

# ***Lutheran Mission Matters***

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# “The Giant That Couldn’t Sleep”: An Active Theology of Missions as Derived from the Lutheran Confessions

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**Abstract:** Some have described the Lutheran Church as a “sleeping giant.” The implication would seem to be that the Lutheran Church is gigantic when it comes to theology but relatively inactive when it comes to missions. One could make a good case against the caricature itself, but the purpose of this essay is to ask a more fundamental question: Can this giant even sleep? I argue that it cannot and set out to develop a two-dimensional theology of missions as derived from the Lutheran Confessions that is categorically active and very much alive. It focuses on the mission of the Triune God (vertical dimension) which flows naturally into the mission of the Church (horizontal dimension).

## Introduction

The Lutheran Church has allegedly been described as a “sleeping giant.”<sup>1</sup> The implication would seem to be that despite our great contribution to theology, we have a tendency to rarely, if ever, act on it. In a manner of speaking, we are supposedly asleep. The great “giant” of theology seems reluctant to wake up, rear its head, and venture out to plow the fields and plant the seed. The caricature ultimately suggests a question: What good is a sleeping giant?

Reactions vary. Some (myself included) would deny that the giant is “sleeping.” Such a stigma seems less than historically accurate. Even a cursory overview of the history of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod would reveal a church body that has been quite awake indeed, and not only in terms of its theology, but especially in terms of its missionary activity, both at home and abroad.<sup>2</sup>



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Others (myself included) disagree with the underlying assumption that one's theological prowess benefits no one and is otherwise wasted on the world. The rather emphatic words of G. K. Chesterton on the importance of theology and its distinctions come to mind:

In all the mess of modern thoughtlessness, that still calls itself modern thought, there is perhaps nothing so stupendously stupid as the common saying, "Religion can never depend on minute disputes about doctrine." It is like saying that life can never depend on minute disputes about medicine.<sup>3</sup>

In this regard, he was of the same mind as Martin Luther. The Reformer was certainly not one to dismiss the importance of the Christian life, but he insisted above all on the importance of doctrine, for "life may be unclean, sinful, and inconsistent, but doctrine must be pure, holy, sound, unchanging . . . not a tittle or letter may be omitted, however much life may fail to meet the requirements of doctrine" (WA, 30 111, 343–344). Hence, Luther and the Reformers took their stance on issues of doctrine seriously and spent considerable time and effort in developing the rationale for their doctrinal stances and defending them against any opponents.

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I find less helpful a third reaction that some adopt, namely, that of boasting that one is better off being a gigantic giant lying asleep than a puny peon running around. In other words, having sound doctrine and the pure Gospel, even if rarely used in day-to-day life, is far more valuable than having a shallow and shaky theology that is practically and continually used to affect people's lives.

My purpose in this essay is not to explore the mission history of the LCMS. Nor is it to determine the value of being a theological giant. Nor is it to address the question of which is better, a sleeping giant or an active peon. These questions, especially the last one, tend to inadvertently admit and accept the fact that the giant is currently sleeping. But is that even possible?

Luther and the Reformers took their doctrinal stance because they believed wholeheartedly that it was firmly grounded on Holy Scripture. Just as important to them, however, were the pastoral implications of that doctrine. They were deeply concerned with the salvation and care of souls. In retrospect, it seems clear that this concern lies at the root of the entire Reformation movement. It is ultimately what gave rise to the fateful posting of the 95 Theses and serves as the underlying concern throughout the Augsburg Confession and its Apology, not to mention both of

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Luther’s catechisms. In other words, the Reformers did not boast in their doctrine simply because of its prowess, but they were ready to die for it because they believed that in the long run it was a very practical matter of spiritual life and death for the souls of many. It is in this way that Luther viewed theology as eminently practical.<sup>4</sup> Theology is not just speculation, nor is it merely about doing good works. For Luther, all of theology was about “the sinful and lost human being and the justifying and saving God” (LW 12:311).<sup>5</sup> Moreover, such a theology was not merely about examining the God-man relation from a distance, but it was also and ultimately a matter of God’s creating and establishing a relation with us.<sup>6</sup> Any legitimate engagement in theology, then, necessarily creates faith and brings about salvation.

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If this theology of the Lutheran Reformers is what makes the Lutheran Church a “giant,” then the question is no longer, “What good is a sleeping giant?” Rather, we should be asking, “Can this ‘giant’ even sleep? Can it even doze?” And the conclusive answer would have to be a resounding “no!” There is something so inherently practical and powerful about the theology of the Lutheran Church that, I would submit, it simply cannot remain inactive. With this in mind, it is safe to assume that if the “giant” is sleeping then it must be some other theology we are involved with.

The theology that the Lutheran Reformers were talking about can be found today most clearly and succinctly presented in the Lutheran Confessions and gathered together in *The Book of Concord*.<sup>7</sup> This essay takes a closer look at the inherent liveliness of the “giant” by narrowing our focus to one aspect of Lutheran theology, namely, the theology of missions. Although it may not directly address the topic of missions, I believe that Lutheran confessional theology has some deep insights that can serve as a foundational basis for a theology of missions today that is very active and quite alive.<sup>8</sup>

There are, of course, different approaches to missiology. There are those that focus on the practical side, delving into auxiliary disciplines such as anthropology, intercultural studies, and missional leadership. As a career missionary myself for many years in Africa, I do not wish to undermine in any way the value and, yes, necessity of such “left-hand kingdom” tools used in service to God’s mission. Such discussions are crucially helpful when it comes to *how* the “giant” might carry out its activity. But I am concerned here with a much more fundamental question of *why* the

“giant” must be active in missions in the first place. Although I recognize the temptation to linger forever on the *why* and continually put off actual engagement in the *how*, it is likewise dangerous to overlook the *why* and jump immediately to the *how*. When all is said and done, the *why* ultimately helps us make responsible decisions about the *how*.

So, why missions in the first place? Is the work of mission simply an “addendum” to what God is really doing in the world? Is it really just a matter of mere obedience to yet another command that God added to the list we already had? Did God pass the baton, and now it’s up to us to complete His mission? Are not Christian missions about liberation from oppression and caring for the needy? These and other questions like them reflect misunderstandings that greatly affect the *how* of missions and, in turn, call for a return to the *why* of missions. They can be addressed (and, if need be, adjusted) only as we explore the inherently missional<sup>9</sup> nature of confessional<sup>10</sup> Lutheran theology. In other words, I find it immensely helpful and most necessary to underscore what Lesslie Newbigin called the “logic of missions”<sup>11</sup> (but from a Lutheran point of view), that is, how our theology naturally and spontaneously<sup>12</sup> propels toward missional action and expression.

Our theology naturally and spontaneously propels toward missional action and expression.

My purpose in what follows is twofold: (1) offer a brief sketch of a theology of missions as derived from the Lutheran Confessions; and (2) offer an explanation as to why and how the Lutheran Church with its confessional theology of missions cannot sleep, but instead must be very much alive and active. To do this, I wish to direct our attention to the vertical dimension of missions as being the work of the Triune God (the Father as Creator, the Son as Redeemer, and the Holy Spirit as Sanctifier)<sup>13</sup> and then, once this is established, to concentrate on the horizontal dimension of missions (the instrument of the Church).<sup>14</sup> Establishing the vertical aspect (God’s mission or what theologians sometimes call the *Missio Dei*) before directing our attention to the horizontal aspect (the Church’s mission) is vitally important, because the latter flows directly from and is motivated and “empowered” (SD IV, § 6)<sup>15</sup> by the former.

## Vertical Dimension of Missions

I find it somewhat surprising how little attention God the Father receives in discussions about missions. Perhaps this is because the reconciling act of the Son and the sanctifying work of the Spirit appear to be more closely related to the subject of missions. It may also be due to the fact that Jesus directly engaged in activities that resemble what we consider “mission work” today. The Holy Spirit, for His part, was

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sent out to continue “mission work.” God the Father seems somewhat peripheral to the whole affair. But nothing could be further from the truth. God as Father provides the ultimate source (and example) for the actual Mission of God. This becomes especially clear when we direct our attention to His work as “Creator” (LC, Second Part, §§ 16, 19).

There are only twelve words in the English translation of the First Article of the Apostles’ Creed, but each is deeply significant for Christian faith and life. The words “almighty Creator of heaven and earth” (LC, Second Part, § 9) not only identify God the Father as the Creator but necessarily define us as His creatures. What does this mean? It means that He universally preserves all things, including every aspect of our lives, from whom I marry to what I eat in the morning, and everything around us, from the birds in the air to the grain in the fields (LC, Second Part, §§ 13–16). However, the Father is concerned with more than just our day-to-day well-being and continued material existence. When we confess Him as “Creator,” we confess that God the Father is concerned that we participate in a greater existence, one free from the power of the devil. According to Luther, essential to God’s role as Creator and Preserver is that He “daily guards and defends us against every evil and misfortune” (LC, Second Part, § 17). On the basis of this confession and the Lord’s example, we can most confidently pray, “but deliver us from evil” and be assured that it is our Father’s will that we be rid of our “archenemy” (LC, Third Part, §§ 112–113).

This loving protection from the devil and his evil minions finds its fullest expression in the redemptive actions of Jesus Christ and its continuing effect in the sanctifying actions of the Holy Spirit.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, as our “Creator,” it is God the Father who put into action the ultimate plan whereby through faith we are restored as the perfect creatures that He so graciously created. This incredible expression of loving kindness reminds us of His title as “Father” (Rom 8:15). But His love for His children surpasses that of even the most loving human parent. In fact, even the most ideal conceivable father-son experience on this earth would only be a faint shadow of that which truly exists between our “loving father” and we who are “truly His children” (SC, Lord’s Prayer, § 2). In an unfathomable way, He yearns to see His children free from every evil and especially death (both physical and eternal).

Here we catch a glimpse of the missionary heart of God and find categorically that He “is for us” (Rom 8:31). Moreover, the missionary heart of God is not an accidental occurrence simply occasioned by the fall of humankind. It is not merely a matter of feeling sorry for us, a feeling of pity triggered by the mess we caused. If, as Luther was wise to point out, God’s love, in sharp contrast to human love, “does not find, but creates that which is pleasing to it,”<sup>17</sup> the same could be said of His missionary heart. It is simply who He is. In fact, it is deeply significant for our own understanding of the inherent *a priori* missionary heart of God that His very purpose in creating us was to save us: “For in all three articles God himself has revealed and

opened to us the most profound depths of his fatherly heart and his pure, unutterable love. *For this very purpose he created us, so that he might redeem us and make us holy*” (LC, Second Part, § 64; emphasis added). As the Father, God’s primary goal in creating us was and remains the restoration of His creation—the new creation through Christ Jesus (2 Cor 5:17). God the Father becomes the source of God’s mission that finds its culmination in Christ and continuity in the Holy Spirit.

While a theology of mission may begin with God as Creator, it cannot end there. In fact, the reader may have noticed that even our description above of the missionary dimension of the First Article could not help but “spill over” into the Second Article. This is an important point. God’s mission does not find its ultimate fulfillment in His general love and care for His creation, nor is the Church’s mission ultimately about carrying out the “cultural mandate” (Gn 1:28). Neither can we truly know the magnitude of His mission on behalf of His creation through natural revelation. As important as God’s creative work is, Luther was quick to point out that “we could never come to recognize the Father’s favor and grace were it not for the Lord Christ, who is a mirror of the Father’s heart. Apart from him we see nothing but an angry and terrible judge” (LC, Second Part, § 65). It is interesting that throughout the Middle Ages the Apostles’ Creed was commonly divided into twelve statements. Luther innovatively arranged it into three separate articles in order to emphasize how the Triune God is saving us in an interpersonal and relational way, such that all that God does in the creed is “for us.”<sup>18</sup> The Second Article serves as both the foundational center and goal of this mission of the Triune God.<sup>19</sup>

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Claiming Jesus Christ as the “foundational center” of God’s mission means, first, that He is the foundation upon which the entire mission depends and, second, that He is the central point upon which the entire mission converges. Set the person and work of Jesus Christ aside, and the entire mission loses its focus and crumbles to the ground. What is left might be considered a mission, but it surely would not be God’s mission as we find it in Scripture.

The Son serves as the foundational center for God’s mission primarily because He was and remains the first and greatest missionary, God’s ultimate Word of reconciliation to the world (Ap IV, § 80). God is a speaking God. He “loves to talk.”<sup>20</sup> He created all things through a spoken Word and through that Word He is re-creating all things. That creative Word of God is not static. It is ever active and alive in a way that uses and yet surpasses human language. Unlike Christian missionaries who are sent out *with* the power of the Word, Christ *is* that very Word become flesh

(Jn 1:14). Lutheran theology with this Word as its foundational center cannot remain lethargic. It is active by its very nature.

We see this above all in the substitutionary life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, which serves to reconcile us to the Father. Only because of what the Son has done on our behalf does “God the Father forgive our sins by grace, regard us as upright and righteous, and give us eternal salvation” (SD III, §§ 9–11). Jesus accomplished many feats and gave many sermons during His earthly life. This was His way of demonstrating in word and deed that God is among people carrying out His missionary work. Yet it is important to realize that these activities, by themselves, do not form the foundational center of God’s mission, for they find their climax and culmination in the ultimate redeeming and reconciling missionary act of Jesus Christ—His death on the cross and resurrection from the grave on behalf of all people throughout all of history and throughout the whole world. Hence, the foundation and focal point of God’s mission is

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Jesus’ redemptive work. This is precisely what we confess in the Second Article of the Apostles’ Creed when we say, “And [I believe] in Jesus Christ, *our Lord*” (LC, Second Part, § 26; emphasis added). To confess Christ as Lord, Luther explains, is to believe that He is our redeemer, that is, “he who has brought us back from the devil to God, from death to life, from sin to righteousness, and keeps us there” (LC, Second Part, § 31). Later when writing his personal testimony (Smalcald Articles), Luther called this “the first and chief article” of which nothing “can be conceded or given up, even if heaven and earth or whatever is transitory passed away” (SA II, §§ 1–5).

It is curious that in the Smalcald Articles Luther joins together under the “office and work of Jesus Christ” both Christ’s redemptive work (redeeming the world by His death and resurrection) and what we might call His justifying work (saving a person through faith). Traditionally, theologians have labeled these, respectively, “objective” and “subjective” justification. The point I wish to underscore here is that, although the confessors do *distinguish* between the two for the sake of clarity (see, e.g., AC III & IV), they are careful to hold them together as *inseparable*. The implications for God’s mission are profound. The baton of missions is not simply handed over to the Church upon Christ’s ascension. Rather, the mission that Jesus *began* to carry out during His earthly life and through His death and resurrection (Acts 1:1), He now continues to carry out in the world today through the Church. Here we begin to overlap with the Third Article. Suffice it to say at this point that

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God's incarnate Word continues His Mission as God's proclaimed Word of promise that creates saving faith. Promise personified becomes promise proclaimed. This is why Luther and the Reformers had an undying confidence in that Word. Luther once remarked that the preaching of the Word had a life of its own, like the ever expanding progression of waves from a stone tossed into water (WA 10:139, 17–140, 16).<sup>21</sup> They were convinced that, although it was information, i.e., Good News, it was not mere proposition.<sup>22</sup> It was “not idle or dead, but effective and living” such that through it “the devil is cast out and put to flight” (LC, First Part, §§ 101–102) and the forgiveness of sins is received (LC, Fifth Part, § 31). Its purpose, flowing from that of God the Father, is to defeat the devil's grip on us and to re-create us as new creations. This is partly why we confess the Son, along with the Father, as “Creator” (AC I, § 3; SD VII, §§ 44–45).

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While remaining the indispensable foundational center of God's mission, the Son also serves as its goal in that “he shall come to judge the living and the dead” at His second coming (LC, Second Part, § 25). His return will be the final fulfillment of God's mission. The devil will be finally, completely, and utterly defeated, never to rise again. We will be completely and fully new creatures existing in pure harmony with God, untainted by vestiges of the old. This does not call for loafing at the present as we await His return, however, because as Christians we already can and do experience “proleptically”<sup>23</sup> (i.e., ahead of time) the benefits of His second coming. Though we still struggle with the day-to-day realities of our sinful selves, we are already reconciled and declared righteous before God for Christ's sake (AC IV, §§ 1–3). It becomes important especially on the horizontal level (see below) that we see the benefits of the goal of God's mission as available to us right now. With this, our theology of missions takes on a sense of joy (the victory is assured) as well as urgency (the victory is at hand).

I pointed out earlier that, apart from Christ, the Father would appear as “an angry and terrible judge.” It is also true that “neither could we know anything of Christ, had it not been revealed by the Holy Spirit” (LC, Second Part, § 65). The dynamic or active power which drives God's mission is found in the person and work of the Holy Spirit,<sup>24</sup> who is sent, i.e., “proceeds,” from the Father and the Son as a continuation of their work of creation. He is an indispensable part of God's mission, for it is only through the “grace, help, and operation of the Holy Spirit” that we are brought to faith in God and trust in Him above all other things (AC XVIII, § 2). In discussing the issue of human free will, the confessors are adamant: Without the “power and action of the Holy Spirit” all the “planting and watering . . . would be

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in vain,” all the work done in missions would be for nothing (SD II, § 55). This is a terrible thought. Without the Holy Spirit, the benefits of the bitter sufferings and death of the Son to reconcile us to the Father would be closed to us, and true righteousness and holiness would be impossible. Without the power and dynamism of the Holy Spirit, the Good News “I forgive you because of Jesus’ death and resurrection for you!” would become old news about a man who long ago claimed to die for the world.<sup>25</sup> Salvation would be reduced to a matter of memory. Thankfully, that is not the case. The proclamation of forgiveness in first-order discourse (for you) is a “proposition that packs power” in the here and now.<sup>26</sup> Through it the Holy Spirit has called and gathered “a holy little flock and community of pure saints under one head, Christ” (LC, Second Part, § 51). We confess this as “the holy Christian church, the communion of saints” (LC, Second Part, § 34), and it is unlike any other group or gathering of people throughout the world. It is a “unique community in the world” (LC, Second Part, § 42), gathered around the Word and Sacraments (SD II, §§ 48–52), those gifts that God has given to it and through which He has promised that the Holy Spirit will produce faith (AC V, § 3) and save souls. Luther then offers this summary: “Creation is now behind us, and redemption has also taken place, but the Holy Spirit continues his work without ceasing until the Last Day” (LC, Second Part, § 61). Such a theology of missions cannot fade away or become drowsy through the ages. It finds its dynamic and, therefore, active and vibrant continuation in the person and work of the Holy Spirit.

### **Horizontal Dimension of Missions**

We have established, thus far, a framework for a theology of missions focusing on its vertical dimension as the mission of the Triune God. That mission has the creative work of God the Father as its source, the redemptive and justifying work of God the Son as its foundational center and goal, and the sanctifying work of God the Holy Spirit as its dynamic, though all three equally participate in the work of each person.<sup>27</sup>

What remains is to offer a few comments regarding what we might call the horizontal dimension of our theology of missions. It deals primarily with the Church’s participation in God’s mission. When that participation takes place in particular instances and places we call them “missions.”<sup>28</sup> It is beyond the scope of this essay to delve into how this plays out in the life of the Church when it comes to such matters as strategy,

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methods, resources, etc. As interesting and necessary as those are, I wish to focus our attention in particular on how and why a church with the theology of missions as described above cannot be asleep at the wheel, so to speak, when it comes to missions.

I mentioned earlier that the horizontal dimension (the Church's mission) derives and flows from the vertical dimension (God's mission). This has significant consequences for how we understand missions. It does not mean that we are dealing with two different missions or that the Church's mission picks up where God's mission left off. Such a misunderstanding might underlie some of the lethargic drowsiness that tempts so many congregations. Rather, our mission is a participation in the continuing greater mission of the Triune God that, indeed, is still in full force.

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(God's mission).

Our missionary God is a God who very often works through human instruments. We may find this so normal about our God that we take it for granted. It is helpful to keep in mind that He did not have to do it this way. From a purely human perspective, it's quite a risky strategic move. He chose Abraham to be a blessing for the nations (Gn 12:1–3).<sup>29</sup> He selected Israel as His “treasured possession” to serve as priests for the nations of the world (Ex 19:5–6).<sup>30</sup> He kept a remnant for Himself through whom would come the promised Messiah to save the world (Is 49:6; Jer 29:7). As we have seen, He did not conduct mission business from afar but sent His own Son to become human to accomplish that mission (Lk 24:46–47). He sent out the apostles to proclaim the Good News to Judea, Samaria, and to the corners of the earth (Lk 24:48–49; Acts 1:8; Mt 28:16–20). When they huddled down in Jerusalem, He scattered them through persecution so that the Word was finally preached in Samaria and made use of Philip as the first to preach to the “ends of the earth” (Ethiopia) (Acts 8). He reminded Peter through a vision that God is and always has been about saving the whole world (Acts 10). He worked through James, the first “president” of the Christian Church at the first apostolic council at Jerusalem, to redirect missionary efforts to the nations (Acts 15). He transformed Saul the persecutor into Paul the apostle and into one of the greatest missionaries the Church has ever seen. And the list could go on. Throughout the Book of Acts, we see the Word as active and organic. It “spreads,” “grows and multiplies,” and “grows mightily and prevails” (Acts 6:7; 12:24; 19:20). And yet that Word of Good News is never without human mouths and lives that proclaim it. Nor is it separated from the Christian Church which also “multiplies” and “increases in number” (Acts 9:31; 16:5).

My point in this rapid survey of God’s mission over a span of two thousand years of biblical witness is that God’s mission continues through the Church today. This is a crucially important point. As we have seen, that mission—with its source, foundational center, goal, and dynamic found in the Triune God—has an undeniable power and a certain momentum that continues to propel itself forward through the work of the Church today. If history has shown anything, it has demonstrated that God’s mission cannot be hindered. The theology of missions as presented above reveals why this is so. The Church is carried along and propelled forward as it participates in God’s mission to save the nations. For God in His infinite wisdom has chosen her as His “unique community in the world, which is the mother that begets and bears every Christian through the Word of God, which the Holy Spirit reveals and proclaims, through which he illuminates and inflames hearts so that they grasp and accept it, cling to it, and persevere in it” (LC, Second Part, § 42).

It is a profoundly humbling thought that the Church serves as the “mother that begets and bears every Christian through the Word of God.” Luther did not mince words: God creates, calls, and gathers “the Christian church, *apart from which no one can come to the Lord Christ*” (LC, Second Part, § 45; emphasis added). Our missionary God does not carry out His mission apart from His Church. In a very real sense, the Church cannot remove itself from participation in God’s mission or even take a break from it. It cannot sleep. To do so would call into question its very existence as Church. As they stood before the Diet of Augsburg, accused of being outside of the Church,<sup>31</sup> the Lutheran confessors boldly confessed the Church as “the assembly of all believers among whom the Gospel is purely preached and the holy sacraments are administered according to the Gospel” (AC VII, § 1). Although using different terminology, this redefinition of what constitutes the Church has significant missiological implications. The Church is no longer legitimized by its adherence to an external figure, i.e., the Pope, but is redefined by its faithfulness in preaching Christ crucified and raised for the forgiveness of sins and in administering the sacraments which convey that same Gospel. It is through these very means that God wishes to make use of the Church to “beget and bear” true believers and keep them in the faith. In other words, God’s mission defines the Church. To be Church is to be about God’s mission.

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The opposite is also true. If the Church fails to faithfully proclaim the Word and administer the sacraments, then it forfeits its “very existence and essence.”<sup>32</sup> Lest we lose sight of the universality of God’s mission and focus too narrowly and

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exclusively on those already within the Church, it is helpful to remind ourselves that that proclamation and especially the sacrament of Baptism are meant also for those outside of the Church (Mt 28:19–20). While preaching on Luke 24:46–47, Luther emphasized the universality of the Church’s mission:

Christ intends and herewith commands that such preaching [about the forgiveness of sins] should not be made known in a corner or to a special few alone. . . . Instead, it should be preached in the whole wide world or, as he says, “among all nations” and again “to all creatures.” He says this so that we know that he does not want to have anyone singled out or excluded. (WA 21:253.35–262.6)<sup>33</sup>

Although “perfectly free lord[s] of all [and] subject to none,” thanks to God’s mission on our behalf (vertical dimension), we remain “perfectly dutiful servant[s] to all, subject to all” as we gratefully participate in the Church’s mission (LW 31:344).<sup>34</sup> The greatest service to neighbor is to supply him or her with the one thing needful—the Gospel. The person and work of the Holy Spirit serves as the direct connection, so to speak, between God’s mission (vertical dimension) and the Church’s mission (horizontal dimension). If the Church disallows the Holy Spirit His work of carrying out God’s mission of saving souls through Word and sacrament, then, as Luther put it, “there [is] no Christian church” (LC, Second Part, § 45). It is important to understand that losing its status as Church is not punishment for sleeping or inactivity. Such an approach to missions tends to see it as mere obedience to a command. Rather, if participation in God’s mission is *essential* to what it means to be Church, then losing the status of Church is simply a matter of laying aside the very thing that serves to define it.

Moreover, if the Lutheran Church is considered a giant because of its confession of faith, and if confessing one’s faith is inherently what the Church’s mission is about, then being a giant inherently means to be about the Church’s mission.

The point is this: The liveliness of the giant is *essential* to its gigantiness. When all is said and done, there really is no such thing as a *sleeping* giant. There is only an *active lively* giant or a *dead* giant. And a dead giant is no giant at all.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> The saying has been attributed to Billy Graham, though it may be more apocryphal than actual. Although Rev. Graham was apparently quite fond of the term, no one seems to have been able to identify when and where he said it in reference to the Lutheran Church (LCMS or other).

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., Michael W. Newman, *Gospel DNA: Five Markers of a Flourishing Church* (San Antonio: Ursa Publishing, 2016); Theodore P. Bornhoeft, *Mission Beginnings* (Columbus: Brentwood Christian Press, 1988).

<sup>3</sup> G. K. Chesterton, *The Resurrection of Rome* in *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton*, vol. XXI (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990), 320.

<sup>4</sup> For Luther on “theology as practical,” see WA TR 2:56, 22–23 (no. 1340), 464–465 (no. 2444); WA TR 1:72–73 (no. 153); WA TR 5:384, 16–17 (no. 5867); LW 54:22.

<sup>5</sup> Lectures on Psalm 51 from 1532. I follow the translation and am indebted to the helpful analysis of Oswald Bayer, *Theology the Lutheran Way*, ed. and trans. Jeffrey G. Silcock and Mark C. Mattes (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2007), 16–21.

<sup>6</sup> See Bayer’s comments about “theology as relation.” Bayer, *Theology*, 19–20.

<sup>7</sup> All references and quotations from the Lutheran Confessions are from Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000).

<sup>8</sup> I am not the only one who shares this sentiment. There are few other books in English that I have encountered that underscore the inherent evangelistic and missionary dimension of every aspect of Lutheran theology as well as Robert Kolb, *Speaking the Gospel* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1995). It is also readily accessible to the layperson. Not so accessible, but definitely worth digging into, is Klaus Detlev Schulz, “The Missiological Significance of the Doctrine of Justification in the Lutheran Confessions” (PhD diss., Concordia Seminary, 1994).

<sup>9</sup> This term is used in various ways and carries different connotations. In this essay, I use it broadly as synonymous with the adjective “missionary,” whereby it basically means “having to do with missions and God’s mission.”

<sup>10</sup> As is the case with “missional,” this term also carries a variety of connotations. In this essay, I use it broadly to describe theology as confessed by the original confessors in the Lutheran Confessions. Based on my understanding of the concept of “confession,” I maintain that to be “confessional” is to be “missional” and to be “missional” is to be “confessional.” For an excellent monograph on the historical development of “confessing” as a way of life in the early years of the Evangelical (Lutheran) movement and its implications for today, see Robert Kolb, *Confessing the Faith: Reformers Define the Church, 1530–1580* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1991).

<sup>11</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1989), 116–127:

Perhaps my title, “The Logic of Missions,” may seem an odd one, but I am concerned to explore the question of how the mission of the Church is rooted in the gospel itself. There has been a long tradition which sees the mission of the Church primarily as obedience to a command. . . . This way of putting the matter is certainly not without justification, and yet it seems to me that it misses the point. It tends to make mission a burden rather than a joy, to make it part of the law rather than a part of the gospel. . . . The mission of the Church in the pages of the New Testament is more like the fallout from a vast explosion, a radioactive fallout which is not lethal but life-giving. One searches in vain through the letters of St. Paul to find any suggestion that he anywhere lays it on the conscience of his readers that they ought to be active in missions. For himself it is inconceivable that he should keep silent. (116)

<sup>12</sup> See Roland Allen, *The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church, and the Causes that Hinder It* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 1962).

<sup>13</sup> The goal here is not to isolate or separate the persons of the Trinity or their work, but to more fully and deeply explore the *Missio Dei* by focusing on different aspects of the collective economic work of the Trinity. In this respect I follow Luther’s lead (see Klaus Detlev Schulz, *Mission from the Cross: The Lutheran Theology of Mission* [St. Louis: Concordia, 2009], 92). Apart from the Son’s redemptive work, which required human flesh, each person of the Trinity is involved in every divine work. For a helpful discussion on Luther’s use of the Creed

in his catechisms and “The Unity of the Trinitarian Persons and Works,” see Charles P. Arand, “Luther on the Creed,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 20 (2006): 10–21.

<sup>14</sup> Though I take it in a different direction, this approach has been partially adapted from Schulz, “Missiological Significance,” 4–6.

<sup>15</sup> “True good works are not performed out of our own natural powers, but they are performed when a person is reconciled with God through faith and renewed through the Holy Spirit.”

<sup>16</sup> Schulz, “Missiological Significance,” 25.

<sup>17</sup> LW 31:57 (*Heidelberg Disputation*, thesis 28).

<sup>18</sup> Arand, “Luther on the Creed,” 2.

<sup>19</sup> I have adapted these motifs from Schulz, *Mission from the Cross*, 117.

<sup>20</sup> Kolb, *Speaking the Gospel*, 9, 56–61.

<sup>21</sup> See Volker Stolle, *The Church Comes to All Nations: Luther Texts on Mission*, trans. Klaus Detlev Schulz (St. Louis: Concordia, 2003), 24–25.

<sup>22</sup> Kolb, *Speaking the Gospel*, 58.

<sup>23</sup> Proleptic denotes the “assigning of a person, event, etc., to a period earlier than the actual one; the representation of something in the future as if it already existed or had occurred; prochronism” ([www.dictionary.com](http://www.dictionary.com)).

<sup>24</sup> See Schulz, “Missiological Significance,” 52. For a fuller explanation of the dynamic of God’s mission, albeit from a slightly different perspective, see pp. 52–64.

<sup>25</sup> See the insightful comments on this by Gerhard O. Forde, *Theology is for Proclamation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 6.

<sup>26</sup> Kolb, *Speaking the Gospel*, 58.

<sup>27</sup> See fn. 13.

<sup>28</sup> See David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 10.

<sup>29</sup> See Chris Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press Academic, 2006), 199–221.

<sup>30</sup> Wright, *Mission of God*, 224–225, 255–257.

<sup>31</sup> Shortly before their arrival in Augsburg, John Eck had published and circulated a document called *404 Theses*, which accused the evangelicals (derogatorily called “Lutherans”) of numerous heresies in an apparent attempt to depict them as a sect that was no longer part of the Christian Church. In response, the evangelicals had Philipp Melancthon add several articles clarifying and defending their theological views as soundly catholic, i.e., still in accordance with the whole. These twenty-one articles were placed before the seven articles that treated more practical issues.

<sup>32</sup> Schulz, “Missiological Significance,” 59–60.

<sup>33</sup> See Stolle, *Church Comes to All Nations*, 32.

<sup>34</sup> *The Freedom of a Christian* (1520).