

# ***Lutheran Mission Matters***



Volume XXV, No. 1 (Issue 50) May 2017

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

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

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

## I. Introduction

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

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



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

## **II. The Paradigm Shift of the Reformation Era**

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

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

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

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

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

Figure 1A—Doctrine, Religion, & Spirituality

| Aspect       | Old paradigm of Medieval Catholic Tradition  | New paradigm of Martin Luther & company   |
|--------------|--|---|
| Doctrine     | Medieval Catholic Tradition: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Authority: papal declaration, church tradition, and church councils</li> <li>• Salvation is located in the church<br/>-Good works → atone spiritual debt</li> <li>• Work/law-based salvation</li> <li>• Indulgences: God’s favor, purgatory</li> <li>• Ultimate end of all to man’s glory or church’s glory</li> </ul>   | Reformation: The Reformation “solus” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bible only (<i>Sola Scriptura</i>)<br/>-inspired authoritative Word of God</li> <li>• Christ only (<i>Solo Christo</i>)<br/>-salvation by grace through faith in Christ</li> <li>• Grace only (<i>Sola Gratia</i>):<br/>grace-based</li> <li>• Faith only (<i>Sola Fide</i>):<br/>faith-based<sup>3</sup></li> <li>• God’s Glory only (<i>Soli Deo Gloria</i>)<br/>-efficacious call of God to His glory</li> </ul> |
| Religion     | Church tradition: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Auricular confession, celibacy, indulgences, papacy, pilgrimages, purgatory, monastic vows, relics, saints, worship practices, etc.</li> </ul> Scripture: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In Latin vulgate alone, handled by clergy alone</li> <li>• subordinated to church authority</li> </ul> Rule: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Principle of papal &amp; clergy authority</li> <li>• Judaic legalism and superstition</li> </ul> | Reformation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• freed from church tradition: the 7 sacraments, celibacy, performance of the sacrificial Mass, magisterial authority</li> </ul> Scripture: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• in vernacular, by common folks</li> <li>• interpretation done in community of believers</li> </ul> Rule: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Principle of freedom in Christ, priesthood of believers, and authority of Scripture</li> </ul>         |
| Spirituality | Institutionally sanctioned spirituality  | Individual conscience & pursuit of spirituality   |

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

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

**Figure 1B – Politics, Communication, etc.**

| Aspect         | Old Paradigm   | New Paradigm  |
|----------------|--|---|
| Politics & law | Power: church governed politics<br>Authority: the church ruled over every sphere of life | Power: separation of church & state<br>Liberty: right & obligation of the individual conscience (modern democracy)  |
| Social order   | Papal authority & concentration of power in Rome   | The Peasants’ War, the indigenous movements, & “Protestantism” <sup>6</sup>   |
| Ethics         | Subject to the authority of the pope and ecclesiastical order                            | Individual liberty & conscience <sup>7</sup><br>“ <i>Vocatio</i> ” <sup>8</sup>   |
| Science        | Conformism: no individual pursuit  | The Renaissance—free to explore all aspects   |
| Economy        | Monasticism & church vocations   | “The protestant ethic”—Max Weber  |
| Communication  | Monopoly of the Catholic establishment   | Printing and literacy:<br><ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Movable-type printing &amp; informed public</li> <li>• Linguistic &amp; literary legacy</li> </ul> |

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

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

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

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

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

There is a shifting landscape of Christendom from the northern to the southern hemisphere as observed by Philip Jenkins and Andrew Walls.<sup>14</sup> This is evidenced by various phenomena, such as the fact that the current pope is from South America (not Europe) and that the Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization (LCWE) II and LCWE III occurred in Manila and South Africa respectively (not in Europe, but in Asia and Africa). In light of the demise of the West in a post-Christian mode and the surge of mission forces in the global south in Christian missions (see #1B in Figure 2), there are many practical implications for contemporary ministry to be considered by the leadership of the Lutheran churches here and now. Here I will note several key aspects to be discussed further in Part Two: replace the Euro-centric and paternalist paradigm of traditional

There is a shifting landscape of Christendom from the northern to the southern hemisphere.

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

## Global Trend 2—The Phenomenon of Diaspora and Diaspora Missions

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

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

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

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

The trend of the global phenomenon of diaspora is reversing the historic direction of shifting Christendom (from the West to the rest and from northern to southern hemisphere), with massive numbers in the diaspora moving toward the G7 countries, that is, toward the northern hemisphere and from the rest to the West.

- Missions *to* the diaspora—reaching the diaspora groups in forms of evangelism or pre-evangelistic social services, then discipling them to become worshipping communities and congregations.
- Missions *through* the diaspora—diaspora Christians reaching out to their kinsmen through networks of friendship and kinship in host countries, their homelands, and abroad.
- Missions *by* and *beyond* the diaspora—motivating and mobilizing diaspora Christians for cross-cultural missions to other ethnic groups in their host countries, homelands, and abroad.
- Missions *with* the diaspora—mobilizing non-diasporic Christians individually and institutionally to partner with diasporic groups and congregations.<sup>17</sup>

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

#### IV. Conclusion

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

#### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> “Martin Luther,” *New World Encyclopedia*

[http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Martin\\_Luther](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Martin_Luther) (retrieved Dec. 20, 2016).

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. 1962; second edition 1970. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press).

<sup>3</sup> Martin Luther, “Faith is a living and unshakable confidence, a belief in the grace of God so assured that man would die a thousand deaths for its sake.” *Preface to the Epistle to the Romans*. As quoted by Debra Ronca, “Martin Luther and the New Paradigm,” [www.reasons.org](http://www.reasons.org), July 23, 2014 (retrieved Dec. 29, 2016).

<sup>4</sup> Marc Kolden, “Luther on Vocation” Oct. 1, 2001. *Journal of Lutheran Ethics* <https://www.elca.org/JLE/Articles/1015> (retrieved Dec. 29, 2016).

<sup>5</sup> Enoch Wan, “Protestant Ethic and Chinese Culture: A Reflection of Max Weber’s Theory and Methodology,” in *East & West: Religious Ethics and Other Essays*, ed. Zhang Zhigang & M.Y. Stewart. (Beijing: Central Translation & Publication of China, 1996).

<sup>6</sup> Originated from a “protest” from Lutheran princes, e.g. Phillip of Hesse, in Lutheran territories in response to the attempts of Emperor’s representative to reestablish Catholicism in Lutheran territories at the Second Diet of Speyer.

<sup>7</sup> Luther’s tract, “The Freedom of a Christian” (1520)—“A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none; a Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.”

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

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

<sup>10</sup> BAM (business as mission) is not easily defined but can be described by the characteristics such as: “Profitable and sustainable businesses; Intentional about Kingdom of God purpose and impact on people and nations; Focused on holistic transformation and the multiple bottom lines of economic, social, environmental and spiritual outcomes; Concerned about the world’s poorest and least evangelized peoples.” From “Business as Mission,” *The BAM Review*.

January 14, 2015, <http://businessasmission.com/what-is-bam/>  
An extensive coverage (88 pages) on BAM in the document produced by the LCWE Issue Group entitled, “Business as Mission.” Lausanne Occasional Paper No. 59, 2004, [https://www.lausanne.org/docs/2004forum/LOP59\\_IG30.pdf](https://www.lausanne.org/docs/2004forum/LOP59_IG30.pdf) (retrieved Dec. 20, 2016).

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>16</sup> Enoch Wan & Joe Dow, “Serving China’s internal diaspora: motive, means and methods,” *Global Missiology*, [www.GlobalMissiology.org](http://www.GlobalMissiology.org), January 2016.

<sup>17</sup> Wan, *Diaspora Missiology*, 7–8.

<sup>18</sup> A case in point is the current state in the US as quoted below, by John W. Whitehead, “The Breakdown of the Traditional Family: Why Conservative Christians Should Rethink Their Blame Game,” *The Huffington Post*, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/john-w-whitehead/the-breakdown-of-the-trad\\_b\\_675444.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/john-w-whitehead/the-breakdown-of-the-trad_b_675444.html)—“Since 1974, about 1 million children per year have seen their parents divorce, and children who are exposed to divorce are two to three times more likely than their peers in intact marriages to suffer from serious social or psychological pathologies. In their book *Growing Up with a Single Parent: What Hurts, What Helps*, sociologists Sara McLanahan and Gary Sandefur found that 31% of adolescents with divorced parents dropped

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

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

<sup>19</sup> Gretchen Livingston, in a Pew Research Report dated December 22, 2014, “Fewer than half of U.S. kids today live in a ‘traditional’ family.” <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/12/22/less-than-half-of-u-s-kids-today-live-in-a-traditional-family/>

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

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

<sup>21</sup> Phil Johnson & Joanne Duberley (eds.) *Postmodernist Epistemology—Relativism Unleashed?* (Sage, 2000).

<sup>22</sup> Recent publications of this persuasion are as follows:

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

<sup>23</sup> “Ethical pluralism,” *New World Encyclopedia*, <http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Pluralism>

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

<sup>25</sup> Wan & Hedinger, *Relational Missionary Training*.

<sup>26</sup> Enoch Wan, “The Paradigm of ‘Relational Realism’,” *Occasional Bulletin*, EMS, vol. 19, no. 2 (Spring 2006):1–4.

<sup>27</sup> Enoch Wan, “Relational Theology and Relational Missiology,” *Occasional Bulletin*, EMS, vol. 21, no. 1 (Winter 2007): 1–7.

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

Enoch Wan

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