into the body of Christ.

Many funerals and weddings have "moved" from the church to secular settings.

As society becomes less religious, it increasingly marginalizes churches and pastors. Many Christians are embarrassed about making public testimony to Christ in settings where unbelievers are present. Many believers and near believers in Christ believe they can exercise their faith in God-pleasing ways without being involved in a church or involving the Church in funerals and weddings.

It is helpful to recognize these developments and consider contemporary approaches and methods to engage people with the Gospel in this pluralistic society.

Wide Acceptance of Cremation

Cremation of the body is an increasingly popular option. The National Funeral Directors Association's (NFDA) 2017 Cremation and Burial Report found that 50.2 percent of Americans chose cremation in 2016. The NFDA projects that the rate of cremation will reach 78.8 percent of deaths by 2035. In 2015, 32 percent of people who were cremated had no memorial service.

The decline of religious commitment and the lower cost of cremation are contributing to this change. The report notes that from 2012 to 2017, the proportion of Americans who feel it is very important to have religion as part of a funeral decreased from 49.5 percent to 39.5 percent.[1] Costs of cremation and burial vary widely depending on place and options. However, cremations cost from $800 to $3,000, while burials with casket and vault commonly range from $8,000 to $13,000.

The Church in the past resisted cremation, claiming that it was originally a heathen custom and implies a denial of the resurrection. The *Lutheran Cyclopedia* of 1954 noted that "sentiment among the more conservative bodies is still very strong against

the custom."[2] Some pastors today are in the awkward position of opposing cremation, while members of their congregations are choosing it.

In recent decades, most churches have moved toward acceptance of cremation, judging biblical arguments against it as weak and unconvincing. The Vatican's Holy Office (now the Congregation of the Doctrine of Faith) lifted the prohibition against cremation in 1963, although it opposes the scattering of ashes. This rule was incorporated into the revised Code of Canon Law of 1983 (Canon #1176) and the Order of Christian funerals.

Funerals Outside of the Church

More cremations have led to fewer traditional funerals at a church, mortuary, or cemetery because there is no need for a service of burial. People are creative in finding ways to bury, retain, or scatter the remains, also called cremains. Federal, state, and local laws govern how family members can do this, though few people are aware of the laws.

More cremations have led to fewer traditional funerals.

With fewer services of burial, there is less need to find a pastor or church to officiate. When families desire informal memorials, a friend or family member may be called upon to lead it, or they may search for an officiant on the internet.

Should Pastors Officiate at Funerals of People who Appear to Have Little or No Faith?

Consider this situation: Sean, a grandson of a now-deceased member of our congregation, called to ask if we would officiate at his mother's funeral. He says that she believed in God and allowed neighbors to take him to Sunday School as a child, but that she did not go to church or pray openly at home. We would like more background, but Sean can't think of any more details. Should we officiate at her funeral?

Pastors are sometimes asked to officiate at the funerals of unchurched people who seldom or never received the Means of Grace (the preached Word or the Lord's Supper) for decades, or perhaps their whole lives. Is it faithful ministry to accept, or to decline, invitations to officiate? What principles do, or should, pastors follow in deciding what to do in any given case?

There are two general approaches in deciding whom to bury and how to conduct funerals. We label them here as *affirm* and *evangelize*. While there is crossover between the two and few people think that one excludes the other, this article uses the terms to describe the different *emphases* in funeral theory and practice. The two

positions are described here in unambiguous ways, as a help in thinking through the issue.

Traditionally, seminaries have taken what we call here an *affirm* approach, instructing pastors to decline these invitations because "*Christian burial is for Christians*." The Concordia Theological Seminary (CTS) website offers an article by J. A. Petersen, which insists that pastors should refuse to "grant a Christian burial" to anyone who is theologically liberal or "willfully neglects" the Means of Grace. The author reasons that burial liturgies proclaim faith in Christ alone, which assures us of resurrection, and it is misleading to imply that such people will enjoy the resurrection.[3] He maintains that by burying a person, the pastor testifies to the faith of the deceased and *affirms* that the person will enjoy the resurrection of the faithful. By declining to bury a person, the pastor testifies that the person in all likelihood did not have saving faith, warning survivors not to follow a similar path. The author admits that "we can only judge by that which we see," and that final judgment belongs to God. However, he states that in "Christian burial, the pastor does pass judgment; he pronounces him a Christian, calls him blessed," and so it would be untruthful to grant Christian burial to those who showed little sign of faith.

A recent CTS video by Professor Richard Warneck also opposes funerals of apparent unbelievers. He allows that some pastors officiate at such funerals in order to present the Gospel but does not refute their practice in detail as Petersen does.[4] Applying the *affirm* principle, Warneck and Petersen would not officiate at Sean's mother's funeral.

These pastors consider faithful ministry in funerals to be *affirmation* that the deceased had hope in Christ. They indirectly reinforce unchurched people's tendency to exclude God from their lives when they decline to officiate at funerals of people whom they consider to have lacked faith. This practice adopts a *defensive reaction* to growing unbelief in the world. The model is James's making a doctrinal statement in the controlled setting of a church conference (Acts 15:13–21).

Other pastors consider faithful funeral ministry to be *evangelizing* ministry and think "*funerals are for evangelism*." They consider a memorial service to be an evangelistic opportunity to present Law and Gospel to unbelievers, who seldom or never hear the Word of God. They see it not so much as a Christian burial, but as a secular opportunity to preach Jesus Christ at a time when people may be more open to the message because of their grief and fear of death. (Most cemeteries are secular settings in that they are owned by corporations and embrace atheists and all religions. Homes are secular settings when families do not practice the faith or have Bibles or Christian objects.) The pastors alter the service accordingly, structuring it more as an evangelistic message than as a Christian burial that affirms that the deceased was a believer and will enjoy the resurrection. They reinforce unchurched people's desire to look to God at end of life. This practice adopts an *offensive engagement* of growing

unbelief in the world. The model is Paul's proclaiming the unknown God and resurrection in Christ in the contested setting of Areopagus (Acts 17:18–34). Applying the *evangelizing* principle, these pastors would likely officiate at Sean's mother's funeral.

The evangelistic approach is a "messier" experience than the affirmation approach. The affirmation approach generally requires that the family cede to the pastor complete control over how and where funerals and weddings are conducted and who speaks (usually just the pastor). The evangelizing approach generally gives up some control and reluctantly expects some mixed messages in exchange for the opportunity to preach the Gospel.

Both approaches have uncomfortable aspects. The affirmation approach sometimes gives "Christian burial" to people who had "just enough" sign of faith (perhaps yielding to their families) or denies burial without truly knowing people's hearts. The evangelistic approach preaches salvation in Christ alone, but may imply approval of the deceased's lack of visible faith by officiating.

A funeral may become a bridge by which people come into the Church. Every church has some members who joined after a death in the family, and evangelistic funerals aim for this. Some pastors consciously plan a Christian burial for devout believers that affirms confidence in their resurrection but present a more explicitly evangelistic message at memorials of apparent unbelievers.

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Venue Weddings

"Destination," or "venue," weddings at resorts and vacation spots have gained attention. But the bigger change is that "venue weddings" are increasingly replacing church weddings. Young adults commonly want weddings in attractive settings, such as parks, golf courses, vineyards, hotels, and retreats. They are often set in nature, such as mountains, beaches, lakes, and the countryside. Venues provide impressive settings for both ceremony and reception with fine dinners and alcoholic drinks.

The desire for exceptional services is one reason weddings have become expensive and profitable. The average cost of a wedding in 2019 is $29,858, although it varies widely by location.[5] One result of living in a wealthy society is a demand for fine things, which has driven up the price of weddings, college, automobiles, homes, and other products.

Venue weddings are favored by many religious young adults who are regular in worship and Bible study, not just the nonreligious.

This author has a total of fifteen married children, nieces, and nephews. All were raised in the Church by devout parents, in five states, and the great majority appear, until now, to have active faith themselves. Not many were rooted in one church at the time of their weddings, mainly because of the mobile nature of young adults.

Even though they have a church background, thirteen of the fifteen (including this pastor's children) were married in places other than a church, including a golf course, a park, a retreat, a hotel, a camp, and a bed and breakfast. A large number of these weddings were not officiated by pastors.

There is a growing and large number of nonreligious young adults today who are unlikely to look for a church and pastor to officiate at their weddings. In addition, two generations of Christians have been brought up in Calvary Chapel- and "seeker"-type churches that look like auditoriums and warehouses. Traditional churches may seem alien to them, and they may see church art as signs of religious error, based in part on Roman Catholic excesses like statues of saints.

There is an ironic contradiction in how people in our prosperous society judge financial cost. On the one hand, we are willing to spend ever larger amounts for weddings, but choose cremation because we are unwilling to spend comparatively much smaller amounts on burials.

Officiants at Venue Weddings

A minority of venue weddings are served by pastors, partly because a smaller percentage of young adults are active in churches, compared to their parents' generation. Many pastors hesitate to do weddings outside of the church, especially for couples who are not members, for a variety of reasons. Pastors may feel used by couples who are "shopping" for wedding vendors. Wedding planners and venues may recommend officiants who will provide an emotional experience that appeals to diverse wedding parties, rather than clergy who offer a Christian ceremony. The lack of a Christ-centered wedding may affirm a couple's slide away from faith and the Church rather than toward it. While ministry to couples before and after weddings is more significant than the weddings themselves, ongoing ministry happens more often when pastors and churches are involved in the weddings than when they are not.

Engaging People in Transition

Transitional and stressful times in life can serve to reignite faith and fellowship with other believers or, conversely, result in drifting from faith and fellowship. People are often open to ministry at critical times such as birth, marriage, change of residence, loss, tragedy, and death.

The increase in venue weddings and cremation means that fewer people come to the Church for assistance at marriage and death. This calls for the Church to actively engage people at these times rather than passively wait for them to come to church and the pastor. This is a shift in orientation from pastoral care to evangelistic outreach.

This calls for the Church to actively engage people at these times rather than passively wait.

Here are methods churches are increasingly using to engage people evangelistically at transitional times.

Support Groups for People in Transition

Support groups and classes enable churches to offer comprehensive care during transitional times. GriefShare and DivorceCare are thirteen-week classes that use video, homework, and discussion to help people work through emotions and life changes.[6] The length of the classes, friendships that develop among church members, nonmembers, and church leaders, and even a church location can create a bond between nonmembers and the church. Ideally, the classes are led by church members who have faced grief or divorce themselves, which helps make them effective leaders and releases the pastor for another activity.

Classes like The Marriage Course[7] are structured like GriefShare, but they add dinners and replace group discussions with private discussions between each couple. Such classes are more effective at helping people than officiating at funerals and weddings, and they can be effective evangelistic tools, especially when offered on a regular schedule.

Deacons Officiate at Funerals and Weddings

Deacons often officiate at funerals and venue weddings. People who will not approach a church or pastor often will invite a deacon to lead a service, especially when an unchurched person knows a certified deacon.

While deacons are new to the Missouri Synod, historic churches, including all Lutheran churches in Europe, have centuries of experience with them. The historic church thought that deacons, unlike pastors, have one foot in the church and one in the community, because deacons commonly hold (or have held) a secular job, whereas pastors can seem less approachable, particularly in churches that emphasize the status of the office of pastor or require extensive education. Because of their place as a bridge into the community, deacons were assigned parts of the liturgy that reflect this status, such as prayers, the reading of the Gospel, and giving the cup in Holy Communion, "Thus, the office of deacon represented the link between the altar and the world."[8]

An informal poll among deacons in the Pacific Southwest District several years ago revealed that about forty percent of the deacons had officiated at funerals, and nearly ten percent had officiated at weddings. Other districts with a high number of preaching deacons also find that many deacons officiate at funerals. Some states prohibit unordained people from officiating at weddings and so do not allow deacons to do so, even though they have more claim to be ministers than people who simply purchased internet ordinations.

This poll reflects a very limited sample and was taken in a district in which there are a high number of preaching deacons. Most of them work in churches with their pastors rather than in churches where they provide primary pastoral care. Nonetheless, the poll reveals the growing ministry of deacons.

Deacons, like pastors, approach weddings and funerals as opportunities to present the Gospel and Christ Jesus, not as friends or employees paid to deliver an emotional ceremony. Classes that train deacons to preach and lead worship can or do include instruction on wedding and funeral services.

Deacons are committed to supplement and enlarge, not replace, the ministry of pastors. Online training in preaching and worship is available from the Mission Training Center, which is based at Concordia University, Portland.[9]

It should not be surprising that many unchurched people welcome scriptural Christian messages at weddings and funerals. George Barna found that three-quarters of unchurched people hold some conservative Christian beliefs, including that the miracles of the Bible actually took place, Jesus was born of a virgin, and the Bible is the literal Word of God. Twenty-eight percent said they are moderately or absolutely committed Christians.[10] Many left their church because of some kind of problem or conflict and hesitated to find another church, in the same way that divorced people may hesitate to marry again. When asked to officiate, the deacons and pastors should describe the Christian nature of the service so that the family can choose to accept or decline this type of ceremony.

Are Deacons Pioneers or Trespassers?

Are deacons who preach and officiate at funerals and weddings trespassing on pastors' territory, or enlarging ministry as faithful servants? Are they evangelistic pioneers, taking advantage of opportunities to preach the Gospel off church grounds, or violating church law that only ordained pastors may preach?

Supporters of preaching deacons show that Stephen and Philip, two of the seven deacons of Acts 6–8, preached evangelistically and baptized. The Missouri Synod has a history of unordained men, such as *Besuchern* (visitors) and *Reisepredigern* (traveling preachers), who preached as needed.[11] Many Reformation-era churches were served by unordained preachers, and large churches depended on unordained

preachers to help meet the demand of five hundred sermons a year.[12] The Confessions and C. F. W. Walther identify deacons as a kind of regularly called clergy distinct from pastors.[13] Deacons are restoring to the Church a type of Lutheran theology and ministry that the Missouri Synod has largely forgotten.

Deacons take advantage of opportunities to preach the Gospel at funerals of unchurched people who would likely not invite a pastor to preach nor hear the Gospel from secular officiants. This is one way that deacons expand and supplement, not supplant, the ministry of pastors.

Cremation or Burial?

It is important to avoid offending people unnecessarily, especially at sensitive times, such as funerals. We mustn't diminish the Gospel message and hope of the resurrection by focusing on adiaphora (things which are neither required nor forbidden), such as the means of disposing of the body. Any method which is respectful of the remains is in keeping with the scriptural teaching that each human being—body and soul—is created in God's image.

Churches historically have often buried people in cemeteries on church grounds and interred well-known people inside churches. This is now rare, especially in urban areas.

However, churches are increasingly building columbaria on church grounds. A columbarium is a group of niches within a garden or a wall of brick or stone that contain the cremains of the departed. Columbaria range from small gardens to large mausoleums, such as the 4,746-niche installation under the Cathedral of our Lady of the Angels in Los Angeles. Columbaria can be home-made, site-built, or built off-site and delivered to churches.

Columbaria must have permits and follow federal, state, and local laws. Congregations establish their own bylaws to govern their columbaria. Rules may require all burial services to be done by church staff and detail who may and may not be interred there. Columbaria and burial ceremonies provide a direct link between families and the church. Columbaria in church settings can provide as distinct a Christian witness as cemeteries.

Is Cremation a Godly Practice?

By building columbaria, a church states that cremation is as godly a practice as burial. There are several traditional arguments against cremation: Jews buried their dead, and God buried Moses (Dt 34:6). Some argue that cremation is tied to Hinduism and some forms of paganism, or that it may be an atheist's way to spite faith in God and the resurrection, or that it desecrates the body. There is also a nebulous feeling that God somehow needs a dead body in order to raise it (in the way Jesus and Lazarus

were raised), which isn't possible if it has been reduced to ashes and scattered. Also, Orthodox Jewish law forbids cremation.

Critics of cremation cite the examples of Hebrew patriarchs, including Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, and David, who buried rather than cremated their dead.[14] The key question is whether ancient Hebrew practice should be raised to the level of moral requirement and prohibition for Christians. If so, we are in the uncomfortable position of having to accept many patriarchal practices that we believe to be immoral or unwise.

Several patriarchs were polygamous; Abraham married his half-sister. Genesis never even implies that Judah acted immorally when he visited a prostitute. Abraham arranged his son's marriage. Abraham required his family and servants (or slaves) to be circumcised. Later Jews were required to obey Mosaic Law, including dietary restrictions.

Patriarchal and Jewish practice is informative, but not normative. Early Christians accepted some Old Covenant beliefs and practices but rejected or did not continue others. Many aspects of the lives of the patriarchs reflect social mores of their time, not spiritual and moral requirements for all God's people.

Critics of Cremation Confuse Destruction by Fire with Dignified Disposal of a Corpse

There are only two examples in the Bible of cremation as an alternative to burial by either Jews or Gentiles, and both are pictured as honorable or reasonable. Saul's body was burned by faithful Israelites to *prevent* desecration by enemies (1 Sm 31:8–13), which was seen as a valiant and honorable act. Amos 6:8–10 mentions cremation but does not oppose it. In context, Amos predicts large numbers of deaths during the siege of a city ("I will deliver up the city," 6:8) and the necessity of cremating bodies, because it would not be possible to access a cemetery outside the city wall.

Critics of cremation confuse dignified burning of a human body as part of funeral practice with destruction of objects or people by incineration.

By comparison, imagine criminals who invade a house, kill its residents, and burn the bodies, house, and property. Is this an example of malicious and complete destruction of a household, or a warning not to cremate bodies of those who die of natural causes?

Critics of cremation commonly cite Amos 2:1 as a prime example of God's condemning cremation. Amos describes the sins of Moab and God's fitting retribution: "because he burned to ashes the bones of Edom's king. . . . I will send fire on Moab that will consume the fortresses. . . . I will destroy her ruler" (vv. 1–3). Did Moab sin by cremating Edom's king after he died, or by destroying its king and kingdom?

The parallel construction of the passage shows that God's punishment fits Moab's crime. God does not threaten to cremate Moab's king after he dies, just as Moab cremated Edom's king instead of burying him. God's promised fire is not cremation but the destruction of Moab's ruler, fortresses, and capital city by war. Thus, it is better to understand cremation as a proper alternative to burial than as the destruction of something by fire as found in this biblical account.

Achan's body and his stolen wealth were burned as a means of removing accursed objects from Israel (Jo 7:1, 11–15, 24–25), in the same way that the accursed residents and property of Jericho and some other cities were previously burned (Jo 6:17–21; Dt 13:12–17). Jews in the past, like orthodox Jews today, sometimes burned or destroyed unclean things that could not be purified by water (Lv 13:52). Burning did not *cause* defilement; rather, it was used to *remove* defilement. By contrast, leaving a corpse exposed defiled the land (Dt 21:22–23).

If Christians are forbidden to cremate, it is surprising that the Bible does not explicitly forbid cremation, and that the Torah is surprisingly thin on laws regarding funeral practices and disposal of the body.

One argument against cremation amounts to "if pagans do it, then Christians should not," citing early Christians who buried as a testimony against Romans who cremated. But this leaves Christians with the question of which pagan religion to oppose. Should Christians bury because Hindus and most ancient Romans cremate—or should they cremate because ancient Egyptians, Muslims, and Mormons bury? When ancient Hebrews buried, did they implicitly affirm the theological reasons for burial held by Egyptians? Doing things differently than unbelievers may be beneficial at times, but it shouldn't be a primary guide for our beliefs and practices.

There is a common legend that atheists cremate in order to spite God and resurrection, and so Christians must reject cremation in order to avoid denying the faith. This is a little like saying that Christians should avoid going into space because a Russian cosmonaut asserted that God doesn't exist because he didn't see God in space. A few atheists like nineteenth-century Italian nationalist, Giuseppe Garibaldi, insisted on cremation, though he probably was opposing the temporal power of the Roman Catholic Church more than rejecting faith. Most atheists today are buried, which doesn't suggest that they believe in resurrection, while others choose cremation for the same reason many theists do: because it's practical.

The vague idea that God somehow needs the old body in order to resurrect it is fuzzy thinking. God recreates the body anew at the resurrection, not resuscitates it, whether it was cremated, eaten by animals, or decayed in a grave. God need only remember our DNA in

God recreates the body anew at the resurrection, not resuscitates it.

order to recreate our bodies from scratch, in much the same way as He created Adam.

North Americans today (with few exceptions) consider cremation to be an honorable way to dispose of the body, unconnected with religion, and don't think it conflicts with any belief in an afterlife. (First-century Romans who cremated still believed in a paradise-like afterlife, the Elysian fields.) The Church need not hold on to burial as a form of witness to the resurrection. In India, where cremation is common, Christian burial may serve as a witness to the resurrection, especially when Christian testimonies are engraved on tombstones. This author found it a moving experience to walk through a Christian crematory in the spiritual darkness of Delhi.

Pragmatic Disposal of the Body

People who oppose cremation point to Abraham, who "buried" his wife Sarah in the cave at Mahpelah (Genesis 23), and state that this is a model for Christians to follow.

But did Hebrews consciously choose caves over cremation because it was morally and spiritually required, or because it was cheap, convenient, and effective? Did Abraham deliberately reject cremation to set himself apart from idolatry?

Saying that Abraham "buried" Sarah is a misnomer. Unlike modern burial, he didn't bury her body in the earth; he placed it in a cave. Does this imply that he rejected *both* burial and cremation as pagan practices, choosing a cave as the moral alternative? The Canaanites from whom Abraham bought the cave understood his desire to place the body in a cave, because they did the same. The Egyptians, Canaanites, and Philistines who often dominated parts of the land of Israel also buried or used caves.[15] Abraham followed, not rejected, local pagan practice. There is no record in the Bible of pagans in Palestine following a regular practice of cremating their dead. Hebrew prophets never cited cremation as one of the many reasons they opposed idolatry.

Caves were commonly used in the land of Israel as burial places because they were cheap, easy, and convenient. It wasn't necessary to dig graves in the hard rock of the earth, because a cave was already a hole. Hillsides in Israel are riddled with caves because its limestone is easily eroded by rainwater, and archaeologists have discovered cave cemeteries. The tomb Jesus' body was placed in was likely part of a cemetery built from caves along the hillside of Golgotha. Same-day burial was feasible for most people because the family cave tomb was always ready.

When bodies decomposed, bones were placed to the side of the tomb in a pit inside the cave, or, in New Testament times, were placed in a bone box called an "ossuary." Other bodies from the same extended family were added to the grave when needed. A small cave served an extended family for generations; thus, new graves did not have to be constantly dug and cemeteries expanded.

What would it have cost Abraham to cremate a body? It requires about 220 pounds of wood[16] and three hours to cremate a human body, because it is 65 percent water. Even in New Testament times, cremation would have been costly and difficult due to deforestation, the arid climate, and large number of deaths in Israel's population of two million.

From a practical and technological standpoint, the situation is now reversed. Cremation has become practical, and burial is becoming impractical. The number of deaths in huge urban areas add to the rarity and cost of available land for grave sites. Graves take up a lot of space due to the casket and vault; they are not reused as caves were.

Cremation has become much more feasible due to the efficiency and low cost of natural gas. Huge amounts of wood or coal would be needed to cremate large populations, and the disposal of the ashes of the fuel itself would be a problem. Natural gas has a much smaller carbon footprint, leaves no fuel ash, and transportation is easy.

The Hebrews used caves or dug holes for burial because it was practical, not because the Torah and morality demanded it, and Americans choose cremation for the same reason.

The Hebrews used caves or dug holes for burial because it was practical, not because the Torah and morality demanded it.

It is inaccurate Bible interpretation to insist that the pragmatic practice of placing bodies in caves or tombs is a divine command and a moral and spiritual necessity.

Why You Burn or Bury Is the Critical Issue

The purpose, method, and circumstances of burning a body are more important than the actual burning, just as the purpose, method, and circumstances of *burying* a body are more important than the burial itself. The word *cremation* is used to distinguish honorable disposition of a body from incineration, which is destroying trash. Crematories allow families to hold funeral rites in the crematory as part of the cremation. On the whole, North Americans consider cremation an honorable alternative to burial.

The laws and practices ruling cremation are different from those governing incineration, in order to preserve dignity. Crematories are designed to cremate only one body at a time, and cremation of multiple bodies is illegal, in order to honor the individual. Exceptions are sometimes made for stillborn twins or mother and baby who die in childbirth.

Critics of cremation deride it as a violent process, which is a disgusting and dishonorable treatment of the human corpse. How does natural decomposition

compare? A corpse discolors, bloats, and then ruptures as a result of the buildup of gases. Maggots feed on the flesh, tissues liquefy, fluids froth, and gasses vent through natural openings and ruptures, with putrid odors. If given the choice of watching either cremation or decomposition, most people would probably choose cremation as less repulsive.

What Makes Disposal of a Body Dishonorable?

Respect versus shame is the key issue regarding treatment of the human body, whether alive or dead. When ancient Hebrews and Christians buried or placed bodies in caves, they were concerned with respect and shame, not with what the pagans did. Exposure, abuse, ridicule, and neglect bring shame to the body. When alive, a person was shamed by being stripped naked in public, shaved, abused, beaten, defaced, or dismembered. The shaming was done as punishment for crime, or more often as an act of war. After death, a body was shamed by being exposed for ridicule, as Saul and criminals were (1 Sm 31:8–13; Dt 21:22–23), or exposed to the elements, where they would decompose (Ps 53:5) or be eaten by animals (defaced). Neglected bodies were shamed because there was no one to honorably dispose of them (Ps 53:5).

Respect versus shame is the key issue.

There are a few exceptions to the rule of shame by exposure, abuse, ridicule, and neglect. For example, defacement is accepted for a higher purpose when it is used in medical organ transplant, and autopsy or dissection may be done to preserve the lives of others.

Cremation, ancient and modern, is not shameful, because bodies are treated with dignity and respect; they are not exposed, abused, ridiculed, or neglected, and families consider it respectful.

Not all burial of bodies is considered honorable or acceptable. When a murderer buries the body, it is dishonorable because it hides the crime and prevents honoring the dead. Mass burial in war or genocide is dishonorable because it is an act of war and doesn't honor the dead. Korah and those who rebelled against God with him were suddenly buried in earth (Nm 16:31–33). Just as it is improper to use these examples of dishonorable burial as reasons to prohibit all burial, it is incorrect to use examples of dishonorable burning of the dead as reasons to prohibit cremation.

The Value of Burial

The New Testament uses the burial (planting) of a seed and the burial of the body as illustrations of the resurrection. Just as a seed is buried but springs to new and better life, so the body is buried and springs to new and better resurrection life (1 Cor 15:36–

38). Just as Christ was buried and raised, so His disciples will be as well. These are powerful images of the resurrection to reflect on at funerals and Bible studies.

However, a traditional illustration of resurrection is the phoenix which rises from the ashes. This mythological bird dies in flames, only to be reborn from the ashes; and Romans, such as Pliny the Elder, referred to this myth. Nonetheless, Christians since Clement, the bishop of Rome and martyr, used the phoenix to illustrate resurrection in general and Christ's resurrection in particular. The phrase in the funeral service, "Ashes to ashes, dust to dust in the certain hope of the resurrection" may echo this symbol. The phoenix symbol uses cremation as an essential part of the image of death and resurrection, rather than as an argument against resurrection.

Adapt Ministry to Fit Circumstance

One strength of the Christian Church over the centuries is its ability to adapt ministry and fellowship to fit circumstance. The Church has prospered under dictatorship and democracy, when legal and illegal, when favored by society and when rejected, when there are many openings for ministry and evangelism, and when they are few. Faithful ministry looks a little different in one society than it does in another.

As people change how they commemorate transitions, such as the beginning of a marriage and the end of a life, the Church can adapt its ministry to bring faith in Christ Jesus to bear in providing loving assistance, at times of joy and at times of deep need.

Endnotes

[1] "NFDA Cremation and Burial Report Shows Rate of Cremation at All-time High," NFDA News Releases, National Funeral Directors Association, July 18, 2017, http://www.nfda.org/news/media-center/nfda-news-releases/id/2511/nfda-cremation-and-burial-report-shows-rate-of-cremation-at-all-time-high.

[2] Erwin Lueker, ed., *Lutheran Cyclopedia* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1954), 271.

[3] J. A. Peterson, "Christian Burial," *Concordia Theological Quarterly,* July 1934. Posted on the Concordia Theological Seminary website, http://media.ctsfw.edu/Item/GetFullText/5624. This detailed case against funerals of apparent unbelievers explicitly rejects the practice of officiating in order to present the Gospel. It condemns cremation, except in rare cases of expediency, and refuses to bury those who are cremated. Almost the entire article describes when to *refuse* to officiate at funerals.

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Raising Eutychus: A Model for Youth Ministry (Acts 20:7–12)

Vernon E. Wendt Jr.

Abstract: In Acts 20:7–12, when the apostle Paul raises the youth, Eutychus, from the dead, we have an opportunity to consider this miracle allegorically. If God can restore "the chief of sinners" (Paul) from spiritual death and use him to revive Eutychus after people had pronounced him dead, then He can certainly use us to revive spiritually the youth of this generation, no matter how bleak the situation may appear.

Multiple studies on youth ministry have highlighted the fact that forty to fifty percent of youth drift from God and the faith community after they graduate from high school. Around half of them may return to church after they get married and have children, but that still leaves a large percentage who eventually abandon the faith. Even more alarming is the notion by Ken Ham et al., in their book, *Already Gone*, that Lutheran youth are already "lost" in their hearts and minds in elementary, middle, and high school—not in college as many assume.[1] In order to reverse these trends, the apostle Paul, in his raising Eutychus from the dead, provides a model for effective youth ministry. The model includes the following: making youth ministry a priority, modeling humility, identifying with youth, being an advocate for youth, recognizing youth as an essential part of the Body of Christ, and preventing spiritual slumber.

Making Youth Ministry a Priority

Acts 20:10 begins with the words, "But Paul went down," implying that Paul descended from the place where he was preaching in order to minister to Eutychus. By interrupting his preaching to tend to Eutychus, Paul demonstrates how we are to make youth a priority, especially when it comes to their spiritual health. As C. F. W. Walther once told his seminary class, "You cannot use your time to better advantage than by

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serving well the young people of the congregation."[2] Youth ministry ought to be a priority of every church body and its congregations, as well as of each individual church member.

Modeling Humility

Paul demonstrates the humility we are to have in ministering to our youth when he ministered to Eutychus. The Greek word *epépesen* (translated "bent over"), used in the phrase *katabás dé o Paûlos epépesen autôi* (but Paul went down and bent over him), brings to mind similar gestures made by Elijah when he ministered to the widow of Zarephath's son (1 Kgs 17:21–22) and by Elisha when he ministered to the widow of Shunam's son (2 Kgs 4:34). The only other place *epépesen* appears in this exact grammatical form and nuance of meaning is in the parable of the prodigal son at the reunion between the father and his younger son (Lk 15:20). In this particular context, *epépesen* can be translated "he threw himself on him" and implies a loss of dignity, since dignified people are not supposed to hurl themselves at others, especially a father of a rebellious son. Similarly, we are to minister to our youth in a spirit of humility. As Philippians 2:3–4 says, "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others."[3] Some of the ways we can ensure this spirit of humility is through (1) servanthood, (2) vulnerability, (3) commitment, (4) affirming God's call, and (5) remembering our time in history.

We are to minister to our youth in a spirit of humility.

1. Servanthood

Romans 12:1–2 encourages us to be servants of all, including our youth, as St. Paul through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit writes, "I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to the world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect." Based on the mercies of God available to believers in Christ, the Apostle appeals to Christians to surrender themselves to God as living sacrifices. Essential to ministry with our youth through servanthood, and in keeping with living a Spirit-controlled and Word-filled life, is the need for daily renewing the mind in the truths of God's Word, along with being in regular worship and group Bible study.

2. Vulnerability

On a practical level, one way we can demonstrate humility to our youth is to share some of the similar struggles that we had when we were their age, e.g., getting cut from the basketball team, failing algebra class, being turned down by your big crush. And while we don't have to go into detail about our sins, the more vulnerable we are in confessing our need for a Savior, the less our youth will hide from us, as they in turn confess their own struggles. A visible way of doing this is by being in regular worship with our youth, as together we confess that we are sinners in need of a Savior and receive Christ's forgiveness in the words of Absolution, the message of the Gospel, and in the Lord's Supper. As a role model, it's important to remind our youth not to imitate us in our sins, but to follow us as we follow Christ (cf. 1 Cor 11:1).

3. Commitment

Youth ministry is challenging, requiring significant commitment to the task and benefiting from constant prayer. Just as Paul was fully committed to the well-being of Eutychus, any decision to leave youth ministry should be considered just as carefully and prayerfully as entering it. The case of John Mark found in Acts 13 offers hope for anyone who has forsaken his call to youth ministry or plans to do so. Through maturity and the encouragement of his cousin, Barnabas, the Holy Spirit was able to mold John Mark into a champion of the Early Church. He eventually became a beloved companion to Paul, who had once rejected him (2 Tm 4:11); and the Colossian saints were asked to be receptive to him (Col 4:10). The same Holy Spirit can restore dropouts to be champions in youth ministry, as they grow and mature in the faith.

4. Affirming God's Call

While there are numerous joys in youth ministry, there are also challenges that can cause the weak-hearted to give up in despair. Hence, when making the solemn promise to serve the youth of their congregation in the rite of installation, church workers include the essential addendum, "with the help of God," thereby humbly acknowledging their dependence upon the One who called them to this task. Through prayer and devotion, we who minister with youth—ordained, commissioned, or lay—should regularly affirm that the Holy Spirit has led them into youth ministry. In addition, the affirmation of the local congregation can reassure that God is with and for us in our ministry with youth. Those who have received a public call by the church to youth ministry can look to their call document as a visible reminder of the blessing found in Hebrews 13:20–21: "Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that

which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen."

5. Recognizing Our Time in History

The story of Esther accentuates our own unique time on this earth when her Uncle Mordecai says to her, "who knows for such a time as this one have you been born?" (Est 4:14). If Esther had been born years earlier, she would have been "old and gray." On the other hand, had she been born years later, she would have been just a child. But in God's providence, Esther had been born at such a time in history so that, as a young woman, she was able to win King Xerxes' beauty contest. Consequently, she was able to use her position as queen to thwart Haman's plan to destroy God's people. Similarly, God has raised us up to have an impact on young lives during our lifetimes while we have been blessed with the maturity and health to do so.

Identifying with Youth

After bending over Eutychus, Paul embraced him in his arms. The Greek words *kaí sumperilabón,* translated "and taking him in his arms," parallels the raising of dead youths by Elijah and Elisha, as well as the welcoming of the prodigal son's father. Elijah stretched himself over the widow of Zarephath's son three times (1 Kgs 17:20); Elisha lay on the widow of Shunamite's son in such a way that his mouth was on his mouth, his eyes on his eyes, and his hands on his hands (2 Kgs 4:34); and the father of the prodigal son "ran and embraced and kissed him" (Lk 15:20). Correspondingly, we can identify with today's youth in our (1) communication style, (2) love, (3) sympathy, (4) commonalties, and (5) authenticity.

1. Communication Style

Just as Paul embraced Eutychus at his level, so those who minister to youth should attempt to identify with them at their level, so that they do not come across as intruders into their world or as looking down upon them as their superior. As 1 Peter 5:3 advises, "All of you, clothe yourself with humility toward one another, because, 'God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.'" Or as Paul described his means to "win as many as possible": "I have become all things to all people" (1 Cor 9:22). We may not be as demonstrative as Elijah, Elisha, the father of the prodigal son, or St. Paul, but we can

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seek to identify with our youth in the style in which we communicate with them. Our facial expressions, eye signals, mouth movements, hand gestures, positions of our arms and legs, and posture can make a huge difference in how we are received or not received by our youth.

2. Love

First Corinthians 13 describes the loving characteristics that we demonstrate when identifying with the youth to whom we are ministering: "Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends. . . ." This chapter in the Bible, commonly referred to as "the great love chapter," begins with the verse, "If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal." To paraphrase this verse in terms of youth ministry: "If you are cool, trendy, hip, and know all the latest theories on youth ministry, but have not love, then your actions may speak so loudly that your youth cannot hear you." When Jesus wept over the death of His friend Lazarus, the people marveled, saying, "see how he loved him" (Jn 11:36). May the love we have for our youth similarly cause people to marvel.

3. Sympathy

In our ministry with youth, we are to avoid two extremes when ministering to their needs. One extreme is to choose not to get involved in their lives, like the Levite and the priest in the parable of the Good Samaritan, who, when they saw the man who was beaten and robbed on the road to Jericho, passed by on the other side (cf. Lk 10:30–32). The other extreme is to become so involved in our youths' lives that we end up overidentifying with their feelings and characteristics to the point that we become just as overwhelmed as they are. We are to draw our strength by clinging to the cross of Jesus, while showing empathy to the youth to whom we are ministering. Together, we invite them to join us in looking to the cross of Christ as a sure anchor in life's storms.

In our ministry with youth, we are to avoid two extremes when ministering to their needs. One extreme is to choose not to get involved in their lives. . . . The other extreme is to become so involved in our youths' lives that we end up overidentifying with their feelings and characteristics to the point that we become just as overwhelmed as they are.

4. Commonalities

One of the comforts of Jesus' incarnation is that "we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin" (Heb 4:15). Jesus knows what it's like to be human in this fallen world, because He's been here before. Likewise, youth workers can identify with their youth, because at one time they were also youths. In addition, even though we may be from different generations, there are commonalities we share as human beings that can serve as bridges to any gaps that may exist. No matter what their age, people are seeking the answers to life's big questions: Who am I? Where am I from? Why am I here? What am I supposed to do? Where am I going?, as well as the "smaller" questions: Why don't I have a girlfriend (or boyfriend)? or Why don't my parents understand me?

5. Authenticity

Youth leaders are to lead their youth to trust that Jesus meets them right where they are, loves them as they are, and desires to be a part of their lives right now—not when they become as cool, holy, and amazing as their leaders. Consequently, the more hip, cool, holy, or amazing that we present ourselves, the more distant our youth will tend to feel from us. By living and sharing our faith in an authentic way, even though we may not necessarily be considered "cool and hip" by society's standards, we are demonstrating to our youth that the Lord isn't just a trend but "an ever-present help in trouble" (Ps 46:1). It can be something as simple as praying for God's blessing on a meal in a public place, such as a fast-food restaurant.

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Being an Advocate for Youth

While Paul was ministering to the lifeless Eutychus, he could have focused only on Eutychus. Instead, he addressed the crowd by saying, "Do not be alarmed, for his life is in him" (Acts 20:10). Paul's addressing the crowd parallels the Lord's raising of Jairus's daughter, that is, before He tells her to arise, He says to the mourners, "Why are making a commotion and weeping? The child is not dead but sleeping" (Lk 8:52). Similarly, the prodigal son's father told his servants, "Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet" (Lk 15:22).

From our allegorical perspective, while others may have been caught up in Eutychus' fall, the height from which he fell, and the horrible sight of his lifeless body, Paul saw beyond this. He saw a life that his Savior had died for, as well as the potential of that young life. Eutychus should be given another chance to live, just as he, Paul, was given another chance on the road to Damascus. In application, we are to be an advocate for today's youth to those who would question their value in God's Kingdom as well as in the local church. Not only are we to keep the Eighth Commandment by speaking well of our youth and putting the best construction on things, we are to keep in mind that the Holy Spirit is working in their lives just as He is at work in our own life. As Paul writes in Philippians 1:6, "being sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ." An effective way to do this is to look for evidence of the Holy Spirit's working in the lives of Lutheran youth in their love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (cf. Gal 5:22–23) and help them to see and verbally affirm this evidence. Just as the father of the prodigal son continued to search for his lost son, we are to continue to hold out hope for the "lost sheep" of today's youth. In summary, don't give up on your Eutychus!

Recognizing Youth as an Essential Part of the Body of Christ

After raising Eutychus from the dead, we are told that "Paul had gone up and had broken bread and eaten" (Acts 20:11a). While "breaking bread" may refer to the Lord's Supper (cf. also v. 7, where St. Luke writes, "On the first day of the week we came together to break bread"), it can include table fellowship, especially since Paul ended up talking all night long (cf. v. 12). We can assume that Eutychus was part of this table fellowship. And given the fact that he had just been miraculously raised from the dead, he might have been the guest of honor, similar to the prodigal son (cf. Lk 15:23–24). For like the prodigal son, Eutychus was considered lost to the world, but now had been given new life. Therefore, as the prodigal son's father exclaimed, "Let us eat and celebrate!" (Lk 15:23). The local church can recognize their youth as being an essential part of the Body of Christ (1) in its teaching, (2) in its fellowship, and (3) by integrating youth in the life of the congregation.

1. Teaching the Value of Youth in the Body

The local church should communicate to its members the significance of youth ministry in its teachings from God's Word. For example, the Bible not only teaches that there is neither male nor female, Greek or Jew, slave or free, when it comes to redemption in Christ (cf. Gal 5:28), it also tells us that there is neither young or old when it comes to our need for a Savior. David, in his penitential psalm, acknowledges that he was conceived in sin (Ps 51:5); while still in Elizabeth's womb, John the Baptist leaped at the voice of the Mother of the Lord (Lk 1:44); Jesus was indignant when

people tried to prevent Him from blessing the little children being brought to Him, saying, "Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God" (Jn 10:14); and, when commissioning the disciples, Jesus tells them to "go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit" (Mt 28:19). "All nations" includes youth from infancy. In addition, the apostle Paul advises Timothy, "Let no one despise you for your youth" (1 Tm 4:12).

2. Recognizing Youth in Fellowship

When it comes to "life together" in the local church, young and old meet in the waters of Holy Baptism, indicating "that the Old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and that a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever."[4] Not only can adults join youth in the fellowship of the Altar by receiving Holy Communion, they can also join them in table fellowship, such as having lunch with them in their school's cafeteria, inviting them "for a bite to eat" at a local restaurant, or hosting them for a meal at their home. Furthermore, the church's fellowship hour before or after worship provides a regular opportunity for young and old to interact. Rather than relegating the church's youth to the "kids' table," they should be invited to "move up to a higher place" (Lk 14:10) at the "adult table," as honored brothers and sisters in the family of God.

3. Integration vs. Isolation/Separation

Just as we can assume that Eutychus took part in the breaking of the bread with Paul, ideally youth should be included in the church's worship services, e.g., serving on the ushering team, working with the altar guild, being a greeter, playing an instrument, serving as an acolyte, crucifer, and banner bearer, assisting with the readings. In addition, youth can be assimilated into the life of the congregation by assisting with Sunday School and VBS, helping with food distribution, being appointed as youth representatives to the church council, as well as the other areas of the life in the local church in its mercy, witness, and life together. However, even though 1 Corinthians 12:22 reminds us that "the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable," oftentimes the youth are treated as if the other, i.e., older, parts of the Body of Christ don't need them. Too many youths grow up attending church with their parents when they are little, but then they attend a separate "youth church" as they get older and never make the transition to attending "adult church" when they're on their own. While some may follow this pattern by returning to worship with their little ones when they themselves become parents, others may never return. For this reason, *don't lock the youth in the youth room*! We don't need one!

Preventing Spiritual Slumber

After the meal, we read in Acts 20:11 that Paul conversed with the people of Troas all night long until daybreak. By raising Eutychus from the dead, he was given a platform to catechize his listeners in the truths of the Christian faith. Again, we can assume that Eutychus was an eager listener to Paul's teachings that night. While before he had slumbered when Paul taught, after being raised from the dead, he was motivated to gladly hear and learn from God's Word as Paul taught it until daybreak. While Scripture doesn't reveal the contents of Paul's teachings that night, the raising of Eutychus from the dead provided for him a golden opportunity to share with his listeners the hope of the resurrection in Jesus Christ. A similar example of teaching after an act of restoration can be found in the parable of prodigal son, when after welcoming his youngest son back home, the father explains to his eldest son, "Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found" (Lk 15:31–32).

Of course, there was always the danger that Eutychus could fall asleep again to his peril. Far worse, however, is the danger of our youth falling into a spiritual slumber and not being found ready when the Lord returns. Like a watchman on the wall, the Lutheran Church offers the following remedies to prevent such lethargy:

- **Correct catechesis.** Luther's Small Catechism offers to our youth a summary of the doctrines in the Bible. As Luther says, "The Catechism is an epitome and brief transcript of the entire scripture."[5] Hence, the Catechism is something to grow into not grow out of.
- **A clear distinction between Law and Gospel.** By being taught to make a distinction between Law and Gospel when reading God's Word, Lutheran youth are being equipped to live out their lives in continual repentance this side of heaven.
- **An emphasis on the Word and Sacraments as God's Means of Grace.** Rather than looking to subjective feelings or "spiritual experiences" for evidence of their faith, our youth can look to the objective Word of God, daily remember their Baptism, and regularly partake of the Lord's Supper for the strengthening and preservation of their faith. Through God's Means of Grace, they can be confident that their sins are forgiven in Christ.
- **A love for the local church where God's Means of Grace can be found.** By emphasizing Christ's serving us through His Word and Sacraments in the Divine Service, youth are less inclined to see worship as a chore but rather as a time of receiving of God's gifts and responding in praise and worship. In hearing God's Word spoken and sung, and in receiving Holy Communion, they are assured that Christ is truly present with them and for them. By

emphasizing the blessing of the local congregation as the place where the Means of Grace can be found, they are motivated to keep the Third Commandment by being in regular worship, as well as to follow the admonishment found in Hebrews 10:24–25, "And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near."

- ***Simul Iustes et Peccator* ("simultaneously saint and sinner").** By acknowledging that this side of heaven Christians must still struggle with a sinful nature, our youth are able to avoid being on a continuous emotional pendulum, swinging from the heights of self-righteous pride to the depths of despair over their wretched sinful condition. This teaching is especially important as teens struggle with making the transition to becoming adults. Confession and Absolution are critical in dealing with and providing comfort in this struggle.
- **The Table of Duties.** There is no reason for youth to agonize over their "big purpose" in life. The Table of Duties found in Luther's Small Catechism offers our youth a guide for living out their Christian faith in all areas of life, no matter what their vocations or occupations. The Table of Duties offers biblical explanations for the various stations in life as follows: to bishops, pastors, and preachers; what the hearers owe to their pastors; of civil government; of subjects; to husbands; to wives; to parents; to children; to servants; hired men, and employees; to employers; to the young in general; to widows; to all in common.[6]
- **Theology of the Cross.** Stephen Arterburn and Jack Felton in their book, *Toxic Faith*, contend that "More agnostics and atheists have been created by a false expectation of an easy life from God than any other false belief."[7] By teaching our youth to look to the cross to affirm their identity in Christ and identify with Him in their sufferings, rather than turning away from the Christian faith when troubles occur, they will be more prone to draw even closer to their Lord, as He in turn draws closer to them (cf. Jas 4:8), and to follow the words of 1 Peter 4:12–13: "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed."
- **God's inspired, inerrant Word.** First Timothy 3:16 tells us that "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness." By holding God's Word sacred, we are equipping our youth to be like the wise man who built his house upon the rock by hearing and putting God's Word into practice, so that when the

storms of life come, our youth do not end up crashing and abandoning the Christian faith altogether (cf. Mt 7:24–27; Lk 6:46-49). Those who hold only to the fundamentals of God's Word or reduce the Bible to the Gospel only are exposing our youth to a "pandora's box of compromise" on the rest of God's Holy Word. And if our youth are taught not to take all of God's Word as being inspired, then why should they believe what it says about their salvation in Jesus Christ? Granted, Christ, not the Bible, is the foundation of our faith—but our only authoritative and infallible source of knowledge about Christ is Holy Scripture.

- **Christ-centeredness.** In the midst of all its activities, e.g., meetings, Bible studies, outreach and service events, retreats, mission trips, the overall purpose of youth ministry is to point our youth, and us with them, to Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. St. John, near the end of his Gospel states, "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (Jn 20:30–31). Likewise, a church can minister to its youth in many different ways, but its heart and center should be Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world, and the Good News of our salvation in Him.

A church can minister to its youth in many different ways, but its heart and center should be Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world, and the Good News of our salvation in Him.

Conclusion

Through His Means of Grace, God continues to raise and sustain the spiritually dead to new life in Christ. As Christians, all we have to do is look in the mirror for a prime example of this! However, there remain numerous youth who have yet, through grace, to be made alive in Christ. If God can make alive "the chief of sinners," i.e., Paul, and use him to make alive Eutychus after others had pronounced him dead, then He can use us to restore the youth of this generation, no matter how bleak their situation may appear. Acts 20:12 tells us that people were greatly comforted when Paul raised Eutychus from the dead. Similarly, we can be a source of great comfort to family members and loved ones of our youth in our ministry with them. Subsequently, just as the father of the prodigal son celebrated and was made glad at the restoration of his son (cf. Luke 15:25–27, 31–32), so we can experience the joy of witnessing lost youth being found and reclaimed by Christ through the Gospel.

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Missional Lessons on *Philoxenia* from Missionaries

Rodney D. Otto

Abstract: The author points out the many lessons to be learned from mission work abroad with its emphasis on sharing the Gospel through friendship that can be applied in mission work in the United States, the world's third largest mission field.

Rubbing shoulders with missionary giants has been life changing. Ernest Hahn and Herbert Hoefer served in south India during the latter part of the twentieth century. Their missional hospitality overcame Muslim and Hindu cultural barriers not only in India, but also in America, where they used the bridge of hospitality to introduce immigrants to Jesus, the Christ. They served in a time of mission awakening. Methodology shifted from a mission compound mentality to spontaneous, indigenous church planting and people movements. Returning from India, they taught contextualization of the Gospel for America's growing populations of Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs. This article began as a thank-you for their ministries but soon expanded to be a thank-you for other missionaries, pastors, and teachers.

They used the bridge of hospitality to introduce immigrants to Jesus, the Christ.

In 1943, my baptism at St. John Lutheran Church, Hanover, Iowa, sowed seeds of compassion for all. The chancel figure of Jesus with outstretched hands set my life's theme: "Come to me all who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest" (Mt 11:28). My childhood pastor, Rev. Elmer Wehrspann, framed the larger picture of church as the Kingdom of God. The teachers and pastors of my wife, Phyllis, in her

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Rev. Dr. Rodney Otto is retired in Grand Rapids, Michigan. He earned a Doctor of Ministry in missiology at Western Seminary in Holland, Michigan. Short-term mission trips in Guatemala and India formed his stateside ministry. For a decade in retirement, he served a diverse small urban struggling congregation in Grand Rapids where hospitality learned from missionaries resulted in fourteen cultures reflecting the colorful saints of heaven. rod.phyl@gmail.com

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Michigan childhood nurtured her worldwide mission passion. Mission festival speakers ignited our callings to reach neighbors near and far. Junior college deaf ministry pushed us out of our cultural box. Professor Walter Boss at Concordia Senior College shared how much patience is needed for Muslim work in the Middle East. Working for seminary nurse, Virginia Reinecke, introduced me to medical missionaries on furlough.

In 1965, missionary Roland Miller's Sem I Intro to Mission course deepened my interest in cross-cultural hospitality. His book, *Muslims and the Gospel: Reflections on Christian Sharing*,[1] is a clear presentation of Islam through the lens of friendship. The book is "an effort to personalize the data . . . it results from the writer's experience of 24 years of living in a Muslim town in India. . . . It is the Mappila Muslims of Kerala who have deepened for me the meaning of friendship."[2] In an age of pluralism, building relationships diminishes cultural walls and barriers, sharpening the focus of twenty-first century Gospel witness.

In an age of pluralism, building relationships diminishes cultural walls and barriers, sharpening the focus of twenty-first century Gospel witness.

Also during Sem I, my dormmate at the Seminary, B. H. Jackayya, president of Concordia Seminary in Nagercoil, India, became a lifelong friend. When I visited his home in Kollegal, Karnataka, via a Mission India[3] trip, his hospitable welcome left an indelible imprint on my heart. My roommate, Terry Borchard, and I wanted to volunteer for India during Sem II, but India changed its visa policy, and we did not receive visas. My wife, Phyllis, and I met Herb and Carol Hoefer before they left for India. These seminary contacts laid a foundation for our cross-cultural ministries to immigrants and minorities in America.

In 1989, a long-time India missionary, Mary Esther Otten, recovering from hand surgery with a family from our parish in Kentwood, Michigan, provided first-hand stories of her husband, Henry, who served along with Hahn and Hoefer's team ministry in the India Evangelical Lutheran Church (IELC). Later in the 1990s, we learned from Douglas Rutt, Ed Auger, and Mayan garbage dump workers in Guatemala the difficulty of crossing linguistic and cultural boundaries. In 2004, a week-long seminar in India with Eugene Bunkowske and Indian lay leaders deepened my respect for IELC's contextualization of the Gospel. Extending that visit by four days with Pastor Daniel in Desuya, Punjab, we shared his ministry to Sikhs through dynamic church planting.

My seminary roommate, Terry Borchard, modeled missional hospitality for five decades in New Guinea. His South Dakota rural toughness translated to a deep love for the Ippili people of New Guinea. He felt more at home in those remote highlands than anywhere stateside. His life's work created a written language for the Ippili New

Testament. His translation was recognized by Fuller Seminary for its cultural sensitivity and contextualization.

India's mission field was different. Two millennia of Gospel proclamation had built up barriers between the church and Hindu/Muslim culture. Contextualization faced deep misunderstandings,[4] but the practice of hospitality helped missionaries cross age-old barriers.

The creativity of Hahn and Hoefer is worth exploring. Friendships outside the mission compounds grew through the use of reading rooms. Dialogue uncovered the cultural nuances that paved the way for their effective Gospel proclamation. Muslims and Hindus trusted them as friends. On our side of the world, we imitated their intentional hospitality in our stateside ministry. My lifelong friendship with missionaries serving in India made a difference in the Midwest parishes I served: rural, small town, suburban, new mission, and urban. Hahn's booklets and tracts, along with Hoefer's church-shaking work with NBBC in India, spawned my own version of stateside hospitality. In our own experience, the sending church was reshaped by missionaries to distant lands. Cross-cultural hospitality that Hoefer and Hahn modeled from the 1950s to the 1980s still bears fruit. Their style was the road less traveled, a difficult task.

Dialogue uncovered the cultural nuances that paved the way for their effective Gospel proclamation.

Hahn's tract ministry burst through the mission compound wall. His passion and intense work overcame many difficulties in writing, publishing, and distributing tracts. Hahn peppered the Hindu/Muslim countryside "white for harvest" with his Gospel tracts. Hospitality led the way to neighbors. Christ's compassion overcame barriers. Hahn built a bridge of unconditional friendship with Muslims. Besides the many workers in India who helped with the tracts, he could always depend on women stateside through the LWML.[5] After his service in India from 1953–1978, Hahn continued publishing and distributing tracts through his Philoxenia organization.

Hahn's sense of humor and twinkle in the eye softened his intense sharing of bundles and boxes of booklets and tracts. His Canadian garage was filled to the brim, with little room for a car. He sent us postal packets and once even a carload of boxes. As I write this article, Hahn is in a nursing home. We continue to talk. His daughter Ingrid hands him the phone. With each call, he suggests new Muslim contacts.

Missional hospitality blossomed in western Michigan. Hahn's Sikh tract[6] led to intentional and spontaneous witnessing. As I visited neighbors, gas station attendants, party store owners, and students, they were eager to dialogue about faith. Regular visits to a Grand Haven gas station paved the way for me to share the Gospel at a Punjabi funeral of a murdered Sikh attendant. Friendships grew Sikh Christians. When a

Myanmar pastor joined Redeemer, an urban church I served in Grand Rapids during retirement, he needed an internship for his master's program. Redeemer commissioned him to Sikh ministry, since he knew Punjabi. He had Sikh friends but knew little of their faith. Hahn's tract on Sikhism and his booklet, "Your Muslim Guest," molded his Gospel witness. The Holy Spirit created curiosity in several Sikh hearts. Over a two-year period, three confessed Christ and attended Punjabi Bible study. Witness in their native tongue matured their faith. Hahn's tracts still help us today as we visit our friends at the Grand Rapids area *gurdwara*.[7]

The following is from Hahn's brochure, *The Sikhs and Their Religion*, published by his Philoxenia ministry in Canada. It gives the biblical background for missional hospitality:

> Philoxenia means "caring for the stranger." It serves as an antidote to xenophobia, literally "fear of a stranger"—a familiar disease that permeates the human heart. Words related to Philoxenia are hospital, hostess, hospice and host (the word for the bread of the Eucharist). Biblically it is the remembrance of Jesus Christ in our Lord's Last Supper as the ultimate Host, the Supreme Sacrifice. Can we settle for the following Scriptures as encouragement? ". . . the stranger who sojourns with you shall be to you as the native among you. . ." (Lev. 9:33, 34) "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers. . ." (Heb. 13:2)

Decades after meeting Herb and Carol Hoefer at the seminary, we connected with them at a Muslim/Hindu mission conference. Phyllis and I experienced their sensitivity to Hindu culture, demonstrating Christ's compassion. Hoefer's creative and sensitive research uncovered the Spirit's work in the hearts of Jesu Bhaktas (NBBC). His amazing interviews and subsequent publications have influenced mission leaders from India to Fuller Seminary in California. A *Mission Frontiers* article called Hoefer's work "striking research undertaken in the mid-eighties."[8]

Imposing mores beyond what Scripture prescribes stifles indigenous church growth and disrupts Kingdom work. Hoefer states that God redeemed people of all cultures. Therefore, orthodox Christians may retain their own unique cultural practices. Cross-cultural compassion demands humility and hospitality. Hoefer reiterated "the real move toward an indigenous Christian faith can never come from the Christian community. It must grow out of 'Churchless Christianity,' with the help and encouragement of the church."[9] God values people of all cultures; He created them.

Cross-cultural compassion demands humility and hospitality.

All these missional influencers affected our years in Grand Rapids, where God gifted us with a diverse congregation and a nonprofit organization to help immigrants.

Both ministries were based on Matthew 9:36: "When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd." Fourteen different cultures worshiped in a small, struggling urban congregation with the joy of heaven's colorful saints. It was a beautiful experience. For ten years, our nonprofit, "CALL: Christ's Compassion for All" helped over four hundred families annually with immigration issues *pro bono* or affordable. Clients came from nineteen cultures. Recently, volunteering in a local high school English class for immigrants opened doors of a nearby LCMS congregation to a service in Swahili.[10] Blessings flowed freely in western Michigan by welcoming immigrants as friends and neighbors.

Hahn, Hoefer, and Otten followed the footsteps of earlier missionaries who practiced hospitality. In 1706, Bartholomaeus Ziegenbalg initiated Lutheran work among Tamil-speaking Indians. Two hundred years later, Stanley Jones cultivated unconditional friendship with Ghandi and high caste Hindus. *The Christ of the India Road*[11] is his classic text on hospitality.

Today, Greg Finke leads the way in missionary hospitality in the United States. *Joining Jesus,* his textbook for hospitality to those outside the church, is simple.[12] Enjoy people, especially neighbors. Observe what Jesus has already done in the hearts of your friends outside the church. "Seek the kingdom of God," as Jesus commands. Open your eyes and ears to hear and see what God is doing in secular American culture today. Greg's questions to us are "What is God up to in your life?" and "How is He messing with you?"

I have learned to listen and show respect, rather than impose my ideas of how every person should follow Christ. I am still figuring out what creative approaches will develop friendships among immigrants, nones,[13] and those of other faiths. What avenues would be more hospitable than the path through a church door? May the Spirit lead us with the passion of St. Paul on Mars hill and beyond.

Endnotes

[1] Roland Miller, *Muslims and the Gospel: Bridging the Gap: A reflection on Christian Sharing* (Minneapolis, MN: Lutheran University Press, 2006).
[2] Miller, *Muslims and the Gospe*l, 11.
[3] Mission India, a Grand Rapids, MI mission organization, trains indigenous workers in India and hosts short-term mission trips for clergy.
[4] B. V. Subbamma describes caste and cultural barriers that India workers faced in her 1970 study at Fuller Seminary, "Christian Approach to Hindus."
[5] Ernest Hahn, "Missionary Ernest Hahn Writes," *The Minaret* 18 (February 1964): 10.
[6] Ernest Hahn, *The Sikhs and Their Religion* (Mississauga, Ontario: Hospitality, n.d.)

[7] A gurdwara (gurdwārā; meaning "door to the guru") is a place of assembly and worship for Sikhs. People from all faiths, and those who do not profess any faith, are welcomed in Sikh gurdwaras.
[8] H. L. Richard, "Christ-Followers in India Flourishing—But Outside the Church: A review of *Churchless Christianity*," *Mission Frontiers* (December 2001).
[9] Richard, "Christ-Followers in India Flourishing," 202.
[10] Students in East Kentwood High School, a suburb south of Grand Rapids, speak 75 different languages. St. Mark Lutheran of Kentwood, Michigan, welcomed these immigrants for their Sunday afternoon worship time.
[11] E. Stanley Jones, *The Christ of the Indian Road* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1925).
[12] Greg Finke, *Joining Jesus on His Mission* (Elgin, IL: Tenth Power, 2014).
[13] Those not willing to pass through church doors or identify with any particular religion.

Reviews

CHRISTIAN MIND IN THE EMERGING WORLD: Faith Integration in Asian Contexts and Global Perspectives. Edited by Peter Tze Ming Ng, Wing Tai Leung, and Vaughn King Tong Mak. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018. 594 pp. Hardcover. $119.95

Have you ever belatedly heard about a conference and wished you could have attended? In this book, the reader can "attend" the international conference reflected in the book's title, hosted in Hong Kong by Lumina College, January 25–27, 2018.

The title reflects something both ambitious and daring about the book. It is ambitious because "It is like one of those titles that a doctoral advisor would discourage for a dissertation. To combine the thought and findings of 30 scholars under this umbrella theme, first at a conference and then in a book is a bold attempt" (ix). But it is carried out well. It is daring in calling for "faith integration." As the editors explain: "**Academic Faith Integration** is a dangerous phrase. In the name of academic freedom we have edged out any dialogue on metaphysics. Academics are expected to be schizophrenic, in that they are supposed to keep their personal beliefs for private consumption" (x). But these writers persisted: "We understand our central purpose in teaching, scholarship, and administration in higher education as love for God and love for the world that God has given us. . . . We believe that sending students and ideas into the world is our best method of [countercultural] caring for the world" (23).

Conference papers appear in the book in three parts: The Christian Mind, The Emerging World, and Academic Faith Integration. This third part includes five themes: Science and Technology, Business and Politics, Education, Religion and Technology, and Cultural Studies. As this list suggests, the book is too wide ranging to summarize neatly. But here are some highlights:

In Chapter 6, conference organizer Wing Tai Leung asks, "How can our future leaders learn global literacy and collaboration?" He answers with a brief description of four models that have not worked well (Internal curriculum change; External, with overseas activity; Digital Networking; and some Co-Creation). He then documents the Co-Creation model of Lumina College in Hong Kong, including intercultural shaping of curriculum, glocal perspectives, hybrid pedagogy of digital and personal integration, culture making projects, and mentoring as a way of life by Christian faculty (124).

Each word "counts" in the title of Chapter 10 in Part 2: "A Chinese NGO's Faith-Based Vision for Families of Children with Disabilities: Impact of Chinese and American Learning Communities." The NGO and two US Christian colleges sought to create "peer-networks for families with disabled children" (210), intending to have an impact on Chinese cultural attitudes concerning people with disabilities.

In Part 3, where Michael Brownnutt explores the relationship of science and religion in the pursuit of truth, he offers this challenge: "While this change in [Christian] perspective towards factual truth has been influential in Western theological thought, it is arguably a departure from, rather than a realisation of, a traditional Christian perspective" (259).

In discussing "The Purpose and Practice of Business for Christians in the Asian-Chinese Context," Albert M. Erisman proposes that work in all its forms matters to God. How, then, can Christian faith speak both to a Western, free-market capitalism and to a "Hong Kong work [culture] dominated by the drive to earn money" (309)?

Exploring a particular element of religion and theology in chapter 22, Max Hui-Bon-Hoa explores the history of The Christian Association of the University of Hong Kong over a forty-year period (1953–1993), noting its various responses to the outside world, that world described in four elements: Hong Kong University itself, Mainland China, the local church scene in Hong Kong, and Hong Kong society in general.

The conference comes to the reader in twenty-four chapters, including a first chapter "literature review" of the field of faith integration. Attending to these papers can add breadth and depth to academic and other work in mission. The papers offer Asian perspectives and practices to support and challenge faith integration around the globe. The conference was—and the book is—a significant opportunity to consider why and how to do mission and witness in a world different from the one I and most of us have known. This is a resource for Christian thinking as our world continues to take new forms.

Rich Carter

TRADITIONAL RITUAL AS CHRISTIAN WORSHIP: Dangerous Syncretism or Necessary Hybridity? Edited by Daniel Shaw and William Burrows. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books. 2018. xxiv, 278 pp. Paperback. $50.00.

Hybridity is the theme that unites this collection of missiological essays and case studies edited by Daniel Shaw of the Fuller Graduate School of Intercultural Studies and William R. Burrows, a Roman Catholic professor of intercultural studies at New York Theological Seminary. The volume under review is part of the American Society of Missiology Series of missiological studies and has been designated as one of the ten most significant books on mission published in 2018.

The essays and twelve case studies in this publication deal with the importance for missions of the religious rites, rituals, and ceremonies employed in many folk and traditional societies. Because rituals are often associated with the worship of pagan deities and ancestral spirits, many missionaries, both Protestant and Roman Catholic, have prohibited converts to Christianity from taking part in the traditional rituals celebrated by their families and their communities. For many missionaries, all pagan

rituals are believed to be satanic and therefore off limits for true believers. Shaw and Burrows argue that traditional rites, rituals, and symbols are not to be rejected but rather recycled and used by Christians in their worship of the triune God.

Shaw and Burrows point out that cultural anthropologists have long recognized that in many parts of the world rituals, ceremonies, feasts, and religious symbols have been one of the most effective instruments in the communication of local customs, religious concepts, moral instruction, and worldviews. Rites are important in establishing the identity of a people and their place in the world and in passing cultural values from one generation to another. According to Christian anthropologist Paul Hiebert, traditional rituals also function in helping to resolve the middle zone problems experienced by people in everyday life.[1]

The disregard for traditional rites is, according to Shaw and Burrows, most unfortunate because, by condemning all the rituals that help in defining a people's identity, new converts to Christianity are cut off from their families and fellow tribesmen—converting them into social outcasts with little chance of bringing the members of their communities to worship Christ.

It is Shaw's contention that Christian communicators should rather study the rituals and ceremonies of a given people, not in order to prohibit all ritualism, but to transform and purify the religious rituals of a people and employ them as vehicles that communicate the Gospel in cultural terms that can be readily understood by the members of a given society. The Gospel, avers Shaw, can be grafted onto pagan rites in order to create a hybrid that is both true to the Gospel and to the culture of a given people's group. In some of the case studies present in this collection, the investigators, many of them indigenous believers, detail how they have created new rites that, while still retaining many pagan elements, have been purged of idolatry and witchcraft. In this way, traditional rites can be employed in worshiping Jesus Christ as the One whom the Creator God has sent to bring the forgiveness and new life to which the old rites pointed but did not produce.

This hybridity, advocated by Shaw and Burrows here, goes far beyond contextualization. In it, all that is not contrary to the Gospel in the religious rituals of a people is to be retained and recycled, grafted on to the Gospel message of salvation in Christ alone. This, according to the authors, is important because many of the traditional rites contain all manner of redemptive analogies that point to Christ, who is the fulfillment of all of the good things that were sought in traditional rituals.

Hybridity, according to Shaw and his disciples, does not produce a dangerous syncretism. It is rather God's way interacting with cultures different from those of His chosen people. Hybridity avers that new, culturally relevant rites should be developed, rites that point to Christ and His salvation for all peoples.

Hybridity, we are told, is God's way of interacting with cultures different from our own. The traditional feasts, festivals, and rites celebrated by God's Old Testament people were originally pagan feasts that had been adopted, purified, and recycled for use in Israel's worship of the God who called Abraham and his descendants to be a blessing to all people. Passover, Tabernacles, Pentecost, New Year's, Purim, First Fruits started out as feasts celebrated by the Canaanites as they worshiped their gods with sacrifices, hymns of praise, and ritual washings. The Holy Spirit helped the Israelites to rework and recycle these pagan rites and rituals, eliminating those elements that could not be reconciled with the Torah. Instead of using pagan rites and rituals to celebrate the mythic victories of the pagan deities, the feasts of God's people came to celebrate the mighty works of the Lord in salvation history

Hybridity, avers Shaw, is God's way of acting when a pagan culture comes into contact with His chosen people. The people of Israel, guided by the Holy Spirit, helped the Israelites to rewrite and recycle all manner of traditional rites, ceremonies, and even psalms—eliminating those elements that could not be reconciled with the Torah and recycling the rest. Instead of celebrating these rites and rituals in order to experience the divine in an eternal return to a mythic past, the Old Testament feasts of Israel became a celebration of the mighty acts of God in salvation history. This salvation history served to move Israel forward to the coming of Jesus and the consummation of all things in the kingdom of God.

Although the names of Father Wilhelm Schmidt[2] and Don Richardson (*Peace Child* & *Eternity in the Hearts*[3]) are not mentioned in this volume, one senses their presence hovering in the background and flitting back and forth from one case study to another. Like Schmidt and Richardson, Shaw and Burrows believe that in the rites and ceremonies of many traditional societies there is a belief in a good but distant Creator God who has turned the governance of human affairs over to demigods and ancestral spirits. According to the authors of this book, this Good Creator God who was worshiped by our pagan ancestors should be identified by missiologists with God the Father, whom we confess in our Christian creeds. In the rites and myths of many pagans, Shaw and Burrows detect the presence (and perhaps also saving faith) in this Good Creator God, who has been worshiped by our pagan ancestors under many other names. For this reason, we are told, missionaries do not bring God to a people without the true God. God has always been with their ancestors. They have known and worshiped God by different names. Now, through the proclamation of the Good News, people of other cultures come to know and experience the presence of the God that their ancestors sought in the rites and rituals that they passed on to their descendants.

Much space is given to the ancestors by the authors of the case studies presented in this volume. This stems from the great respect and reverence for and even fear of the ancestors in many traditional societies. For centuries, missionaries have struggled with the question of ancestor worship and rites celebrated in order to honor, appease,

or seek the help of the ancestors. In one of the book's twelve case studies, Melanesian theologian, Joshua Kurung Daimoi, presents Jesus as the Supreme Ancestor whose high priestly ministry supersedes the activity of all the ancestral spirits of his people. In this theologian's reworking of the ancestral traditions of Melanesia, the ancestors become the great cloud of witnesses mentioned in the Epistle to the Hebrews.

By publishing this collection of essays and case studies promoting the concept of hybridity in missionary practice, Shaw and Burrows have done a service to the science of missiology. The reader will have to decide for him- or herself which ideas and practices here presented are in accord with the Gospel or whether they miss the mark. Although the authors all acknowledge the work of the old Evil Foe, some of them seem to underestimate the ways in which hybridity, despite all of the research of missiologists, can still lead to the dangerous syncretism they wish to eschew.

One should note in working through this volume that all the studies here presented have to deal with traditional worldviews and traditional societies, that is, those that would fit into the quadrant that anthropologist Mary Douglas would consider as high group and high grid. The solutions offered by Shaw and Burrows would probably not, in my opinion, work as well in a modern "Big Man" society[4] or a frontier society.[5] As far as missionaries in traditional societies are concerned, this is a must read.

Rudy Blank

Endnotes

[1] Paul G. Hiebert, "The Flaw of the Excluded Middle," *Missiology: An International Review* 10, no. 1 (1982): 35–47.
[2] Mircea Eliade, "*La Búsqueda*" (Buenos Aires: Editorial La Aurora, 1971), 148–152.
[3] Don Richardson, *Eternity in Their Hearts* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 117–136
[4] Paul G. Hiebert and Eloise Hiebert Meneses, *Incarnational Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 43–184.
[5] Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1973), 79–92.

Lutheran Mission Matters Call for Papers: May 2020

Dear Colleagues in Mission,

This message comes to you as an invitation to contribute an article to the publication, *Lutheran Mission Matters,* in its Spring 2020 issue. The theme for the issue is "Mission in a World on the Move." The editors are seeking articles that emphasize the contributions that "the people on the move"—immigrants, displaced persons, and refugees throughout the world—can make and are making to the life of the church, as well as articles discussing the contributions that the churches and their members can make to serve the estimated 71 million people in any year living as immigrants and refugees in our world today.

It is clear from the heated controversy in many lands regarding immigration that people everywhere are divided in their assessment of immigration, as well as of the treatment of migrating people. Can the theology and practice of the Lutheran Church contribute to this lively discussion? Is there something to be realized from Lutheran history? What can Lutheran Christians learn and what insight and guidance can they offer in the context of a world on the move?

The Lutheran Society for Missiology, along with its publication *Missio Apostolica*, now titled *Lutheran Mission Matters*, has been in existence for more than twenty-eight years. This peer-reviewed publication is indexed in the ATLA Religion Database on the EBSCO platform, along with the full text of the articles. *LMM* articles are available also under the "Publications" tab on the society's web page at https://lsfm.global.

For your guidance, *LMM* articles are generally about 3,000 words in length, although longer and shorter articles will be considered. The stated deadline for submission is March 15, 2020.

Lutherans have a long and distinguished history in mission. Today, when challenges to Christian faith seem so pervasive, we hope that you will join us in the quest to find 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, the editor of the journal, at rajv@csl.edu.

Sincerely,
Dr. Victor Raj, Editor

A Note to Contributors

We welcome your participation in contributing to *Lutheran Mission Matters*. Please observe the following guidelines for submission of manuscripts.

Lutheran Mission Matters publishes studies of missiological issues under discussion in Christian circles across the world. Exegetical, biblical, theological, historical, and practical dimensions of the apostolic mission of the church are explored in these pages. (See the mission statement below.) While issues often focus on a theme, the editorial committee encourages and appreciates submissions of articles on any missiological topic.

Contributors can familiarize themselves with previous issues of *Missio Apostolica* and *Lutheran Mission Matters* at the Lutheran Society for Missiology's website (https://lsfm.global). Click on the Publications link to view PDFs of previous issues.

Book reviews: LSFM also welcomes book reviews. Submit reviews of no more than 500 words. E-mail Dr. Joel Okamoto (lsfmissiology@gmail.com) if interested in writing a review.

Mission Statement

Lutheran Mission Matters serves as an international Lutheran forum for the exchange of ideas and discussion of issues related to proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ globally.

Formatting and Style

Please consult and use *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 17th edition for endnotes. See basic examples below and/or consult the "Chicago-Style Citation Quick Guide" (http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html).

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

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

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

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

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

Quotations of or allusions to specific texts in the Lutheran Confessional writings must be documented. The use of modern translations of the *Book of Concord* is encouraged. Please use the following model.

[5] Augsburg Confession V (Concerning the Office of Preaching) in *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran* Church, ed. R. Kolb, T. J. Wengert, C. P. Arand (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 40.

Direct quotations exceeding four manuscript lines should be set off from the text in an indented paragraph, without quotation marks. Omissions in a quotation should be noted by ellipsis, with an additional period to end a sentence, as appropriate.

Spelling should follow the latest edition of *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*. Words in languages other than English should be italicized.

Preparation and Submission

Length: Concise, clear articles are preferred. Manuscripts should not be more than 3,000–4,000 words although longer pieces may be arranged by the editor.

Content: *Lutheran Mission Matters* is committed to addressing the academic community as well as pastors and people throughout the church and involving them in the theology and practice of mission. Use of terms or phrases in languages other than the language of the article itself is discouraged. The use of complex and long sentences is discouraged. Attention should be paid to paragraphing so that the article is easy to follow and appears inviting on the page.

Use of call-outs: *Lutheran Mission Matters* frequently uses call-outs to break up blocks of text on a page and to emphasize important points being made in the article. The author is invited to use Word's Text Highlight Color to suggest words or phrase that may be included in a call-out. The final decision will be made by the editor.

Format: Please submit articles in single spaced Times New Roman 10-point font with 0.25" paragraph indents.

Submission: Manuscripts should be submitted electronically to Professor Victor Raj, rajv@csl.edu. Submission of a manuscript assumes that all material has been carefully read and properly noted and attributed. The author thereby assumes responsibility for any necessary legal permission for materials cited in the article. Articles that are inadequately documented will be returned for complete documentation. If the article has been previously published or presented in a public forum, please inform the editor at the time the article is submitted.

Review: The editors submit every manuscript to the editorial committee for examination and critique. Decisions are reached by consensus within the committee. Authors may expect a decision normally within three months of submission. Before publication, articles are copy edited for style and clarity, as necessary. Major alterations will be made available to the author for review.

Additional Submission Information

Bio: Authors should provide, along with their submissions, an autobiographical description. Please write 2–3 sentences introducing yourself. Please include your title(s) you would like LMM to use, the form of your name you want to be known as. Tell your present position and/or your education or experience that qualifies you to write the article. If you have a head-shot photo that you would like to provide, we will try to use it. Please provide the email address at which a respondent could reach you.

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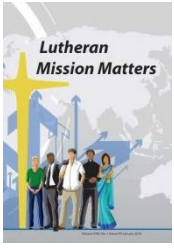

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You are invited!

Save the Date: January 28, 2020

Lutheran Society for Missiology (LSFM)'s Annual Banquet

Place: Koburg Hall of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis

Time: Doors open at 6PM; Event begins at 6:30PM

Theme: "Confident Pluralism: Wrestling with the Loss of Christendom toward a Winsome Witness"

Banquet speaker: Rev. Dr. Chad Lakies
Regional Director, North America at Lutheran Hour Ministries

Cost: $30 for an individual, $50 for a couple

(For Concordia Seminary students, subsidized tickets are available at $15 for an individual, $30 for a couple.)

E-mail lsfmissiology@gmail.com for more information or respond to LSFM emails for reservations.