

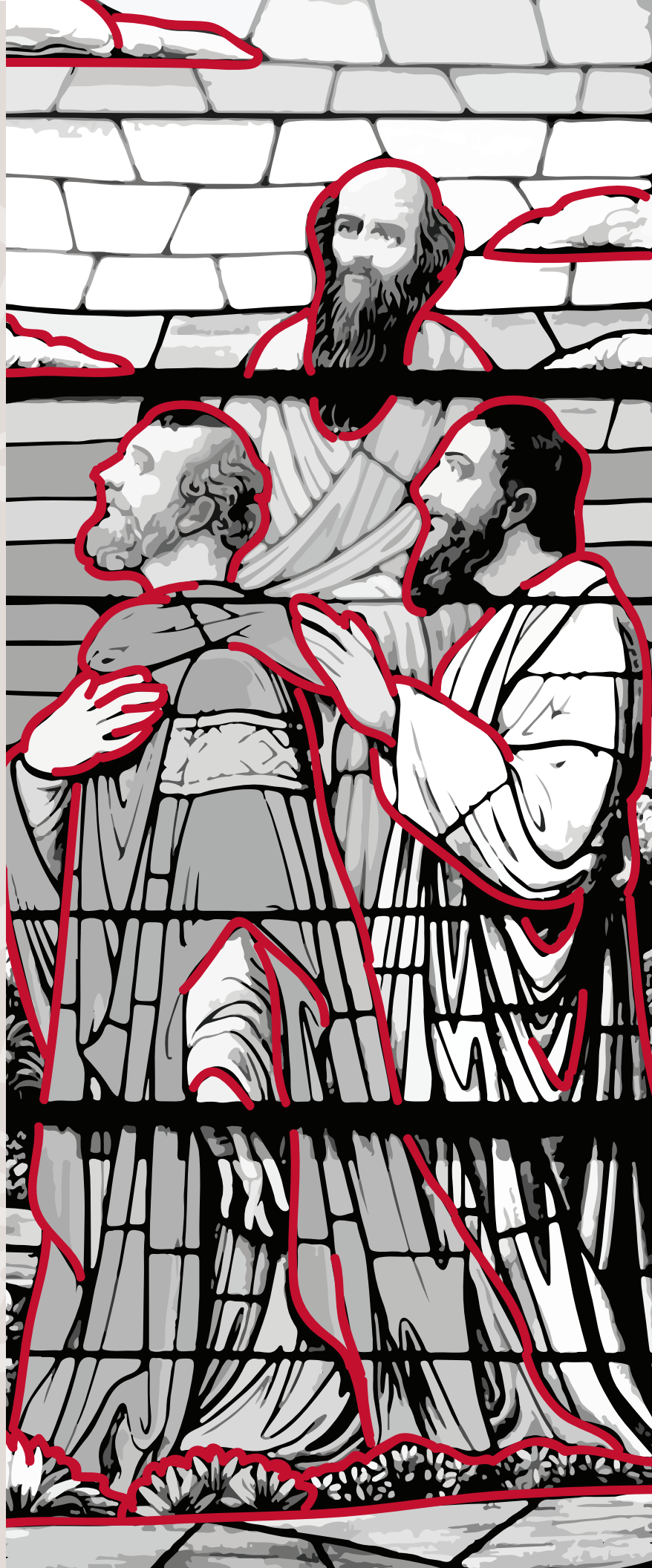
# JOURNAL OF LUTHERAN Mission

September 2016 | Vol. 3 | No. 2



THE  
LUTHERAN CHURCH  
Missouri Synod

Witness Always



# THE JOURNAL OF LUTHERAN MISSION

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# ECUMENICAL AND MISSION OPPORTUNITIES AND BLESSINGS

THIS ISSUE OF THE *Journal of Lutheran Mission* (JLM) presents some of the ecumenical and mission opportunities and blessings that are before us. The Missouri Synod and the members of the International Lutheran Council (ILC) increasingly are approached by both Lutheran and non-Lutheran churches who seek to be faithful to the Holy Scriptures and to increase their Lutheran identity through the study of the Book of Concord. The Synod in convention this past July in Milwaukee recognized and affirmed this. The Synod in convention entered fellowship with six church bodies (Norway, Uruguay, Guatemala, Venezuela, Kazakhstan, and Chile). The convention recognized the ecumenical opportunities that this moment presents in several resolutions (Res. 5-07, “To Affirm and Encourage Work of the International Lutheran Council”; Res. 5-08, “To Commend and Encourage Informal Conversations with Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod and Evangelical Lutheran Synod”; and Res. 5-09, “To Commend and Encourage Interchurch Conversations with Anglican Church in North America and North American Lutheran Church”). The Synod in convention adopted Res. 5-18, “To Commend the ‘A Theological Statement of Mission for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century’ for Synod-wide Study and Use.” The convention adopted Res. 6-04, “To Encourage and Support the Global Seminary Initiative.” All of these resolutions adopted by the convention reflect the current ecumenical and mission opportunities that the current age presents. On the one hand as Western society and the world in general seek to limit and restrict the message of the Holy Scriptures, the church at large seeks conversation and fellowship with those groups who remain faithful to the Holy Scriptures. This presents an incredible opportunity.

The essays in this issue provide examples or reflect the opportunities that influenced the Synod in convention to adopt the above-mentioned resolutions. The first couple of papers were presented at a meeting of the European Lutheran Council, founded in 1986. The European Lutheran Council (ELC) predates the founding of the International Lutheran Council (ILC) by seven years.

The first paper shows the little-known history of how Lutheranism struggled to become established in Belgium. The second paper challenges the Lutheran church to consider if it is “always reforming” or “always repenting.” This paper explores Lutheran ecclesiology. The third paper is a response to the recent Lutheran World Federation (LWF) paper called “The Self-Understanding of the Lutheran Communion.” This is an important study to read to become informed about the conversation in the Lutheran ecumenical world and to understand how Lutheran churches should relate to one another — agreement in the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions. The fourth paper is the presentation Dr. Berhanu Ofgaa, general secretary of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY), gave at the LCMS’ 66<sup>th</sup> Convention in Milwaukee. This paper shows how the church can boldly confess in the face of persecution. The fifth paper, titled “God’s Word forever shall abide; A Guiding Statement on the Character and Proper Use of the Sacred Scriptures,” is a joint statement on the Scripture from the LCMS-LCC-NALC dialog group. The sixth paper is “A Theological Statement of Mission for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century,” which has been adopted by the Board for International Mission (BIM), the Board for National Mission (BNM), and reviewed and enhanced by the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR). This mission statement has been commended to the Synod for study and use by the convention. Finally, the church bodies with whom the Missouri Synod has interchurch relations is listed.

This issue shows how the Missouri Synod has been blessed and what tremendous opportunities exist around the world to walk alongside churches who seek to be faithful to the Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions. Walking alongside other church bodies is not a one-way street, but involves a partnership, a mutuality, where each church body exchanges experiences and learns from one another, making everyone stronger in the end. It appears that the Lord is providing more of these opportunities for the future. We hope that you enjoy this issue.

A final remark about the journal is in order. Since the last issue in April 2016, it has received an award from

the Associated Church Press. This is a recognition of how the journal has matured over the past two years and a call for it to remain on a path of excellence. Additionally, the journal soon will be indexed in the American Theological Library Association (ATLA) Religion Database. This will make it easier for scholars to find articles related to Lutheran missiology. Congratulations to the journal for achieving these milestones!

*In Christ,*

President Matthew C. Harrison

PRESIDENT OF THE LCMS

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and International Mission.



# LCMS, LCC AND NALC LEADERS RELEASE JOINT STATEMENT ON SCRIPTURE

Three church bodies discuss their mutual confession regarding Holy Scripture.

AS AN IMPORTANT STEP FORWARD in the ongoing consultation between representatives of the Lutheran Church—Canada, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, and the North American Lutheran Church, the participants who represented the three church bodies are releasing their joint statement on Holy Scripture, “God’s Word Forever Shall Abide: A Guiding Statement on the Character and Proper Use of the Sacred Scriptures.”

Representatives of the three Lutheran church bodies have been meeting twice a year since late 2011 with conversations focused on similarities and differences, as well as topics of common concern. Discussion regularly addresses the challenges to marriage, sexuality, the sanctity of all human life and the challenge to religious liberty. From the beginning, however, the participants have been engaging in serious, in-depth conversation about the authority of Scripture, which is foundational to the church bodies’ understandings of these other issues.

The two most recent consultations, September 9–10, 2015, in St. Louis, and March 16–17, 2016 in Bradenton, Fla., resulted in the drafting of the common statement, understood as providing guidance to the participants in ongoing, future conversations. The introduction to the document states:

We confess that the Bible is God’s written Word as part and parcel of our deepest confession — that Jesus Christ is the very Son of God, God incarnate, “very God of very God” and the Savior and Redeemer of all humankind. We confess that the Bible is God’s Word because its entire message is focused on Jesus Christ and His saving work. He is the heart and center of Scripture and the key to its true meaning.

Topical sections of the statement include: How did the Bible Get Here; What Kind of Book is the Bible;

Suitable Methodology of Interpretation; and Proper Use of the Bible.

The statement is a reflection of the consensus of the participants and not an official document or doctrinal statement approved by any one of the three church bodies. It is intended to serve as a guideline for further joint study by the representatives and by other groups within the three denominations who are seeking to know more about each other. It is also hoped that it may help pastors and congregations seeking to know more about the confessional Lutheran understanding of the truth and authority of Scripture on which the LCMS, LCC and NALC are founded.

The statement concludes:

We rejoice in our consensus in these truths. We pray that our shared understanding will be a sure and solid foundation for us to address future conversations and discussions, both in matters of agreement and areas where we do not share a common teaching or practice.

Participants in the ongoing consultations between leaders of the LCMS, LCC, and the North American Lutheran Church have been the Rev. Dr. Albert Collver III (LCMS), the Rev. Dr. Joel Lehenbauer (LCMS), the Rev. Larry Vogel (LCMS), the Rev. John Pless (LCMS), the Rev. (President) Robert Bugbee (LCC), the Rev. (Bishop) John Bradosky (NALC), the Rev. Mark Chavez (NALC), the Rev. Dr. Jim Nestingen (NALC), the Rev. Paull Spring (NALC), and the Rev. Dr. David Wendel (NALC).



# GOD'S WORD FOREVER SHALL ABIDE: A GUIDING STATEMENT ON THE CHARACTER AND PROPER USE OF THE SACRED SCRIPTURES

This statement serves as a foundation and guideline for deliberations on the basis of God's word, both in areas where the LCMS and others seek to express a common position and also such topics and practices as may divide us.

## Introduction

**T**HIS STATEMENT, "God's Word Forever Shall Abide" ("A Mighty Fortress Is Our God," verse 4; see LBW 228, 229; *LSB* 657), has been previously published elsewhere and was conceived at the September 2015 meeting of representatives of the LCMS and NALC where we agreed to prepare a joint statement on the authority of Holy Scripture. The LCC representative for the ongoing discussions — although unable to be present for these discussions — affirmed both the goal and this document. The present document uses materials provided by both groups (see bibliography for resources that informed our discussions) and is the result of further conversation and consideration at the March 2016 meeting of the representatives. The statement's initial purpose was to serve as a foundation and guideline for our deliberations on the basis of God's word, both in areas where we seek to express a common position and also such topics and practices as may divide us. It is offered here as a report from the representatives involved in these discussions.

God spoke, and it was so (*GENESIS* 1). Together we acknowledge that God works by His Word. The Word of God brings creation into being in a way beyond human knowledge — a way that can only elicit doxology, not human understanding. Then, to a fallen world God spoke through prophets in great compassion with human speech for human comprehension (*GEN.* 15:1). And now "in these last days," with grace beyond comprehension, "he has spoken to us by his Son": the Word by whom He upholds His universe and, yet, the Word made flesh. The Son, who dwelt among us, reveals that God is love as He bears sin and death in a great exchange that grants us resurrection and eternal life (*HEB.* 1:2–3; *JOHN* 1:1–4, 14, 18).

God's Word is not silenced. He speaks through human voices proclaiming His excellencies. He

bespeaks us righteous in sermon and absolution. He declares His Word by human lips over baptismal water and eucharistic bread and cup. And He speaks with clarity and authority in the Holy Scriptures, which we recognize and confess to be "the only guiding principle and rule" for all Christian teaching, preaching, life and practice (FC SD Binding Summary 9).<sup>1</sup>

We confess together that the Bible is the written Word of God. We confess this even as we recognize that it is a collection of human writings spanning a time period of more than a thousand years in three different human languages. We confess this even as we recognize that the biblical texts address a variety of particular circumstances and exhibit the influence of cultural particularities, historical experiences, individual character traits and so forth.

We confess that the Bible is God's written Word as part and parcel of our deepest confession — that Jesus Christ is the very Son of God, God incarnate, "very God of very God" and the Savior and Redeemer of all humankind. We confess that the Bible is God's Word because its entire message is focused on Jesus Christ and His saving work. He is the heart and center of Scripture and the key to its true meaning. We trust the Bible because it has led us to trust in Jesus as our Savior and Lord. As St. John reminds us: "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" (*JOHN* 20:31; *CP. JOHN* 5:39). We rejoice in the truth that comes in Christ alone — the truth that

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, quotations from the Book of Concord are from *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000).

is given by God's gracious act of sending His Son: "Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world" (HEB. 1:1-2).

With the Church of every era, we regard these texts as the authoritative Word of God, because the Gospel of Christ is known through them and they alone rightly guide the life of faith. Our Lord Jesus Himself declares the trustworthiness of the Hebrew Scriptures when He quotes their authority, saying time and again, "It is written" (e.g., MATT. 4:4, 7, 10; LUKE 24:46). He also assures us that His apostles, whose testimony undergirds the entire New Testament, were inspired by the Holy Spirit and that their writings are trustworthy in every way: "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you" (JOHN 14:26).

Therefore, we joyfully confess that we are not strangers to God and His truth, for in justifying us sinners He has made us members of His household, "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone" (EPH. 2:19-20). The Scripture's prophetic and apostolic testimony to God's work from creation until Christ's future return and renewal of creation is the only trustworthy basis for knowing God rightly. Its authority is complete. We receive it with joy and accept its truth without qualification.

## Part 1: How Did the Bible Get Here?

1. Lutheran confessional theology teaches that God has given humankind a revelation of Himself in His works of creation. The self-disclosure of God in the realm of nature is called "general revelation." The revelation of God in nature, which does reveal God's wisdom and power (ROM. 1:20), nonetheless is finally a revelation of God's *law*.
  - a. Ever since the entrance of sin into the world, the whole creation groans under the bondage of corruption (ROM. 8:19FF). Our whole physical environment witnesses to the judgment of God who visits *death* on the works of His own hands because of human rebellion against Him.

- b. Since general revelation does not witness to the grace that pardons but only to the wrath that punishes sin, the sinner responds to the revelation of God in nature by willfully suppressing the truth to which it witnesses (ROM. 1:18). The sinner either denies that there is a God (PS. 14:1; 53:1) or invents an idol whose wrath can be appeased by human devices (LC I 18-23).

2. The revelation in which God makes Himself known as a *gracious* God is called "special revelation." While special revelation cannot simply be equated with the Holy Scriptures, since God spoke to His people in many ways before any Scriptures were written and has spoken to us in these last times especially in His Son (HEB. 1:1-2), it is nevertheless true that it is in the Scriptures that the knowledge of these special revelations of God's mercy has come to us.
3. The revelation given to us in the Scriptures about all that God has done in human history to effect our salvation *comes from* God. No prophetic teaching about what God was doing through His people to keep His promise of sending a Redeemer arose from any mere human reflection on an interpretation of Israel's history. But men spoke from God about these things as they were moved by the Holy Spirit (2 PETER 1:20-21).

Apostolic proclamation concerning all that God did in Christ was "revealed ... through the Spirit" and imparted "in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit" (1 COR. 2:10, 13; GAL. 1:11-12). The apostle Paul can declare of the Scriptures that nurtured Timothy (and us as well) that "all Scripture is breathed out by God" (2 TIM. 3:16). So also, he can claim the same Spirit as the One who inspired his own writings (ROM. 15:18-19; 1 COR. 2:13; EPH. 3:4-5).

4. Scriptures inspired by God were written by *human beings*. God gave His Word to His Old and New Testament people through human beings whom He Himself chose and endowed to speak His Word to concrete situations and circumstances in the history of His people.

## Part 2: What Kind of Book Is the Bible?

The Bible, inspired by God and written by men, is a divine-human book. However, this is not to say that these are two parts that can be separated. The divine and the human in the Bible are combined in an inseparable union



analogous to the union of the two natures in the Person of Christ.

### 1. *A book written by human authors*

Lutherans acknowledge and teach that the Bible, even though it is and transmits God's very own Word, is a thoroughly human book. They do not have a docetic view of the Bible.<sup>2</sup>

a. One obviously human aspect of the sacred Scriptures is that the language of the Bible is *human language*, written to be read and understood by human beings. Accordingly, the Bible's language conforms to the usual principles of grammar and syntax. The biblical literature contains many of the literary forms and devices used by other literature for the purpose of effective communication.

b. The Bible, considered as written communication, is human also in that it has a *history*.

i. In a sense, the biblical literature represents a "development." The Bible did not fall full-blown from heaven, but grew upon earth. The biblical literature came into existence over a period of many centuries and was written *by* human beings *for* human beings who lived in varying cultures and conditions, but the message remains the same.

ii. Inasmuch as the Bible was written in history by authors who were not insulated from the culture in which they lived and wrote, and inasmuch as its literature was not produced in a vacuum but was originally composed for and addressed to distinctively discreet situations and circumstances, this literature has a historical dimension that gives it *its own peculiar and concrete particularity*. In this sense, it bears the marks of a particular time and culture.<sup>3</sup>

### 2. *A book inspired by God*

Lutherans, however, also teach that the Bible is a *divine* book.

a. While Lutherans recognize that the Bible as an

historical phenomenon is open to investigation by the historian, they believe and confess that there is a not-of-this-world dimension to the sacred Scriptures, not discernible by historical research. Lutherans, therefore, do not surrender the Bible to historians as though they could by their methods give a full account of the origin and nature of the biblical literature.

b. Lutherans will not admit that the historian has the last word to say about the kind of a book the Bible is. They will not permit the historian to rule that the Bible is the product of precisely the same processes that produce other literature.

c. Lutherans believe that in the history that occasioned the writing of the biblical literature God was active in a unique way, so that there is a qualitative difference between the inspired Scriptures and every other form of human expression.

### 3. *A perfect unity*

Since *God* is their primary Author, the Scriptures differ qualitatively from other literature in that they possess such attributes as unity and complete truthfulness or reliability.

a. Lutheran theology has always acknowledged that there is a certain progression discernible in the revelation that God gave of Himself and of His saving actions in history when earlier Scriptures are compared with later Scriptures (as when the Old Testament is compared with the New Testament.)

b. Lutheran theology also acknowledges that there are in the Scriptures no conflicting or contradictory conceptions of God and His ways with humanity, but rather a perfect theological unity, despite different emphases in different biblical books and authors.

c. For Lutheran theology, it is a self-evident truth that God's revelation of Himself in the sacred Scriptures is always perfectly consistent with itself.

d. Lutherans have given deep consideration to the implications of our Lord's two distinct natures united in His person and the Bible's character as a book that is both human and divine.

i. With the Church through the ages we confess that the divine and human natures and attributes of the incarnate Son of God relate to or "communicate" with one another. There is, no

<sup>2</sup> The docetists were a heretical group in the ancient church who denied the true humanity of Jesus. They held that He only appeared to be human.

<sup>3</sup> For example, the situation in Corinth which occasioned Paul's correspondence with that congregation had no precise parallel in any other congregation in apostolic times. If that particular situation had not occurred, Paul's letters to the Corinthians might not have been written at all or, at least, they would have had a different complexion.

doubt, a mystery at work here not unlike that of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the undivided unity of the one God who made heaven and earth, redeemed all humanity and will renew the justified in the new creation. Nevertheless, even as we confess these great mysteries, we also affirm these undeniable truths. As for the *communication of attributes* (*communicatio idiomatum*), we Lutherans have always confessed that which the Word of God makes clear:

1. What is true of each individual nature — the human and the divine — is true of the whole Christ, for He is one divine person (FC SD VIII 36). So it is that we confess the incomprehensible truth that in *the man* Christ Jesus, *God* died for us.
  2. The one Christ, in His office, works “according to, with, and through both natures” (FC SD VIII 46–47).
  3. In the personal union of the human and divine natures, the human nature of our Lord retains all its essential characteristics and traits, but alongside of them it has “special, high, great, supernatural, incomprehensible, indescribable heavenly prerogatives and privileges” both now and into eternity (FC SD VIII 51). And, with regard to this third point, we confess that we cannot limit or define the extent to which Christ’s humanity shares in His divinity.
- ii. With the Church through the ages we confess: The divine and human character of the Scriptures relate to one another in similar ways.
1. The Bible is fully human and fully divine — in its entirety. So we do read and study it, seeking to understand it as we would other historical documents. We also read it expectantly, for we believe its prophetic and apostolic character means that it is ever profitable to us in every way.
  2. God is at work in Scripture — indeed, He is present and most profoundly present in the Person of the Son about whom all Scripture testifies (LUKE 24). God is present wholly in His humanity and divinity

wherever the Word is rightly preached and taught. This is of deep comfort, for Jesus has promised Christians “that not only His mere divinity would be with them (which to us poor sinners is like a consuming fire on dry stubble). But Christ promised that He — He, the man who has spoken with them, who has experienced all tribulations in His received human nature, and who can therefore have sympathy with us, as with men and His brethren — He will be with us in our troubles also according to the nature by which He is our brother and we are flesh of His flesh” (FC SD VIII 87).<sup>4</sup>

3. Our God’s humble work in this divine–human book — a book as open to ridicule as was the Lord whose humility made Him the suffering servant of all — is nonetheless “special, high, great, supernatural, incomprehensible, indescribable.” So much so, indeed, that we gladly confess that this book, like our Lord, is without fault, truthful in all things and given for our salvation (see JOHN 20:31).

4. *An inerrant book — a book that is completely reliable*

Another qualitative difference between the Scriptures and other literature is that the Scriptures — like the God who gives them — are reliable and completely trustworthy, or as the Christian church has often asserted, they are inerrant.

- a. We realize that the term “inerrant” (or terms like “infallible” or expressions like “completely reliable”) is itself open to “errant” understandings and definitions. Not all Christians who confess the inerrancy of the Bible view this inerrancy in the same way or in a way that can be affirmed here. It should not be understood as implying that the Bible’s complete reliability can be demonstrated on the basis of human reason, historical study, scientific evaluation and so forth, but as an article of faith that fully coheres with Scripture’s character as the Word of God.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, ed. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959).

<sup>5</sup> Lutherans are not “fundamentalists.” We note that fundamentalism,

- b. Lutherans do hold that to declare the inerrancy or complete reliability of the Scriptures is to declare that what the Bible teaches to be true in any area of doctrine or life is so, but without any assumption that we can thereby resolve every difficulty of interpretation.
- c. We may not simply reduce scriptural reliability to “spiritual” matters. To do so is to invite a Gnostic sort of faith that not only questions the Bible’s truthfulness in such matters as creation, but in the whole of redemption as well, for the same Bible that tells us God is Spirit (JOHN 4:24) also tells us that He creates the entire material world and has become man, embodied in flesh and blood (JOHN 1:14; HEB. 2:14). So also, a limitation of biblical reliability to “spiritual matters” undermines biblical authority in matters of morality and ethics. Therefore, we affirm scriptural reliability in every matter of doctrine and life.
- d. Lutherans believe that Scripture’s reliability and trustworthiness does not suggest that it employs the technological precision of modern scientific study or contemporary historiographic methodologies. Only an anachronistic interpretive method would impose upon the Bible methodologies that have been developed centuries after its composition or would require the type of precision demanded by modern positivism or scientism.<sup>6</sup>
- e. The Lutheran Confessions make a sharp distinction between the Scriptures and human literature: “no person’s writing can be put on a par with it” (FC SD Summary 9), and clearly affirm that the imperfections that characterize human writings are not found in the Scriptures (Ap XXIV 94–95). Rather, the Word of God is “pure, infallible, and unchangeable” (Preface to the *Book of Concord* [BC Preface], 16; see also paragraph 20).

- f. The Lutheran Confessions confess the truthfulness of the Scriptures with simple and forceful words: “They will not lie to you” (LC V 76; cf. also FC Ep VIII 13) and “God’s Word cannot deceive” (LC IV 57). The Formula of Concord refers to Scripture’s teaching on election as a “clear, certain, and unerring foundation” for faith (FC SD XI 12).
- g. Above all, Lutherans approach the Scriptures with humility, confessing with Luther: “The Pope, Luther, Augustine, Paul, an angel from heaven — these should not be masters, judges, arbiters but only witnesses, disciples and confessors of Scripture” (AE 26:58).

### Part 3: Suitable Methodology of Interpretation

Lutheran theology has always recognized that because the Bible is written in human language, certain general principles of interpretation must be observed. Lutheran theology also recognizes that because the Bible is God’s Word, certain other principles are basic to a correct understanding of its message.

#### *A Human Book: General Principles*

1. Because the Bible communicates God’s eternal truth in literature, written by human authors employing human terminology and idioms, and comprises literary forms common to other human literature, it is self-evident that the best and most thorough biblical exegesis requires the following:
  - a. A thorough knowledge of the languages in which the Bible was originally written;
  - b. Acquaintance with and recognition of the literary forms employed by biblical authors for effective communication (address, oracle, prayer, creed, hymn, proverb, parable, historical narrative, edict, treaty, prose and poetry).
2. Because the biblical literature dates from various periods of human history and was addressed to concrete situations characterized by the particularity peculiar to everything that is historical, biblical interpretation needs to take this “historical dimension” of the Bible into account.
  - a. The biblical literature cannot be treated as though every book and pericope was addressed to general situations, and as though everything that is said in

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historically, is a movement within Reformed theology holding to five fundamental doctrines and asserting that the inerrancy of Scripture is the only foundation for faith. Lutheran theology would hold that faith results from the Word as it is heard and received sacramentally. So faith in Christ, created by the Spirit through the Word, precedes and is the basis for confidence in Scripture’s infallibility. Therefore, while denying that Lutherans are fundamentalists, we joyfully affirm that we confidently hold that the Bible speaks truthfully when it teaches such doctrines as the bodily resurrection of Christ or His virgin birth or God’s miraculous interventions in history.

<sup>6</sup> Positivism and its synonym, scientism, assert that only the sciences can establish a valid truth claim.

every pericope is applicable immediately to every situation.<sup>7</sup>

- b. The interpreter will therefore want to understand:
  - i. What the *original* situation was to which the words were first spoken;
  - ii. What the words meant in that particular historical context;
  - iii. What their continuing meaning is for subsequent times and circumstances.
- c. Lutheran theology, therefore, gratefully uses all the information made available by historical and archaeological research relative to the history of Israel and of all the other nations whose history touches Israel's. Lutheran theology gratefully uses the gains of faithful New Testament scholarship, which broaden and deepen our understanding of the apostolic writings.
- d. When Lutherans say that Scripture interprets itself, this is not to be understood as though historical research has no value for illuminating the meaning of a biblical text.

#### *Inspired by God: Other Principles*

While Lutheran students of the Bible gladly avail themselves of any light that historical research can shed on the Bible as a historical phenomenon, they never forget that the Bible is at the same time God's eternal, immutable Word given to us by inspiration of God to make us wise unto salvation (2 TIM. 3:15).

- 1. Viewing the Bible in this way leads Lutherans to emphasize the following as they interpret the Scriptures:
  - a. The divine and saving wisdom that the Bible imparts can be understood and believed only as the Holy Spirit graciously empowers us to hear what God is speaking to us in His Word.
  - b. In His Word, God speaks to us His Law and Gospel, the Word that condemns and the Word that forgives. These must be carefully distinguished lest the Law be diluted and the Gospel perverted so that we receive from the Scriptures neither the knowledge of sin nor the assurance of grace. The central message

of the Bible is the Gospel of God's free grace toward sinners in Christ Jesus — the Good News that through the cross of Christ, the condemning record of our sin has been erased.

- c. God's Word is, therefore, always to be read and interpreted in light of the Gospel — its central message of Christ and His justifying work. Just as surely, only in the Bible's revelation of the Triune God and the Person and work of Christ can we know the Gospel authentically and truthfully.

The Bible must be understood in this way, or it will not be understood at all.

- 2. With these indispensable emphases in mind, Lutherans employ principles for interpreting the Bible that flow from the fact that it is a divine book whose primary Author is the Holy Spirit.

- a. Since it is the Holy Spirit who bears witness in all the Holy Scriptures to God's actions in human history for the salvation of the world, this witness is consistent with itself and true to the facts. Therefore, a basic principle for interpreting the Holy Spirit's writings is that they are characterized both by *unity* and *truthfulness*.

- b. Because there is perfect unity in the scriptural witness to God and His mighty deeds for our redemption, Lutherans operate confidently with the principle that *Scripture interprets Scripture*.

- i. It is the Spirit's authorship of the Scriptures that makes a meaningful application of this principle possible. If the Bible were merely a human book written from a variety of human perspectives and reflecting only human attempts to talk about God and history, then the unity necessary in order to use one part of Scripture to interpret another would be totally missing.
- ii. Since the Spirit of truth is the Author of Scripture, the witness of Scripture to the history in which God acted savingly is true. This is not to say that the Scriptures are mere chronicles, or that they were written in the first instance to be a history of Israel and a biography of Jesus. The Bible reports history to show what God was doing through Israel and Jesus to accomplish His saving purposes. The history reported in the Bible is selective. In the Bible, God has given us a theology of history.

<sup>7</sup> For example, concerning the Third Commandment, Luther said: "Therefore, according to its literal outward sense, this commandment does not concern us Christians" (LC I 82 [Tappert]). For a discussion of the specific application of specific texts to specific situations, see the Apology's treatment of Matt. 19:21 in Ap XXVII 45–50.



- iii. While the history the Bible reports is selective, it is also wholly reliable. If the history is negated, then what God was doing in the history is negated too, and the Bible is turned into a book of mythology — humanly devised legends with no basis in fact — about the doings of the deity that have nothing to do with human affairs.
  - iv. It is a principle for Lutheran biblical interpretation that the Bible is not mythology, but a revelation from God Himself about what He actually did in the arena of human history in order to carry out His eternal counsels of salvation.
- c. Lutherans hold that the Scriptures are clear in their saving truths (the perspicuity of Scripture). We must, with Luther, distinguish the inner clarity of faith and the external clarity of Scripture. No one — believer or unbeliever — can misunderstand the clear assertion that God created heaven and earth, for example. However, only faith believes this clear assertion. The Bible’s essential message is unambiguous, but only faith appropriates its truth (DEUT. 30:11–14; ROM. 10:5–13). This does not deny that there are passages we cannot understand either in part or fully. For this reason, we read what is unclear to us in light of the overwhelming clarity of the biblical message, confident that God has made clear everything we need for life and salvation in Christ Jesus.
- d. In interpreting the Bible, Lutherans remember that the Spirit has spoken through *human beings* whose words must be understood in the light of their historical context. They remember, too, that the *Spirit* has spoken through human beings. This fact means that historical, human words are at the same time divine, eternal words that speak the truth about God’s saving will and actions.

## Part 4: Proper Use of the Bible

1. Because Lutherans believe, teach and confess that the words of the Holy Scriptures are from the Holy Spirit (Ap IV 107–108; AC XXVIII 49), they therefore hold that the Bible is qualitatively different from all other human literature (FC SD Summary 9; Ap XXIV 94–95). They do not hesitate to call the Bible the “pure, unadulterated Word of God” and “infallible” divine truth (BC Preface 5, 20).

2. Confessional Lutheran theology, accordingly, declares that “we base our teaching on God’s Word as the eternal truth” (FC SD Summary, 13); “God’s Word alone ought to be and remain the only guiding principle and rule of all teaching” (FC SD Summary 9); “Holy Scripture alone remains the only judge, rule, and guiding principle, according to which, as the only touchstone, all teachings should and must be recognized and judged as good or evil, correct or incorrect” (FC Ep Summary, 7); “the only rule and guiding principle according to which all teachings and teachers are to be evaluated and judged are the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments alone” (FC Ep Summary, 1; cp. FC SD Summary, 3).
- a. These quotations from the Confessions leave little doubt about how they use the Bible, namely, as the *ultimate* and *absolute authority* for all that the church teaches in God’s name.
- b. That is why the Symbols repeat over and over again such formulas as “Scripture teaches” (AC XXIV 28; Ap XXIII 11; FC SD I 46; FC SD III 30) and “it is written” (AC XXIV 26; XXVIII 51; Ap IV 263; SA III vii 1–2; III xiii 3; FC SD III 20, 57; VI 12; VIII 6; X 8 11; XI 7).
- c. That is why the Confessions, without concern that some might accuse them of making a legislative use of Scripture, firmly insist that where “we have the clear, certain testimonies in the Scripture ... we should [*sollen wir*] simply believe” and “should not raise any objections” (FC SD VIII 53).
3. The sacred Scriptures are to the Lutheran confessors the source of doctrine.
  - a. In contrast to the authority of the church fathers, the Smalcald Articles (II ii 15) set up the invariable rule: “This means that the Word of God — and no one else, not even an angel — should establish articles of faith.” The Augsburg Confession (Preface 8; Epilog to XXI 2; XXI 4, German) and the Apology (I 2; II 32–43; IV 5, 166; XII 16; *et passim*) appeal to the sacred Scriptures as a whole as well as to individual passages as final authority.
  - b. The “summary and generally accepted concept and form” that the Formula (SD Summary 1) regards as essential for basic and firm agreement in the Church is to be drawn from the Word of God. The prophetic



- and apostolic Scriptures of both testaments are “the pure, clear fountain of Israel” (FC SD Summary 3).
4. Lutherans think it is “rash” to teach something that passages of Scripture do not teach (Ap XII 138), and that it is “extreme impudence” to teach anything that is contrary to testimonies of Scripture (Ap XXIII 63).
- a. Lutherans, therefore, hold “that it is only from the Word of God that judgments on articles of faith are to be pronounced” (FC SD II 8). We accept without reservation that the only norm for the church’s faith and practice must be the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, that is, the written Word of God.
- b. Lutherans appeal to and use the sacred Scriptures as a whole, as well as individual passages of Scripture, as the sole and final authority in the Church.
- i. This means that biblical teaching about the foundational doctrines of Christianity such as the Trinity, the two natures of Christ and the justification of the ungodly by grace through faith in Christ Jesus — these great truths — is sure and certain.
- ii. Just as certain is the biblical teaching on God’s ordering of human life within His creation according to the commandments.

We rejoice in our consensus in these truths. We pray that our shared understanding will be a sure and solid foundation for us to address future conversations and discussions, both in matters of agreement and areas where we do not share a common teaching or practice.

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# INTERCHURCH RELATIONSHIPS OF THE LCMS

by Albert B. Collver III and Darin Storkson

**I**NTERCHURCH RELATIONSHIPS OF THE LCMS have been growing by leaps and bounds in the last triennium. In addition to our growing family of official “Partner Church” bodies with whom the LCMS is in altar and pulpit fellowship, the LCMS also has a growing number of “Allied Church” bodies with whom we collaborate in various ways but with which we do not yet have altar and pulpit fellowship. We presently have thirty-six official partnerships that have already been recognized by the LCMS in convention as well as good relationships with an additional twenty-three Allied Church bodies, many of whom are in various stages of fellowship talks with the LCMS.

In addition, the LCMS also has six “Emerging Relationships” with Lutheran church bodies that we are getting to know but with whom we do not yet have a formal relationship. Most of these have approached the LCMS out of a desire to share our solid, biblical theology.

These various relationships make for a total of seventy-five Lutheran church relationships in a total of fifty-six countries! This represents more than twenty-one million people.

Lastly, the LCMS also has a growing number of “Ecumenical Relationships” with non-Lutheran church bodies for the sake of dialogue and *cooperatio in externis*.

\*Indicates a member of the International Lutheran Council (ILC).

## **Partner Churches (already recognized by the LCMS in convention)**

1. Evangelical Lutheran Church of Argentina\*
2. Evangelical Lutheran Church of Brazil\*
3. Lutheran Church—Canada\*
4. Evangelical Lutheran Free Church in Denmark\*
5. Evangelical Lutheran Church—Synod of France\*
6. Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church (Germany)\*
7. Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ghana\*

8. Evangelical Lutheran Church of Haiti \*
9. Lutheran Church — Hong Kong Synod\*
10. India Evangelical Lutheran Church\*
11. Japan Lutheran Church\*
12. Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya\*
13. Lutheran Church in Korea\*
14. Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia
15. Evangelical Lutheran Church of Liberia
16. Evangelical Lutheran Church in Lithuania
17. Lutheran Synod of Mexico\*
18. Lutheran Church of Nigeria\*
19. Lutheran Church in Norway
20. Gutnius Lutheran Church (Papua New Guinea)\*
21. Evangelical Lutheran Church of Paraguay\*
22. Lutheran Church in the Philippines\*
23. Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ingria (Russia)\*
24. Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church (Russia)\*
25. Lutheran Church in Southern Africa (South Africa)\*
26. Free Evangelical Lutheran Synod in South Africa\*
27. Lanka Lutheran Church (Sri Lanka)\*
28. China Evangelical Lutheran Church (Taiwan)\*
29. Lutheran Church of Togo
30. Lutheran Church of Uruguay
31. Lutheran Church of Venezuela\*
32. Evangelical Lutheran Church of England \*
33. The American Association of Lutheran Churches (USA)\*

## **Allied Churches**

1. Lutheran Church of Australia\*
2. Evangelical Lutheran Church in Belgium\*
3. Evangelical Christian Lutheran Church of Bolivia\*
4. Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cambodia

5. Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in the Czech Republic
6. Silesian Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession (Czech Republic)
7. Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus
8. Evangelical Lutheran Mission Diocese of Finland
9. Indonesian Lutheran Christian Church
10. Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Kazakhstan
11. Malagasy Lutheran Church (Madagascar)
12. Lutheran Church Synod of Nicaragua\*
13. Evangelical Lutheran Diocese in Norway
14. Evangelical Lutheran Church — Peru\*
15. Portugese Evangelical Lutheran Church\*
16. Lutheran Mission in Africa — Synod of Thousand Hills (Rwanda)
17. Confessional Lutheran Church of South Africa
18. Mission Province in Sweden
19. Lutheran Church of East Africa (Tanzania)
20. Istanbul Lutheran Church (Turkey)
21. German Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Ukraine (DELKU)
22. The Lutheran Ministerium and Synod — USA\*
23. The Evangelical Lutheran Church of South Sudan/Sudan

### Emerging Relationships

1. Myanmar Lutheran Church (Burma)
2. Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malaysia
3. Evangelical Lutheran Church in Norway (DELK)
4. Norwegian Lutheran Mission
5. Lutheran Church in Singapore
6. Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania — Southeast Lake Victoria Diocese
7. South Sudan Evangelical Lutheran Church
8. Ethiopian Evangelical Lutheran Church (EELC)
9. Lutheran Church of Colombia
10. Synod of Evangelical Lutheran Churches of Ukraine (SELCU)

### Ecumenical Relationships

1. Roman Catholic Church (The Vatican)
2. North American Lutheran Church (NALC)

3. Anglican Church in North America (ACNA)
4. Anglican Church of South Sudan
5. Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS)
6. Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS)

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# REFORMATION THEN AND NOW: ECCLESIA SEMPER REFORMANDA

by Werner Klän

Is the church always repenting or always reforming? The Rev. Dr. Werner Klän's keynote address to the 24<sup>th</sup> European Lutheran Conference, Antwerp, Belgium, outlines the answer.

## Preliminary Note

**B**EFORE WE TURN TO UNDERSTAND what it might mean that “the church is always to be reformed,” we must note that this phrase was first used by the Reformed theologian Karl Barth in 1947. It can be shown that an early example is Jodocus van Lodenstein,<sup>1</sup> who claims the “truth ... that also in the Church there is always much to reform.” Another version of the term *Ecclesia reformata semper reformanda* (“the reformed church [is] always to be reformed”) is widely but informally used in Reformed and Presbyterian churches today as their motto. Interestingly, the first term was used by Hans Küng and others in the Roman Catholic Church already prior to the Second Vatican Council. There the formula, in a slightly different verbalisation, found its way into the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*, 8): “The Church ... at once holy and always in need of purification, follows constantly the path of penance and renewal.”<sup>2</sup> The expression, thus, has become the demand for an ongoing reformation claimed by many a Christian and kind of common knowledge of — not only — Protestant mainstream self-conception in our age.

Although the formula in its wording is of recent origin only, the issue that it points to can be traced back to the seventeenth century as Theodor Mahlmann has proven in his contribution to the festschrift for Bengt Hägglund in 2010.<sup>3</sup> Johannes Hoornbeek, professor of theology at

the University of Leiden (1617–1666), coined the phrase that “every Reformed Christian is one to reform;” and Hoornbeek strives for a reform pertaining to all levels of the church, including even its doctrine.<sup>4</sup> Much more intriguing, however, is the fact that the first evidence of the proposition that “in the church, reformation is always required” is found in the writings of a Concord-Lutheran theologian, Friedrich Balduin (1575–1628), professor primarius at the University of Wittenberg.<sup>5</sup> This thesis, however, is directed against the intrusion of false doctrine, a reversal of the gospel, a lapse of faith, and at the same time, positioned to retain the apostolic doctrine that cannot be eliminated.<sup>6</sup>

If the observation is correct, that the phrase “ecclesia semper reformanda” encompasses some ambiguities, to say the least, how then do we as confessional Lutheran churches in the twenty-first century position ourselves over against such a claim? I should like to discuss this question in five sections of my presentation:

1. Sixteenth Century Reformation and Nineteenth Century Confessional Lutheranism as “Modern” Approaches to the Formation of the Church
2. Principles of Confessional Lutheran Identity
3. The Challenge and the Mission of the Church
4. Repentance as the Core Attitude of the Christian Church: *Ecclesia Semper Paenitens*

<sup>1</sup> Jodocus van Lodenstein, *Beschouwingen van Zion* (Contemplation of Zion) (Amsterdam, 1674–1678): (“Sekerlyk de Gereformeerde Waarheyd ... leert dat in de Kerke ook altijd veel te herstellen is.”)

<sup>2</sup> “Ecclesia ... sancta simul et semper purificanda, poenitentiam et renovationem continuo prosequitur.”

<sup>3</sup> Theodor Mahlmann, “‘Ecclesia semper reformanda.’ Eine historische Aufklärung. Neue Bearbeitung,” in *Hermeneutica Sacra: Studien zur Auslegung der Heiligen Schrift im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert / Studies of the Interpretation of Holy Scripture in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries: Historia Hermeneutica*, eds. Torbjörn Jhansson, Robert Kolb, and Johann Anselm Steiger, Series Studia 9 (Berlin / New York: de Gruyter, 2010), 381–442.

<sup>4</sup> Mahlmann, “Ecclesia semper reformanda,” 426–432, here 431: “Omnis reformatus est & reformans.”

<sup>5</sup> Mahlmann, “Ecclesia semper reformanda,” 438–442, here 438: “Semper in ecclesia opus est reformation.”

<sup>6</sup> Mahlmann, “Ecclesia semper reformanda,” 440, but even confessional Lutheran theologians of the nineteenth century, like Wilhelm Loehe, spoke about an elaboration that was needed in the church, as its reformation was incomplete in the consequences of its doctrine. Friedrich Schleiermacher, on the other hand, noted that progress in the church meant “restoration,” or “restitution,” but not “melioration.”



## 5. Towards the Celebration of the 500<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Reformation

The answer I am trying to suggest may be conducted by two of the 95 Theses published by Martin Luther in 1517: “1. When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, ‘Repent’ [Mt 4:17], he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance,” and “62. The true treasure of the church is the most holy gospel of the glory and grace of God.”<sup>7</sup>

### 1. Sixteenth Century Reformation and Nineteenth Century Confessional Lutheranism as “Modern” Approaches to the Formation of the Church

A historical truth is apparent and seems to me irrefutable: the Lutheran Reformation was in its time in academic theology, politically, and in many social areas, a forward-looking, if not to say progressive, movement. Realizing that the reform of the church, as effected by the Reformation, was concerned with the rediscovery of the gospel and the necessity of preserving the one church does not alter this assessment. In my opinion it is undeniable that the confessional age, which produced such important basic works as the Augsburg Confession and the Book of Concord, both now an integral part next to the Bible as the main sources of confessional Lutheran identity, made a considerable, if not essential, contribution towards modernizing early modern society and forming states in Europe.<sup>8</sup>

At the root of these “modern” developments lies Luther’s distinction of the “two kingdoms,” or two realms, which provides a way for distinguishing between penultimate realities, values, and goals on the one hand, and the ultimate destiny of human existence on the other. One might tend to blame Luther and the Lutheran confessions for having initiated, instigated, and theologically legitimized the decline of what used to be “Christian Europe” into secularization. This process, however, was far more complex and cannot be reduced to a monocausal

and linear deduction. On the contrary, the Lutheran distinction of the two realms exonerates the church by restricting its tasks to the proclamation of law and gospel apart from ruling and regulating the affairs of state and society. This fundamental distinction does not at all intimate that the law of God would not apply to mundane matters, and thus the application of God’s universal will would have no place in the proclamation of the church; quite the opposite. The “political use of the law” has to be an integral part of the church’s message.<sup>9</sup>

But the church, being according to its Magna Charta in Article VII of the Augsburg Confession the “assembly of saints” commissioned to “purely preach and teach the Gospel and to rightly administer the sacraments” (AC VII,1 [Kolb-Wengert, 43]), does not strive for totalitarian domination of the world: “For the Gospel teaches an internal, eternal reality and righteousness of the heart, not an external, temporal one,” and “does not overthrow secular government, public order, and marriage” (AC XVI, 4f [Kolb-Wengert, 48f]). Right from the outset, the Lutherans claimed that they did “not understand the church to be an external government of certain nations”; rather, the true Christians were regarded as “people scattered throughout the entire world who agree on the gospel and have the same Christ, the same Holy Spirit, and the same sacraments” (Ap VII/VIII, 10 [Kolb-Wengert, 175]).

Therefore, the (“New” or “Old”) Lutheran fathers and mothers in the nineteenth century, filled with the spirit of the revival, discovered the confessional inheritance of the Lutheran reformation as the fulfilment of their longing for the gospel of sin and grace, for the saviour of sinners, and desired to preserve in an undiminished form for themselves and their posterity the heritage of Concord-Lutheranism from the sixteenth century. Hand in hand with this confessional assurance, they discovered the church as an organic, institutional, and communicative strength, in the framework of which their commitment to

Lutheran identity is not first and foremost a special identity; it rather lays claim to catholicity. As in the Reformation, to renew the church means to remain faithful to the one, holy, catholic church.

<sup>7</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, vol. 31: *The Career of the Reformer* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1957), 25, 31.

<sup>8</sup> This insight was basically triggered by the results of the 1988 symposium of the Verein für Reformationsgeschichte: cf. *Die lutherische Konfessionalisierung in Deutschland* (Schriften des Vereins für Reformationsgeschichte 197, Gütersloher Verlagshaus, Gütersloh), ed. Hans-Christoph Rublack, 1992.

<sup>9</sup> This was a prevalent idea in the theology of August Christian Vilmar, a staunch opponent to the state-church-system in the state of Hesse in the nineteenth century. Cf. Werner Klän, “Das Augsburgische Bekenntnis als Grundlage einer neuen Konfessionalisierung in Hessen,” *Lutherische Theologie und Kirche* 26 (2002): 114–134.

God's holy word and the Lutheran confession could take shape. They recognized that church services, confession, and church constitution are integrally correlated. That is why they were prepared to make great sacrifices to maintain their belief, their confession, and their church.

It was no accident that the crystallization point of the confessional awakening, which led in the end to the emergence of independent evangelical Lutheran churches, was the sacrament of the altar. The concern that forced confessional Lutherans onto "solitary paths" was that of preserving their biblical Lutheran understanding in an ecclesiastically binding form, of defending it in its exclusivity against every kind of false compromise. It was these churches that created a new awareness of the Concord-Lutheran principles of the sixteenth century and gave them renewed ecclesiological reality. They wanted to manifest Lutheran identity in the ecclesiastical dimension by establishing that, as the expression of full church fellowship, fellowship in public worship, particularly at the communion table, has as its unconditional prerequisite a consensus in faith, doctrine, and confession.

They were at the same time protagonists of a new freedom of the church from state control and political subordination in character with the gospel. In addition, they were, at least in religious matters, pioneers fighting for social values of the modern era such as freedom of assembly, freedom of speech, and freedom of conscience. The founders of the Lutheran confessional churches in Europe, and those among them to emigrate to Australia, America, or southern Africa, proved to be equal contemporaries of the movement for bourgeois emancipation. This remains true even if we recognize that the theological content for which they were prepared to bring great sacrifice was principally conservative, and that the same held true for their political convictions. The claim for religious and ecclesiastical and theological independence in terms of confessional church bodies is nevertheless an integral part of their common heritage.

It has to be recognized, on the other hand, that these Lutheran movements never succeeded in regaining major influence in the intellectual, spiritual, and religious developments in their respective lands. Whereas in most parts

of Europe — except for France, which since the French Revolution preferred to define the republican constitution as "laical" — the state-church system inherited from the Constantinian era prevailed, these confessional movements and churches were, at least for some time, persecuted, driven underground, and in the end, if acknowledged by the state, marginalized.

So, one could summarize that the transformation of the Lutheran heritage in the confessional Lutheran churches in the nineteenth century formed, in a manner of speaking, an avant-garde stance. They posed questions and found answers that, in their fundamental and perma-

nent reference to Scripture, were also contemporary and appropriate. In this way they found the attention of their contemporaries; thus, a group of Bible-based, church-committed Christians came together and became effective in society, even if only to a certain degree. They formed independent Lutheran church bodies in various German states, but also in America, Australia, and southern Africa. These churches, or

their successors, are for the most part member churches of the International Lutheran Council (ILC) and as such, they are committed to determining their decisions solely on the basis of the word of God, and not on social, cultural, or practical considerations.

## 2. Principles of Confessional Lutheran Identity

I believe that there is on earth a holy little flock and community of pure saints under one head, Christ. It is called together by the Holy Spirit in one faith, mind, and understanding. It possesses a variety of gifts, and yet is united in love, without sect and schism. Of this community I also am a part and a member.

In this manner Luther elucidates the phrase "the congregation of saints" in the Large Catechism in his explanation to the third article of the Apostle's Creed (Kolb-Wengert, 437f).

For Luther, it is of central importance to take seriously the existence of the church, or of "Christendom," as he prefers to say (cf. Luther's deliberations on the translation of *communio sanctorum* in LC III, 47–50 [Kolb-Wengert,

Christians and the church, claimed by their Lord, have nothing to sugarcoat, nothing to gloss over, and nothing to conceal concerning the predicament of men and our contemporary society.

436f]), and the priority of the community of the faithful over one's own belief. This commitment to the church precludes identifying oneself as an atomized individual with private beliefs and piety, and includes seeing oneself within a community of faith which is always prior to oneself and which God the Holy Spirit makes use of for the accomplishment of his work (LC III, 52f [Kolb-Wengert, 438f]).

This approach includes an ecumenical dimension as well. Lutherans understand themselves as being simultaneously evangelical, catholic, orthodox, and ecumenical in the best sense of the word, and professing a church that shall last forever. "It is also taught that at all times there must be and remain one holy, Christian church" (AC VII, 1 [Kolb-Wengert, 42]). Lutheran identity is not first and foremost a special identity; it rather lays claim to catholicity. As in the Reformation, to renew the church means to remain faithful to the one, holy, catholic church. For this reason, the renewal of the church in the Reformation and after has repeatedly been accompanied by the recourse to the Scriptures, the origin and founding document of faith and the church, both of them being *creaturae verbi* — creatures of the word.

The existence and the unity of the church depend upon one and the same thing: the gospel in the form of the proclamation of the word in accordance with the Scripture, and upon the sacraments in the form of administration in conformity with their institution. Herein consists the identity of the Lutheran church and, as a consequence, the standard for the practice and manifestation of church fellowship.

The Lutheran confessions as included in the Book of Concord of 1580 are not intended to be anything other than a rendering of the scriptural truth, concentrated on the gospel. Therefore, the gospel and the doctrine of the gospel are not understood as a collocation of correct propositions, but rather the gospel is understood as an event in which God imparts himself, in which God communicates himself to man and indeed salvifically to man who has broken off the communication with God and, for the reason that he has broken it off, is not in a position to reestablish communication on the strength

of his own efforts.<sup>10</sup> The actual meaning and significance of the gospel, which shines through in the emphasis on its effectualness in *actu*, is in conformity with both the Scriptures and the confession of faith of the Lutheran Reformation. Hence the confession focuses on the centre of the Scripture, namely the gospel, of which Jesus Christ is the quintessence and the living reality.

It is nevertheless true that the confession of faith, and no less the (Lutheran) doctrinal confession, is an introduction to the Scriptures and at the same time centres the Scripture from within the Scripture. The confession of faith arises from the word of God in Holy Scripture and leads back into it. However, it is necessary to ensure that the word of Scripture is and remains prior to the word of the confession. All in all, the confession focuses on the Scriptures and within the Scriptures on the focal point of the gospel.

It is therefore both meaningful and helpful, not least in the sense of making certain of one's own identity, to also revert to texts that are several hundred years old. A truly confessional stance,

however, is not simply a retreat to distant historical documents; it takes place as recourse to the Scripture and is thus a guideline for the profession of faith. The confessional documents of the sixteenth century can be, and are intended to be, a guideline for the understanding of what Christian faith is, what Christian life is. In other words, how we can exist and lead our lives in the sight of God. Since the answers that can be found in the condensed form of the confessional documents of the sixteenth century (can) have a high degree of plausibility even for today's contemporaries, they offer at the very least guidance for communicating faith today as well — Christian faith in its significance for our contemporaries.

The transfer into our times, which is the duty of the church through proclaiming law and gospel to this time and world, has already been accomplished and set down then and there in an exemplary manner. But precisely in this manner, confessional statements or documents constitute a guideline for actual confessing, statements

Confessional Lutheran churches will have to call people back into the fellowship that God grants with himself and, in doing so, into the freedom that God bestows on those who believe.

<sup>10</sup> Oswald Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology: A Contemporary Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 29–43.

that articulate and make possible an understanding of Christian existence and church life that is at the same time scriptural and contemporary — purely and simply by proclaiming the will of God and by communicating the gospel.

### 3. The Challenge and the Mission of the Church

At present, it does not seem likely that a major awakening will stir up European Christians, churches, or societies in the near future. All church bodies in Europe face the challenge of “re-Christianizing” areas that have been “de-Christianized” (Rosin 2007), utilizing for this purpose also models of cooperation underneath the levels of church fellowship and full communion. Especially with regard to ethical challenges, Christians and Christian churches ought to strive to respond to those in one voice, as, for example, the Charta Oecumenica (2001) suggests.<sup>11</sup>

It is far more likely that, at least in Europe, Christianity, or rather the church, will take a shape similar to the one it had throughout the first three centuries — being a minority, despised, mocked, marginalized, suspected, neglected, displaced, persecuted, and even killed. It has always been seductive to Christians, and to church leaders in particular, to see the church as a culturally, politically, morally influential, and even predominant factor or institution in this world. That tempting dream, in some realms of Christianity still lingering on, belongs most intimately to the imperial ideology and ecclesiastical enthusiasm of the Constantinian era.

Nonetheless, it remains the task of the church to proclaim the “righteous, unchanging will of God” (FC SD V, 17 [Kolb-Wengert, 584]) for his world and its population in a manner that is relevant to today. The church is thus obligated to be critical of its contemporary setting. Contemporary life also affects the church and its members. One cannot deny that the church is influenced and affected by worldly societal trends and tendencies. These movements do not only find expression outside and

around the church but also creep into it. Yet the church demonstrates that it is contemporary when it resists current developments of which it cannot approve.

Christians and the church, claimed by their Lord, have nothing to sugarcoat, nothing to gloss over, and nothing to conceal concerning the predicament of men and our contemporary society. They will boldly carry out their task, irrespective of power, richness, or influence of men. They will not cower before the powerful, and not buckle before those in charge of the state, society, or economy. I say this because the history of the church is also a history of failure in light of this responsibility. The history of alliances between throne and altar, Christianity and power, church and dictator, demonstrates these failures all too clearly. If the church desires to do justice to its mission, it will not give in to majority trends and mainstream public and popular opinion.

The call to return to God,  
the call to responsibility  
before God, is indeed  
nothing but the call to  
freedom, the freedom of the  
children of God.

But before it speaks to the situation of its time and world and the predicament of fallen humanity in its defective and ruined relationship towards God, the church must first speak to itself, turn to itself, and permit itself to see that its message concerning the situation of mankind and the world is also its own diagnosis. It

is not that the church asserts itself wherever God allegedly authorizes it to; rather, it simply proclaims what the point is to the world to which it is directed. Mankind stands before God and can neither abolish nor create this existence, nor run away from the judgment that man is, as he is, lacking in his state of existence before God.<sup>12</sup>

When the church does this, it will then be able to speak to those issues in our nations and times where the divine standards of God’s will have been abandoned, despised, or wantonly rejected. It will then have to proclaim that God in his holiness will not allow such offenses and revolt to be tolerated or passed over. At the same time, though, it will speak even more clearly that God himself, in his Son, Jesus Christ, has already overcome this evil, so that our contemporary hearers are not thrown into arrogance or despair (FC SD V, 10 [Kolb-Wengert, 583]).

The church will today, as always, warn, and where necessary, even accuse. It speaks to situations where the

<sup>11</sup> See Charles Hill, “Charta Oecumenica: Guidelines for the Growing Cooperation among the Churches in Europe,” *Conference of European Churches*, May 2003, <http://www.ceceurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/ChartaOecumenica.pdf> and “Ecclesiology and Theological Dialogue,” *Conference of European Churches*, accessed 5 August 2016, <http://www.ceceurope.org/ecclesiology-and-theological-dialogue/>.

<sup>12</sup> Gunther Wenz, *Theologie der Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche*, vol. 2 (Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 1998), 73.



validity of the divine standard is being foundationally or practically challenged, but always with the goal of calling men back into the fellowship and freedom that God preserves and offers in himself. The church has to proclaim that God, who is visible in Jesus Christ, took it upon himself to repair the broken fellowship between him and mankind, in order to free the totality of humankind and each individual man out of the injurious bonds in which we are ensnared, out of the dominion of the ruinous powers around and in us, from the self-inflicted lot of threatening destruction.

#### 4. Repentance as the Core Attitude of the Christian Church: *Ecclesia Semper Paenitens*

In confession and repentance, we are placed before God and are asked what our condition is before him. Simultaneously, a judgment is rendered upon us when we wish to master our life with our own powers. In God's eyes, the problem is our conviction that we are our own masters and that we control the world while, in reality, we orbit only around ourselves. Thus, all people are subject to the judgment that their lives are a failure when and because they look to themselves.<sup>13</sup> We must recognize this and confess "that we neither have nor do what we ought" (LC, Kolb-Wengert, 477). Thus, in our confrontation with the holy God, we realize that we have fallen short of the goal of our existence.

In this moment we are called to self-recognition, to an unadorned, unvarnished, and unsparing regard of our real condition. However, the measures used by such self-assessment, which are grounded in faith, do not lie within us but in God's ordinance. Hence, the insight and confession arises that I am none other than the one exposed before God in the light of his ordinance and according to the measure of his command. Such a confession is a Yes to my No and conversely a No to my Yes. I must affirm that I do not measure up to that which God wants of me, and at the same time deny that such a not-measuring-up is in order.

One of Luther's fundamental insights is that those who realize the untenable state of their being and the abysmal condition of their lives recognize that they can provide neither a foothold nor a foundation for their lives. They rely on and hold fast to the fact that help comes from somewhere else, specifically from God. "For this is the essence of a genuinely Christian life, to acknowledge

that we are sinners and to pray for grace" (LC 9 [Kolb-Wengert, 477]). This desperately desired affirmation of divine aid comes from the gospel, for in absolution God promises us that when we reach the end of our resources he opens new possibilities to us. Exactly at the point where we believe escape is impossible, God lets us know that he provides a new way for us. The fundamental insight of Martin Luther was that "this repentance stays with the Christian unto death" (SA III 3 [Kolb-Wengert, 318]). This insight understands the entire life of a Christian as a process led by the Holy Spirit and aiming at final salvation. The Spirit "works to make the man truly pure and holy" (SA III 3 [Kolb-Wengert, 318]). Here Luther has in mind a procedural event that is founded in a theology of baptism.

Repentance is therefore "nothing other than a return and stepping towards baptism" (LC IV Baptism, 79 [Kolb-Wengert, 466]),<sup>14</sup> "nothing other ... than baptism" (LC IV, 74 [Kolb/Wengert, 465]), indeed, on a daily basis. On the other hand, Luther can also emphasize the progressive aspect of baptism, which connects to the idea of sanctification as it was developed in the exposition of the Third Article of the Creed.<sup>15</sup> Regarding the basis set in baptism, it states: "started once and continuously proceeding in it" (LC IV, 65 [Kolb-Wengert, 465]), or, in the nexus of the aspects of the return into baptism and the proceeding forth from this baptism, it states: "This is what it means truly to plunge into baptism and daily to come forth again" (LC IV, 71 [Kolb-Wengert, 465]). In this daily process of return to the founding date of Christian existence lies the prerequisite for all continuation forward on the path of Christian faith and life. "The new life should be lived so that it continually increases and proceeds forward" (LC V, 24 [Kolb-Wengert, 469]). This is no less than the catechetical exposition on Martin Luther's first of the 95 Theses: "When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, 'Repent' [Mt 4:17], he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance."<sup>16</sup>

What is usually applied to the life and conduct of individual Christians may be suitable for the life of the church as well, for according to Martin Luther, the church is *maxima peccatrix* — the biggest sinner of all.

<sup>13</sup> "This is really what it means to begin true repentance. Here a person must listen to a judgment such as this: 'You are of no account...here no one is righteous,'" (SA III, 3 [Kolb-Wengert, 312]).

<sup>14</sup> See Albrecht Peters, *Kommentar zu Luthers Katechismen 4, Die Taufe. Das Abendmahl* (Göttingen, 1993), 94–100; Wenz, *Theologie*, 118–123.

<sup>15</sup> Bernhard Lohse, *Luthers Theologie in ihrer historischen Entwicklung und in ihrem systematischen Zusammenhang* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995), 278–280; Wenz, *Theologie*, 611–613.

<sup>16</sup> LW 31, 25.



The Wittenberg Reformation had in mind to recall the Roman church to the biblical truths as summarized in the Augsburg Confession:

As can be seen, there is nothing here that departs from the Scriptures or the catholic church, or from the Roman church, insofar as we can tell from its writers. Because this is so, those who claim that our people are to be regarded as heretics judge too harshly. The entire dissension concerns a few specific abuses which have crept into the churches without any proper authority. (AC, Conclusion of Part One [Kolb-Wengert, 59])

This said, Melanchthon and the Augsburg confessors issue a call for repentance to the adherents of the papal church. For with deep-rooted certitude, Melanchthon can say that “just as the church has the promise that it will always have the Holy Spirit, so it also has the warning that there will be ungodly teachers and wolves” (Ap VII, VIII, 22 [Kolb-Wengert, 177]). The church as it exists under the circumstances of this time and age, is a “corpus permixtum,” a “mixed body” consisting of “saints who truly believe the Gospel of Christ,” and at the same time, of “many hypocrites and wicked people, who are mixed in with these” (Ap VII/VIII, 28 [Kolb-Wengert, 178]).

For the church to manage its contemporaneity in a critical manner therefore means, first and foremost, that it becomes aware of its own interwovenness with the times in which it exists. It will therefore first take to heart that which it voices in a critical manner to the world outside itself, if it wants to ensure the credibility of its declaration and message. Thus the church itself will always have to answer to the question as to whether and to what extent it, together with its members, holds itself to those divine standards that it feels compelled to address.

Therefore, the church is obliged to confess and admit to many a transgression against divine standards, both on behalf of its members and also of itself in its aggregate. However, it is exactly this stance that will not affect its credibility but rather strengthen it, provided that it is spoken not from a position of hubris, but from one of befitting humility and informed by the knowledge of its own failings with regard to the divine standards when it speaks from its conscience in this manner. In that case a confession of guilt spoken by the church — repentance! — does have its place and is meaningful. For here, too,

applies Luther’s thesis: “The true treasure of the church is the most holy gospel of the glory and grace of God.”<sup>17</sup>

## 5. Towards the Celebration of the 500<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Reformation

What fundamental insights can Lutheran theology and church provide as genuine contribution to the celebration of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, and how can these insights be communicated to our time?<sup>18</sup>

It should be noted<sup>19</sup> that where the authors of the Lutheran Confessions are concerned, Luther is regarded as being the authoritative, hermeneutic frame of reference for the proper understanding of especially the Confessio Augustana (FC SD VII, 41 [Kolb-Wengert, 600]). They explicitly follow this Luther in determining the relation between the word of God in the Holy Scriptures and the subordinate Confessions of the early church, as well as the Lutheran Reformation, so that Holy Scripture alone is the “one true guiding principle, according to which all teachers and teaching are to be judged and evaluated” (FC SD, Binding Summary 3 [Kolb-Wengert, 527]). Holy Scripture is and remains exclusively canon, whereas the Confessions take up a witness function, admittedly with the claim to truth (FC SD, Binding Summary 12 [Kolb-Wengert, 529]). By contrast, the theologians of one’s own camp are at least on principle not denied the capability to err (FC SD, Antitheses 19 [Kolb-Wengert, 529–531]). During the second half of the sixteenth century, and with this “canonisation” of Luther, Melanchthon’s scholars, who understood themselves to be Luther’s heirs, have attempted to reconstitute and safeguard the tension-filled unity and polar harmony of Lutheran theology and church.

For the Lutheran church, it is that Luther who became instrumental with his catechisms in presenting the Christian community with an introduction to a life guided by God.<sup>20</sup> He thereby points out that Holy Baptism is God’s salutary self-communication, which brings to us “God’s grace, the entire Christ, and the Holy Ghost with his gifts” (LC IV, 41 [Kolb-Wengert, 461]), just as the

<sup>17</sup> LW 31, 31.

<sup>18</sup> Joachim Track, “Die lutherische Stimme in der Ökumene,” in *Was heißt hier Lutherisch! Aktuelle Perspektiven aus Theologie und Kirche* (Hannover 2004), 234–275.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Werner Klän, *Was machen wir aus Luther?*, in *Das Bekenntnis der Kirche zu Fragen von Ehe und Kirche. Die Vorträge der lutherischen Tage 2009 und 2010*, (Lutherisch glauben 6), ed. Karl-Hermann Kandler (Neuendettelsau, 2011), 90–117, esp. 113–117.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Werner Klän, “Anleitung zu einem Gott-gelenkten Leben: Die innere Systematik der Katechismen Luthers,” *LuThK* 29 (2005): 18–35.

sacrament of the altar, which he views as “this great a treasure, which is daily administered and distributed among Christians,” provides the new human being with constant fortification in his battle against Satan, death, and sin (LC V, 39 [Kolb-Wengert, 470f]); and just as the Lord’s Prayer invokes God’s irrefutable willingness for mercy in just such a battle, a battle that becomes inevitable for a Christian precisely by partaking in God’s self-giving and self-revelation, a Christian who, in the battle of the gospel for the gospel, takes on his enemies (LC III, 65–67 [Kolb-Wengert, 448f] and LC III, 80–81 [Kolb-Wengert, 451]).

Luther is perceived and presumed as being the one who construes the Credo for us, thereby gratefully accepting “what God does for us and gives to us” (LC II, 67 [Kolb-Wengert, 440]) and the implementation thereof in the reality of Christ’s liberation act, since Christ “has brought us from the devil to God, from death to life, from sin to righteousness, and keeps us there” (LC II, 31 [Kolb-Wengert, 434]).

It is that Luther who substantiates the identity of Christianity and church as being Trinitarian, and who identifies the Christocentric aspect as being a distinctive feature of Christendom and Christianity, compared to all other forms of religiosity (and areligiosity) that are not based on Christ or inspired by the Holy Spirit (LC II, 63 [Kolb-Wengert, 440]).

It is the Luther who is able to discern law and gospel as being God’s immanent manner of speaking and acting<sup>21</sup> in which the gradient from the extrinsic to the actual work of God proceeds in such a way (FC SD V, 23 [Kolb-Wengert, 585f]) that the church must never be found wanting in proclaiming the declaration of forgiveness and the salvation in Christ, seeing that it is a matter of “comforting and consoling” those that are frightened and “fainthearted” (FC SD V, 12 [Kolb-Wengert, 584]).

It is precisely this Luther who delineates God’s Commandments in the context of faith as a directive for everyone to make them “a matter of daily practice in all circumstances, in all activities and dealings” (LC, 332 [Kolb-Wengert, 431]) and to serve as an instruction manual for a Christian life of human sympathy that is pleasing to God. It is this Luther who places the gospel in its forms of implementation — proclamation, baptism, Eucharist, and confessional penitence as the “third sacrament” (LC IV, 74 [Kolb-Wengert, 465]) — at the

centre of an encompassing Christian understanding of a worship service (SA III, 4, Concerning the Gospel [Kolb-Wengert, 319]).

It is the Luther for whom the wording of the sacrament’s words of institution in their literal sense was so immovably fixed that he could not back down in this regard whenever the real presence of the body and blood of Christ in the celebratory worship of precisely this testament of Christ was called into question (LC V, 8–14 [Kolb-Wengert, 467f]), and is therefore being invoked against the crypto-Philippistic deviances of the second-generation theologians in Wittenberg.<sup>22</sup>

It is the Luther who, with his Christological deliberations on the conceptual conceivability of the universal presence of the human nature in Christ even after Easter and Ascension, as well as on the promised sacramental presence of Christ sacrificed, has played a crucial role in the formation of the Lutheran profile concerning Eucharistic doctrine and Christology during the internal reformatory disputes of the sixteenth century.<sup>23</sup>

It is the Luther who, by the differentiation of the two realms (LC II, 150ff, 158ff [Kolb-Wengert, 407f]), the release of secularism from clerical paternalism, as well as the theological facilitation of the differentiation between “penultimate” and “ultimate” (Dietrich Bonhoeffer), thereby paved the way for the separation of church and state, yet without ever having relinquished God’s reign of power over all ages, nations, people and spheres of life (LC II, 26 [Kolb-Wengert, 389]).<sup>24</sup>

It is the Luther who urged the Christian community of solidarity to bear in mind that we “must all indeed help us to believe, to love, to pray, and to fight against the devil” (LC V, 87 [Kolb-Wengert, 476]), meaning the elementary and fundamental day-to-day life of a Christian existence, advising us to engage in the lifelong practice of being a Christian. Luther in his commentary on St. Paul’s epistle to the Romans had stated: “To stand still in God’s way, means to go backward, and to go forward means ever to begin anew.”<sup>25</sup> This is what daily reformation in personal life and in the church is about! *Ecclesia semper reformanda, hoc est: Ecclesia semper paenitens.*

<sup>22</sup> Cf. e.g., FC SD VIII, 41–43 (Kolb-Wengert, 623f).

<sup>23</sup> Cf. the citations from Luther, Large Confession concerning the Holy Supper (1528) in FC SD VII, 92–103 (Kolb-Wengert, 609f).

<sup>24</sup> Also LC, The Lord’s Prayer, Fourth Petition, 76–79 (Kolb-Wengert, 451).

<sup>25</sup> “Stare in via Dei est retrocedere, sed proficere est de novo incipere,” (WA 56, 486, 7ff).

<sup>21</sup> Cf. the citations from Luther’s exegesis of Luke 5, 1–11 in the summer homily of 1544, in FC SD V, 12 (Kolb-Wengert, 583f).

## 6. Conclusion: Confessional Lutheran Churches — Their Mission in a Globalizing World

Coming from a post-Christian environment like Germany, the once land of the Reformation, I have learned that for the mission of the church, it is most necessary for us to cling faithfully to the biblical roots and to assure ourselves of our historical and even confessional identity. “Reformation” in this sense, is nothing but going back to the roots and starting all over again. And if it holds true that Christianity is in the process of moving from the Northwest Hemisphere to the South and the Southeast, or that it is emerging there, then Christians in Europe (and northern America) are undoubtedly obligated to dialogue with the emerging southern churches about what was once given to the Northern Hemisphere in the biblical record and in the theological legacy of the fathers of the early church, like Cyprian, Athanasius, and Augustine, notably Africans all of them. Moreover, in the era of globalization, the northern churches will have to listen very carefully to what the emerging churches in the south have to say on Christian identity and authenticity, not least in the area of Christian conduct and ethics.

All in all, confessional Lutheran churches will have to call people back into the fellowship that God grants with himself and, in doing so, into the freedom that God bestows on those who believe. In this sense the biblical-reformatory Doctrine of Justification is at the same time “the doctrine of Christian freedom” and as such the “chief article of the Gospel,” the preservation of which is paramount.<sup>26</sup> In the context of the reality and effectiveness of the gospel, the believers subsequently live in a liberated lebensraum (environment), albeit by means of the will of God, the “Law.”<sup>27</sup> In this sense human freedom in the context of Christian faith and thus church proclamation means response,<sup>28</sup> grateful response of the human being who has been liberated towards freedom by God

himself through the sacrificial, death-defying commitment of his Son (GAL 5:1). The call to return to God, the call to responsibility before God, is indeed nothing but the call to freedom, the freedom of the children of God.

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<sup>26</sup> “For it is necessary to retain the teaching of Christian freedom in the churches ... It is necessary to retain the chief article of the Gospel,” (AC XXVIII, 51f [Kolb-Wengert, 99]).

<sup>27</sup> In this context Peters speaks of the “breathing space of Christ’s everlasting grace.” Cf. Albrecht Peters, “Gesetz und Evangelium,” HST 2 (Gütersloh 1981, 1994<sup>2</sup>): 54.

<sup>28</sup> Oswald Bayer, *Freiheit als Antwort: Zur theologischen Ethik* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1995), 74.

# THE FIRST LUTHERAN CONGREGATION: 1566–1585 AND BEYOND

by Gijsbertus van Hattem

ON SEPTEMBER 2, 1566, almost fifty years after the start of the Reformation on 31 October 1517, the first Lutheran church was officially organized in Antwerp. The European Lutheran Conference (ELC) was held in Antwerp in honor of this 450<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The scope of this paper cannot cover every detail of the 450-year history, but only some important points. After an historical introduction of the sixteenth century, the focus will be mainly on the Wonderyear, 1566–67, the years until 1585, the aftermath, and conclude with the Lutheran church in our times.

## Lutherans in Antwerp

This doesn't mean that there weren't Protestants or, more specifically, Lutherans, in the city of Antwerp during these fifty years.

Antwerp was a thriving city and in that time, after Paris, it was the largest European metropolis north of the Alps. By the middle of the sixteenth century, the population was around 100,000 inhabitants. Antwerp was an important trade center and through its port, merchandise from all over the world was distributed, like it is nowadays as well. Belonging to the *Hanze*, or Hanseatic League, a trade organization of cities in north and northwest Europe, it provided a residence for traders of many nationalities.<sup>1</sup>

Already right after the publication of Martin Luther's 95 Theses on and against indulgences, his ideas came to Antwerp to his order brothers at the Augustinian

monastery in the neighborhood of the church of St. Andrew. This monastery was founded in 1513 and had strong ties with Wittenberg. Jacob Praepositius, the prior, had been a student of Luther and came back to Antwerp in 1521. Other well-known names are those of Hendrik van Zutphen, who also studied at Wittenberg; Hendrik Voes;

Jan van Essen as well as several others. They openly announced the Reformation ideas and spoke against many wrong doctrines in the Roman Catholic Church. Many citizens accepted the new ideas. And then of course there were the German merchants who owned a big share of the trade in Antwerp and therefore also had a large influence in bringing the Reformation to the Low Countries. This all contributed to

a fairly large community of Lutherans in the beginning of the 1520s, although there are no numbers to prove it.<sup>2</sup>

## Persecution and First Martyrs of the Reformation

The reaction of the government came without delay. The so-called Low Countries, or the Netherlands, were

Already right after the publication of Martin Luther's 95 Theses on and against indulgences, his ideas came to Antwerp to his order brothers at the Augustinian monastery in the neighborhood of the church of St. Andrew.

<sup>1</sup> Lodovico Guicciardini, *Beschijvinghe van alle de Nederlanden; anderssins ghenoeemt Nederder-Duytschlandt* (Amsterdam, 1612), 49–104. Guido Marnef, *Antwerpen in de tijd van de Reformatie. Ondergronds protestantisme in een handelsmetropool 1550–1577* (Antwerpen, 1996), 21–90.

<sup>2</sup> Nicolaas Christiaan Kist, "De Pauselijke Aflaat-handel, ook in deszelfs invloed op de Kerk-Hervorming in Nederland," *Archief voor Kerkelijke Geschiedenis* 1 (Leyden 1829): 204. Nicolaas Christiaan Kist, "Nederlanders, in de XVIde Eeuw, aan de Hoogeschool te Wittenberg, in de Theologie gegradueerd," *Archief voor Kerkelijke Geschiedenis* 5(16) (Leyden 1845): 346. "Jacobus Proost of Iperenses/Sprenger," *Biografisch lexicon voor de geschiedenis van het Nederlands protestantisme* (Deel 1978): 263–264. Paul Estié, *Het vluchtige bestaan van de eerste Nederlandse Lutherse gemeente. Antwerpen 1566–1567*, (Amsterdam, 1986), 7–9. Johannes Wilhelm Pont, *Geschiedenis van het Lutheranisme in de Nederlanden tot 1618*, (Haarlem, 1911), 23–24. Martin Jhering, *Wandlungen und Aufbrüche. Der Weg der Niederländische Gemeinde von Antwerpen nach Frankfurt am Main* (Frankfurt/M, 2014), 208. Johannes Cristoffel Schultz Jacobi, *Oud en nieuw uit de geschiedenis der Nederlandsch-Luthersche Kerk*, 5 dln. (Rotterdam, 1862), 20–77.

The beginnings of any Lutheran church matter explains the Rev. Gijsbertus van Hattem in a paper delivered at the 24<sup>th</sup> European Lutheran Conference, Antwerp, Belgium.



part of the Holy Roman Empire of Charles V, who was born in Ghent (Flandres) in 1500. Antwerp was part of Brabant, as Brussels was. Charles V, as we all know, was not a friend of the new ideas. In April 1521, at the Diet in Worms, Luther was made an outlaw, and in Charles's whole empire actions against the Reformation were undertaken. He issued some laws against the heretics, the so-called *ketterplakaten*, and fostered the Inquisition.

It did not take much time before the consequences were felt in Antwerp. In 1522, Prior Praepositius was imprisoned and recanted, but changed his mind again, and managed to get out of the city to become a pastor in Bremen until his death in 1562. The same happened to Van Zutphen, the new prior and he was also able to escape. Not so with Hendrik Voes and Jan van Essen. They were imprisoned, refused to recant, and on July 1, 1523, were executed at the Grote Markt in Brussels, burned at the stake for their adherence to the Reformation doctrine. They are considered the first two Lutheran martyrs, making this a date to certainly remember in seven years from now. The monastery of the Augustinians was already demolished in October 1522. When Luther heard about the execution, he wrote a comforting letter to the Christians in the Low Countries and composed a hymn, "Ein neues Lied wir heben an."<sup>3</sup>

In the nineteenth century, the secretary and archivist of Antwerp at the time started the endeavor of publishing the official documents of the city. The first volume was published in 1864 from a first series that would have thirty volumes, twenty of which were by him, and that are now known as the *Antwerps Archievenblad* (AA, Antwerp Archives Bulletin). The series starts with and covers mainly the sixteenth century and much important information can be found about the Reformation and the reaction against it. In connection to the above described we read for example about the prohibition to read and to sell writings of Luther:

**Boeken gemaekt door eenen geheeten broeder Lutherus niet te lesen, verkoopen of daarmede om te**

<sup>3</sup> Schultz Jacobi, *Nederlandsch-Luthersche Kerk*, 34. WA 12, 73–80, "A New Song Here Shall Be Begun," AE 53, 212–216. Jos E. Vercruysse, "De Antwerpse Augustijnen en de lutherse Reformatie, 1513–1523," *Trajecta* 16 (2007): 203.

**gaen, vermits deselve de ketterye smaeken, op de confiscatie ende verbeurte van hunne goederen en de nog personelyk te worden gestraft; geene famose libellen oft rondeelen en balladen te schryven, uyt te geven en voor kerkdoren en poorten te slaen en plekken tegens degene die geene Luthersadherent-en syn ...**<sup>4</sup>

The *Antwerps Archievenblad* also contains lists of all the persons that because of their "heretic" faith were persecuted, imprisoned, and/or executed. This is a valuable and indispensable source for sixteenth century Antwerp history.

These volumes show that the repression of the so-called "heretics" was taken seriously. This also marked the atmosphere for the coming years and decades when many were persecuted and executed. People met secretly. Lutherans had questions about these hidden meetings and asked Luther for advice. Luther disapproved such meetings and suggested creating a house church for the household or to emigrate to a place where it was allowed to publicly profess the Lutheran doctrine. This inspired many to do so.<sup>5</sup>

### Other Protestants

By 1540, another reformation movement inspired by Jean Calvin (b. 1509, France) had gained strength in the Low Countries and

was by far more militant than the Lutheran Reformation. Luther himself actually did not engage with Calvinists as much as many think. He had more to do with the followers of Ulrich Zwingli (b. 1484), the Swiss reformer. And then there was a third, much smaller group, the Anabaptists, who were followers of Menno Simons (b. 1496, Friesland). They actually played a minor role in the events of the years to come, but were severely persecuted.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> *Antwerps Archievenblad*, I (22 Feb 1522), 172. Casper Christiaan Gerrit Visser, *Luther's Geschriften in de Nederlanden tot 1546* (Assen, 1969).

<sup>5</sup> Victoria Christman, *Pragmatic Toleration: The Politics of Religious Heterodoxy in Early Reformation Antwerp, 1515–1555* (Rochester, 2015), 36ff. Ferdinand Jacob Domela Nieuwenhuis, "Bijdragen tot de Geschiedenis der 'Huijskercken,'" *Godgeleerde Bijdragen* 30 (Amsterdam 1855): 404–405. Estié, *Nederlandse Lutherse*, 14–15. E.M. Braekman, "Het Lutheranisme in Antwerpen," *Bijdragen tot de Geschiedenis* 70 (1987): 24–25.

<sup>6</sup> Estié, *Nederlandse Lutherse*, 36, note 61. Robert Van Roosbroeck, *Het Wonderjaar te Antwerpen 1566–1567. Inleiding tot de studie der*



The Antwerp Calvinists organized themselves and had established an unofficial congregation by 1550. By then the Antwerp city government had developed a more condescending behavior against the Protestants. Trade was more important, but not everything that the Protestants desired would be possible. But it allowed a certain freedom for the Protestants, as long they kept a low profile, and so they did, holding their meetings still in secret.<sup>7</sup>

Another important aspect that needs to be mentioned is that Antwerp developed itself in an important printing center. Another lecture today will focus especially on this subject. Where there is trade and money, there is also space for other segments of a civilization to flourish. The political situation was therefore largely influenced by the economic situation of the city.<sup>8</sup>

But changes were on their way. Charles V's health began to fail in his mid-forties. He had been considering abdication long before it became clear in the 1550s that Protestantism in Germany would have to be tolerated. He handed the Holy Roman Empire over to his brother, Ferdinand, in 1554, and in October 1555, in Brussels, he resigned the sovereignty of the Low Countries to his son, Philip of Spain (1527–1598). The following January 1556, he resigned Spain and Spanish America to Philip as well. In August he formally abdicated as Holy Roman Emperor and died in 1558. His son, Philip II, also inherited the Low Countries and had the strong purpose to have only one church in his kingdom, the Roman Catholic Church, and not tolerate Protestantism. In 1559 he left the government of the Low Countries to his older half-sister, Margaret, Duchess of Parma (b. 1522, the illegitimate daughter of Charles and Maria van der Gheynst). She governed there from 1559–1567 and from 1578–1582.

The Lutherans eventually became closer to the Catholics than to the Calvinists. And then the church had also to deal with theological controversies from within, like if the bread should be broken at the consecration or not.

Margaret seemed to be approachable and the lower nobility seized the opportunity. They made a covenant, and on April 6, 1566, they offered a petition to Margaret. They demanded that the Inquisition cease and that the *ketterplakkaten* be nullified. She did not give in right away, but desired a softer approach in combating the heretics. In reality, it was a victory for the *Geuzen*, as one of Margaret's advisors named them after they presented their petition and he tried to minimize it for her, saying: "Ce ne sont que des gueux" (French for "They are just beggars"). This nickname of *Geuzen* (the Beggars) was adopted by the nobility as an honorary title and it was very symbolic, since they promised fidelity to the king even to requiring the beggar's bag.<sup>9</sup>

### Hedge-Preaching/the Wonderyear

The halfhearted answer of the regent was enough for the Calvinists to increase the pressure. Instead of secret meetings outside the city walls, as has been recorded in 1565, they now openly met, still outside the city, challenging the city government. Up until this time, the city government tried to minimize the meetings to the leaders in Brussels by saying that most of the atten-

dants were foreigners. But now everyone could hear the Psalms and the preaching. The first of one of these so called *hagepreek* (Dutch for "hedge-preaching") was on June 13, 1566, hence almost 450 years ago. On June 24, 1566, it was decided to stop meeting in secret. To attend a hedge-preaching was not without risk. Some meetings were guarded by armed guards of their own people to protect the community and the preacher, and to warn against a possible intervention by the government.<sup>10</sup>

This brings us to the picture that illustrates the program of this conference. Frans Hogenberg (1535–1590) made dozens of pictures illustrating the events that happened in those turbulent years. One of those pictures illustrates the

*godsdienslonlusten te Antwerpen van 1566 tot 15* (Antwerpen, 1930), 151.

<sup>7</sup> Estié, *Nederlandse Lutherse*, 15–17. Pont, *Geschiedenis van het Lutheranisme*, 45. Van Roosbroeck, *Emigranten. Nederlandse vluchtelingen in Duitsland (1550–1600)* (Leuven, 1968), 19. Van Roosbroeck, *Wonderjaar*, 152, note 1.

<sup>8</sup> Francine de Nave, "Antwerpen, dissident drukkerscentrum in de 16de eeuw: algemene synthese," *Antwerpen, dissident drukkerscentrum. De rol van de Antwerpse drukkers in de godsdienststrijd in Engeland (16de eeuw)* (Antwerpen 1994): 13–22.

<sup>9</sup> Jozef-Ernest van Roey, *De Val van Antwerpen 17 augustus 1585 – voor en na* (Antwerpen, 1985), 17.

<sup>10</sup> Van Roey, *De Val van Antwerpen*, 18. Estié, *Nederlandse Lutherse*, 18. *Antwerpsch Chronykje, in het welk zeer veele en elders te vergeefs gezogte geschiedenissen, sedert den jaren 1500 tot het jaar 1574 (...) omstandig zyn beschreven* (Leiden, 1743), 75–77. Pont, *Geschiedenis van het Lutheranisme*, 66. Van Roosbroeck, *Wonderjaar*, 7 note 2.

hedge-preaching south of the city. His picture at the same time gives an idea of the distribution of the Protestants, a detail that the occasional observer passes by. At the top by the banks of the river Schelde is a first group of people that, in front of a church, listen to a preacher. This group is marked as *Confessi*, which means those who follow the Augsburg Confession, the Lutherans. Two more groups are pictured. The group on the left under the trees is marked as the *Walsche*, the French-speaking Calvinists. Antwerp had a large contingent of French speakers from the south of the Low Countries and from France, not least because of the economic relations with cities in those areas. One of Antwerp's most well-known printers came from France, Christoffel Plantin. His printing house exists still today as a museum. Antwerp was and is an attractive city. On the other side of the trench, the last group on the right listening to a Dutch preacher is marked *Calvinsche*. The language was already in those days a dividing issue. Interesting detail: There are no armed guards around the more peaceful Lutherans. The strength of the different groups is more or less the same, that means one Lutheran for each two Calvinists, or one-third of the Protestants were Lutheran and two-thirds Calvinists. This proportionality remains the same in the following years.<sup>11</sup>

The time period between Easter 1566 and Easter 1567 has been called the *Wonderjaar* (Wonderyear). Protestants used this word in a positive sense because of their advance. The Catholics used it in a negative sense because of the terrible changes in the Christian faith. Others rather preferred to call it a *Hongerjaar* (Hungryyear) due to the economic consequences for a large part of the population.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> F. Hoogenbergh, *De 80-jarige Oorlog in Beelden* (Den Haag, 1977), 3. Van Roey, *De Val van Antwerpen*, 19. Jozef-Ernest Van Roey, *Antwerpen, het avontuur lijkt bestaan van een stad* (Antwerpen/Rotterdam, 1995), 49. *De kroniek van Godevaert van Haecht over de troebelen van 1565 tot 1574 te Antwerpen en elders*, 2 dln. Volume 1, ed. Robert Van Roosbroeck (Antwerpen, 1928–33), 63–91. *Antwerpsch Chronykje, in het welk zeer veele en elders te vergeefs geschiedissen, sedert den jaren 1500 tot het jaar 1574 (...) omstandig zyn beschreven* (Leiden, 1743), 78. Pont, *Geschiedenis van het Lutheranisme*, 69. Van Roosbroeck, *Wonderjaar*, 18–19. J. Andriessen, “Het geestelijke en godsdienstige klimaat,” *Antwerpen in de XVIde eeuw, Genootschap voor Antwerpse Geschiedenis* (Antwerpen 1975): 215–216. Van Roey, *De Val van Antwerpen*, 65. Van Roey, *Antwerpen, het avontuur lijkt bestaan van een stad*, 90, 102. Estié, *Nederlandse Lutherse*, 37, note 62. Guido Marnef, “Protestanten in ‘Noord en Zuid’: Krekhistorische beschouwingen n.a.v. een recente studie,” *Bijdragen tot de Geschiedenis* 70 (1987): 139–145.

<sup>12</sup> Estié, *Nederlandse Lutherse*, 16. *Antwerpsch Chronykje, in het welk zeer veele en elders te vergeefs geschiedissen, sedert den jaren 1500 tot het jaar 1574 (...) omstandig zyn beschreven*, 69. Erich Kuttner, *Het Hongerjaar* (Amsterdam, 1949), 31.

More hedge-preaching followed, not only in Antwerp, but all over Flanders, Brabant, and Holland. These drew a large number of attendees. The one on August 10, 1566, for example, had 24,000 people. Surely not all were Protestants; likely many came because of the novelty.<sup>13</sup> Margaret got worried, and questioned the issued regulations and laws. Antwerp reacted, reminding her of the important position of the merchant and the trade. Nobody was waiting for persecution. It was decided to send one of the twelve noblemen of the *Raad van State* (a council instituted in 1531 by the emperor to assist the government in the Low Countries) to Antwerp to sort things out. The one sent was William of Nassau (b. 1533), Prince of Orange, and also *Landgraaf* (viscount) of Antwerp, among other titles. He arrived July 13, 1566, in Antwerp and faced a major challenge in solving the religious tensions.<sup>14</sup>

William of Orange had an important role in the Low Countries. Born in Dillenburg, Germany, and baptized Roman Catholic, he was raised Lutheran. During his further education at the court of Charles V in Brussels, he became Roman Catholic, but kept sympathy for the Lutherans. In 1559, Philip II appointed him as *Stadhouder* of Holland, Zeeland, and Utrecht. His wife, Anna, was from Saxony and Lutheran. His brother, Louis (Lodewijk) of Nassau, was a professed Lutheran.<sup>15</sup>

## Iconoclasm

Despite all his diplomacy, William of Orange was not very successful. On the contrary, iconoclasm erupted and reached Antwerp on August 20, just when William had left the city for consultations in Brussels the day before. The iconoclasts destroyed the interior of many churches, among them the cathedral where the Calvinists managed to preach. Lutherans and Calvinists differed in many aspects concerning doctrine — Holy Communion, for example. Lutherans also tried to keep obedience to the authorities and had no problems with the images and altars in the churches. Iconoclasm was neither induced nor supported by Lutherans. In the meantime, one priest, Matthijs, became noteworthy because, despite the fact that he was Roman Catholic, he preached in a Protestant, Lutheran way, and attracted many people. The city

<sup>13</sup> *De kroniek van Godevaert*, Volume 1, 63. Estié, *Nederlandse Lutherse*, 20, 24. Andriessen, “Het geestelijke en godsdienstige klimaat,” 215. Marnef, “Protestanten in ‘Noord en Zuid,’” 140.

<sup>14</sup> Van Roey, *De Val van Antwerpen*, 20.

<sup>15</sup> Estié, *Nederlandse Lutherse*, 38.

government called him to the church of St. George in the hopes of getting control of the situation.<sup>16</sup>

### Agreement and the First Lutheran Church: 1566–1567

When William returned to Antwerp on August 26, he managed to reestablish order. Some iconoclasts were executed, others banned or punished. The Calvinists requested freedom of religion, and the Lutherans did the same on the 28th. The latter were struggling to know how to act in this situation *sui generis* wherein the authorities did not take the initiative to establish the Protestant religion, as happened in Germany or Scandinavia. The requests resulted, after some negotiation, in William on August 31, 1566, announcing that in the Low Countries, with the approval of the king and the regent, the Inquisition and the *ketterplakkaten* against the heretics for the time being was suspended.<sup>17</sup> The first Lutheran church in a non-Lutheran country established with the approval of the authorities was a fact.

The Lutherans, contrary to their practice, already had called some pastors without the approval of the authorities and now asked for their approval. They also asked to make some churches available for the Lutheran services. Again they did not wait for an answer, but rented a barn close to St. Michael's abbey (this abbey was demolished under Napoleon rule).<sup>18</sup>

On September 2, 1566, William of Orange and the Lutherans made an agreement, which included provisions<sup>19</sup> to, among other things, not disturb the other religions, and allowed the Lutherans to use, besides the barn they already were renting, a place named *Reyger*, close to the *Paardenmarkt*,<sup>20</sup> and a place named *Lijmhof*,

close to the *Oudaenstraat*. And if we consider Matthijs a Lutheran, then also St. George's church should be included, but only until September 25. They were also allowed to call two pastors for each of the three places.<sup>21</sup> This agreement did not differ much from the one made with the Calvinists. The agreement was signed by the different parties, for which the Lutherans seemed to choose ad hoc some representatives, since they had not really organized themselves yet. For their organization the Lutherans were surely influenced by the Calvinists.<sup>22</sup>

### Life of the Church

**Membership** — What about the membership of the church in 1566? Calculations differ, but as has been pointed out before, it would be acceptable to estimate one-sixth of the population being Lutheran, one-third Calvinist, and one-half Roman Catholic. In a population of 100,000 this means roughly 16,000 Lutherans.<sup>23</sup> This is an optimistic estimate since we will never know the real membership. In January 1567, William reported that 12,000 people had signed the Augsburg Confession. Margaret estimated only 4,000. Lutherans were also called “Martinists,” followers of Martin Luther, or “Confessionists,” those of the Confession, a reference to the Augsburg Confession of 1530.<sup>24</sup>

Most of the members were Germans, but also inhabitants of Antwerp, among them many wealthy ones, are found in the member lists, such as the city's secretary, Alexander Grapheus, and the alderman, Nicolaas Rockox, Jacob van Wesenbeke, a good friend of William, and Godevaert van Haecht, to name some of them. The latter two both wrote about the events in those years, especially

<sup>16</sup> Van Roey, *De Val van Antwerpen*, 22. Estié, *Nederlandse Lutherse*, 22–26. Van Roosbroeck, *Wonderjaar*, 50, 59. Andriessen, “Het geestelijke en godsdienstige klimaat,” 216. *De kroniek van Godevaert*, Volume 1, 98–103. *Antwerpsch Chronykje, in het welk zeer veele en elders te vergeefs gezogte geschiedenissen, sedert den jaren 1500 tot het jaar 1574 (...) omstandig zyn beschreven*, 95. Pont, *Geschiedenis van het Lutheranisme*, 72–73.

<sup>17</sup> Estié, *Nederlandse Lutherse*, 29. *De kroniek van Godevaert*, Volume 1, 105. Van Roosbroeck, *Wonderjaar*, 52. Gustaaf Asaert, *De val van Antwerpen en de uittocht van Vlamingen en Brabanders*, (Tielt, 2004), X, 149.

<sup>18</sup> Asaert, *Vlamingen en Brabanders*, XI, 22–23. Van Roosbroeck, *Wonderjaar*, 66.

<sup>19</sup> Asaert, *Vlamingen en Brabanders*, XI, 56–58. Johannes Wilhelm Pont, “De belijdenis van de luthersche gemeente te Antwerpen over de erfzonde, 1579,” *Nieuwe Bijdragen tot kennis van de geschiedenis en het wezen van het lutheranisme in de Nederlanden* 1 (Schiedam 1907): 124.

<sup>20</sup> A. Thijs, *Historiek der straten en openbare plaatsen van Antwerpen* (Antwerpen, 1973), 191.

<sup>21</sup> Estié, *Nederlandse Lutherse*, 30–32.

<sup>22</sup> Asaert, *Vlamingen en Brabanders*, XI, 56–58. Estié, *Nederlandse Lutherse*, 35–36, note 60. Schultz Jacobi, *Nederlandsch-Luthersche Kerk*, 17–18. Johannes Cristoffel Schultz Jacobi, “De toestand van Antwerpen na de invoering van de Hervorming,” *Nederlandsch Archief voor Kerkelijke Geschiedenis* 15 (Leiden 1844): 115–175. Van Roosbroeck, *Wonderjaar*, 64. Andriessen, “Het geestelijke en godsdienstige klimaat,” 215. Johannes Lehnemann, *Historische Nachricht von der ... im sechzehenden Jahrhundert ... evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche in Antorff und der daraus entstandenen niederländischen Gemeinde Augburgischer Confession in Frankfurt am Mayn, aus beglaubten Urkunden mitgeteilt* (Frankfurt/M, 1725), 56.

<sup>23</sup> Van Roey, *De Val van Antwerpen*, 57–70. Braekman, “Het Lutheranisme in Antwerpen,” 29. J. Briels, *Zuid-Nederlanders in de Republiek 1572-1630. Een demografische en cultuurhistorische studie* (Sint-Niklaas, 1985), 76.

<sup>24</sup> Estié, *Nederlandse Lutherse*, 37. *De kroniek van Godevaert*, Volume 1, 114. Schultz Jacobi, *Nederlandsch-Luthersche Kerk*, 19. Guillaume Groen van Prinsteren, *Archives ou Correspondence Inédité de la Maison d'Orange-Nassau*, Serie, dl. 3 (Leiden, 1835), 5.

van Haecht.<sup>25</sup> Interestingly, almost all the *suikerbakkers* (confectioners) of the city were Lutherans.<sup>26</sup> Probably Rubens's parents were also members of the church, since in 1582, his mother-in-law, Clara Colyns alias de Touion, in her will left a bequest to those of the Augsburg Confession.<sup>27</sup> She would have been delighted to know that almost 450 years later a conference is being held at the back of or on the grounds that her grandson bought in 1606 to build what today is known as the Rubens House, as we are today, in experiencing this fitting setting for a conference like this. Thanks to the Rubenianum for its hospitality.

**Church Buildings** — Immediately after the signing of the agreement, the Lutherans (and the Calvinists) started to build their churches. Both Lutheran church buildings at Reyger and Lijmhof were finished before the end of the year, though the places were used for open air services as long weather permitted. The barn at St. Michael's in the meantime had been improved with galleries and an altar. The Calvinists did the same and built two churches, one at the *Wapper* for the French-speaking, and one a little bit further at *Hopland* for the Dutch-speaking. They also improved another location, but of course, no altars at their churches.<sup>28</sup>

**Pastors** — The six called pastors were Franciscus Alardus (b. 1530, Brussels), Balthasar Houwaert (b. ca. 1525, Brussels), Johannes Ligarius (b. 1529, East-Friesland), Johannes Saliger (b.?, Lübeck), Dittmar Tymannus (b. ?) and Christian Warnerus (b. ?), and all had arrived by mid-October 1566.<sup>29</sup> Also Matthijs (van Statvelt ?), after

the closing of St. George and until the arrival of the called pastors, had preached a while at the *Lijmhof*.<sup>30</sup> Besides the six pastors, the church also called six theological advisors to help with counseling. Among them was the well-known Matthias Flacius. The others were Herman Hamelmann, Johan Vorstius, and three from Mansfeld, Cyriacus Spangenberg,<sup>31</sup> Martin Wolff, and Joachim Hartmann (and some sources mention a seventh person, a certain Dr. Ulsperger). They were all known as die-hard, anti-Calvinist Lutherans.<sup>32</sup> Flacius had an important role.<sup>33</sup>

**Services** — The agreement allowed for the Protestants to hold services on Sunday and during the week on a saint's day. If no such day was on the calendar, then on Wednesday. The Calvinists only used Sunday and Wednesday for worship. The first service with Holy Communion was celebrated on September 15 in the barn. After the first communion service, it was celebrated every Sunday. The congregation most likely used a translation of the German "Bonner Hymnal" from 1544, which contained psalms and all Luther's hymns, except one.<sup>34</sup> Apart from the instruction in the church, plans were made to have their own schools for the education of the children in a Lutheran way.<sup>35</sup> Also an agenda was written by the advisors with the order of services. "Agenda. Christian Liturgy of God's congregation in Antwerp, holding to the genuine, pure and unaltered Augsburg Confession." It contained an order for a communion service, one without communion, one for a baptismal service, and one for a wedding service.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Asaert, *Vlamingen en Brabanders*, IX 423–427. Estié, *Nederlandse Lutherse*, 37–38. Schultz Jacobi, *Nederlandsch-Luthersche Kerk*, 42. Schultz Jacobi, "Hervorming," 168–169. Pont, *Geschiedenis van het Lutheranisme*, 77. Van Roosbroeck, *Emigranten*, 183. Van Roosbroeck, *Wonderjaar*, XVII–XVIII.

<sup>26</sup> Andriessen, "Het geestelijke en godsdienstige klimaat," 1X, 426. Schultz Jacobi, "Hervorming," 170, note 5. Oliver K. Olson, "The Rise and Fall of the Antwerp Martinists," *Lutheran Quarterly* 1 (1987): 98–119, 98. Frans Hendrik Mertens and Karel Lodwijk Torfs, *Geschiedenis van Antwerpen*, 8 dln. (Antwerpen, 1845–53), 616.

<sup>27</sup> Van Roey, *De Val van Antwerpen*, 25, 67, 104.

<sup>28</sup> Estié, *Nederlandse Lutherse*, 40–42, note 71. *De kroniek van Godevaert*, Volume 1, 108, 117. *Antwerpsch Chronykje, in het welk zeer veele en elders te vergeefs gezogte geschiedenissen, sedert den jaren 1500 tot het jaar 1574 (...) omstandig zyn beschreven*, 98. Van Roosbroeck, *Wonderjaar*, 98, 139. Pont, *Geschiedenis van het Lutheranisme*, 76, note 4. J.C. Diericxsens, *Antuerpia christo nascens et crescens seu acta ecclesiam Antuerpiensem ejusque Apostolos ac Viros pietate conspicuos concernentia utque ad seculum XVII*, 7 dln (Antwerpen, 1773), Volume IV, 345.

<sup>29</sup> Estié, 42–44. Schultz Jacobi, "Hervorming," 141. Pont, *Geschiedenis van het Lutheranisme*, 79–81. Van Roosbroeck, *Wonderjaar*, 137–138.

<sup>30</sup> Estié, *Nederlandse Lutherse*, 47, note 92. Schultz Jacobi, *Nederlandsch-Luthersche Kerk*, 31. Floris Prims, *Geschiedenis van de Sint-Jorisparochie en -kerk te Antwerpen (1304–1923)* (Antwerpen, 1923), 154–155.

<sup>31</sup> Pont, *Geschiedenis van het Lutheranisme*, 69–80. Johannes Wilhelm Pont, *De Luthersche kerken in Nederland. Haar belijdenisschriften, kerkeordeningen en liederenschat historisch toegelicht en ingeleid* (Amsterdam, 1929), 74–96.

<sup>32</sup> Estié, *Nederlandse Lutherse*, 44–47. Schultz Jacobi, *Nederlandsch-Luthersche Kerk*, 28–34. Van Roosbroeck, *Wonderjaar*, 184.

<sup>33</sup> Schultz Jacobi, "Hervorming," 156. Van Roosbroeck, *Wonderjaar*, 137. Pont, "De belijdenis van de luthersche gemeente 1579," 121–164. Braekman, "Het Lutheranisme in Antwerpen," 23–38. On pages 26–27, Braekman misses the point about the advisors.

<sup>34</sup> Estié, *Nederlandse Lutherse*, 47–51. *De kroniek van Godevaert*, Volume 1, 108. Pont, *Geschiedenis van het Lutheranisme*, 79. Van Roosbroeck, *Wonderjaar*, 183. Casper Christiaan Gerrit Visser, *De Lutheranen in Nederland tussen katholicisme en calvinisme 1566 tot heden* (Dieren, 1983), 72.

<sup>35</sup> *De kroniek van Godevaert*, Volume 2, 19, 45.

<sup>36</sup> Estié, *Nederlandse Lutherse*, 56. Johannes Wilhelm Pont, *De luthersche kerk in Nederland* (Baarn, 1908).



**Antwerp Confession** — Lutheran literature had been circulating for years already in Antwerp, for instance, Luther's Small Catechism, but more was needed. Several publications appeared of which one is significant, the "Antwerp Confession."<sup>37</sup> It brings in 23, often long, articles of the Lutheran doctrine professed by the Antwerp Church. It was signed by the six called pastors. On one side it confirmed the Lutheran doctrine (*affirmativa*); on the other side it condemned the Roman Catholic, the Anabaptist, and the Calvinist doctrines (*negativa*). The way the others interpreted Holy Communion takes a long part of the confession in articles XVI and XVII.

**Church Seal** — The Church also had a seal that 400 years later was reintroduced in the third Lutheran church in 1962. It depicts the Lamb that is worthy to open the Book with the seven seals (REV 5). The broken seals hang on the open book, which reads EVANGELIUM IESU CHRISTI. Heavenly light beams from above. The inscription around the seal reads SIG. ECCL. EVANG. CONF. AUGU. VRB. ANTUE (Seal of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in the City of Antwerp).<sup>38</sup>

William had tried all those months to get the Lutherans and Calvinists on the same page, asking the Calvinists to accept the Augsburg Confession, so that the Provisions of the 1555 Peace of Augsburg could maybe also be applied to the Low Countries, since Charles chose to use the peace treaty for only some regions of his empire. William's efforts were in vain. That Lutherans and Calvinists were not able to work more together pleased the government.<sup>39</sup> How the old adage "divide and rule (conquer)" fit the situation. The relationship with the Catholics was not much better. When theological advisor Spangenberg left Antwerp, he declared, "In Antwerpen Christ hangs between criminals, the papists and the Calvinists."<sup>40</sup> But in the months to come, the Lutherans eventually became closer to the Catholics than to the Calvinists. And then the church had also to deal with theological controversies from within, like if the bread should be broken at the consecration or not.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Estié, *Nederlandse Lutherse*, 56. Johannes Wilhelm Pont, *De luthersche kerk in Nederland* (Baarn, 1908).

<sup>38</sup> J.K. Schendelaar, *Lutherse Kerkzegels in Nederland* (Utrecht, 2000), 24.

<sup>39</sup> Olson, "Antwerp Martinists," 98–119. Estié, *Nederlandse Lutherse*, 57–64.

<sup>40</sup> Estié, *Nederlandse Lutherse*, 65. Schultz Jacobi, *Nederlandsch-Luthersche Kerk*, 5 dln (1864), 22–24.

<sup>41</sup> Estié, *Nederlandse Lutherse*, 68–69. De kroniek van Godevaert, Volume 1, 129–130. Pont, *Geschiedenis van het Lutheranisme*, 82. Van Roosbroeck, *Wonderjaar*, 285–286.

## Reaction and the End

One may think that everything was settled and peace had returned to the city. To some extent this is true. The Catholics were reorganizing, despite the divisions, and people tried to pick up normal life. But Margaret hadn't been inactive all those months. Although she had sent William to mediate, she did not agree with his solution. She had sent secret agents to keep her informed about the plans of the Lutherans and Calvinists and to support the Roman Catholics,<sup>42</sup> so she was well-informed about what was going on. She also had ordered a couple of times to end the non-Catholic services in Antwerp, but Lutherans and Calvinists each time referred to the agreement of September 2. When she in January 1567 demanded it again, the Lutherans got worried. The theological advisors were leaving and returning to where they came from, Flacius being the last one to leave by the end of February.<sup>43</sup>

Margaret continued the pressure, and on February 20, she ordered again the end of all heretic services and ordered the pastors to leave the city. William, who had managed to protect the Protestants so far, now with his keen insight into the political and military situation, realized that the cause of the Reformation in Antwerp, and elsewhere in the south of the Low Countries, for the moment was lost. On March 13, Margaret sent in the army, which stayed for the moment out of the city. The Calvinists tried with an armed opposition to gain control over the situation, but it failed, partly because the Lutherans did not join them. Rather the Lutherans joined the city government, faithful to their principles to obey the authorities. By March 15, it was all over. Margaret ordered the closing of all non-Catholic churches, although William and the city government pleaded to let the Lutherans keep their churches, but it did not help.<sup>44</sup>

From March 20 on, the Protestants started to leave the city. On April 10, the city government ordered the Protestant pastors to leave the city in 24 hours. Along with the pastors, about 4,000 Protestants left the city. The

<sup>42</sup> Estié, *Nederlandse Lutherse*, 65.

<sup>43</sup> Estié, *Nederlandse Lutherse*, 70. *De kroniek van Godevaert*, Volume 1, 174. Van Roosbroeck, *Wonderjaar*, 289, 317–334.

<sup>44</sup> Van Roey, *De Val van Antwerpen*, 24. Estié, *Nederlandse Lutherse*, 70–72. *Antwerpsch Chronykje, in het welk zeer veele en elders te vergeefs geschiedte geschiedenissen, sedert den jaren 1500 tot het jaar 1574 (...)* omstandig zyn beschreven, 121. Schultz Jacobi, *Nederlandsch-Luthersche Kerk*, 39–41. Pont, *Geschiedenis van het Lutheranisme*, 87–88. Pont, *De Luthersche kerken in Nederland*, (Amsterdam, 1929), 85–86. Van Roosbroeck, *Wonderjaar*, 362–383. Andriessen, "Het geestelijke en godsdienstige klimaat," 217–218. *De kroniek van Godevaert*, 208–209.



next day, twenty more ships with refugees left. Lutherans mostly emigrated to the north part of the Low Countries (the Netherlands today) and to Germany, mainly Frankfurt, where a flourishing congregation was founded. It should be noted, however, that most of the Lutherans did not leave.<sup>45</sup> An estimated 10,000 people left the city in the following months and year, among them Jan Rubens, lawyer and alderman, with his wife, Maria Pypelincx. They went to Siegen, where their son Pieter Paul, the master painter of the contra reformation, was born in 1577 and baptized Protestant.<sup>46</sup> This means that, on the other hand, many Protestants stayed but conformed to the new rules and went back to secret meetings. The first Protestant adventure in Antwerp was over. For almost seven months Antwerp had known a certain freedom of religion. Now a time of repression would start.

### Repression: 1567–1576

And it started right away. The Spanish Army entered the city on April 26 and came to stay for a couple of years. Once also the Duke of Alba as commander had arrived, another period of turbulent years started for Antwerp. The churches of the Protestants were demolished.<sup>47</sup> The *Raad van Beroerten* (Council of Troubles, or popularly called, “Blood Council”) was installed. The first heads to roll were those of the counts of Egmont and Hoorne. Many Lutherans and Calvinists who stayed in the city and were known as such were persecuted and many of them executed. A citadel was built for the army and as a warning to the city not to revolt. Difficult years of repression followed, culminating with the *Spaanse Furie* in 1576. Also William was condemned. In 1568, he chose openly in favor of the Reformation and started to resist the Spanish occupation. The so-called Eighty Years’ War began and only ended in 1648 with the peace of Westphalia. It would take until 1576 before the Protestants would again get the freedom to profess their faith publicly.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Van Roosbroeck, *Emigranten*, 33, 183. *De kroniek van Godevaert*, Volume 1, 210–212. Schultz Jacobi, “Hervorming,” 172–175.

<sup>46</sup> Rik Torfs, *Rubens’ religieuze kunst – Wat vandaag?* (Lezing St. Paulus, Antwerpen, 2004), 2. Van Roey, *De Val van Antwerpen*, 25.

<sup>47</sup> Estié, *Nederlandse Lutherse*, 76. *De kroniek van Godevaert*, Volume 1, 220–222, 237. *Antwerpsch Chronykje, in het welk zeer veele en elders te vergeefsch gezogte geschiedenissen, sedert den jaren 1500 tot het jaar 1574 (...) omstandig zyn beschreven*, 134, 137. Schultz Jacobi, “Hervorming,” 152, note 5.

<sup>48</sup> Estié, *Nederlandse Lutherse*, 77–79. *De kroniek van Godevaert*, Volume 2.

### The Second Church: 1578–1585

With the Pacification of Ghent on November 8, 1576, which gave freedom of religion, many of the refugees returned in the hopes of living in a free country. But actually only on July 22, 1578, did the governor, Archduke Matthias of Austria, make this possible with the “Religious Peace.” In every place where at least 100 people professed the same faith, there was also the freedom to do it openly. On September 18, 1577, the Prince had already arrived in Antwerp. Ten and a half years after, he left it in the *Wonderjaar*.<sup>49</sup>

On August 29, 1578, Lutherans were given the barn by St. Michael’s Abbey, the St. Anna Chapel at the *Keizerstraat* (Keizerskapel), and the attic of the Hessen House to assemble. On October 22, the St. George’s church nave, and later also the choir and the rest, and the church of the Carmelites on the Meir followed (as noted above, this was probably the church which Rubens’s grandmother attended). Also the church of the monastery at Falconplein (?) (*Falcontinnenklooster*), and in August 1581, the St. Walpurgis’s church (to replace the barn) were given to the Lutherans.<sup>50</sup>

In 1566 the church had services in Dutch and German; now there were also services in French. The salaries of the pastors were paid by the city from September 1581 on. The number of Lutherans grew fast, and they needed pastors. Adolf Fischer, Carel de Meijer, Stephanus Praetorius, and the well-known Cassiadorus de Reyna were some of the many pastors that served the Lutheran churches in those seven years until 1585.<sup>51</sup>

Many of the documents published twelve years earlier came in handy now. A new document was the “Confession on the Original Sin,” which settled the dispute that already disturbed the church in 1566. De Reyna wrote a catechism, Willem Van Haecht wrote a psalter in Dutch, and Charles de Navière wrote a songbook in French.<sup>52</sup>

From all the church locations only the attic and the Keizerskapel survived until our days. St. George’s church was demolished during Napoleon’s rule and another

<sup>49</sup> Van Roey, *De Val van Antwerpen*, 35–36. Pont, *Geschiedenis van het Lutheranisme*, 397–400.

<sup>50</sup> Pont, “De belijdenis van de luthersche gemeente 1579,” 161. Edm. Geudens, *De Keizerskapel* (Antwerpen, 1920), 24. Van Roey, *De Val van Antwerpen*, 67. Prims, *Geschiedenis*, 165, 168.

<sup>51</sup> Braekman, “Het Lutheranisme in Antwerpen,” 29. Pont, *Geschiedenis van het Lutheranisme*, 402–410.

<sup>52</sup> Pont, “De belijdenis van de luthersche gemeente 1579,” 119–159. Braekman, “Het Lutheranisme in Antwerpen,” 30.

church was built on the location in the nineteenth century. The building of what is now the Lutheran Church is from the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth century, built on the grounds that came available after demolishing the 1542 city wall in the midst of the nineteenth century.

### The Fall of Antwerp

The siege started in 1584 and the subsequent fall of Antwerp on August 17, 1585, to the Duke of Parma brought the city back to Spanish, and Roman Catholic, rule.<sup>53</sup> Unlike in 1567, the Protestants were given four years to decide what they wanted. They could recant and stay, or keep their faith and go. They also were allowed to take with them all of their goods. The population of Antwerp had decreased to 82,000 in 1579. By 1589, it would decrease by another 40,000 to 42,000.<sup>54</sup> Many went to the Protestant north and helped the Dutch to their Golden Age in the seventeenth century. Many went to Germany. Antwerp Lutherans were all over the place. An era of nineteen turbulent years ended in a defeat for the Reformation in the south of the Low Countries, but at least in the north, freedom of religion was achieved.<sup>55</sup>

### And Beyond

With half of the population gone away, and with the port closed because the Dutch had blocked access to it, Antwerp turned into a sleeping city. But in the almost two hundred years of the contra reformation it was very active in the fine arts. Many of those famous painters were Protestants (Jordaens), or influenced by them (Van Dyck), or from Protestant origin (Rubens).<sup>56</sup>

During these 200 years, as before in the time of repression, the (very) few remaining Lutherans kept a low profile and only had services for their own households.<sup>57</sup> They were occasionally served by pastors from Amsterdam. This small but brave congregation had an oval seal, which depicts a tree, probably a date palm. The inscription reads: A.C.A. QUO PRESSIOR EO VALENTIOR (Antwerp [Congregation] of the Augsburg Confession: stronger through persecution).<sup>58</sup>

The Calvinists had their small congregation, the

*Brabantse Olijfborg*, and survived. After the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, Protestants were tolerated.<sup>59</sup> This all changed when Napoleon came in 1792. The port was reopened. In 1801, a law was passed that gave equal rights to Catholics, Calvinists, and Lutherans. After the independence of Belgium in 1930, the Calvinists organized themselves and founded the Protestant Church of Belgium in 1939. The first King of Belgium, by the way, was Lutheran, although not a really active one. Other Lutherans that came to Antwerp were the Norwegians, who in 1870 finished building and owned the church building at the *Tunnelplaats* until last year. This is the only remaining Lutheran church in Antwerp built as such. With the open port, the Germans came again, among them Lutherans, and they had a strong presence in the years before the First World War and had their services at the Protestant church in the *Lange Winkelstraat*, and in the church, demolished in 1975, in the *Bexstraat*.<sup>60</sup>

### The Third Church: 1939–Present

In 1934, a small evangelical Protestant congregation was formed at the initiative of Lambert Hellings. Through his contact with the Scandinavian Lutheran pastors, he turned to the Lutheran churches abroad and his congregation adopted the Lutheran Confessions in 1939. Difficult years were ahead with the eruption of World War II. The congregation was offered for a while the use of the Norwegian Church. After the war, a house in the *Geulinckxstraat* was used till the death of Pastor Hellings in 1956. Again, there were difficult years until the next pastor, Hendrik Zijlstra, arrived in 1958. Services were now held in the Swedish Church at the *Italiëlei*, but their own building was needed. This was found in 1962 in the *Tabakvest* and after some renovation work and fitting of church windows, the church was dedicated in May 1964. Pastor Zijlstra retired in 1985 and since April 1986, Gijsbertus van Hattem has been the pastor. In 2002, the Lutheran Church was recognized by the government. In 2014 it celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the dedication of the church and 75 years of this “third” Lutheran Church in Antwerp.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>53</sup> Van Roey, *De Val van Antwerpen*, 71–80.

<sup>54</sup> Van Roey, *De Val van Antwerpen*, 82.

<sup>55</sup> Asaert, *Vlamingen en Brabanders*. Braekman, “Het Lutheranisme in Antwerpen,” 30–31.

<sup>56</sup> Van Roey, *De Val van Antwerpen*, 103–104.


<sup>57</sup> Braekman, “Het Lutheranisme in Antwerpen,” 30.

<sup>58</sup> Schendelaar, *Lutherse Kerkzegels*, 24–25.

<sup>59</sup> Van Roey, *De Val van Antwerpen*, 101. Dick Wursten, “De ‘gemeente onder het kruis’, de Brabantse Olijfborg (1648–1798),” *De Band* (kerkblad VPKB): Antwerpen, 2015. Also see <http://www.protestantsekerkantwerpennoord.be/historie-protestantmomentopnamen.htm>

<sup>60</sup> “Christuskirche”

<sup>61</sup> Gijsbertus van Hattem, *Gedenkboek van de Evangelisch-Lutherse Kerk te Antwerpen. Weer 50 jaar lutherse kerk in Antwerpen en 25 jaar van de inwijding van het huidige kerkgebouw* (Antwerpen, 1989).



The Lutheran Church of Belgium has churches in Antwerp and Brussels and is a founding member of the Antwerp Council of Churches in 1972. On the international level, it is a member of the International Lutheran Council and of the European Lutheran Conference. It is hosting these days a conference in Antwerp and many Lutherans of different European countries and from the U.S. are in our midst today.

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# MISSION AS NOTA ECCLESIAE?: TESTING THE SCOPE OF AUGSBURG CONFESSION 7 AND 8

by Klaus Detlev Schulz

Is mission a sign of the church?  
The Rev. Dr. Klaus Detlev  
Schulz's presentation from the  
Concordia University Irvine  
Joint Professors' Conference  
explains.

IN OUR DISCUSSION OF AC VII AND AC VIII, a few fundamental questions have to be answered if we bring systematics and missiology together, as I'm told to do. How do the two articles in the Augsburg Confession relate to missions? How does ecclesiology inform mission and how does mission inform ecclesiology? Is, as my title indicates, mission a sign of the church? Here we touch on a sensitive topic. In terms of becoming involved in mission both theologically and in practice, Lutheranism is a Johnny-come-lately. It took time to develop a missiology that would clarify issues related to foreign missions. Of course, as rightly pointed out, Luther's theology and Lutheran theology is a seed bed for missions,<sup>1</sup> yet the seed still had to sprout and bear fruit. Over the history of Lutheranism, voices came forward, of which many were formative figures to the LCMS, and gave important impulses for mission. In researching the questions above, it became evident to me that in Lutheranism there is a particular progression in the knowledge on missionary ecclesiology, and AC VII and VIII were directly drawn in and addressed in this process. Thus, in this presentation I'd like to walk with you through some stages reflecting that progression in chronological order, starting with a historic investigation, but then ending on a contemporary note relating to mission issues today. In all of this progression, AC VII and VIII stood, and still stand, steady as pillars saying what they have said for exactly 486 years, whereas

the mission discussions orbited around these articles gradually illuminated their missiological potential.<sup>2</sup>

## I. Stage 1: Mission marginalized

The ecclesiology of the Augsburg Confession as defined in AC VII did not go unnoticed by mission scholars. For example, in an essay, *Theological Education in Missionary Perspective*, David Bosch takes a stab at the Protestant definitions of the church, of which AC VII was the first:

Mission is not  
the possession of  
a few committed  
Christians more  
pious than others  
... but rather it  
belongs to the  
church, the baptized  
body of believers.

Another factor responsible for the present embarrassment in the field of mission is that the modern missionary enterprise was born and bred outside the church. The church — especially the Protestants — did not regard itself as called to mission. The Reformation definitions of the church were concerned with what

happened inside the church: on preaching, the Sacraments and discipline. The church was a place where something was being done (passive voice), and not a people who did something ... Consequently when the missionary flame was eventually kindled, it burned on the fringes of the institutional church, frequently meeting with passionate resistance from the official church. The well-known multiplication of missionary societies had a disastrous influence on the subsequent development of the study of mission as an academic discipline.

<sup>1</sup> Herbert Blöchle, "Die missionarische Dimension in der Theologie Luthers," in *Die Einheit der Kirche: Dimensionen ihrer Heiligkeit, Katholizität und Apostolizität* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1977), 367. "Luther did not speak just on occasions and periodically to the questions about mission to the heathens. His entire theology is rather permeated by a 'missionary dimension'."

<sup>2</sup> Now a missiological reading of the Lutheran Confessions is a common thing to do. It started with Franz Wiebe, "Missionsgedanken in den lutherischen Bekenntnisschriften," in *Lutherisches Missionsjahrbuch für das Jahr 1955*, ed. Walther Ruf (Neuendettelsau: Selbstverlag der Bayerischen Missionskonferenz, 1955), 15-71. For the latest attempt see, Tim Huffmann, "The Lutheran Confessions and Mission," *Trinity Seminary Review* 33 (Summer 2012): 19-37.



When missiology was eventually granted a place in theological institutions, this was the result of pressure from missionary societies, or (particularly in the United States) from students, or in some instances even from a government. On the whole neither the churches nor the theological schools themselves welcomed the intruder. Mission was an appendix to the church; missiology would be no more than that in the theological curriculum. Traditionally theology was subdivided into biblical, systematic, historical and practical disciplines and it was not clear how and where missiology should fit in.<sup>3</sup>

I need to address this statement on a number of levels throughout my presentation. Two reactions immediately come to mind. First, it is true, as Bosch says, the definition of the Augsburg Confession speaks of a church as the congregation of saints “in which” or “among whom” the “Gospel is purely taught and the sacraments rightly administered.” This definition does in fact place the word in the midst of believers (the congregation of saints). At best it reflects a *missio ad intra*; the outside world; the *missio ad extra*, however, is left unmentioned. Thus, can mission be counted as part of Lutheran identity? Even in his *On the Councils and the Church* (1539), Luther does not include in the seven signs of the church the sharing of the gospel to the world outside, although his seventh sign of the church as bearing the cross could be implicitly understood as a consequence of its life and witness in and to the world.<sup>4</sup> But where is the sentness character and the church’s orientation towards the world explicitly mentioned in Lutheran ecclesiology?<sup>5</sup> If it comes to defining

Whereas other societies were driven by a strong eschatological focus of bringing in the end and doing mission to the glory and honor of God, the Lutheran mission expanded the universal church by enfolding people through baptism into the Lutheran church.

Lutheran identity then scholars are quick to argue, and perhaps rightfully so, that it is focused on its teaching identity, and not on mission identity, of instructing the doctrine through “the ministry of teaching the Gospel” through the *Lehramt* in the church, as AC V, 1 (Kolb-Wengert, 41), and our Article AC VII point out, and not through the office of a missionary to the world.

Second, it is also true, as Bosch points out, that there were stations in the history of Lutheranism where Lutheran theologians and leaders resisted — for right or wrong reasons — certain individuals’ efforts to respond to the Lord’s mandate of going to other nations.

The famous hymnist Philip Nicolai (1556–1608) published *De Regno Christi* in which he laid out a global ecclesiology that proved his and others’ interpretation of Romans 10:18 that through the work of the twelve apostles the gospel had already reached all parts of the world, and if non-Christians now existed in certain pockets, it was because they had shunned the gospel. The Lutheran Superintendent of Augsburg, Heinrich Ursinus (1608–1667), and the Protestant Council (*Corpus Evangelicorum*) at Regensburg dismissed Justinian von Welz’s (1621–1668) request for permission to go to Surinam because he and his “Jesus-Love-me” society would bring to the people non-Lutheran principles such as asceticism and mysticism.<sup>6</sup>

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sacraments as something the gospel gives to the believers to make Christ’s presence known to all through the social reality of a Christian community as it lives with one another and with other non-believers among them. *The Evangelizing Church: A Lutheran Contribution*, eds. Richard Bliese and Craig van Gelder (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2005), 10

<sup>6</sup> The reasons for questioning Welz’s proposals were legitimate when one reads his first tract entitled *De Vita Solitaria* (1663), subtitled with *The Hermit Life According to God’s Word*. (Original title: *De Vita Solitaria, das ist / Von dem Einsidler Leben / Wie es nach Gottes Wort / und der Alten Heiligen Einsidler Leben anzustellen seye*.) Welz sought to revive a monastic holiness and evangelical asceticism for missionary purposes that were influenced by theologians such as Eusebius of Caesarea (260–339), Augustine of Hippo (354–430), the medieval mysticist, Thomas à Kempis (1379/80–1471), and Johann Arndt (1555–1621), the most influential Lutheran devotional writer and promoter of a mystical tradition within Lutheranism. James Scherer, *Justinian Welz: Essays by an Early Prophet of Mission* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1969), 15–17.

<sup>3</sup> *Missiology. An International Review*, vol. X, no. 1 (January 1982): 17

<sup>4</sup> *Luther’s Works (LW)*, Vol. 41, eds. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999, c1966), 164.

<sup>5</sup> The authors of the book *The Evangelizing Church: A Lutheran Contribution* recognize the deficit and thus connect word and sacrament to Christian community saying: “We do not believe that the connection of the presence of Christ in the Christian community is sufficiently captured in the phrase Word and Sacrament.” They therefore draw in Luther’s fifth form of the gospel, the “mutual conversation and consolation of the brothers and sisters” (SA III, 4) to word and



Johann Gerhard (1582–1637) defended the Lutheran faith against the Anglican Hadrian Saravia (1531–1613), who in his ecclesiological treatise (1590) “*De diversis ministrorum evangelii gradibus, sicut a Domino fuerunt institute*” (Concerning the different orders of the ministry of the Gospel, as they were instituted by the Lord), claimed that the episcopal office continued the full office of the apostles and the authority to go universal (*ite mundum universum*). Instead, Gerhard followed Nicolai’s geo-ecclesio arguments and also added that the office of the apostles was unique and only the preaching and teaching functions remained for the church to continue. But these functions, Gerhard said, were now tied to the congregations to which such preachers were called (Acts 14:23). The mandate to go to the world was a unique privilege the apostles had and it could not be continued through the office of a bishop.<sup>7</sup>

In 1652, the Wittenberg faculty released a three-point statement against the scruples of an Austrian nobleman, von Wetzhausen, who had queried why the followers of the Augsburg Confession were staying put instead of going out to the world. First, the faculty repeated Gerhard’s parochial confinement of the preaching office, and second, it promoted a kind of universal theism, namely that according to Romans 1 and 2 and Acts 17:27, God left his footprints among all nations in the world so that no one can plead innocence. As punishment for their ignorance, God has removed all preaching of the gospel from them, and he is not to be blamed for not restituting what had been lost.<sup>8</sup> Third, the faculty closes by admonishing all rulers in the world to build churches and schools so that the preaching of the true Lutheran faith is furthered worldwide and their citizens are protected from Papist and Calvinistic errors.<sup>9</sup>

The fact is that the one church by faith exists and the *satis est* points out what it needs to survive.

As we look back on our own Lutheran heritage, we should note one important factor. In spite of the squabbles that were going on, the theologians above never denied the universal claim of the gospel. In fact, the Wittenberg faculty closes its statement with a prayer: “May God keep the light of His holy Gospel always burning among us and may among all nations an eternal church be gathered which in all eternity lauds and magnifies him,”<sup>10</sup> and Gerhard in his *Loci* marvels at how the gospel spreads its wings because of its universal claim, and offered ecumenical charity to Roman Catholic mission efforts in India and other parts of the world.<sup>11</sup>

The problem is that the leading sixteenth and seventeenth century theologians were not able or willing to back up the call with an ecclesiology (which includes the office of the preaching) that would support the run of the universal gospel. Tying the office of preaching down parochially and not allowing it to be commissioned and sent into the world as a missionary office should be seen as an overreaction against false opposition coming from two sides,<sup>12</sup> and that overreaction led them to temporarily misunderstand or falsely restrict AC V and AC VII to parochialism. And today, all the above may seem to us an oddity, as we are heeding to the universal call with an unrestricted and unimpeded mission paradigm.

<sup>7</sup> *Mission in Quellentexten*, ed. Werner Raupp (Bad Liebenzell: Verlag der Liebenzeller Mission, 1990), 68–69.

<sup>8</sup> By contrast, the *Lumen Gentium* made preaching to them no longer a necessity either by pleading for their innocence: “Those also can attain everlasting salvation who through no fault of their own do not know the gospel of Christ or His Church, yet sincerely seek God and, moved by grace, strive by their deeds to do His will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience. Nor does divine Providence deny the help necessary for salvation to those who, without blame on their part, have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God.” *Lumen Gentium* 16, in *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter M. Abbott, trans. Joseph Callagher et al. (Chicago: Follet, 1966), 35.

<sup>9</sup> *Mission in Quellentexten*, 70–71.

<sup>10</sup> *Mission in Quellentexten*, 71.

<sup>11</sup> Nicolai displayed similar charity: “Even among the Roman Catholic and Jesuit missionaries the desire to save souls comes to the fore, and consequently what they preach is so close to the truth and the method they follow so evangelical that at home they would be called heretics... Everywhere there is still baptism, through which many thousands of children who die in their youth become heirs of eternal life.” Philip Nicolai, *Commentariorum de regno Christi, vaticiniis prophetis et apostolicis accommodatorum Libri duo* (Frankfurt: Johannes Spies, 1597). Wilhelm Loehe, *Three Books about the Church*, trans. James Schaaf (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), 93.

<sup>12</sup> In his essay, *Die Lutherische Kirche und ihre Mission*, Wilhelm Maurer correctly states that Lutheran Orthodoxy needs to be seen in its treatment of apostolate and mission in light of two opposing thoughts, 1) The Roman Catholic Church and its supporters that had arrogated to themselves the undiminished apostolate either in the form of monastic mission or in the episcopacy and 2) A mystic-enthusiasm of Welz and others infiltrating into the church that would question the accepted interpretation of Scripture and the well-structured church order. Wilhelm Maurer, “Die Lutherische Kirche und ihre Mission,” *Kirche und Geschichte: Gesammelte Aufsätze*, Band II, eds. Ernst-Wilhelm Kohls and Gerhard Müller (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1970), 192.

## II. Stage 2: Universality, Mission and Ecclesiology

By the time the nineteenth century came around, we see a development in how neo-Lutheran theologians embraced a universal perspective that accepted the missionary office and an ecclesiology that serves that universal motive of the gospel. In the yet unsurpassed Lutheran ecclesiological treatment, *Three Books about the Church*, Wilhelm Löhe defines the church as a creation of God's word, and that the word then comes out of the midst of the church and reaches all people. First, he tackles the doctrine of predestination, which gets in the way of that universal perspective:

Opposed to this teaching is the doctrine of the universal grace of God which is taught by our church. It is God's will that all men be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. [1 TIM. 2:4]. God is completely sincere about this. This is why Christ had to atone for our sins, and not only for our sins but for the sins of the entire world. The means by which we appropriate his atonement — Word and sacrament — must be made known to all men for the Lord says ... (LUKE 24:46, 47). This is why the call of the Word must come to all men. Thus the doctrine of the universal call of all ... is the inviolable doctrine of our fathers.<sup>13</sup>

Löhe reorients AC VII's focus towards within to one that now points to the outside world.

Thus, once that universal call was established, the issue of sending preachers became a possibility, especially since mission societies like Hermannsburg, Neuendettelsau, and Leipzig had started to emerge who were willing to step to the plate, regardless of territorial churches' support or not. The first item to deal with was the question of whether the missionary's office came directly out of the word and sacrament ministry mentioned in AC V and AC VII or whether the church was obliged to send and commission individuals simply because the civil authorities demanded it?<sup>14</sup> In answer to that question it became

Mission is the church expressing and witnessing God's salvific intentions to the world through the preaching of the gospel and the right administration of the sacraments.

clear that the parochial setting of the ministry, as argued in the seventeenth century, could not hold its sway for long. When the territorial church first refused to ordain his mission candidates, Ludwig Harms, the founder of the Hermannsburg Mission Society, did so himself. In his *History of the Hanoverian Mission*, Georg Haccius comments on that event: "After the ordination Harms seconded and sent the missionaries onto the mission field. Thus, they were duly and lawfully called and ordained and could therefore on the foundation of article fourteen of the Augsburg Confession move out confidently and joyfully."<sup>15</sup> Similar moves to advance the mission office were done earlier with the Leipzig Mission Society. Adolf von Harless (1806–1879), a professor at Erlangen, and a member of the Leipzig Mission Society's board (*Missionskollegium*), offered his own thoughts on the subject of our discussion:

As far as their (missionaries') status is concerned, it would be difficult to dismiss the fact that it bears all marks of a proper, Christian and apostolic call. They are placed in the call of the Lord to the Apostles: Go ye to the world. They did not go on their own accord, but have been found fit for their office and have been placed into it by those who in the Evangelical Lutheran Church have the right to do so. The church is the community of believers, that keep themselves to the pure Word and Sacrament and such a community has sent them out with a loyal pledge to their confession.

And Harless concludes: "We cannot find anything amiss here that would prevent us from considering them *rite vocatus* in the sense of the 14. Article of the Augsburg Confession."<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Loehe, *Three Books about the Church*, 82.

<sup>14</sup> An example of this would have been the response of August Herman Franke's Halle Mission to the Danish ruler's behest to provide preachers for the Danish colony, Tranquebar.

<sup>15</sup> Georg Haccius, *Hannoverische Missionsgeschichte*, Vol II (Hermannsburg: Verlag der Missionshandlung, 1910), 217. The territorial church did come around and on 19 October 1857, duly examined and ordained twelve mission candidates in Hanover as recorded by Harms himself in the *Hermannsbürger Missionsblatt* (HMB), no. 10 (October 1857): 150–155.

<sup>16</sup> Johannes Aagaard, *Mission, Konfession, Kirche*, Volume II (Gleerups, Denmark: Clemenstrykkeriet, 1967), 719. In contrast, the Director of Leipzig, Karl Graul, proposed that the church, which would emerge from the missionaries' work, should take over responsibility and not the home church, including ordination and salary. *Ibid.*, 718.

According to Wilhelm Maurer, the identification of the office of pastoral ministry and missionary as the same office was something new in the Lutheran church. The nineteenth century neo-Lutherans broke open the territorial and parochial confinement of pastoral ministry and congregationalism that persisted in the church orders since the time of the Reformation. By having eliminated monastic orders, Lutheranism had lost a strong arm that worked mission to the world. Now they have reached a point where pastoral ministry includes a worldwide, universal perspective and a mission obligation. Both pastoral office and that of the missionary are identical. Their tasks and duties were the same because they both were under the mission obligation which goes out from the congregation and reaches out into the wide world of nations. And both are tied to the ministry of word and sacraments, proclaiming the one gospel and administering the sacraments that were instituted by Christ.<sup>17</sup>

Peter Brunner helps to summarize the issue: Jesus' mission mandate

shows, that the missionary sent to the nations of this world embodies the pastoral office (*ministerium verbi*) and expresses the Lord's command most closely ... This form of the pastoral office, which dwells among us as shepherd of the congregation, must be understood fundamentally and practically as that of a missionary. The pastor is the missionary, who has remained put at that place, where heathens were gathered to be disciples of Jesus. If we understand the pastor as the missionary "standing still," then it might be fairly obvious, why the pastoral office belongs to the Church by divine law (*de iure divino*). The pastor is obligated to also be a missionary to those people, who are not yet part of the Church through gospel and baptism. Similarly his pastoral service is established like that of the missionary's by the sending and the founding command of Christ.<sup>18</sup>

The texts spoken at ordination clearly indicate that pastoral ministry does not exclude the idea of sentness

<sup>17</sup> Georg Schulz, *The Lutheran Understanding of the Pastoral Office in Missions*, unpublished article, p. 2.

<sup>18</sup> Peter Brunner, "Vom Amt des Bischofs," in *Pro Ecclesia* I (Berlin: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1960), 235-292.

and the outward look. Thus, we can conclude that the missionary and the pastoral office both have their source in the *ministerium ecclesiasticum*. Geographical locality is not the matter because there is only one frontier or borderline: that of unbelief and belief, which runs, in fact, right through the church as AC VIII indicates by placing hypocrites among the *vere credentes*.<sup>19</sup> Given this reality, all preaching is to a degree evangelistic in focus.

### III. Stage 3: Church and Mission Societies

Upon reading AC VII we notice one further omission yet of great ecclesiological importance and still of relevance, namely the question of who bears the responsibility for sending in response to the universal call. AC VII does not answer that question directly. It speaks to the church as the congregation of saints. The emergence of mission societies, however, necessitates an ecclesiological clarification as to whether the mission societies or the church bear the responsibility for mission. In answer to this

question Lutherans gravitated towards the church as the true agent of God's sending. We turn to the founding father of the LCMS, C.F.W. Walther, who in a sermon looked back to Germany, praising the work of mission societies, yet pushing beyond to a missionary ecclesiology:

Nevertheless, the mission societies that had arisen and were a sign of the newly awakened Christian life were also at the same time a sign that the situation in the church as a whole

was not what it ought to be. For where the situation is as it should be, it should not be necessary to form small mission societies in the church, but the whole church must itself be a great mission society. The Lord has established it to be exactly this.<sup>20</sup>

We notice that Walther is cautiously positive about the societies' contribution, since he places the missionary

Imbued by the Spirit of God's mission, the church's orientation towards the world is one that is not of choice. God defines her that way.

<sup>19</sup> "Although the church is, properly speaking, the assembly of saints and those who truly believe, nevertheless, because in this life many hypocrites and evil people are mixed in with them, a person may use the sacraments even when they are administered by evil people" (AC VIII, 2 [TBC, 43]).

<sup>20</sup> C. F.W. Walther, "The Mission Society Established by God—Is. 43:21" in C.F.W. Walther, *The Word of His Grace: Occasional and Festival Sermons* (Lake Mills: Graphic Publishing Company, 1978), 19.

obligation on the church as a whole. Further down in the sermon he answers his own rhetorical question,

who is it then, to whom the responsibility to preach the Gospel among all the people on earth has been committed after the death of the apostles? ... Is it true, then, that the work of converting is the responsibility of the public servants of the church alone? No, it is not... The true mission society that has been instituted by God Himself is nothing else than the Christian church itself, that is the totality of all those who believe in Jesus Christ ... This means that Christ was not content just to give faith as an invisible thing to those who belong to his church, but he also gathers them by the visible sign of Holy Baptism into outward visible congregations.<sup>21</sup>

Walther follows an ecclesiology that places all Christians, the *congregatio sanctorum*, as God's mission society, joined by the love for the spiritual needs of their neighbors, by enfolded outsiders through baptism into the body of Christ. Walther does not leave the church invisible but obliges the visible church, the *coetus baptizorum* to respond: "According to God's Word," Walther says, "the church has been baptized into one body. This means that Christ was not just content to give faith as an invisible thing to those who belong to His church, but he also gathers them by the visible sign of Holy Baptism into outward visible congregations."<sup>22</sup>

We have here an ecclesiological definition of mission that was a concern pushed by many Lutherans in the nineteenth century — formative figures — around the identity of the LCMS. Lutheran mission, though pursued at first by mission societies and pious believers, ultimately became an ecclesial concern. The first Lutheran to be vocal on this issue was a Hanoverian pastor who had frequented with Wyneken and who had become influential on Lutheran ecclesiology and mission through his tract, *Die Mission und die Kirche* (The Mission and the Church), written in 1841. A few quotations from that tract must suffice to explain his point: "Mission, I now claim, must have an ecclesial character. It must proceed from the church and abide in the church. It must be nothing other than the church itself in its mission activity" (27). "Therefore the church as the community, as the organic body of the Lord, has the command for mission" (28).

"But the relationship is mutual. Mission also cannot go without the church. From the church it has the right of existence, for the Lord did not want a church and mission, but a church engaged in mission" (28).

In the nineteenth century, steps were taken to form a closer organizational union between mission and the church. We see this also in the LCMS where the Office of International Mission (OIM) and Office of National Mission (ONM) are organized and structured within the LCMS, and the LCMS assumes in its bylaws the role of sending overseas, which many would declare antiquated and in need of overhaul. And yet, the underlying fact remains: mission is not the possession of a few committed Christians more pious than others, who on the basis of a second level decision band together, but rather it belongs to the church, the baptized body of believers. To find an ecclesial way of expressing that obligation is characteristic of the Lutheran church and mission.

#### IV. Stage 4: The Confession, Church and Mission

By connecting mission to the church, a further issue had to be clarified, which was the question of to whom were those who went and preached accountable in their proclamation and witness? Since they can't leave unattached to the church, AC VII became instrumental in answering that question and it shaped the identity of Lutheran confessional mission. That became evident in the justification of Lutherans creating their own mission societies built on an ecclesiology which argued that the Evangelical Lutheran church represents the true church visibly because it administers the sacraments according to the Lutheran Confessions. Non-denominational, parachurch organizations like Basel, or faith based missions like the CIM (China Inland Mission) of Hudson Taylor,<sup>23</sup> or Moravian missions, could no longer receive Lutheran support. Lutheran mission was distinctly different than the above. It defined mission objectively in confession and spirituality, and the call to serve was mediated through the church and not based on the internal, personalized call and accountability to the Lord alone as we see with Hudson Taylor. Moreover the signs, especially baptism, were elevated consciously to a mission sacrament and the church is raised as the "spiritual mother of all those who will be saved."<sup>24</sup>

So when Wilhelm Löhe embraced the universal call

<sup>21</sup> Walther, "Mission Society," 20.

<sup>22</sup> Walther, "Mission Society," 20.

<sup>23</sup> Klaus Wetzell, "Die Stellung Hudson Taylors im Kontext der Missionsgeschichte," *Evangelikale Missiologie* (1/15): 9–23.

<sup>24</sup> Walther, "Mission Society," 21.



of the gospel — including the sacraments — for North America, he remarked, “Christ had to atone for our sins, and not only for our sins but for the sins of the entire world. The means by which we appropriate his atonement — Word and sacrament — must be known to all men.”<sup>25</sup> Mission was understood as *nota ecclesiae*, as a bearer of the signs of the church to the world, the pure preaching of the gospel and the right administration of the sacraments, and through these acts the world and all nations would be blessed. Especially the adverbs “pure” and “right” instructed Lutheran mission to align its proclamation and teaching in accordance with the Lutheran Confessions.

Johann Gottfried Scheibel would be the first Lutheran picking this motive for the mission in Dresden associated with “old Lutheran” pastor Johann Georg Wermelskirch (1803–1872) — the society later to be relocated to Leipzig. In 1835, Scheibel pleaded:

Now, as much as one mentions this fact, we can no longer ignore the confessional differences, for missionaries are preachers, receive the ordination, which is a churchly-confessional act, teach on the Lord's Supper, distribute the sacrament, and this is either understood Catholic, or Reformed, or Lutheran. According to the Lutheran Confessions, you cannot have a Lutheran-Reformed Lord Supper ...<sup>26</sup>

The motive for mission became the interest to bring the word and the sacrament to the world the Lutheran way. Whereas other societies were driven by a strong eschatological focus of bringing in the end and doing mission to the glory and honor of God, the Lutheran mission expanded the universal church by enfolding people through baptism into the Lutheran church.

And Löhe, who believed that mission was the “one church of God in her motion, the actualization of the one universal, catholic church,” — a truly ecumenical stance — nonetheless hailed the visible Evangelical Lutheran Church as the center of all denominations, for she is in possession of the true word of God as expressed in the Lutheran Confessions. As he would say: “If the Lutheran Church has the pure Word and sacrament in a

pure confession, it obviously has the highest treasures of the church unperverted.”<sup>27</sup> To illustrate the point of the supremacy of the Lutheran Confessions, Löhe uses a metaphor of “a king drinking pure water from a spring when he could also have quenched his thirst with impure water from a buried cistern.”<sup>28</sup>

The interest in promoting an ecclesial-confessional identity for mission was also promoted by Ludwig Petri, who asked the following questions in his treatise *Mission and the Church* (1841):

It is obviously neither loving nor wise nor just for mature, European Christianity to withhold from the heathen world the profit that it has earned through the most painful experiences, in the hottest battles, among the greatest dangers, and with the bitterest losses, so that they may earn the profits themselves along the same dangerous, perhaps even more ruinous path... Shall we transmit dogma to the heathen so vaguely that they and Christianity with them must once again endure all the controversies in which we have bled: the Arian, Pelagian, Sacramentarian and others likewise? That appears to me equally foolish and unjust. If in our doctrine we have the truth and the correct understanding of the Scriptures, then we owe it to the heathen. If we have something good in our ecclesial nature, e.g. in our divine services or in our principle concerning the relative freedom of ceremony and structure, why should we withhold it from them? In any case there will remain so many battles for the heathen that we might well spare them the avoidable ones as much as we can ... No missionary who is commissioned by us can, as it were, simply learn the Scriptures by heart and speak in his own words without any exegesis, interpretation, and particular rendering. (8, 22–11, 11)

And so we see that a stage has been reached where the church and mission are fused consciously in promoting the faith. Lutheran confessional mission was born and its identity was based on AC VII, and it became important to declare one's own ecclesial and mission identity in contrast to other particular churches and mission activities. These intentions reached their apex in 1892, when at the founding of the Bleckmar Mission (now Lutheran Church

<sup>25</sup> Loehe, *Three Books about the Church*, 82.

<sup>26</sup> Volker Stolle, *Wer seine Hand an den Plug legt: Die missionarische Wirksamkeit der selbständigen evangelisch-lutherischen Kirchen in Deutschland im 19. Jahrhundert* (Gross Oesingen: Verlag der Lutherischen Buchhandlung: Heinrich Harms / Oberurseler Hefte, 1992), 94.

<sup>27</sup> Loehe, *Three Books about the Church*, 113.

<sup>28</sup> Loehe, *Three Books about the Church*, 104.



Mission), two principles were approved at the synod of the Hanoverian Free Church in 1899: “The Lutheran church can pursue only Lutheran mission, 2. Lutheran mission can only be pursued by a Lutheran church.” In 1953, in view of partner churches emerging on the field, a third statement was added by its executive director, Friedrich Wilhelm Hopf: “Lutheran mission work must lead to a Lutheran Church.”<sup>29</sup>

This third statement took into consideration not the issue of what occurred back home, but was directed towards the church that resulted from the preaching of the word. The confessional element as goal became important at that juncture. Whereas the English churches were all pursuing the three self-principles, the Lutheran missionaries followed more the goals of pursuing a pure confession to the degree that collaboration with just any mission was no longer acceptable. And yet, the ecumenical character would remain in focus in that Lutheran mission furthers the one church, the *una sancta*, through its own preaching and teaching.<sup>30</sup> The LCMS stands in this tradition since its first missionaries, Theodor Naether (1866–1904) and Franz Mohn (1867–1925), were influenced by Walther’s confessional stance on the verbal inspiration of Scripture and its infallibility as Scripture and the Confessions teach it, and decided to take a stance against an emerging, rationalistic understanding of Scripture.<sup>31</sup>

## V. Stage 5: Affirming the Copernican turn: Ecclesiology and the *missio Dei*

One important contemporary missiological principle that now stands unshakable is the Copernican turn which was defined at Willingen in 1952. Then in the report paper on the conference the following statement authored by Leslie Newbigin was released:

Mission has its source in the Triune God. Out of the depth of his love to us, the Father has sent forth his own beloved son to reconcile all things to himself that we and all men might through the Holy Spirit be made one in Him with the Father in that perfect love which is the very nature of God.<sup>32</sup>

This development of placing mission in the hands of God as the starting point and not the church might sound not that trenchant. However, looking at history, mission until World War II was largely associated with what the church desired, and in their pursuit of missions, many goals were formulated that had little to do with what God actually wanted. In his book *Mission of God*, Georg Vicedom puts it best:

There is the danger that the church itself may become the point of departure, the purpose, the subject of the mission. This is not, however, in accord with Scripture, since it is always the Triune God who acts, who makes His believers members of His kingdom. Even the church is only an instrument in the hands of God. The church herself is the only outcome of the activity of God. The Conference of Willingen accepted the concept *missio Dei* to describe this fact.<sup>33</sup>

Mission is anchored in the ontology of God, which bears itself out in functionality: God is what he does, he sends his Son. Born out of the inner-Trinitarian movements of the early church fathers, the *missio Dei* concept builds on the outward economic Trinity that God’s purpose in mission is to send his Son to redeem his created world through the work of the Holy Spirit.<sup>34</sup> As a term, it

<sup>29</sup> The first two were written by Heinrich (Wilhelm) Gerhold (1838–1899). Volker Stolle, “Das Missionsverständnis bei der konfessionell-lutherischen Missionswirksamkeit im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert,” *Kirchenmission nach lutherischem Verständnis* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 1993), 124–148, therein 142–143. For a discussion of these three principles, see Friedrich Wilhelm Hopf, “Lutherische Kirche treibt Lutherische Mission,” in *Lutherische Kirche treibt Lutherische Mission. Festschrift zum 75 jährigen Jubiläum der Bleckmarer Mission*, ed. Friedrich Wilhelm Hopf (Bleckmar: Mission Evangelisch=Lutherischer Freikirchen, 1967), 13–47.

<sup>30</sup> For this reason, Lutheran missions extends an ecumenical charity by not discounting the fact that as much as errors are evident in the missions of other denominations, the possibility of them creating faith though their preaching still exists.

<sup>31</sup> Stolle, *Wer seine Hand an den Pflug legt*, 85. Naether and Mohn would be sent back to India by the LCMS in 1894 and 1896 respectively.

<sup>32</sup> In the sectional “The missionary calling of the Church,” *International Review of Missions*, 41 (1952): 562. See also *Classic Texts in Mission & World Christianity*, ed. Norman E. Thomas (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1995), 103–104.

<sup>33</sup> Georg Vicedom, *The Mission of God* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1965), 4–5.

<sup>34</sup> Karl Barth’s presentation in 1932 entitled, “Die Theologie und die Mission in der Gegenwart,” addressed to pastors at a conference in Brandenburg, reminds the audience: “Must not the most faithful, the most convinced missionary think seriously about the fact that the concept ‘*missio*’ in the ancient church was a term from the doctrine of the Trinity, the designation of the divine self-sending, the sending of the Son and of the Holy Spirit into the world?” Karl Barth, “Die Theologie und die Mission in der Gegenwart,” *Theologische Fragen und Antworten* (Zollikon: Theologischer Verlag Zuerich, 1957), 100–126, therein p.115. In this presentation, Karl Barth does not mention the *missio Dei*. It is not he but the conference at Willingen in 1952 and Karl Hartenstein to whom the *missio Dei* concept must be attributed. Hans Wiher, “*Missio Dei* (Teil 2)”, in *evangelische missiologie* 2/15, 92.

must first be understood as a *genitivus auctoris*, or subjective genitive, namely that the Trinitarian God is the one who sends, more precisely, that the Father sends, but who himself cannot be sent, and then also as an attribute genitive by which God is seen also as the sent one in his Son. Vicedom says:

God sends His Son; Father and Son send the Holy Ghost. Here God makes Himself not only the One sent, but at the same time the Content of the sending, without dissolving through this Trinity of revelation the equality of essence of the divine Persons.<sup>35</sup>

Unfortunately, over the years the term *missio Dei* has been discussed and promoted by numerous faith traditions, and as a result its use has become more a bane than a boon. For this reason, some call it a “shopping cart” or a “Trojan horse.”<sup>36</sup> In contrast to ecumenical interpretations, where the agenda is set by the world and the church is marginalized in God’s mission, we would have to think church centric, namely that God’s mission takes the church as his instrument, and that salvation history comes through the proclamation of the church distinct from God’s direct dealings in the world (i.e., *Heilsgeschichte versus Weltgeschichte*). The positive side of the term *missio Dei* is that it thinks of the church and mission as coming from the Triune God, and that the church is assuming a central place in the divine activity towards the world. AC VII is incredibly helpful here in that, by mentioning the signs and that the Holy Spirit is working through them, it explains how soteriology works in contrast to alternative proposals like social gospel or liberation theology, or the fast emerging Renewalism. By taking up the church in the mission of God, the church is also in her being missiologically understood. She does not adopt mission or considers it accomplished through programs in the church. She should fundamentally understand her existence in God’s mission to the world and thus be oriented towards the world and transform her existence in God’s mission into functionality according to the sequence: “The church is, the church does what it is. The church organizes what it does.”<sup>37</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Vicedom, *The Mission of God*, 8.

<sup>36</sup> David Bosch, *Transforming Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1991), 392.

<sup>37</sup> Craig van Gelder and Dwight J. Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academics, 2011), 64. For a discussion on ontology and functionality, see John G. Flett, *The Witness of God* (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2010), 292.

To elevate this consciousness for a missionary ecclesiology that avoids the dichotomy of ecclesiology and missions, the term *missional* has been coined. One of the key insights offered by Darrell Guder in his *Missional Church* is that, “the ecclesiocentric understanding of mission has been replaced during this century by a profoundly theocentric reconceptualization of Christian mission. We have come to see that mission is not merely an activity of the church. Rather, mission is the result of God’s initiative.”<sup>38</sup>

Lutheranism has yet to respond to this use of the term “missional.” Novel terms generally raise skepticism among theologians over their value. Certainly the framework proposed would have to be welcomed, and yet the lack of a Lutheran contribution to that term justifies concerns over its interpretation. The term *missional* as currently understood in missiological circles does not embrace an ecclesiology as defined in AC VII. It therefore remains unclear how the mission of the Holy Spirit works since no means are mentioned. In fact in the recent upgrade of the book *Missional Church* (1998), the *Missional Church in Perspective* (2011), the authors admit that they have only made modest investigation into what the sacraments and ordination would mean for the term “missional church.”<sup>39</sup> As of now, the concept promotes an enthusiasm with no clear description of God’s delivery system and no ministry in its support. For that reason, unless modified, the term “missional” has little to offer in terms of structuring Lutheran mission.<sup>40</sup>

When we apply the *missio Dei* to AC VII and VIII, these two articles presuppose that the Holy Spirit has done his work of gathering a worshipping community around his means, the signs. It should be said that the article on the church does not stand isolated from its preceding articles. According to Wilhelm Maurer, Articles I–VIII represent a sequence in a salvation history scheme. For the activity of God’s gathering work preceding the coming about of the church, we would point to the articles AC III and IV, the objective work of Christ’s death for the sinful world and brought to the community through

<sup>38</sup> *Missional Church*, ed. Darrell Guder (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 4.

<sup>39</sup> Van Gelder and Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective*, 61.

<sup>40</sup> I have pointed this out in *Mission from the Cross* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009), 299. I also refer here to an unpublished presentation by Ken Schurb, *The Church in Luther’s Large Catechism: Missional?* at a conference in Missouri where he makes initial investigation into the concept and draws similar conclusions as I do.

the work of the spirit in AC V. This is indicated by Luther in the Large Catechism:

Christ has acquired and won the treasure for us by his sufferings, death, and resurrection, etc. But if the work remained hidden so that no one knew of it, it would have been all in vain, all lost. In order that this treasure might not remain buried but be put to use and enjoyed, God has caused the Word to be published and proclaimed, in which he has given the Holy Spirit to offer and apply to us this treasure, this redemption. [LC II, 38 [TBC, 436]]

The church should understand herself in the mission of God and not at the beginning or the endpoint. Full ecclesial mission is only accomplished when the church recognizes her missionary nature and position in the mission of God as having been gathered and now sent, and when mission is understood churchly.<sup>41</sup> This is the Copernican turn that Lutheranism accepted in 1980 at the Luther Academy at Ratzeburg where the term “*missio Dei*” was vetted by Lutheran scholars and published under a book entitled *Lutheran Contributions to the missio Dei*.<sup>42</sup>

The theological implications of this Copernican shift are apparent for missiology as a theological discipline and as a hermeneutic principle. Just as God’s act of sending his Son is not a secondary act, so too the church cannot make mission her secondary act. Theology can no longer marginalize missiology, otherwise it is bad theology. The sad fact is this: that since the introduction of a fourfold discipline during the Enlightenment, theology always suffers from a fragmentation with no unifying telos. That unifying *telos* or framework of theology is now seen to be mission. Thus, as Stan Nussbaum puts it: “Missiologists are not asking for a bigger slice of the pie, it is a total restructuring of theology as a discipline.”<sup>43</sup>

Thus, the Trinitarian missiological approach is more encompassing than looking at fragments of theology to explain missions.<sup>44</sup> Christopher Wright demonstrates this hermeneutical perspective from Scripture:

The writings that now comprise our Bible are themselves the product of and witness to the ultimate

mission of God...Mission is not just one of a list of things that the Bible happens to talk about, only a bit more urgently than some. Mission is ... ”what it’s all about.”<sup>45</sup>

Missiology no longer is satisfied with a proof text method where a few nuggets here or there validate mission. Rather, it reads the Bible missiologically and understands the church missiologically. And Wright takes the Trinitarian focus one step further and sees in Christ not only the Lord and Savior but also the one sent by God and who sends his church. Thus, according to Wright, Christocentric theology must also be missional. Unfortunately, Wright’s hermeneutic is wide and sweeping: important distinctions between God’s *missio generalis* and *specialis* are not made. What is the difference between the First Article or the cultural mandate and the mission mandate to proclaim the gospel, to which again AC VII points? How important is it exegetically and biblically that in the Gospels God desires his word preached, heard, and then received through baptism? Mission is a keryg-matic sacramental act and stations in Scripture should be identified as God’s true mission where that happens.

## VI. Stage 6: Struggling with Contemporary Challenges

If one follows Dana Robert’s report published in *Missiology* on the history of the American Society of Missiology (ASM) — founded on 8-11 June 1973 — one will note the troubling past missions had in North America.<sup>46</sup> By the early 1970s, the collapse of mission’s legitimacy was imminent. The fall of colonialism and the Vietnam War played havoc on missions. Nationalist movements in many countries blamed missionaries for being complicit with Western occupation and they bid them to go home. The criticism of missionaries resulted in students losing interest in what they deemed a colonial enterprise; mission studies at denominational seminaries were aborted or replaced with other courses, and at the universities the secularization of religious studies marginalized missions and evangelism. The Second Vatican Council’s (1962–65) concessions to other religions caused many Roman Catholic missionaries to leave the field or the church. And the only professional society for mission studies

<sup>41</sup> Stolle, *Wer seine Hand an den Pflug legt*, 103.

<sup>42</sup> *Lutherische Beiträge zur Missio Dei* (Erlangen: Martin-Luther-Verlag, 1982).

<sup>43</sup> Stan Nussbaum, “A future for missiology as queen of theology?” *Missiology. An international review* 42, no. 1 (January 2014): 57–66.

<sup>44</sup> Ross Langmead, “What is Missiology?” *Missiology. An international review* 42, no. 1 (January 2014): 67.

<sup>45</sup> Christopher Wright, *The Mission of God* (Downer’s Grove: IVP, 2006), 22.

<sup>46</sup> I’m paraphrasing here Dana Robert, “Forty years of the American Society of Missiology: retrospect and prospect,” *Missiology. An international review* 42, no. 1 (January 2014): 6–25.

that remained was the seminary-based Association of Professors of Missions, which had dwindled in numbers to just a few.<sup>47</sup> Thanks to the endeavors of ASM, mission survived both in practice and as a subject in theological education. But its survival was built around three controversial themes on which there was dissent, even within the Association: collaboration and convergence (i.e., ecumenicity), church growth, and contextualization.

These three themes still captivate missiological discussions today. AC VII speaks to these three subjects, and we can be thankful for the reference to *satis est*: First, AC VII professes an ecumenicity based on the *una sancta*, which transgresses denominational lines. AC's point is not so much to argue for visible unity, but rather to point out that unity should not be associated with one visible church, the Roman Catholic Church. Instead, the Augsburg Confession sought to redefine the true unity with the gospel of justification by faith. Thus, in spite of all the visible disunity of the church visible, the Confessors could argue that the true unity of the church still persists by faith alone, and it is not an article of sight but of faith. However, though this one church they call the *una sancta* exists by faith alone, it needs the visible signs of the church, the pure preaching of the gospel, and the right administration of the sacraments in order to be created and to survive. In contrast, ecumenical relations today wish to see a greater visible unity, thinking that this is what the AC pleads for.<sup>48</sup>

The LCMS's reason for existing and its identity is shaped by AC VII, for the reference to the *pure* preaching of the gospel and the *right* administration of the sacraments define her relationship with other visible churches. In other words, not denying that the true unity of the church is by faith and that it exists across denominational lines, the quest of visible church bodies coming together is guided by that very sentence on the pure preaching of the gospel and the right administration of the sacraments. In case anyone has his doubts about what "pure preaching of the gospel" means, the LCMS has always

drawn in FC SD X, 31 ("as long as these churches are otherwise united in teaching and in all the articles of the faith")<sup>49</sup> as an important commentary. By that we see that the Confessors are not gospel minimalists<sup>50</sup> but rather, the gospel of justification, though truly the queen in shaping our identity, stands in a long line of other doctrines that are to be upheld. If we were, for example, neatly defining the gospel but then to ignore a properly understood ministry or predestination, then the gospel would not be preached and it loses its relevance. What alternatives to this approach do we currently have? Should we take the approach of American Evangelicalism, whose basis for unity is mostly subjectivism, a personal experience with Christ, and an indwelling of his Spirit, a conversion and a display of personal holiness expressed at revivals? Or should we go with an Evangelical Confessionalism, as we see it in the Lutheran World Federation and the World Council of Churches, which makes as its only basis for unity the doctrine of justification by grace that has been so altered that it hardly represents what the Confessions teach, and allows it to coexist with a lot of doctrines that actually contradict it?

The fact is that the one church by faith exists and the *satis est* points out what it needs to survive. However, to demand visible unity with one another, the teaching of the gospel and all its articles become relevant, and this validates why the Evangelical Lutheran Church, and the LCMS's identification with it, exists. This explains the longstanding rule for Lutherans in North America that Lutheran pulpits and altars are for Lutheran pastors only; more specifically as a *communio in sacris* rule which applies to missions also.

Second, in terms of Church Growth, AC VII speaks on the work of the Holy Spirit who through his means gives faith where and when he pleases. No mention is made of human programs and social sciences as the means contributing to quantitative growth of the church. The Augsburg Confession, including AC VII and VIII, have made their primary focus the word of God, and not

<sup>47</sup> Robert, "Forty years," 7.

<sup>48</sup> On 30 October to 8 November 2013, the World Council of Churches Assembly met in Busan and passed a unity statement calling for greater commitment to the visible unity of the church. The statement says: "In faithfulness to this our common calling, we will seek together the full visible unity of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church when we shall express our unity around the one Table of the Lord." In that case the marks of the church draw the lines, and everything that does not belong to them, such as practices and traditions, belongs to the other side of the line. They are human traditions and do not belong to the unity of the church.

<sup>49</sup> "For this reason the churches are not to condemn one another because of differences in ceremonies when in Christian freedom one has fewer or more than the other, as long as these churches are otherwise united in teaching and in all the articles of the faith as well as in the proper use of the holy sacraments" (SD X, 31 [TBC 640]).

<sup>50</sup> Leif Grane sees AC VII's "teaching of the Gospel" in a minimalistic way: "The AC could very well be characterized as preconfessionalistic, since it in no way envisions nor encompasses the idea of a confession as a line of demarcation of one denomination from another." *The Augsburg Confession: A Commentary*, trans. John H. Rasmussen (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1987), 97.



the church, as it is represented in Roman Catholicism's hierarchical system and her traditions. It is the *viva vox evangelii* that serves and remains as the foundational principle of the true church of Christ (AC VIII). The Reformation defines the church as the *creatura verbi* and therefore makes the church of all time and in all places a fruit of the living, proclaimed word of God and the means of grace. That is why, with Martin Luther, Walther can call the church the "mother" where salvation is found and not outside of it.<sup>51</sup> The missiological lesson we take from this is that the Reformation and the Confessions motivate us not to seek the *growth* of the church, but the *proclamation of the gospel* from which the church comes about and lives. Growth and expansion of the church over all parts of the world are only consequences of this missionary motive of proclaiming the gospel.

Third, on contextualization, AC VII's *satis est* also serves as an important qualifier in that it is enough for the true unity of Christianity around the world to be in agreement on the pure preaching of the gospel and the right administration of the sacraments, and not on rites and ceremonies. This means that it provides an opening for local communities to express their practice in ways different to ours.<sup>52</sup> However, AC VII takes a universal or catholic perspective for all churches around the world to agree on what is their common purpose, which is not to jeopardize the pure preaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments with local theologies and syncretism.<sup>53</sup> From AC VII's point of view, unity was found in faith and in the consent of the gospel (*consentire de doctrina evangelii*) and not in human traditions that the Roman Catholic Church was enforcing on every worshipping community. Today that argument for *satis est* pushes for the freedom and autonomy of congregations in ceremonies and worship that may endanger any

form of unity in worship. If we follow the context of AC then we are cautioned not to think that way. The introduction of Lutheran agendas was an immediate project the Reformation began, and Melancthon argued that once the rites, whether universal or local, are established as not necessary for salvation, they are nonetheless kept for the sake of tranquility and peace in the church (Ap VII, 33-34).<sup>54</sup> By being incorporated into the adiaphora of the church, like the vestments and the dishes for Holy Communion, liturgy and music became indifferent matters. Whether theology and practice can be seen as so divorced from one another is a huge question to which a liturgical missiology could provide guidance with principles from Luther's love for music and the theology of the Reformation. It is as urgent a matter as it ever has been.<sup>55</sup>

It might be true what Andrew Walls says: that we will never meet universal Christianity in itself, but always in local expressions, and that means in a historically, culturally conditioned form.<sup>56</sup> However, AC VII and AC VIII offer a universal perspective on what the church needs for her survival and that is the pure preaching of the gospel and the right administration of the sacraments, and in contrast to pluralism as relativism, we assume that one interpretation of this gospel exists and one interpretation for the sacraments also. Here AC VII and VIII provide the metanarrative, one that curbs the creation of local theologies and a radical contextualization of the gospel that holds a church and her theology captive to the cultural context. AC VII's reference to the "teaching of the Gospel and the right administration of the sacraments" calls for a meta-theology, and the Creeds and the Confessions serve that meta-theology against attempts to localize and syncretize the gospel. This may be what Paul Hiebert suggests with his concept of critical contextualization.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>54</sup> Grane, *The Augsburg Confession*, 96.

<sup>55</sup> Claudio Seifert, *Towards a "Liturgical Missiology": Perspectives on Music in Lutheran Mission Work in South Africa*, submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Theology in the subject of Missiology at the University of South Africa (October 2003), 6.

<sup>56</sup> Andrew Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of the Faith* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1996), 235.

<sup>57</sup> Critical contextualization sees "cultures as both good and evil, not simply as neutral vehicles for understanding the world. No culture is absolute or privileged. We are all relativized by the gospel." Thus, Paul Hiebert points out: "On the global scale this calls for both local and global theologies. Local churches have the right to interpret and apply the gospel in their contexts, but they also have a responsibility to join the larger church community around the world to seek to overcome both the limited perspectives each brings and the biases each has that might distort the Gospel." Paul Hiebert, "The Gospel in Human Contexts: Changing Perceptions of Contextualization," in

<sup>51</sup> "He [the Holy Spirit] has a 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 ..." (LC II, 42 [TBC 436]).

<sup>52</sup> Discussions around contextualization are rare in the LCMS, though in great need if the gospel is to find its place in North America's ethnicities. A laudable attempt to bring contextual issues to our attention recently came from Larry Vogel's study, "America's Changing Demographic Landscape," *Journal of Lutheran Mission* 2, no.3 (June 2015): 10-28.

<sup>53</sup> The allowance for freedom in rites and ceremonies does seem to place the *ius liturgicum* in congregations, if one goes with current LCMS practice. However, it is evident that such freedom was left to territorial churches: "... our churches teach ..." and not to local churches belonging to that territory. This explains the strong push for uniform agendas from the outset of the Reformation.



## Conclusion

Given what has been said, the underlying argument is that mission is a *nota ecclesiae*, a sign of the church that has its roots in AC VII and VIII in the preaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments. All that was needed is a shift in scope that embraces a focus towards the world. Mission is the church expressing and witnessing God's salvific intentions to the world through the preaching of the gospel and the right administration of the sacraments. Thus, imbued by the Spirit of God's mission, the church's orientation towards the world is one that is not of choice. God defines her that way. If mission is treated as a *nota ecclesiae*, then AC VII and VIII will remain missiologically valuable and important anchors in addressing questions as these six stages demonstrate. But then affirming a missionary ecclesiology, we will also have to make adjustments in the way we teach missions in the curriculum and how it is practiced in the life of the synod and congregations. Moreover, when mission is the life of the church, then she is obliged to step forward and address current issues and challenges as a church and not surrender or outsource much of her missionary life to individual interest groups.

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*Missionshift. Global Mission Issues in the Third Millennium*, eds. David J. Hesselgrave and Ed Stetzer (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2010), 82-102, therein p. 93 and 94. Paul Hiebert, who takes a cultural perspective, nonetheless praises the value of creeds: "One method often overlooked by Protestants are catechisms. Like the early church creed, these are brief theological summaries that can be readily memorized and recalled. Today many Protestants have smorgasbord theologies, and lack a simple, coherent understanding of the gospel (Bibby 1987). Confessions and catechisms not only provide a comprehensive view of Christian faith, but they also preserve that faith over time. Churches that recite them, even after the members have lost a vital, living faith, can experience revival later as the younger generation raised in the church grasp these truths." Paul G. Hiebert, R. Daniel Shaw, and Tite Tienou, *Understanding Folk Religion: A Christian Response to Popular Beliefs and Practices* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1999), 253.

Discover what this collection of essays by the Lutheran World Federation says about the Gospel, the sacraments and why its churches believe in “reconciled diversity.”

# A REVIEW AND COMMENT OF THE SELF-UNDERSTANDING OF THE LUTHERAN COMMUNION

by Albert B. Collver III

## Introduction / Background

THE ETHIOPIAN EVANGELICAL CHURCH Mekane Yesus (EECMY) in its General Assembly, held from January 28 to February 2, 2013, decided to sever relations with the Church of Sweden (CoS) and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA) over their decisions on same-sex marriage/partnership and ordination of same-sex ministers.<sup>1</sup>

At that meeting, Mekane Yesus elected to become the first and only member of the LWF to date to register its disagreement with the ELCA by severing all existing ties with its American sister church. Mekane Yesus announced it would deny sharing Holy Communion with ELCA leaders and pastors and called on “all Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus departments and institutions (at every level) to implement this decision.” At the same time, Mekane Yesus ended its relationship with the Church of Sweden and any other Lutheran churches “who have openly accepted same-sex marriage.”<sup>2</sup>

The decision of the EECMY threw the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) into a crisis. Since the LWF’s Seventh Assembly held in Budapest in 1984, the LWF

has regarded all the member churches in altar and pulpit fellowship.<sup>3</sup> The action taken by the EECMY in 2013 threatened to undo the communion shared among LWF member churches. News of the EECMY’s decision to sever with the CoS and ELCA spread across the LWF. As a result, the LWF formed committees and began to prepare documents to address the topic of communion, in partic-

The viewpoint presented that each church discerns how to live out the message of the gospel gives the appearance that all churches are equal and that there is no colonialism, or preferred reference point, for interpretation.

ular, about what it means to be in communion with each other. Most recently, the LWF released two documents to explore what “communion” means.

The documents describe the LWF’s self-understanding of communion. The first document is titled, *Understanding the Gift of Communion: The Quest for a Shared Self-Understanding of the Lutheran Communion — A Reader*.<sup>4</sup> This document is a collection of essays that describes the “reconciled diversity” position of the LWF. The document essentially takes the position that

“like-mindedness” does not serve as the “bond of our

<sup>1</sup> Martin Junge, “Claiming the Gift of Communion in a Fragmented World,” in *Understanding the Gift of Communion: The Quest for a Shared Self-Understanding of the Lutheran Communion*, 9–15 (Geneva, Switzerland: The Lutheran World Federation, 2014), 10.

<sup>2</sup> Sarah Dreier, “Disagreements over Homosexuality Divide African Churches and the ELCA,” *Word & World* 34, no. 2 (2014): 189.

<sup>3</sup> The Lutheran World Federation, “Past Assemblies and Themes,” 2016. <https://www.lutheranworld.org/content/assembly>. “The Seventh Assembly was held in Budapest, Hungary, 22 July – 5 August 1984. The venue constituted another milestone: the first LWF Assembly and meeting of a major international Christian organization in the ‘Second World,’ the then Communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Delegates suspended the membership of two white Southern African churches due to their continued failure to end racial division in their churches. Member churches affirmed pulpit and altar fellowship through a constitutional change. The Assembly resolved to ensure an equal number of female Assembly delegates by the Ninth Assembly.”

<sup>4</sup> *Understanding the Gift of Communion: The Quest for a Shared Self-Understanding of the Lutheran Communion — A Reader*, ed. Witness, Department for Theology and Public (Geneva, Switzerland: The Lutheran World Federation, 2014). The document can be found at [https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/DTPW-Self-Understanding\\_Communion-low.pdf](https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/DTPW-Self-Understanding_Communion-low.pdf)

togetherness as a communion of churches,”<sup>5</sup> rather it is the fact that the churches are united via Augsburg Confession VII in the preaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments. Gospel is defined as excluding the law and ethical questions. Essays in the document also identify the rejection of homosexual love as a new form of colonialism.<sup>6</sup> The second document is titled *The Self-Understanding of the Lutheran Communion: A Study Document*.<sup>7</sup> This document is shorter than the other and describes communion as a gift and a task. The LWF has sent it to all members for comment and will present it as a vote before the world assembly in 2017. This document will be the focus of this essay.

## Analysis

The document begins with a “Preface” by Dr. Martin Junge, General Secretary of the Lutheran World Federation. The Preface states that the members of the LWF are a communion of churches. A goal of the LWF for the 2017 Reformation celebration is to show the world “what it means to be an ecclesial communion from a Lutheran perspective.”<sup>8</sup> Junge next states that a hallmark of Lutheran ecclesiology is “unity in reconciled diversity.” The next sentence explains what “reconciled diversity” means.

**At all times and in every place, churches discern how faithfully to live out the message of the gospel in their contexts.**

**As part of this process, they are called to review and examine cultural and socio-ethical paradigms in light of the gospel of Jesus Christ.<sup>9</sup>**

There are several significant points in this statement.

First, “churches” discern how to live out the message of the gospel. Note that the Scriptures do not inform or

instruct the churches, but rather the churches decide how to live out the gospel in their own contexts. Each church interprets for themselves what the Scripture means for them. It appears that the Scriptures are subordinate to human interpretation. One wonders if such a view can still claim “sola Scriptura” as its confession. The viewpoint presented that each church discerns how to live out the message of the gospel gives the appearance that all churches are equal and that there is no colonialism, or preferred reference point, for interpretation. The CoS and the ELCA can discern that living out the message of the gospel means the acceptance of homosexual love in their context, while the EECMY can decide that living out the message of the gospel does not accept homosexual love in their own context.

Second, the hermeneutical move the document asks the member churches to make is to examine “cultural and socio-ethical paradigms in light of the gospel of Jesus Christ.” The LWF will maintain that homosexuality is a “cultural and socio-ethical paradigm” and not something forbidden by the Holy Scriptures. The law of God is subsumed by the gospel. Natural Law is simply a cultural and socio-ethical paradigm that can be dismissed by churches today, much as the Christian church dismissed the Jewish ceremonial law in the first century.

The document begins by discussing autonomy and accountability. Although in the past, the LWF regarded church bodies as “autonomous,” this understanding does not fit well with the current understanding that the LWF is a communion rather than a federation of independent, autonomous church bodies. Presently, the LWF is putting forth the idea that autonomy needs to be balanced with accountability to the other members. In light of the current disruption within the LWF’s communion, there are two possible readings: 1) The EECMY was wrong to break communion with the CoS and the ELCA as this was an autonomous act; 2) The CoS and the ELCA did not sufficiently take into account the “socio-cultural contexts” of other churches when they decided to accept homosexual love. Although there are two possible readings, the sense of the document indicates more displeasure with the EECMY for breaking fellowship, than it does with the CoS and the ELCA for not taking “socio-cultural” contexts into account. This is made clear when the document explains the role of church law.

How is the  
gospel defined  
and what is  
included in that  
definition?

<sup>5</sup> *Understanding the Gift of Communion*, 15.

<sup>6</sup> *Understanding the Gift of Communion*, 96. “The failure of the church and Christians to accept homosexual love given in the framework of faithful and conjugal relationships reverts into a condemnation of homosexuality that is a reenactment of exclusionary categories inherited from a colonial and patriarchal past.”

<sup>7</sup> *The Self-Understanding of the Lutheran Communion: A Study Document*, ed. Department for Theological and Public Witness (Geneva, Switzerland: The Lutheran World Federation, 2015). The document can be downloaded from [https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/Exhibit 9.2 The Self-Understanding of the Lutheran Communion.pdf](https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/Exhibit%20The%20Self-Understanding%20of%20the%20Lutheran%20Communion.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> *The Self-Understanding of the Lutheran Communion*, 5.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

Church law governs various aspects of the life of an individual church, such as who is eligible to receive communion or to be ordained to the ministry. The various principles expressed in church law reflect both a theological understanding of the church and local conditions. Both of these are culturally mediated.<sup>10</sup>

In other words, the decision of a church body to ordain or not ordain a person is tied to the local culture. There is not a clear Scriptural word regarding the qualifications for ordination, but it is culturally determined. Therefore, both the CoS and ELCA can decide that their local culture allows for the ordination of practicing homosexuals and the EECMY can say that their culture does not allow it, but this difference in culture is not divisive of the communion or fellowship in the LWF; it is part of the reconciled diversity.

As a result of the broken communion between the EECMY, the CoS, and the ELCA, the document notes, “the churches have started to ask themselves how to engage with disagreements in the communion in a critical but constructive way.”<sup>11</sup> The document acknowledges that “the churches of the communion face questions regarding family, marriage and sexuality. While some churches have taken official positions on these issues, others have not. And then there are those that are in the process of discerning how to engage with these questions.”<sup>12</sup> The document acknowledges that marriage and sexuality are issues facing the LWF. The document does not state that this essentially is a divide between the old colonial powers (Europe and the United States) and the global South. The document states correctly that it is a question of “being true to the gospel.”<sup>13</sup> Left unsaid is that the churches supporting homosexuality and those who oppose it do not share the same gospel.

The LWF describes the situation as follows:

Considering current controversies, such as the ordination of people with homosexual orientation and the blessing of relationships between people

of the same sex, some approach these issues under the rubric of the pastoral imperative to be inclusive, while others assert that entertaining such a decision can undermine the integrity of the communion. For this reason, we should not qualify these issues as “socio-ethical” alone but also as issues of church order and discipline that play a role in the proclamation of the gospel.<sup>14</sup>

The LWF would like to present the issue as being about the proclamation of the gospel. Some churches, like the CoS and ELCA, believe that “the ordination of people with homosexual orientation and the blessing” of same-sex relationships is a matter of the gospel. At the same time, other churches (the majority of churches within the LWF) believe approving such things is against the gospel. Note that the LWF does not recognize that this is a doctrinal issue. It is socio-ethical and a matter of church order, which the document previously said was culturally mediated.<sup>15</sup> The document next suggests that these differences might be related to the Reformation “concept of *adiaphora*, involving “matters pertaining to human

Is the Holy Scripture the word of God? Or do the Holy Scriptures merely contain the word of God?

traditions, rites and ceremonies and so marked a space for acceptable differences.”<sup>16</sup> The LWF’s *Self-Understanding of Communion*, at the very least, suggests that the controversies within the LWF over “the ordination of people with homosexual orientation and the blessing of relationships between people of the same sex” might be regarded as *adiaphora*. Understanding this matter as an *adiaphoron* would allow some churches to ordain homosexuals and bless same-sex relationships and would allow other churches to refrain from the same without dividing the LWF communion. It is akin to saying that sexuality and marriage issues are no more church divisive than whether a church in Africa uses drums during worship while a church in Germany or North America uses the pipe organ for worship.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> *The Self-Understanding of the Lutheran Communion*, 14. “Church law governs various aspects of the life of an individual church, such as who is eligible to receive communion or to be ordained to the ministry. The various principles expressed in church law reflect both a theological understanding of the church and local conditions. Both of these are culturally mediated.”

<sup>16</sup> *The Self-Understanding of the Lutheran Communion*, 16.

<sup>10</sup> *The Self-Understanding of the Lutheran Communion*, 14.

<sup>11</sup> *The Self-Understanding of the Lutheran Communion*, 15.

<sup>12</sup> *The Self-Understanding of the Lutheran Communion*, 15–16.

<sup>13</sup> *The Self-Understanding of the Lutheran Communion*, 16.



The next section of the document provides “resources for accountable decision making.” The format of this section contains four theses statements followed by a subsection under each thesis titled, “Our conviction” and “Need for discussion.” The goal of the “resources” is to “orient the communion in the task of discerning how to live together in the midst of diversity.”<sup>17</sup> A brief examination of the theses/resources follows.

Thesis or Resource 1: “The gospel is the core of our life in communion.”<sup>18</sup> The “Our Conviction” sub-section begins,

The unifying core of our Christian faith and of our Lutheran confessions is our salvation in Jesus Christ by grace through faith, witnessed in Scripture that reveals God’s unconditional love for us (EPH 2:8)... The conviction shared by all churches of our communion is that the reality and gift of God’s justifying grace is the foundation of Christian belief and life, and that Christian practice and “good works” follow from faith, which looks to grace for unity (GAL 3:25-29). This unity is established by the Word that constitutes the church as the visible body of Christ.”<sup>19</sup>

Indeed, the gospel of Jesus Christ is the center of fellowship and communion. This prompts two significant questions: How is the gospel defined and what is included in that definition? Generally speaking, the LWF defines “gospel” very narrowly to mean “God’s justifying grace.” Historically, in connection with communion, that is, altar and pulpit fellowship, Lutherans have not defined agreement in the “gospel” in a narrow sense, but in a broader sense to include agreement in doctrine, including teachings both of law and gospel. Different Christian denominations, who have very different teachings and understandings on a variety of doctrines, can agree with one another that the gospel is narrowly defined as the justification of the sinner. Yet, such agreement that Christ justifies the sinner has not been seen historically as sufficient to permit communion or fellowship between Lutherans, Roman Catholics, Baptists, Presbyterians, and so forth. Historically, agreement in doctrine and teaching also was required.

Additionally, in order to agree on the justifying grace of God, one must also agree on what God is justifying or saving us from. In the context of the conflict among LWF members, some member churches regard the practice of homosexuality to be a sin that is in need of Christ’s forgiveness, while other member churches in the LWF do not regard the practice of homosexuality, particularly when it occurs in a faithful and conjugal relationship, to be a sin. On the one hand, the LWF members that regard the practice of homosexuality as a sin would understand the gospel of Jesus to offer forgiveness to those people who repent of homosexuality. On the other hand, the LWF member churches who do not regard the practice of homosexuality, particularly which occurs in faithful and conjugal relationship, to be a sin (CoS and ELCA) would not understand a reason to repent or receive forgiveness for that activity — hence the gospel of Jesus does not provide forgiveness for that lifestyle simply because it is not required or needed. This example demonstrates that there is not an agreement on the gospel of Jesus in the narrow sense, since one party regards it as a sin in need of forgiveness and the other does not. So it seems that the LWF defines the gospel in an even more narrow sense, one that simply acknowledges “God’s justifying grace” without any agreement or acknowledgement of sin. This is not to say there must be agreement about the enumeration of sins, but rather agreement in the basic categories described by the Ten Commandments (Decalogue). The topic of what is intended by agreement in the gospel will be addressed further when the next thesis/resource is addressed.

Next the LWF document references but does not quote or explain in detail Dr. Martin Luther’s “The Freedom of a Christian”<sup>20</sup> as a significant work that helps us understand “the new relationship that God establishes.” The document states that a distinction must be made between hearing God’s voice “as a will demanding conformity to external moral laws” or “as a promise to renew our whole existence by granting us a new identity in Christ.”<sup>21</sup> These statements could be interpreted in a few ways, one of which is that “socio-ethical” issues (such as marriage and sexuality) involve a conformity to external moral laws, rather than living within the promise. The document gives the impression that Luther’s “The Freedom of a

<sup>17</sup> *The Self-Understanding of the Lutheran Communion*, 17.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Martin Luther, “The Freedom of a Christian,” in *Luther’s Works*, edited by Harold J. Grimm and Hartmut Lehmann, trans. W.A. Lambert, 31 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1957), 327–377. Hereafter referred to as AE for the American Edition.

<sup>21</sup> *The Self-Understanding of the Lutheran Communion*, 17.

Christian” supports the position that is presented in this document. Indeed, Luther’s “The Freedom of a Christian” divides the Scriptures into two basic categories: command and promise.<sup>22</sup> Luther’s view does not nullify the law or Natural Law. Luther writes, “The law must be fulfilled so that not a jot or tittle shall be lost, otherwise man will be condemned without hope.”<sup>23</sup> Martin Luther would not see his writings as undoing the Scriptural prohibition against homosexual practice. Luther certainly would affirm forgiveness for those who sought it, but he would not say that the law and command of God was nullified. Luther did not practice the gospel reductionism advocated in this paper. The practice of gospel reductionism allows for one to say that a literal interpretation of the creation account as found in Genesis, or rejecting that God actually stopped the sun for Joshua, is not problematic since such rejection does not affect the gospel principle of justifying faith. In a similar manner, gospel reductionism is used to dismiss “socio-ethical” matters such as homosexuality as not affecting the gospel principle of justifying faith.<sup>24</sup> The LWF in this document has adopted a gospel reduction argument to allow the acceptance of homosexual love.

Under this section’s “Need for Discussion” subsection, the document states that although fellowship/communion is an action of God, individual member churches can take actions that “make it more difficult for us to experience communion and so ‘grieve the Holy Spirit of God’ (Eph. 4:30).”<sup>25</sup> What “decisions” that grieved the Holy Spirit and made it more difficult to experience communion are not clear. Is the document speaking about the decisions made by the CoS and ELCA regarding homosexuality? Or is the document speaking about the decision made by the EECMY to break fellowship? Both? At this point the document is unclear. The following context seems to imply that the “decisions” refer to the actions taken by the CoS and the ELCA. “Nevertheless, contextual demands require churches continually to discern law and gospel

in response to pastoral needs and political realities, and may cause churches to take decisions that other churches might not understand.” The context implies that “decisions” refer to the actions taken by the CoS and the ELCA, and that their decision about homosexuality was the result of their discernment of law and gospel and pastoral care concerns. “Political realities” also are mentioned. This implies that governmental pressure and/or shifting public opinion may have influenced the decision taken by these two churches bodies to embrace homosexuality. The last line is rather “colonialistic” and “paternalistic” to say some “churches might not understand.”<sup>26</sup> The churches of the global South understand but believe the decision of the CoS and the ELCA to embrace homosexuality is against the word of God. It seems if the interpretation is reversed and that decision refers to the EECMY’s action to sever fellowship with the CoS and ELCA then it would also apply. Their decision was based upon a discernment of law and gospel and pastoral care concerns for the souls of people. Finally, the CoS and ELCA do not accept the action of the EECMY to sever fellowship. The reality is that the dispute in the LWF is not a matter of understanding, but rather a fundamental disagreement over the word of God.

The document next states, “Members of the communion should be able to disagree with each other’s decision without necessarily threatening the unity of the communion. This is true on condition that such a decision is not deemed to compromise the common affirmation of justifying faith.”<sup>27</sup> These statements make the assumption that the ordination of practicing homosexuals and the blessing of same-sex relationships is an adiaphoron, a matter of indifference, and not a doctrinally divisive matter. Such a statement neglects the fact that the issue is about a disagreement over what the Holy Scriptures teach, not an adiaphoron such as whether or not African churches can use drums in worship while European and North American churches use a pipe organ. The LWF document states that the decision of accepting homosexuality “is not deemed to compromise the common affirmation of justifying faith.” As indicated earlier, there is no agreement on justifying faith without an agreement on Natural Law and the Decalogue. Without agreement that sin condemns and what those sins are, such as the Sixth Commandment that forbids any sexual activity outside of marriage

<sup>22</sup> AE 31, 348. “Here we must point out that the entire Scripture of God is divided into two parts: commandments and promises. Although the commandments teach things that are good, the things taught are not done as soon as they are taught, for the commandments show us what we ought to do but do not give us the power to do it.”

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Edward H. Schroeder, “Law-Gospel Reductionism in the History of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod,” *Concordia Theological Monthly* 43, no. 4 (April 1972): 233. “Thus, for example, according to critics the Law/Gospel reductionists can argue that cosmological or mythic aspects in Joshua and Genesis are to be interpreted as such inasmuch as this interpretation does not affect the Gospel.”

<sup>25</sup> *The Self-Understanding of the Lutheran Communion*, 18.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

between a man and a woman, there is no agreement on the gospel which forgives such sins.

The second thesis/resource is “Word and sacraments are events of communion.”<sup>28</sup> This next section picks up the Augsburg Confession, Article VII, as the definition of the church.

The church is identified as evident in those places where the gospel is preached purely and the sacraments are rightly administered. According to CA VII, it is enough (*satis est*) for the true church and its unity that we preach the gospel and celebrate the sacraments properly. God promises that this church will last forever.<sup>29</sup>

The position of the LWF in regards to communion/fellowship is that “It is enough (*satis est*)” if a church preaches the gospel and celebrates the sacraments. Again, in this case, the gospel is narrowly defined to be teaching that God justifies and forgives. Although this “narrow” definition of the gospel has allowed the LWF to form its communion, this same narrow definition is demonstrating a significant weakness by revealing the disunity of various LWF member churches regarding how the Scripture should be interpreted. When member churches share a basic definition of natural law and the Decalogue, the limitations of such a narrow definition of the gospel are not as immediately apparent. However, now that Natural Law and the Decalogue are rejected by some member churches, the disunity between them is more apparent. The LWF perhaps is incapable of recovering Natural Law and the Decalogue so it must now resort to hermeneutical tricks and narrow definitions of the gospel in order to maintain unity and their communion.

The interpretation of Augsburg Confession, Article VII, is rather significant to the concept of fellowship/communion.<sup>30</sup> As Dr. Roland Ziegler identifies, there are four basic interpretations of AC VII.<sup>31</sup> The first, as advocated by Albrecht Ritschl, emphasizes the gospel over doctrine.<sup>32</sup> This view argues, “The foundation of the church as church, that is, the preached gospel and the

administered sacraments, and the foundation of the unity of the church are the same. This implies that differences in doctrine are no longer church dividing.”<sup>33</sup> The second view is most famously articulated by theologians of the Prussian Union and by the Leuenberg Agreement (1973).

<sup>34</sup>This view, unlike the first view, advocates for more than consensus in preaching the gospel and administering the sacraments, but requires a doctrinal agreement in the gospel. This agreement in the gospel is defined in a narrow sense. The LWF’s view appears to be a conflation of the first and second interpretations of Augsburg Confession, Article VII. The third interpretation of AC VII holds that consensus consists in

recognizing that the Holy Scriptures as the norm and standard of teaching and in regarding the Lutheran Confessions as the correct exposition of the Scriptures — that and not much more. This means that other questions that are not addressed in the confession should not be divisive.<sup>35</sup>

As a result, topics not explicitly mentioned by the Lutheran Confessions do not require agreement. The fourth interpretation of the AC VII holds that “the consensus necessary for the unity of the church consists in everything that the Scriptures teach.”<sup>36</sup> This is the position taken by the member churches of the International Lutheran Council (ILC).<sup>37</sup> In contrast to the position of the ILC, which calls for agreement in everything that the Scriptures teach for fellowship/communion, the LWF does not require agreement in the Scriptures but instead bases fellowship/communion on the agreement that the gospel (narrowly defined) needs to be preached and the sacraments need to be administered. This minimal approach taken by the LWF demonstrates its weakness in the current controversy by holding the position that some members can regard homosexuality as a sin while others

<sup>28</sup> *The Self-Understanding of the Lutheran Communion*, 19.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> See Albert B. Collver, “Augustana VII: The Church and Fellowship,” *Journal of Lutheran Mission* 2, no. 5 (2015): 38–44.

<sup>31</sup> Roland F. Ziegler, “Doctrinal Unity and Church Fellowship,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 78, no. 3–4 (2014): 59–79.

<sup>32</sup> Ziegler, “Doctrinal Unity,” 61. “Ritschl wants to emphasize doctrina evangelii, not doctrina evangelii.”

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> Ziegler, “Doctrinal Unity,” 63. “The second school of thought on the meaning of AC VII sees the necessity of a doctrinal consensus, not just an agreement in the preaching of the gospel, but restricts it to a consensus on what the gospel (in the narrow sense) and the sacraments are. This is the interpretation and the ecumenical model that was first proposed by some theologians of the Prussian union and much later by the Leuenberg Agreement (1973), by which the churches that subscribed to it entered into full church fellowship.”

<sup>35</sup> Ziegler, “Doctrinal Unity,” 64–65.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> The International Lutheran Council’s website can be found at <http://www.ilc-online.org>.

can regard it as part of a God-pleasing life and remain in fellowship/communion.

This section also makes statements about the celebration of the Lord's Supper. The document views the Lord's Supper as an act which "creates" fellowship rather than as an expression of the fellowship/communion that exists because of a common confession of faith.

The sacred meal is the means by which the church is constituted as body, and a body is only a body insofar as it is diverse... We are diverse, but diversity is a part of the mystery of our salvation (ROM 12:3-8). We have been justified and our justification does not only validate diversity; it produces it.<sup>38</sup>

The interpretation taken by the LWF's document hangs on the understanding of the body of Christ as found in 1 Corinthians 11. When 1 Corinthians 11 speaks of discerning the body, the first and primary sense is the discernment or recognition that Christ gives his true body and blood in the Lord's Supper. There is a secondary sense in which 1 Corinthians 11 speaks of discerning the church as the body of Christ. Yet this is secondary to the discernment and recognition of Christ's true body and blood, given to eat and to drink for the forgiveness of sins. When Saint Paul speaks about sinning against the body of Christ, he is first and foremost speaking about denying that Christ gives his body and blood to eat and to drink for the forgiveness of sins in the Lord's Supper, and only in a secondary way speaks of acknowledging other Christians who are part of the body of Christ.

The incorporation into the body of Christ is found in baptism. In baptism, a person is incorporated into Christ's death and resurrection (ROM 6:1-13). Historically, not all those who were baptized were admitted to the Lord's Supper for a variety of reasons, ranging from a lack of instruction, to differences in the confession of faith, to unrepentant sin. Connected to baptism was the confession of the Creeds. It is not the celebration of the Lord's Supper that constitutes the church as the body, but rather the administration of baptism that incorporates a Christian into the body of Christ. The Lord's Supper is practiced among Christians who share the confession of faith and it reflects their unity and incorporation into the body of Christ. The LWF document is certainly correct when it says, "when we are unable to celebrate together,

our communion is damaged."<sup>39</sup> The EECMY currently will not celebrate the Lord's Supper with the CoS or the ELCA.

The LWF document tried to acknowledge that baptism is one of the gifts given to the church that incorporates people into the body of Christ. The document, however, allows for the possibility of unbaptized believers, that is, those who profess faith but remain unbaptized.

In certain regions of the LWF there are people who desire Baptism but can only do so at considerable expense to themselves or their loved ones. There is need for the communion to acknowledge their faithfulness, even though they are unable to experience Baptism.<sup>40</sup>

This statement takes up the topic of the so-called "non-baptized believers" who claim to believe in Jesus but who refrain from being baptized for socio-cultural or political reasons.<sup>41</sup> There is a distinction between people who hear the gospel, believe, and are not able to be baptized and those who choose to not be baptized so that they do not cause divisions within their household, or so they can get married, or so that they do not lose a job, etc.<sup>42</sup> Jesus himself said, "Whoever does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me" (MATT 10:38). At some point, deciding that pleasing father or mother, or seeking a spouse, or retaining a job instead of being baptized is in fact a de facto rejection of baptism.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Sam Thompson, "Reaching Out to the Non-Baptized Believers: Missiological Implications from a Lutheran Perspective," *Missio Apostolica* 2 (2014): 248. "However the 'non-baptized believers' we are concerned with in this discussion are those who are genuine in their faith affirmation and do not necessarily reject or despise Baptism. They are convinced that Jesus is the only God, the Way and the Truth, and that His life and work on the cross is sufficient for the forgiveness of their sin and for their salvation. However, due to various socio-cultural and political reasons and/or because of the failure of the church to effectively minister to them, they still remain as unbaptized believers. These believers could be the fruits of missionary efforts of some institutionalized churches or para-church organizations."

<sup>42</sup> Herbert E. Hoefler, *Churchless Christianity* (Pasadena, California: William Carey Library, 2001), 24. "All of the women speak of their desire to be baptized. No children are baptized, except in Christian families. The boys attend Sunday School for a while, but soon the father takes them with him into work at the business. The girls are not baptized because it would affect the chances of their marriage arrangements, so each non-baptized believing girl must try to work it out with her husband later on."

<sup>43</sup> Matthew 10:34-39: "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. 35 For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. 36 And a person's enemies will be those of his own household. 37 Whoever loves father

<sup>38</sup> *The Self-Understanding of the Lutheran Communion*, 20.



The next significant thesis/resource says, “The Word of God creates and affirms both unity and diversity.”<sup>44</sup> The “Conviction” or belief of the LWF is “The Word of God, mediated through the Holy Scriptures, is the source of ecclesial communion, and of the church’s life, hope, and belief.”<sup>45</sup> The significant challenge with this statement is that the LWF regards the word of God to be mediated through the Holy Scriptures, this is to say that the Holy Scriptures are not necessarily the word of God nor are they equated with the word of God. The LWF does not affirm that the Holy Scriptures are the word of God. In contrast to the LWF position, the churches of the International Lutheran Council (ILC) hold that the Holy Scriptures are the word of God. Dr. J.A.O. Preus in *It Is Written* explains, “To Jesus, Scripture is truly and properly the Word of God, God speaking to us. In Mark 7:13 He speaks of the Law of Moses as ‘the Word of God’ and compares it with the tradition of the Jews which He puts far beneath the Law.”<sup>46</sup> This is a major point of difference. Is the Holy Scripture the word of God? Or do the Holy Scriptures merely contain the word of God? The LWF’s position understands that the word of God is mediated through the Holy Scripture, which is to say the Holy Scripture merely contains the word of God but is not the word of God. This view allows for portions of the Scripture to be ignored or excised, particularly if it is not convenient for a position one desires to take, such as the affirmation of the ordination of homosexuals or the blessing of same-sex marriages.

The LWF document next asserts “The testimony of the Holy Scriptures is not a monotone but a choir of many different voices. Diversity, then, is sanctioned in Scripture (GAL 2:7–10).”<sup>47</sup> What is meant is not entirely clear. What does it mean that the Holy Scripture is not monotone? Does it mean that the Lord employed various authors, who wrote in different styles and literary genres? Does it refer to a higher critical view of interpretation of the Holy Scriptures that some LWF member churches teach? Nor is it clear how the next statement logically follows

that “Diversity, then, is sanctioned in Scripture.” What is diversity? Galatians 2:7–10 is cited, which speaks of the gospel going to the Jews and to the Gentiles. If by diversity it is meant that the gospel is for all people of every nation, tribe, race, and language, then the Scripture does sanction diversity. However, in contemporary English, diversity has different political connotations.

Within the context of the document, “diversity” seems to speak to how hermeneutics should be done.

Therefore, it is essential to be aware of the range of scriptural utterances contained in the Bible rather than to focus on a narrower selection of texts. This diversity is reconciled through the shared core of the Scriptures: all Lutheran churches affirm the basic authority of Scripture interpreted through the hermeneutical key of the gospel of the liberating grace given in Jesus Christ.<sup>48</sup>

First, this section of the document seems to say that a “diversity” of texts rather than a narrow selection should be used to understand issues in a biblical way. In light of the controversy within the LWF over homosexuality, it appears that the proposed hermeneutical key seeks to dismiss the few or narrow passages that speak clearly about homosexuality (GEN 19; LEV 18:22–23, 20:13; ROM 1:24–27; 1 COR 6:9–10; 1 TIM 1:10). Instead of these six passages from both the Old and New Testament that speak clearly on the topic of homosexuality, the document encourages “the range of scriptural utterances” understood through the “hermeneutical key of the gospel.” This argument refers back to the earlier discussion about the definition of the gospel, either narrowly defined as justification by grace or broadly defined to include all the teachings of Scripture.

The final thesis/resource says, “The gospel entails freedom, respect and bearing with one another.”<sup>49</sup> This thesis/resource seems to intend to limit the freedom and autonomy of self-governing, independent church bodies. Yet, the statement seems more directed against the EECMY than it is against the CoS and the ELCA. “Sometimes, the neighbor makes decisions that we do not feel free to make. In such situations, the churches may be called to bear with one another, respecting differing choices as expressions of their own freedom.”<sup>50</sup> In this case, it seems that the church bodies who do not agree with the decisions of the

or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. 38 And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. 39 Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”

<sup>44</sup> *The Self-Understanding of the Lutheran Communion*, 22.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Jacob A.O. Preus, *It Is Written* (Saint Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 1971), 15.

<sup>47</sup> *The Self-Understanding of the Lutheran Communion*, 22.

<sup>48</sup> footnote goes here—it wasn’t on the document

<sup>49</sup> *The Self-Understanding of the Lutheran Communion*, 23.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

CoS and the ELCA are told to bear with another and to respect that decision. Churches are supposed to recognize that they will have different opinions but these differing opinions, even if some believe they are against the word of God, are to be respected and ultimately accepted.

## Conclusion

The LWF's *The Self-Understanding of Communion* is a significant document because it attempts to pacify or restore unity which has been broken within the communion. The LWF member churches will vote on this document to determine if it will be how they interact with each other going forward. The document makes the attempt to bridge differences between views held by the global North and the global South. The confession and hermeneutical presuppositions of the LWF collectively is less than that of some of the member churches. For instance, collectively the LWF cannot say that the Holy Scriptures are the word of God, yet some of the members of the LWF do in fact confess and believe this. The document confesses AC VII in a lesser form by reducing the *satis est* ("it is enough") to mean simply the proclamation of justification by grace, rather than the more complete form that gospel refers to doctrine in all its articles. Finally, the document takes a gospel reductionist approach to the Scriptures, in particular, to natural law and the Decalogue. The end result of such an approach effectively concludes that the LWF as a communion should accept the ordination of homosexual clergy and the blessing of same-sex relationships. Although the document does not explicitly say this, it is hard to envision any other conclusion. It is hard to imagine that this approach will create lasting peace within the LWF communion. It would be far better if the LWF members discussed the actual difference in biblical interpretation and the different views toward the Scriptures. Perhaps with the expression of honest disagreement in document, the LWF actually could find a greater unity.

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# REJOICE: THE CHURCH IS BUILT ON THE ROCK

by Berhanu Ofgaa

Hear about how the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus has undergone persecution and suffering and how it has received God's grace even more.

## Introduction and Words of Greeting<sup>1</sup>

I WOULD LIKE TO BEGIN WITH BRIEF WORDS OF GREETINGS from the church I represent and my own personal salutation. I am a graduate of Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne, Indiana. I have been a rostered pastor of the LCMS before rejoining the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (hereafter referred to as the EECMY), where I hold the position of General Secretary. (*Mekane Yesus* means “the dwelling place of Jesus.”) I have been a missionary at-large in the Ohio district for over six years, working among African immigrants. Working in both the EECMY and the LCMS context has contributed towards bridging the relationship between the two church bodies. Thank you for offering me the privilege of being at this great podium and allowing me to deliver this presentation.

Before proceeding with my presentation, I would like to convey greetings from my church. The EECMY has been in partnership with the LCMS in the last few decades. This accompaniment and walk together in God's mission and the partnership we shared during these years has gradually deepened the relationship between the two church bodies. The incredible support the LCMS has rendered to the EECMY especially has meant a lot to us, as the LCMS stood by the EECMY when the EECMY severed her relationship with her former traditional partners, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA) and the Church of Sweden (CoS), because of their legalization of same-sex marriage and ordination. As the saying goes, “A friend in need is a friend indeed.” On top of this, the

visitation made by LCMS President Matthew Harrison two years ago has elevated the level of this partnership. I hereby would like to convey the congratulatory words of my church for the election of the president for the third term and express her best wishes that this term be years of great blessing.

As a result of all these developments, the EECMY has a high regard for the LCMS and her commitment to the Holy Scriptures and her strong Lutheran identity rooted in the Book of Concord. The great contributions the LCMS is rendering in supporting the EECMY seminaries, specially strengthening the Master of Arts in Theology (M.A.) program at the Mekane Yesus Seminary (MYS) through provision of faculty members and resources, is so spectacular. At present this joint venture between the two church bodies is moving towards launching a Ph.D. program at the MYS by 2017. Taking this opportunity, I would like to recognize the incredible contribution of

Although heavily challenged, the survival of the church was certain because of Jesus' promise.

individuals whom God has used and moved to support this ministry, especially the bridging ministry of Rev. Dr. Albert Collver and the generosity of Mr. Bruce Gilbert, who funded more than forty Master of Theology scholarships at the Mekane Yesus Seminary.

Despite the various challenges and confrontations Christianity today is facing in our present global context, the EECMY is flourishing in all aspects of her growth. For instance, as the statistical report from 2015 shows, in one year alone, over four million unchurched people have heard the good news through the witnesses of the laity,

<sup>1</sup> This presentation was given at the 66th convention of the LCMS, held July 2016 in Milwaukee, Wis.

more than half a million converts have been won and joined the church, and over 1,000 ministers have graduated from the seminaries of the church and joined the ministry. We thank God for this spectacular result.

The EECMY has been blessed with human resources, while the LCMS has been blessed with theological resources and faithfulness to the Scripture, which is something the rest of the Lutheran world needs and desires. Once again, *ameseginalehu*, or thank you. After having said all these as expression of our partnership, I would like to turn your attention to the topic of my presentation.

## **“REJOICE — THE CHURCH IS BUILT ON THE ROCK”**

### **Rejoicing in the Lord**

I would like to begin with the words of Paul, the prisoner of the gospel. He stated, “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice” (PHIL 4:4). As this verse implies, we as Christians are called to rejoice in the Lord. This includes rejoicing both in his suffering and his glory. We rejoice when we suffer for him and with him, and also when we partake in his glory. This shows that there are two types of joy we are called to experience as God’s people. The first is the experience of joy in suffering for him through cross bearing. The second is the joy that comes as a result of it. Peter is right when he stated to those who were experiencing suffering, “After you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you” (1 PET 5:10). Thus, this presentation incorporates both of these joys the church of Christ is called to experience, with special emphasis on the faith journey of the EECMY.

### **Rejoicing in Suffering**

In the above-stated biblical text, Paul brings up special joy God’s people are called to experience in the midst of severe persecution, suffering, and cross-bearing. This is a joy that flows from the experience of the cross. This is a special joy the church of Christ is called to experience in tragic circumstances and hostile environments. This joy is not based on the fulfillment of material blessings, prosperity, health, wellbeing, or success in living. It is a special joy that comes from cross bearing after all these other sources of physical joy are gone. It is a joy in the

The persecution  
couldn’t move  
the church an  
inch from her firm  
confession and  
witnessing to the  
Lordship of Jesus  
in public.

Lord and him alone. The mystery of this joy is the security of being in the secret place of the Most High, which is the security of being on the unmovable foundation on which the church of Christ has been built. This essay depicts the secret of this special joy, reflecting on the enormous joy and great blessings the EECMY experienced during severe persecution under the Communist government of Ethiopia a few decades ago. Before dealing with this testimony in depth, it is important to discuss the theme of this convention, “On this rock I will build my church,” to lay a foundation for this reflection. This text was spoken in response to the confession of Peter about Jesus. This text depicts the real foundation on which the church of Christ has been built.

The phrase “on this rock” is so significant for our study. In this context the phrase “on this rock” carries deep meaning. Examining what the phrase incorporates is so significant for the interpretation of the theme of this convention. What then does the phrase “on this rock” signify? The dictionary meaning of a “rock” is “a large mass of stone forming a hill.”<sup>2</sup> The rock in the Old Testament symbolizes security and defense.<sup>3</sup> It also means a strong founda-

tion that no one moves or stands against (MATT 7:24). It signifies the foundation on which Jesus built his church, which is the confession of Peter.

The Book of Concord in the Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope interprets this passage:

However, as to the declaration: Upon this rock I will build My Church, certainly the Church has not been built upon the authority of man, but upon the ministry of the confession which Peter made, in which he proclaims that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. He accordingly addresses him as a minister: Upon this rock, i.e., upon this ministry ... For He built His Church not upon man, but upon the faith of Peter. But what was his faith? “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” And Hilary says: To Peter the Father revealed that he should say, “Thou art the Son of the living God.” (Tr 25, 28 [Triglotta, 511–513])

<sup>2</sup> “Rock,” Dictionary.com, <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/rock>.

<sup>3</sup> *The New Bible Dictionary*, ed., J.D. Douglas (Inter-Varsity Press, 1976), 1098.



Therefore, the building of the church is upon this rock of confession; this faith is the foundation of the church.

To further explore what this phrase means, it is worthwhile to investigate the four central themes of Peter's confession. These central themes incorporate Jesus as a living God, Jesus as the expected Messiah, Jesus as the Son of God, and Jesus as the cornerstone (EPH 2:19).

### Jesus as a Living God

The first key affirmation of Peter in his confession was the fact that Jesus is the living God. The church is the community that confesses that Jesus is the living God. The phrase "Jesus is the living God" carries a deep understanding of God. First, it implies that he is a living God. This is the very nature that makes him different from the dead idols of the Gentiles. Here Peter affirms that Jesus of Nazareth is not an ordinary religious leader, but the living God. By this he implies that in him there is the same life that is in the Father. This implies the fact that Jesus is life himself, and also the fountain of life to others.

Peter, in this regard, had a profound understanding. He had confessed similar testimony about Jesus at another incident. According to the Gospel of John, the multitude who followed Jesus after the miracle of the bread murmured and drew away because they stumbled over Jesus referring to himself as the "bread of life." Even his own immediate disciples stumbled and struggled with Jesus' difficult word about being the bread of life. Then Peter said, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God" (JOHN 6:68-69). This implies how much deeper Peter's understanding of Jesus was. For Peter, Jesus was more than the physical bread. He realized that Jesus is the bread of life. This profound testimony is the real foundation on which the real church of Christ is built.

### Jesus as the Christ

The second key affirmation of Peter is the fact that Jesus is the Christ of God. In other words, this means that Jesus is the true Messiah, promised by God, prophesied of by all the prophets from the beginning of the world, and expected by the people of God. This includes all his offices of prophet, priest, and king, for which he is anointed by God, and that this Messiah was not a mere man, but a divine person.

Here the Greek term "Christ"

equals "the Messiah" in Hebrew. In the Old Testament, God never promised a coming "Messiah" — at least the Old Testament prophets never used that exact title. And yet pervading the entire Old Testament was this promise and expectation of a deliverer whom God would one day send to free his people from all bondage and oppression. And so "Messiah" became the title that God's people used to sum up all of their hopes and expectations for the coming deliverer and King — the promised son of David. Now so far in Matthew, the title "Messiah" or "Christ" has appeared only six times. Five of these times are Matthew's own narrative comments (four of which are in the introductory first chapter) and the sixth time is when Herod inquired about

where the Christ was to be born. In all of his preaching and teaching, Jesus had never once claimed this title for himself. And yet Peter, having listened to Jesus' preaching and teaching, and having understood the meaning of his miracles, now for the very first time assigns this title to Jesus, implying that Jesus is not simply one of the prophets ... He is not one among many ... He is not a forerunner preparing the way.<sup>4</sup>

Peter affirmed that Jesus was the true Messiah, the deliverer. This affirmation is the other key statement on which Jesus built his church. The real church is founded on the testimony that Jesus is the Christ of God.

### Jesus as the Son of God

The third affirmation of Peter in his confession is the fact that Jesus is the Son of God. This affirmation, as some scholars state, connotes the interpretation that his being is not by creation, as angels and men are, nor by adoption, as saints, nor by office, as magistrates, but by nature, being his own Son, his proper Son, the only begotten of the Father, of the same nature with him, being one with him, and equal to him.<sup>5</sup> As the apostle John states, the main purpose for which the gospel was written was to disclose this very secret about Jesus. It was to disclose the secret that Jesus is the true Son of God (JOHN 20:31).

<sup>4</sup> "Matthew 16:13-18," *Living Word Bible Church*, 11 March 2012, <http://livingwordbible.org/Sermons/Matthew/Matthew16.13-18.pdf>, 2.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

The church was counted worthy to suffer and to sacrifice for Jesus.

As it has been stated in Hebrews 5:5, the Father said to Jesus, “You are my Son, today I have begotten you.” This implies that Jesus is “begotten” as the “Son of God” at his royal coronation and at his appointment as the high priest of his people.

This confession, as uniform, is what all the disciples of Christ agreed in. They took him, one and all, and acknowledged him to be the Son of God, a phrase expressive of his divine nature and distinct personality. They indeed judged him to be a prophet, but not that prophet that was to come, superior to all prophets. Here he is owned to be the Christ, which not only takes in his prophetic office in a higher sense than they understood it, but all his other offices, and declares him to be the promised Messiah, who they thought and spoke most honorably of.<sup>6</sup> This is another ground on which Jesus has built his church.

### Jesus as the Cornerstone

Peter affirms that Jesus is a cornerstone that carries this whole foundation in his first epistle. He states, “You come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood” (1 PET 2:4–5).

This text implies that Christ is the living stone. It also implies that those who believe in him are also living stones. In a similar way, the apostle Paul stated to the church in Ephesus, “You are built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone” (EPH 2:20). This text implies that Christ Jesus is the cornerstone that carries the foundation.

It is this cornerstone (Jesus) and faith in him that sustains the church to endure in the midst of suffering and persecution. More than that, it enables the church to rejoice in suffering, as Saint Paul affirms based on his personal experience, “... we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance” (ROM 5:3). In light of this, I would like to share with you about the sufferings the church in Ethiopia in those tragic circumstances and hostile environments has undergone and the joy that generated from this painful experience.

### REFLECTION ON THE SUFFERINGS OF THE EECMY

As the EECMY is a church born in the midst of opposing circumstances and has walked through a painful path since the days of her formation in confrontation with

various forces of evil working against her, reflecting on the experience of this church would better demonstrate the practicality of the above biblical teaching.

Thus we will deal with the faith journey of this church classifying it into two parts. The first part discusses the joy in the experience of suffering. This is what the church has gained during the severe persecution by the Derg Communist government of Ethiopia. The second part deals with the blessing that thereafter follows, which means the present flourishing growth of the church.

### The Joy in the Experience of Suffering

The journey of the EECMY quite from the days of her formation has been full of experiences of strong confrontations because of opposing circumstances and challenging environments she passed through, especially the duration of the experience of suffering severe persecutions and various sorts of trials that threatened her survival had been so horrible. Those days had been moments of walking in the shadow of death. This deep experience of suffering had a tremendous contribution towards the spiritual formation of the church. It had much contribution in shaping the life of this church.

On the one hand, this horrible experience the church had undergone in those days was so devastating and destructive. The brutal action taken against Christianity in general: The closing down of congregations, banning of worship services, detention of many ministers, severe trials and death of many ministers and church leaders, and loss of church properties had severely damaged the church. It was a duration when church properties were confiscated and the existence of God and his church were totally denied. It was a duration when many believers had been brutally tortured, beaten, harassed, intimidated, lost their jobs, detained, and faced various sorts of sufferings and trials. Those evil moments were when many leaders and ministers of the gospel were brutally tortured to death, when many top leaders like the Rev. Gudina Tumsa suffered repeated imprisonments and faced a cruel death. Especially, it was the moment when many young people were atrociously tortured and faced various sorts of trials, including being forced to deny Christ. As I myself have been a partaker of these trials and sufferings, I testify this as a living witness.

Nevertheless, all these horrible actions didn't and couldn't stop the church from boldly declaring the Lordship of Christ. Although heavily challenged, the survival of the church was certain because of Jesus' promise.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

The persecution couldn't move the church an inch from her firm confession and witnessing to the Lordship of Jesus in public. The church was counted worthy to suffer and to sacrifice for Jesus. All these challenges and confrontations from the forces of evil couldn't prevail against this church, as Jesus said. The words of Jesus, "the gates of hell cannot prevail against it," have been demonstrated and proven in the experiences the church in Ethiopia underwent. This severe persecution and test of faith endured by the EECMY in those horrible days, even though it shocked and rocked her foundation, did not move her an inch from her firm confession.

The experience of this atrocious suffering, on the other hand, made a great contribution towards the qualitative and quantitative growth of the church. The experience of persecution as stated above has contributed to the growth of the church in many other aspects. First, it had a tremendous contribution to the numerical growth of the church. The experience of persecution invigorated Christian witness. The testimony of heroes of faith during their trials was a moving and powerful experience of witnessing for Christ. It empowered the witness of the victims of this suffering. Here, the words of the Rev. Tumsa, who was the General Secretary of the EECMY, are worth mentioning. He stated, "We as Christians cannot simply tolerate a bad situation and keep quiet. It is our duty to act, to speak, and even risk our life. The power of the resurrection is experienced only through death."<sup>7</sup> Such bold and powerful witness has impacted many people and has drawn many, even the persecuting cadres, to Christ.

There were instances where the cadres sent to congregational services for spying and closing churches ended up joining the church, having been touched by God's power.<sup>8</sup> As the ancient saying goes, "The blood of martyrs is the seed of the Gospel." In a similar way, through the seed sown during this horrible experience, the church experienced a blooming growth and expansion.

<sup>7</sup> Johannes Launhardt, *Evangelicals in Addis Ababa (1919–1991): With Special Reference to the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus and the Addis Ababa Synod* (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2004), 248.

<sup>8</sup> Launhardt, *Evangelicals in Addis Ababa*, 266. "A different approach was used to close the Entotto Mekane Yesus Church. During 1986... A man from the Security office called the pastor Qes Belina Sarka on the telephone and asked him to bring the keys of the church. Belina answered that he had to come himself and close the church if he had an order to do so. The security agent called three times, but Belina did not act. Finally, the man came himself with the intention to get the keys of the church. Since the church was packed with people, the agent had to wait for the end of the gathering. In the end of the service, however, he decided to join the congregation."

As statistical reports show, the church had demonstrated tremendous numeric growth during those years of persecution. Numerically, the church increased in membership by 1.1 million during those seventeen years of persecution.<sup>9</sup>

Second, the experience of persecution had a great contribution towards qualitative growth of the church. Qualitatively it had a great contribution to the spiritual formation of the church, both on individual and community levels, enhancing the purity of faith. Persecution detaches believers from the natural world and attaches them to the supernatural world; it detaches from the things of this world and attaches to the heavenly.<sup>10</sup> It relegates the victims to the experience of losing things of this world in order to gain Christ. Such a journey of faith draws believers to the life of the cross with its absolute dependency on God. Paul has spoken in support of this view while sharing his own personal journey of faith to the Philippians. Here he states that he sacrificed everything for Christ in order to gain him. He says:

But all those things that I might count as profit I now reckon as loss for Christ's sake. Not only those things, I reckon everything as complete loss for the sake of what is so much more valuable, the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have thrown everything away and consider it as mere refuse, so that I may gain Christ and be completely united with him. (PHIL 3:7–9)

Third, persecution of faith has a great contribution to transformation of life. It purifies faith like gold. In this regard it is important to consider the words of Peter to those who were facing persecution. He states:

In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith — more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire — may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. (1 PET 1:6–7)

According to Peter, suffering refines faith as gold is refined by fire. It increases the vitality of faith.

<sup>9</sup> Gudina Tumsa, "Report on Church Growth in Ethiopia" in *Witness and Discipleship* (Gudina Tumsa Foundation: Addis Ababa, 2007), 138.

<sup>10</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, trans. R.H. Fuller (New York: MacMillan, 1949), 73.

Fourth, the experience of persecution transformed the ministry of the church. The closing down of the churches and stopping of public worship by the government order forced the church to operate underground where small groups of people gathered for worship. This unique practice of ministry born in the midst of suffering in those days continued effectively and is still in operation. As a result, today most members of the church are structured into small groups. Small group or cell group ministry is a new experience the church explored during this horrible time. The development of small group services contributed to the growth and multiplication of members. It enhanced the growth of the church in two aspects. First, it enhanced the numerical growth of the church as it provided better access to reach out to family members and other unchurched people, as these small groups were among the community and they were so close to individuals interested in the program. Second, it enhanced the qualitative growth of the church as it was the best forum of edification and nurturing of faith through the Bible studies conducted, reflections, and sharing of testimony of life. It also developed a strong mutuality as it was a forum for sharing one another's burdens through prayers.

Fifth, persecution introduced the victims to miraculous signs and wonders. During the time of persecution, events occurred that had no natural explanation. Under torture, courageous Christians bore witness and stood firm in the face of their adversaries. To stay firm in the confession under threat of death is a miracle and a gift of God. The bold witness of these Christians even at times of their trials led their tormentors to Christ. Some victims were tortured to the point of death, yet lived even when medical science said they should not recover or even that they should die. These people were healed through the prayers of the church and lived to continue to share the gospel.<sup>11</sup> All these testimonies demonstrate the secret of

rejoicing in suffering. The apostle James affirms this fact in his writing to the saints undergoing tests of faith:

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. (Jas 1:2-4)

This was the secret that turned things upside down and resulted in this great victory in the midst of severe suffering. It was the fact that the church is founded on a strong base, Christ.

### The Joy in the Experience of His (the Lord's) Glory

The second joy, as it has been stated above, is the joy in the glory of the Lord. This was the experience that followed the suffering. As a result, today the EECMY rejoices in this special joy of celebrating the glory of the Lord. This part deals with this special joy we experience in the Lord.

The EECMY, established in the late 1950s after a century-old labor of the western missionary endeavor with 20,000 baptized members, has now skyrocketed to 7.8 million members, organized into 8,500 congregations and 4,000 plus preaching places (mission stations). This incredible growth from 20,000 to 7.8 million members taking place in so short a time span is another proof of the strength of the foundation on which the church has built and the mighty power working in the church.

The history of the EECMY after the downfall of the Communist government has been a history of great success and achievement. It was the moment when the power and authority Jesus granted to his church has been publicly displayed. It has been when the closed down churches resumed their public worship. It has been the duration when the formerly confiscated properties of the church have been returned.

This moment after the downfall of this evil government has been the duration when the church upheld high the keys of heaven entrusted to her in declaring Christ in public loudly, making use of facilities the Communist government built for running its evil purposes, like revolutionary squares, stadiums, and big meeting halls. As a result, this moment has been a duration of flourishing growth and expansion, when the former persecutors and cadres joined the church, repenting of their former

<sup>11</sup> Launhart, *Evangelicals in Addis Ababa*, 246. "One day an armed cadre entered the room of the prisoners and asked for a girl called Gennet. Since two girls among the detained had that name, both were taken out of the room. At first the younger Gennet was cross-examined, threatened, and beaten. When the cadre failed to get the answers he was expecting, he took his pistol, drilled it into Gennet's acoustic duct and deafened her. Next Gennet Leul Seged was interrogated. She was stripped of her clothes, thrown to the ground, and beaten. When these measures did not work one of the most cruel torturing methods, called *wofei lala*, was applied. Gennet Leul Seged claims that she felt, consciously, only the first hard blow on her feet. Then she experienced that even in this situation Christ was close to her. After two months of imprisonment and harassment the Bethel youth group was released. None of them had given up their faith. The two girls called Gennet, however, were badly injured. They saw many doctors but without success. Finally, the hearing of the younger Gennet was restored while

a Bethel youth group prayed for her, and Gennet Leul Seged's leg was restored to health during a prayer meeting in the Bole Meserete Kristos Church, on 21 December 1978."



sinful actions and practices. This duration has been when the EECMY demonstrated spectacular growth in all aspects, especially in membership growth. As the statistical reports of the church show, the growth in the last twenty-five years since the downfall of the Communist government has been explosive. By the end of the downfall of that government, there were 1.5 million members. Today, the membership of the church, according to the 2015 statistical report, is over 7.8 million.

Especially, the present numeric growth of this church since the launching of her “Five Year Strategic Plan” was so spectacular. This strategic plan, which is the first of its kind, launched as of January 2013 and has had a very significant effect on the growth of the church, especially in increasing the involvement of the laity in mission. Among the many strategic goals incorporated in this plan, the mission of sharing the gospel with thirty million unreached people in that time span (2013–2017) within and outside the nation has shown fabulous and fruitful results. The comparison of the results achieved before and after the implementation of this plan, which means contrasting before and after 2013, shows a tremendous difference. It increased the yearly numeric growth of the church from a three percent to an eight percent average. The major factor for such drastic change was the mobilization of the laity in evangelism. In this regard it is worthwhile to mention the participation of the laity in summer evangelism, which has displayed spectacular results. The mobilization of the laity in summer evangelism has been conducted in the last three years as part of the strategic plan. This summer, from 15-30 August 2016, it has been planned to share the gospel with five million unchurched people through mobilizing 5,000 congregations and receiving one million new members into the church. This spectacular accomplishment is another source of our joy. We therefore rejoice in the Lord for this great blessing. We rejoice in him in both our pains and blessings.

## Conclusion

The above enumerated facts in our essay, based on the reflection on the experiences of the faith journey of the EECMY, depict the secret of rejoicing in the Lord in every circumstance, good or evil. It calls upon the contemporary church to keep on rejoicing in the Lord and him alone, standing firm on the unwavering solid foundation on

which she has been established, the rock that no earthly power can move and overcome, neither hell nor heaven can prevail against it. It calls upon the contemporary church surrounded with multiple strange doctrines and confusing philosophical thoughts to stand firm, adhering to her sound biblical doctrine (EPH 2:19) and shining to the decaying world, full of darkness and despair, upholding the message of the cross without shying off and retreating. It calls upon the contemporary church to strongly resist the devil and principalities of evil forces operating in our global context from snatching the keys of the kingdom out of her hand, standing firm on her confessional ground. It calls upon us to be watchful of the signs of the time and be careful on how we walk, as Paul says, “so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and

carried out by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes” (EPH 4:14). It also calls upon the contemporary church, drowned in the sea of the globalized world, to reclaim the keys of the kingdom entrusted to her in earnest prayer and repentance.

Furthermore, this essay calls on the contemporary confessional Lutheran churches to be watchful and critical of the evils of the day with spiritual discernment and join hands in fighting them. Especially it is a time when we, churches of the same theological position, need to join hands and wrestle against these forces of evil, holding up high the banner of the cross, declaring boldly in public the Lordship of Christ and the unchanging gospel in the changing world without any retreat that Jesus is still a living God, the Christ, the Son of God, and the only way of salvation. Rejoice in the cross of Jesus; the gates of hell will not prevail against the church!

Therefore:

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. 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. (HEB 10:23-25)

May the gracious Almighty God bless the convention!

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*The Rev. Dr. Berhanu Ofgaa is general secretary of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus.*

Rejoice in the  
cross of Jesus; the  
gates of hell will  
not prevail against  
the church!

# A THEOLOGICAL STATEMENT FOR MISSION IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

by Matthew C. Harrison

## Background

**R**ELECTING OUR COMMITMENT TO THE PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) in convention has adopted resolutions in support of missions for decades. In 1986, for example, Resolution 3-02 was adopted, resulting in the 1991 publication of “A Theological Statement of Mission” by the LCMS Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR). As the context both domestically and internationally has changed since the end of the twentieth century, it is helpful to express the timeless truths of God’s desire to save all people in contextual and contemporary language for the situations the church encounters in the present age.

Most recently, Resolution 1-03A was adopted in 2013, calling for the development of a “Theological Statement of Mission for the 21st Century” by the end of 2014 that would form the basis for Synod-wide study of the subject.

In fulfillment of this resolution, “A Theological Statement for Mission in the 21st Century” was developed and adopted by the Board for International Mission (BIM) and the Board for National Mission (BNM). This version was published in the *Journal of Lutheran Mission*, March 2014, pages 60-69. The Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) reviewed, provided feedback, and helped revise the final version, which was commended to the Synod in Convention 2016 Resolution 5-18, “To Commend ‘A Theological Statement for Mission for the 21st Century’ for Synod-wide Study and Use.”

\*In November 1991, the LCMS Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) released a

document, “A Theological Statement of Mission.” Just as the current document is the result of a Synod convention resolution (2013 Res. 1-031A), the 1991 CTCR document was produced as a result of a Synod convention resolution (1986 Res. 3-02). For decades, the Missouri Synod has passed resolutions in conventions in support of mission. This reflects how the Missouri Synod takes

seriously Christ’s mandate for the gospel to be proclaimed to the entire world. The 1991 CTCR statement on mission and the current document demonstrate how each generation and age of the church must confess and put into practice the faith given to us by our Lord Jesus Christ. The two documents, while written in different styles, are in harmony with one another, expressing the same truths about Christ’s mission and the church’s response to our Lord’s mandate. In fact, the CTCR statement on mission states about itself, “This statement was

Christ himself is the content of the gospel, and thus of the church’s mission of *Witness (martyria)*, *Mercy (diakonia)*, *Life Together (koinonia)*.

not envisioned as an end in itself but as a tool that would be available for possible use by the various units of the Synod as they seek to develop their own individual mission statements.” In this regard, the 1991 CTCR statement has served as a helpful tool. In like manner, the following statement seeks to be a helpful tool for the present time. It is a consideration of various aspects of the church’s mission in a way that is consistent with Synod’s three-fold emphasis on *Witness (martyria)*, *Mercy (diakonia)*, *Life Together (koinonia)*.<sup>1</sup> Although the following document

<sup>1</sup> *Witness, Mercy, Life Together* is an attempt to describe what the church always has done — proclaim the gospel, care for people’s bodily needs, and have fellowship and community together as the church. Relating these themes to the Greek nouns *martyria*, *diakonia*, and

seeks to address mission from a distinctively Lutheran theological perspective, it is not a “missiology” *per se*. As such, it will not engage the wide variety of perspectives found in that discipline, reflect the many fine contributions of various scholars in that field, or address all of the practicalities of mission practice. Rather, it seeks to set forth priorities and specific areas of concern that call for particular emphasis for the mission efforts of the LCMS at this time.<sup>2</sup>

**1. God.** Where the Holy Trinity is present via the gospel and received in faith, there cannot but be *Witness (martyria)*<sup>3</sup>, *Mercy (diakonia)*<sup>4</sup>, *Life Together (koinonia)*<sup>5</sup>. These

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*koinonia* is not a suggestion that they are either translation equivalents or full conceptual parallels. Whatever titles are given to such churchly work or whatever terms are used, these activities have been a part of the church's life since the beginning. See Albert B. Collver's *Witness, Mercy, Life Together: Bible Study* (Saint Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House), 2011. In *Mission from the Cross: The Lutheran Theology of Mission* (Saint Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 2009), Klaus Detlev Schulz describes both the Trinitarian nature of mission (see chapter 6, 87–97) as well as the activities of the church and Christians that could be summarized by terms such as *Witness, Mercy, Life Together*. Schulz adds the idea of *leitourgia* as he diagrams the church's work (237). He also refers (1) to the work of “proclamation, confession and witness” (see 14–17, 161–167), (2) to the church's *diakonia* (101–104), and (3) to the church as “a new community” (see chapter 13).

<sup>2</sup> For a helpful and trustworthy guide to the particular discipline of missiology, Schulz's work, mentioned in the previous footnote, *Mission from the Cross*, is noteworthy. It thoroughly engages the field of missiology and the work of various other missiologists and constructs a distinctively Lutheran missiology that is relevant for our particular time.

<sup>3</sup> While the term *martyria* can be translated “witness,” its frequent if not primary application in the New Testament is to the testimony of the apostolic eyewitnesses of our Lord. This is true of the noun and its verbal cognates in the book of Acts, in the Gospel of John, and elsewhere in the New Testament. Here it is used in the more general sense of the church's proclamation.

<sup>4</sup> The *diakon-* word group is the subject of significant discussion in contemporary exegetical circles and is never translated as “mercy” (*eleos* is the Greek word for mercy). While the lexical understanding of the language of *diakonia* and related terms has undergone significant change, the idea that the word group may include such things as rendering specific aid, service, help, or other expressions of mercy cannot be doubted. The word *diakonia* is recognized by many English speaking people because the words “deacon” and “deaconess” are derived from it. Translations of the New Testament often render it as “ministry” or “service.” It is used here to denote “acts of mercy” or “mercy in action.” This fits with the use of the verbal cognate of *diakonia* to describe the work of Jesus and his merciful sacrifice in Matthew 20:28 (MARK 10:45). The noun is used to describe the charitable work of Christians in Romans 15:25 and 2 Corinthians 8:19–20. The noun *diakonia* is used in a similar way in Acts 11:29; 2 Corinthians 9:1, 12.

<sup>5</sup> “Life together” is not a translation for *koinonia*, which is normally rendered by terms such as “communion,” “fellowship,” “participation,” or “sharing.” Life together is a helpful expression, however, that captures an essential aspect of the church's fellowship/participation/sharing, since such *koinonia* is what the life of Christians together with one

three reflect God's very being as Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier,<sup>6</sup> and they encompass his holy and gracious will for all in Christ Jesus — namely that all come to believe in and bear witness to Christ, reflect divine compassion, and live together in forgiveness, love, and joy in the church (AC I [Kolb-Wengert, 37]).<sup>7</sup>

**2. Humanity.** It is the deepest offense to natural man that, apart from the life-giving witness of God in Christ, he is blind, dead and an enemy of God (EPH 2:8–9); incapable of “true fear of God and true faith in God” (AC II, 1 [Kolb-Wengert, 36–39]; 1 COR 1:22–25); and is, therefore, helpless under the damning and merciless hammer of divine law (JER 23:29). The condemnation of the law knows no respect for persons, much less class, ethnicity or sex. The witness of the gospel (word and sacrament) is the sole source of life for the dead, the only remedy for sin, death and the devil. Thus, the entire life of the Christian individual and the church is lived in and for the fact that “the Son of man came to seek and save the lost” (LUKE 19:10).

**3. Christ, the content of the Gospel.** Christ himself is the content of the gospel, and thus of the church's mission of *Witness (martyria)*, *Mercy (diakonia)*, *Life Together (koinonia)*. The gospel is defined by Christ's person, words and works, and it transcends time and space. Just as “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow,” so the gospel is the unique once-for-all offering of Christ, the God-man, for the sins of the world (HEB 10:10). “The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses us from all sin” (1 JOHN 1:7). “The work is finished and completed. Christ has acquired and won the treasure for us by His sufferings, death, and resurrection” (LC II, 38 [Kolb-Wengert, 436]). The communication of the gospel may vary culture

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another is all about.

<sup>6</sup> The use of these “economic” titles for the Triune God [Creator, Redeemer, Sanctifier] echoes Luther's *Small Catechism* and should not in any way be taken to imply avoidance of the biblical name of the Blessed Trinity — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

<sup>7</sup> Please note that this document wishes only to echo “the catholic faith” of one God in three Persons (Athanasian Creed 1–3, KW 24). Therefore, to “reflect God's very being” is not to define the blessed Trinity, nor is it to suggest that the triad of *Witness, Mercy, Life Together* fully encompasses the entirety of God's attributes. Rather, it simply expresses that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are perfectly united in the work of witness, mercy, and life together as they create, redeem, and sanctify. The work of witness reflects the Word who is God; the work of mercy reflects God who is love; and the work of life together reflects the Trinity in unity as well as the mystical union between Christ and his church. This also echoes the CTCR's *Theological Statement of Mission* which stated: “Mission begins in the heart of God and expresses his great love for the world. It is the Lord's gracious initiative and ongoing activity to save a world incapable of saving itself” (5).

to culture, but the fundamental definition of the gospel as justification is timeless because it is biblical (ROM 3:21–26; 4:5). “[W]e receive forgiveness of sin and become righteous before God out of grace, for Christ’s sake through faith when we believe that Christ has suffered for us and that for His sake our sin is forgiven” (AC IV, 1 [Kolb-Wengert, 38, 40]).

#### 4. Christ, the Source and Model for the life of faith.

Faith lays hold of Christ, and from him it is enlivened and given its impulse and model for *Witness* (*martyria*), *Mercy* (*diakonia*), *Life Together* (*koinonia*). Jesus spends himself completely (MARK 1:38) to bear witness as the Son of God sent for the salvation of the world (JOHN 3:16). Jesus has compassion on the needy within and outside the community of faith (MARK 7:28). Jesus establishes a community of believers who are “brothers and sisters” (ACTS 2; MARK 3:31 ff.), who are “not to lord it over each other” (MATT 20:25) but to live together in forgiveness (MATT 18), love (JOHN 15) and mutual service (JOHN 15:12; MARK 10:45; PHLM 2). “Oh, faith is a living, busy, active, mighty thing, so that it is impossible for it not to be constantly doing what is good” (FC SD IV, 10 [Tappert, 10–11]). While the church’s work of extending of Christ’s *Witness* (*martyria*), *Mercy* (*diakonia*), *Life Together* (*koinonia*) in community will always be but a weak reflection of his own, where there is no *Witness*, *Mercy*, *Life Together* in forgiveness and love, there is no church, no faith in Christ.<sup>8</sup> To paraphrase Luther, Christ is both *sacramentum* and *exemplum*, both sacrament (gift) and model for the Christian.

**5. The saving word of God.** God’s means of bringing salvation in Christ is the word of God proclaimed: “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” (ROM 10:8–9). “So that we may obtain this faith,” our confession says, “the ministry of teaching the gospel

<sup>8</sup> This is not to suggest that, in some wooden fashion, *Witness*, *Mercy*, *Life Together* are the “marks of the church” in the sense of AC VII. It seeks only to emphasize that where the gospel is rightly preached and sacramentally administered, there the Holy Spirit will be creating faith through the witness of Christ’s gospel. Such faith will result in active love of the neighbor (*mercy*) and will sustain the fellowship of believers (*life together*). See § 5 below.

and administering the sacraments was instituted” (AC V, 1 [Kolb-Wengert, 41]). Thus the church, the assembly of all believers in Christ, is found *where* the word of God is found, where “the gospel is purely preached and the holy sacraments are administered according to the gospel” (AC VII, 1 [Kolb-Wengert, 42]). The word of God — read, spoken, proclaimed — will not return to God empty but will accomplish his purpose (ISA 55:10–11) and will bring people to faith in Christ “where and when it pleases God in those who hear the gospel” (AC V, 2 [Kolb-Wengert, 41]). That is why the church is not recognized by individual faith or works, which may be invented or contrived, but by these external marks, “the pure teaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments in harmony with the gospel of Christ” (AP VII and VIII [Kolb-Wengert, 174]).<sup>9</sup> Therefore, where the word of

God is found; where Holy Absolution is proclaimed (the specific announcement of the forgiveness of sins for the sake of Christ); where Holy Baptism is done in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit; where Christ’s true body and blood are given by his word of promise, there you will find the church, the assembly of believers in Christ, and there you will find Christ himself. Moreover, where Christ’s church is located in the word and sacraments, there you will find

Bearing witness  
to the saving good  
news of God for  
us in Jesus is the  
fundamental task of  
the church  
(MATT 28:19).

*Witness* (*martyria*), *Mercy* (*diakonia*), *Life Together* (*koinonia*) (GAL 2:8–9).

**6. Witness is the sacred and fundamental task of the church.** Bearing witness to the saving good news of God for us in Jesus is the fundamental task of the church (MATT 28:19). This leads to the making of disciples. The apostolic witness is connected to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The preaching of the gospel consistently proclaimed Jesus as the Messiah promised by the Old Testament Scriptures, preached the damning law in full force (“You killed the author of life” [ACTS 3:15]) and preached forgiveness through repentance, faith and Holy Baptism. This apostolic message is to predominate proclamation by called preachers within the community of believers, the proclamation of evangelists to those outside the church, and the witness of every Christian in the context of his or her vocations in life. It is the sacred task

<sup>9</sup> Compare with Ignatius, “The Epistle of Ignatius to the Smyrnaeans”: “Where Christ Jesus is, there is the catholic church,” 8.



of preachers to know the Scriptures ever more profoundly and constantly to seek to improve the craft of preaching that the gospel may be preached in its biblical fullness and with clarity to its hearers. It is the sacred task of preachers to equip the saints to bear witness to Jesus to their friends, family, and others who are placed before them in their daily vocations. The word of God is equally effective for salvation, whether proclaimed by Christ, the angels, called preachers, or shared by common Christians among one another, or with those who do not yet know Christ's forgiveness (ISA 55:11).<sup>10</sup> In order to carry on Christ's witness into the world, the church is entrusted with training, teaching, and making pastors through theological education. This witness will accompany the church's corporate work of mercy (the mercy is Christ's) and will dominate the church's life together. "Where Christ is not preached, there is no Holy Spirit who creates, calls, and gathers the Christian Church, without which no one comes to Christ the Lord" (LC II, 45).

Dr. C. F. W. Walther asked to whom the responsibility to preach the gospel among all people of the earth has been committed. He answered:

The word of God is equally effective for salvation, whether proclaimed by Christ, the angels, called preachers, or shared by common Christians among one another, or with those who do not yet know Christ's forgiveness.

Here we see that it is the people of the New Testament, or the Holy Christian Church, that God has prepared or established, to show forth His praise in all the world. That means that the church is to make known the great works of God for the salvation of men, or that which is the same thing, to preach the Gospel to every creature. Even Isaiah gives this testimony, having been enlightened by the Holy Spirit: The true mission society that has been instituted by God is nothing else than *the Christian church itself*, that is the totality of all those who from the heart believe in Jesus Christ.<sup>11</sup>

**7. Witness and confession.** Witness and confession are two inseparable aspects of the church's life in this world. Witness to Christ is as simple as John 3:16 but as fulsome

as the gospel of the incarnation; humiliation and exaltation of Christ; his Baptism and ours; Absolution; the Holy Supper; the doctrines of grace, conversion, election, bound will and more. The gospel is, in fact, replete throughout the Scriptures and to be applied pervasively and winsomely in manifold ways according to the need of the hearers. As confession, the witness of the gospel rejoices in standing for the creedal truth as it is in Jesus. It is as simple as the earliest confessions of the faith ("Jesus Christ is Lord," PHIL 2:11; LC II, 27) or the Small Catechism or as replete as the Nicene Creed or the Formula of Concord. The church's goal is always witness unto sal-

vation in the simple message of salvation by the blood of Jesus and growth into the full confession of the orthodox Lutheran faith. The Lutheran church rejoices that salvation is found wherever simple faith in Jesus and his merits is found, but it always seeks a witness and confession consisting of the "whole council of God" (ACTS 20:27). Lutheran mission is creedal and catholic.

**8. Mercy as sacred vocation.** The church is Christ's body, and as such, she continues his life of mercy as a

witness to the love of God for body and soul. The church has a corporate life of mercy toward those within the orthodox fellowship of believers, toward the broader community of Christians and to those outside the church (GAL 6:10). The church can no more ignore the physical needs of people than Christ could have refused to perform healings or persons can be separated into body and soul in this life. Thus, the early church heartily and vigorously continued Jesus' ministry of healing and care for the needy (ACTS 6; 2 COR 8-9). This witness, through mercy accompanying the gospel, has been a missiological force of the church in its great periods of advancement, especially in times of desperate need and persecution. The care for the widows (ACTS 6) and Paul's collection for Jerusalem (2 COR 8-9) are the great prototypical models for mercy for the church for all time. We care for people in need, not with any ulterior motive, nor even in order to proclaim the gospel. We proclaim the gospel and care for the needy because that's who Christ is, and that is who we are as the church in this world (JOHN 14; ACTS 4:12).

<sup>10</sup> See also § 16 below.

<sup>11</sup> C. F. W. Walther, "The Mission Society Established By God," in *The Word of His Grace* (Lake Mills: Graphic Publishing Co., 1978), 20.

**9. Life Together as bestowed and lived.** Our Life Together in Christ's church is not acquired by human decision or merit; it is a gift. Just as one does not elect one's own family, so we are brought into Christ's holy people by the action of the Triune God. "God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 COR 1:9). The Lord has called, gathered, enlightened and sanctified us through the gospel to live together as his church. Life in this community is a gift that entails responsibility. We see this in Paul's exhortation to Ephesians to bear with one another in love, "eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (EPH 4:3), even as he is quick to add that we were called into the one body of Christ and faith in a singular Lord. We cannot create the unity of the body of Christ; that is given. But we are to be on guard against teachings and practices that would tempt us away from the one Lord, the one faith and the one Baptism that keep us in union with the one God and Father of us all.

**10. Witness, Mercy, Life Together in the apostolic church.** The apostles testified to *Witness* (*martyria*), *Mercy* (*diakonia*), *Life Together* (*koinonia*) in the apostolic church. An example of this can be found in Galatians 2:7, 9–10. The apostles divided up the task of proclamation (witness) to the circumcised and the uncircumcised. The apostles remembered the poor (mercy). The apostles extended the right hand of fellowship (life together).

"Bearing witness," says Luther, "is nothing but God's Word spoken by angels or men, and it calls for faith."<sup>12</sup> In Acts 1:8, the risen Lord says of his apostles that they will be his witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and beyond those borders to the end of the earth. It is the apostles who with their own eyes have seen the Lord, touched him with their own hands and heard his voice with their ears (see 1 JOHN 1:1–4), who are designated witnesses. We are witnesses only in the derived sense that our words echo the reliable testimony of the apostles. To

<sup>12</sup> Martin Luther, "Lectures on Zechariah" (1527) in *Luther's Works*, vol. 20, ed., Walther Miller, trans. Hilton Oswald (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1973), 213.

bear witness is to speak not of ourselves but of another — Christ Jesus. The apostolic church is sent to repeat the witness of the apostles that Jesus Christ, true God and true man, is the only Lord who saves.

"You notice," said Luther, "that concern for the poor is the other work of the apostles."<sup>13</sup> Saint Paul exhorts the church to care for the poor. In the third century, Tertullian wrote how the pagans would say of the Christians, "See how they love one another."<sup>14</sup> The way that the church cares for the needs of those within the church is a witness to the world. Yet the mercy of God does not stay within the church but goes out from the household of faith into the entire world.

"[W]e preach the Gospel," said Luther while commenting on Galatians 2:9,

in unanimous consensus with you. There we are companions in doctrine and have fellowship in it; that is, we have the same doctrine. For we preach one Gospel, one Baptism, one Christ, and one faith. Therefore we cannot teach or command anything so far as you are concerned, for we are completely agreed in everything. For we do not teach anything different from what you teach; nor is it better or sublimer.<sup>15</sup>

Going about our daily vocation as baptized members of Christ's royal priesthood, we testify to Christ, speaking his saving word, the same word we regularly hear in preaching and the same word we read for ourselves in Holy Scripture (e.g., through personal and family devotions).

The life together of the apostles was based upon having the same foundation in Jesus Christ, that is, holding to the same doctrine. This life together is not created by us but by the Lord. When the same doctrine is recognized in another Christian or in a church body, we have a life together.

**11. On being Lutheran today for the sake of Witness, Mercy, Life Together.** "The Gospel and Baptism must

<sup>13</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, Volume 27: *Lectures on Galatians*, 1535, Chapters 5–6; *Lectures on Galatians*, 1519, Chapters 1–6, eds. Jaroslav Pelikan, Walter A. Hansen (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964), 210.

<sup>14</sup> Tertullian, *Volume 3: Apology* 39.6 Ante-Nicene Fathers, eds. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishing, 1996), 46.

<sup>15</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, Vol. 26: *Lectures on Galatians*, 1535, Chapters 1–4, eds. Jaroslav Pelikan, Walter A. Hansen (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1963), 104.

traverse the world,”<sup>16</sup> said Luther. This is what Lutheran missions care about — faithfully preaching repentance and faith in Jesus’ name, baptizing and teaching so that those who belong to Christ in every nation are built up in his word and fed with his body and blood. Mission is, to use the words of Wilhelm Löhe, “the one church of God in motion,” calling, gathering and enlightening unbelievers through the pure teaching of the gospel. This definition lies at the heart of what it means to be Lutheran in mission. Lutheran mission is defined by an unqualified (*quia*) subscription to *The Book of Concord* as the correct exposition of the Holy Scriptures. We are in harmony in the one biblical gospel and the Sacraments instituted by Christ. Rejecting theological pluralism and its offspring universalism, Lutheran mission is grounded in the exclusive claims of Jesus Christ, knowing outside of his word, which is spirit and life, there is only darkness and death.

**12. The church today as a community of Witness, Mercy, Life Together.** When the German mission leader and theologian of the last generation, Friedrich Wilhelm Hopf (1910–1982), asserted, “The Lutheran Church can only do Lutheran missions,” he was observing that the Lutheran confession is inseparable from mission.<sup>17</sup> There is no church without mission, and no mission without the church. Evangelism becomes the church’s mission when its goal is gaining souls for the local community of believers and planting the church as a witnessing, merciful community of believers. When confession and mission are pulled apart, both suffer. Mission without confession is reduced to zealous fanaticism. There can be no confession without mission for confession takes place before God and in the presence of a listening world. The mouth of confession is the voice of mission always proclaiming that Jesus Christ is the God who justifies the ungodly, giving life to the dead in the forgiveness of sins. And this forgiveness of sins is found only in the Christian church where the Holy Spirit “daily and richly forgives all my sins and the sins of all believers,” to use the words of the Small Catechism. That is why, in the Book of Acts, those who received the preaching of the apostles were baptized, being added to the church, says Luke (Acts 2:41). In the church created by mission, which has at its heart the

preaching of the gospel, those brought to faith “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, the breaking of bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:42). Church and mission go together; you do not have the one without the other.

The claim, no doubt disputed in our day, that Lutheran missions lead to Lutheran churches is far from a parochial appeal to brand-name loyalty or mere denomination-alism.<sup>18</sup> Instead, it is the recognition that the Holy Spirit calls, gathers, enlightens and sanctifies a holy Christian people through the pure preaching of the gospel and sacraments administered according to the divine word. Lutherans are glued to the scriptural truth that the Spirit works faith in the hearts of those who hear the good news of Jesus crucified and risen when and where it pleases him. Faith is not created by human enthusiasm, crusades for social justice or strategic planning. Faith comes through the word of the cross. That’s what Lutheran mission is given to proclaim. It is precisely in this Lutheran understanding of mission that mercy and life together converge.

Lutheran mission celebrates First Article gifts of language and culture. Lutheran mission has no interest in changing the culture of a people as long as those conventions and culture are not sinful. In fact, Lutheran mission, as found in the Reformation, seeks to bring the gospel to people in their native language. Lutheran mission teaches that Christian churches are to be subject to the governing authorities and do not engage in revolution. Lutheran mission seeks to build capacity in the newly planted churches so that, in the unity of faith and confession, these younger churches may mature and live as true partners together with us in *Witness, Mercy, Life Together*.

**13. Word of God.** The Triune God is a speaking God. By his spoken word, the Father brought creation into existence (GEN 1:1–2; PS 33:6; JOHN 1:1–3). Christ, who is the eternal Logos, speaks his words, which are “spirit and life” (JOHN 6:63). The word of Christ’s death and resurrection — the message of God’s reconciliation of sinners to himself — is preached. It is this preaching that creates faith since

<sup>16</sup> Werner Elert, *Structure of Lutheranism* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1962), 386.

<sup>17</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm Hopf, “The Lutheran Church Plants Lutheran Missions,” trans. Matthew C. Harrison and Rachel Mumme, *Journal of Lutheran Mission* (April 2015).

<sup>18</sup> Neither is this claim intended to be sectarian in nature. The Holy Spirit is at work wherever the gospel is preached and the sacraments are administered and, therefore, there exists throughout the world under various names the *catholic church* (that assembly which holds the *catholic faith*; see Athanasian Creed). Lutherans thank God for that reality, but it is not a reason to minimize the importance of Lutheran churches exercising their missionary responsibilities in a way that is fully faithful to their Confessions, thus producing new *Lutheran churches*.

“faith comes from hearing and hearing through the word of Christ” (ROM 10:17). The Holy Spirit was breathed out by Jesus to his apostles on Easter evening (see JOHN 20:22) and inspired them to put his word into writing “so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name” (JOHN 20:31). It is through the prophetic and apostolic witness to Christ delivered to us in the Holy Scriptures — the Spirit-inspired and inerrant word of God — that we have access to Jesus and life with him (see 2 TIM 3:15 and 2 PET 1:16–21). The Holy Scriptures are to be interpreted in light of their being given by the Triune God. “The exegesis of the Holy Scriptures cannot contradict their inspiration.”<sup>19</sup> Both interpreter and context stand under the Holy Scriptures and are, in fact, interpreted by the divine word. The internal clarity of Scripture is mediated through the external clarity of its own words. Far from being an imposition on the Bible, the right distinction of the law from the gospel is nothing other than the distinction between “letter” and “Spirit” (see 2 COR 3:1–18). Without this distinction, the Holy Scriptures remain a dark book (see AP IV, 5–6 [Kolb-Wengert, 121]; FC SD V, 1–27 [Kolb-Wengert, 581–586]).

The Scriptures stand in the service of preaching. Preaching that conforms to the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures is the oral word of God and, therefore, a means of grace. Preaching is never merely descriptive but always a kerygmatic, efficacious proclamation that delivers condemnation to secure sinners and consolation to those broken by their sin. Preaching is always a speaking of either the law or the gospel in the present tense, creating repentance and faith in those who hear, where and when it pleases God (see ISA 55:10–11; AC V, 2–3 [Kolb-Wengert, 40–41]).

Preaching is not limited to the sermon but is also individualized in the absolution where God’s servant is entrusted to speak words that forgive sins now (see JOHN 20: 21–23; SC V, 15–29 [Tappert, 349–351]).<sup>20</sup> The absolution is eschatological, that is, it brings the verdict of the last day into time as Christ says, “I forgive you your sins.” The absolution leaves no room for doubt for it is God’s own word of promise to be trusted in life and death.

#### **14. Baptism.** Baptism is far more than a rite of initiation.

<sup>19</sup> Oswald Bayer, “Theology as Askesis,” in *Gudstankens aktualitet*, trans. E. M. Wiberg Pedersen, et. al. (Copenhagen: Forlaget ANIS, 2010), 49.

<sup>20</sup> This is included under Baptism originally; see Kolb-Wengert, 360–362.

While it is a line of demarcation between unbelief and faith and hence not optional for mission, it is more than an entry point into the Christian life. Dr. C. F. W. Walther wrote, “Let us never forget that through Holy Baptism we have all joined the mission society which God Himself has established.”<sup>21</sup> Baptism is best thought of as present tense, hence, “I am baptized” and not “I was baptized.”<sup>22</sup> Luther notes, “I am baptized, and through my baptism God, who cannot lie, has bound himself in a covenant with me.”<sup>23</sup> Baptism is the Triune God’s gift whereby he demonstrates his mercy by bestowing on us a new birth (see JOHN 3: 3–6; 1 PET 1:3–5; TITUS 3:4–7). Baptized into his own name (MATT 28:18–20), we have God’s own pledge and witness that we belong to him through the forgiveness of sins (see ACTS 2:38–39) and are heirs according to the promise (ROM 6:1–11; GAL 3:26–29; COL 2:12–14). Therefore, Baptism will not be withheld from infants or from new converts to the faith. Since it is by Baptism that we are joined to the body of Christ (see 1 COR 12:12–13), this sacrament is foundational for our life together.

**15. Lord’s Supper.** Hermann Sasse described the sacrament of the altar as “the church’s heartbeat.”<sup>24</sup> In this sacrament, Christ gives his body and blood under bread and wine for us Christians to eat and to drink. It is his testament in which he bestows the fruits of his saving sacrifice on the cross: His body given into death and his blood shed for the forgiveness of our sins. Luther underscores the forgiveness of sins in the Small Catechism as he engages in a threefold repetition of the words “given for you” and “shed for the forgiveness of sins.” These words show us that the sacrament of the altar is the testament of God’s sure mercy for sinners. When we come to eat and drink Christ’s body and blood, we come as beggars to the feast of heaven. In this sacrament, we are not accessing Christ by liturgical mimesis;<sup>25</sup> rather we are proclaiming

<sup>21</sup> Walther, “The Mission Society,” 24.

<sup>22</sup> Thus Christians live in our baptism through confession and absolution. By God’s grace we daily return to our baptism as we crucify the old man in confession of sin and rise in accord with the new man in holy absolution (the forgiveness of sins). This gift therefore keeps the objective nature of God’s grace ever before us so that we do not fall into relying on our experience or emotion. For these reasons we also strive to retain individual confession and absolution in the church.

<sup>23</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 35: *Word and Sacrament I*, eds. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton Oswald, Helmut Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999), 36.

<sup>24</sup> Hermann Sasse, *We Confess the Sacraments*, trans. Norman Nagel (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1985), 151.

<sup>25</sup> Mimesis means “imitation, mimicry.”



the Lord's death until he comes (see 1 COR 11:26). Eating and drinking in the Lord's Supper do not create life together (*koinonia*) but confess and express this unity we have in the proclamation of Christ's death. Life together (*koinonia*) in confessing him is always Christ's work and Christ's gift by his word. Hence the practice of closed Communion is a necessary corollary of the doctrine of the Lord's Supper.<sup>26</sup> Bringing contradiction in teaching or life in the Holy Communion fails to give witness to Christ and what he gives us in and with his body and blood.

**16. Priesthood of the baptized.** The apostle Peter writes to those who have been “born again to a living hope” (1 PET 1:3), that is, to those who are baptized into Jesus' death. He describes us as “living stones” that are built up as a “spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 PET 2:5). This priesthood is holy, that is, it is cut off from the uncleanness of sin and set apart to live by faith in Jesus Christ. Notice that the New Testament does not speak of us as individual priests, each going his or her own way and doing the work of a priest for ourselves. Rather the New Testament speaks of our lives lived within a company of priests, a priesthood.

The priesthood offers spiritual sacrifices. These are not sacrifices that atone for sin.<sup>27</sup> Jesus did that once and for

all on the cross (see HEB 7:27). The sacrifices that we offer are spiritual sacrifices, the sacrifice of a broken heart and contrite spirit (see PS 51:17). This is the life of repentance: Daily dying to sin and living in the newness of Christ's forgiveness. In other words, the whole life of the believer is one of sacrifice. This is the point that Paul makes in Romans 12:1 where he 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 this 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.

Everybody in the ancient world knew that sacrifices were dead, not living. Jerusalem's temple resembled a slaughterhouse more than a church. The priest, smattered with blood, looked more like a butcher than a clergyman. Paul's words must have jarred his original readers for he writes of a living sacrifice. We present our bodies as living sacrifices for we have died to sin in Baptism and now live in Christ's resurrection (see ROM 6:1–11).

This priestly life is our vocation, our calling. We live it out in our daily callings in the congregation, in civic community (citizenship), the family and the place of work. Here we who have received mercy from the Father show forth that mercy in our dealings with others, and it is here that we bear witness to Christ by “proclaiming the excellencies of him who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 PET 2:9).

Going about our daily vocation as baptized members of Christ's royal priesthood, we testify to Christ, speaking his saving word, the same word we regularly hear in preaching and the same word we read for ourselves in Holy Scripture (e.g., through personal and family devotions).<sup>28</sup> The content of our witness is always Christ,

<sup>26</sup> The Missouri Synod has used different nomenclature to express the idea of closed Communion at various times in her history. Different terms have been used to describe the same doctrine and practice. The terms “closed Communion,” “close Communion” and “close(d) Communion” are equivalent terms. Article VI of the Missouri Synod's Constitution states as a condition of membership in the Synod, “Renunciation of unionism and syncretism of every description.” Article VI:b provides additional clarification by defining unionism and syncretism as “Taking part in the services and sacramental rites of heterodox congregations or of congregations of mixed confession.” The practice of closed Communion then precludes receiving Communion at churches that hold heterodox positions. The Missouri Synod has adopted Dr. C. F. W. Walther's *Church and the Office of the Ministry* as its official position in 2001 (Res. 7-17A). In Thesis VIII of Walther's *Church and the Office of the Ministry*, Walther writes, “Here the saying of Augustine holds: ‘Believe and you have eaten.’ As I said before: To receive the Sacrament is a mark of confession and doctrine. Therefore, whoever does not regard as true the doctrine of the church in which he intends to attend the Sacrament cannot partake of the Sacrament in that church with a clear conscience.” (Download Walther's Thesis VIII at <http://goo.gl/gKqIOq>.) Werner Elert, *Eucharist and Church Fellowship in the First Four Centuries*, trans. Norman Nagel (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1966), 76. “By ‘closed Communion’ reference is to the restricting of participation to full members of the congregation.” Participation in Holy Communion is directly connected to church fellowship. See also CTCR, Admission to the Lord's Supper (1999), <http://www.lcms.org/Document.fdoc?src=lcme&id=411>.

<sup>27</sup> Prayer is an important sacrifice and must not be confused with the means of grace. Prayer is a confession of faith which recognizes that God's “good and gracious will is done even without our prayer,” as

Luther makes clear in the Small Catechism. Prayer does not seek to control or manipulate God. Prayer does not engage in superstition that goes beyond what the Lord has promised in his word. Prayer is the expression of the justified sinner who humbles himself before God's almighty hand — and by the Spirit's work through word and sacrament — is led to rely upon Christ alone while praying as the Lord prayed in Gethsemane, “Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.” See CTCR, *Theology and Practice of Prayer* (2011), 18–20.

<sup>28</sup> Schulz, *Mission from the Cross*, 242–243, reminds us that “Luther emphasizes that every Christian has the right and obligation to pass on and witness God's Word in his personal sphere of life. In fact, Luther may at times even use the term ‘preach’ (*predigen*) for this act, implying that the incumbents of the priesthood of all believers are actually given a certain task to proclaim the Gospel wherever they may be. The

crucified and raised from the dead for all. In so doing, we are inviting others into the same life we have received from Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the only real life there is: that given in word and sacrament. Baptized believers will often be found urging others, believers and unbelievers alike, to “come and see” (JOHN 1:39) what Christ has done for them and for all.<sup>29</sup>

**17. Office and offices.** There is one office that Christ has instituted for the proclamation of his word and the giving out of his sacraments. This is the Office of the Holy Ministry (see JOHN 20:21–23; AC V, XIV, XXVII). Through the call of the church, the Lord places qualified men into this office (see 1 COR 14:33–38; 1 TIM 2:8–14). The men who serve in this office are to be properly trained and capable (see 1 TIM 3:1–7; 2 TIM 2:1–7; 4:1–5; TITUS 1:5–9) of the task of being stewards of the mysteries of God (see 1 COR 4:1–2). The church may not be without this office for it is to this office that Christ has entrusted the preaching of his word and the administration of his sacraments.<sup>30</sup> No one puts himself into this office, nor does the church have the right to refashion the office into something other than what the Lord has instituted, or to put men into the office without being called and ordained (see AC XIV). The church does live in freedom to create offices that assist those who are placed in the one divinely-mandated office of the ministry of word and sacrament. These helping offices (auxiliary offices) would include deacons, deaconesses, evangelists, schoolteachers, catechists, cantors, parish nurses, workers of mercy, and the like.<sup>31</sup> These are valuable offices of

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context of this private preaching does not stand in conflict with the pastoral ministry of preaching and administration of the Sacraments publicly affirmed through the proper rite of vocation (*rite vocatus*)."

<sup>29</sup> Oftentimes, it is precisely this testimony from the priesthood of the baptized that plants the seeds for the church in contexts where the church has not yet been established, where ordained pastors or missionaries are not present, or where the church is persecuted. The word does not return empty (ISA 55:11) and faith can and does take root and grow through the word when and where it pleases the Holy Spirit, whether the gospel is spoken by laity or clergy. Thus the faith did not disappear when missionaries were forced from China and pastors were jailed. Even as Lutherans rejoice in that truth, we also recognize that the witness of the laity does not mean the office of the pastor (or ordained missionary) is thereby rendered unnecessary or expendable. See Schulz, *Mission from the Cross*, 239–247, and § 17 herein.

<sup>30</sup> Thus the AC calls this “the office of preaching” (*das Predigamt* AC V 1).

<sup>31</sup> The Office of the Holy Ministry, or the office of preaching and teaching, is founded on the apostles and prophets of Scripture and is seen within such scriptural offices identified by the names bishop/overseer (*episkopos*), elder (*presbyteros*), and shepherd (*poimenos*). This preaching office includes within it not only the work of “pastor” as Lutherans now identify it most commonly, but also evangelist and teacher (EPH 4:11). In LCMS tradition an office of teacher, in distinction

service to the body of Christ and the world, but they are not to be confused with the Office of the Holy Ministry itself. The Office of the Holy Ministry might be said to be the office of faith as Christ instituted it so that faith might be created in the hearts of those who hear the preaching of Christ crucified. Helping or auxiliary offices are the offices of love for through these callings the love of Christ is extolled in word and deed as his mercy is extended to those in need.

Those whom Christ through his church has placed in the Office of the Holy Ministry do not lord it over the priesthood of the baptized, but they stand among the baptized, as one of them, holding an office of service, seeking only to give out the Lord’s gifts as he intended (1 COR 4:1–2).

**18. Worship: *koinonia*, freedom, catholicity and the limits of love.** Questions of liturgical diversity and uniformity need to be set within the context of the distinction between faith and love. Faith is freed by the gospel from all works of self-justification, but faith is not freed from the gospel or the means that Christ has instituted to bestow the gospel (the pure preaching of this good news and the right administration of the sacraments according to the divine word; see AC VII). Preaching and sacraments require form, and this form is catholic rather than sectarian or self-invented. Lutherans gratefully inherited the Western liturgical tradition filtered through the sieve of justification by faith alone and honor it as our heritage (AC XXIV [Kolb–Wengert, 68–72]). Lutherans make a distinction between what Christ has mandated and what his word prohibits. In between the two are “adiaphora,” or “middle things,” which are neither commanded nor forbidden by God. The middle category of adiaphora does not mean that these matters are unimportant or indifferent; they are to be evaluated by how they confess the truth of the gospel and sacraments. In

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from the pastoral office, has been auxiliary in nature, working under and assisting the one who has overall responsibility for preaching and teaching. In other parts of the world, a particular office of evangelist aids the church’s ministry in a similar fashion in the particular work of outreach, church planting, and mission development, especially where few ordained pastors are available. So also, the office of catechist has developed in churches for the particular work of instructing new believers. Thus, there is one overarching preaching office (see AC V), but it is inclusive of certain responsibilities that may be shared with others in offices that appear in various times and places in the church. And, in addition, there may be other helping offices established which fall only marginally within the scope of the work of the preaching office or are even completely distinct from it (e.g., a church musician or a parish nurse or an administrator of a food program). See also CTCR, *The Ministry: Offices, Procedures, Nomenclature* (1981).

times when a clear confession is called for, the Formula of Concord reminds us, matters of adiaphora may cease to be adiaphora (see FC SD X, 10 [Kolb-Wengert, 637]). Ludwig Adolph Petri notes that mission “must abstain from establishing confessions, accepting new customs in the divine service, uniting separated confessions and the like. As soon as mission begins to do something like that, it is manifestly in the wrong, for none of those tasks is charged or relegated to mission.”<sup>32</sup> This is to say that matters of liturgical practice are not best left to the individual but should reflect our confessional consensus so that both the freedom of faith and the love for brothers and sisters is maintained.<sup>33</sup> Love is always given to patience and deference to the weakness of the fellow believer (see ROM 14), but it may never be used as an excuse to compromise the truth of our confession. Liturgical diversity within the larger catholic context will be guided by the need to maintain unity in both faith and love (see FC SD X, 9 [Kolb-Wengert, 637]).

**19. Visitation.** Sometime after his first missionary journey, “Paul said to Barnabas, ‘Let us return and visit the brothers in every city where we proclaimed the word of the Lord and see how they are’” (ACTS 15:36). So the church today — following also the example of the apostles, Luther, Melancthon and others — engages in evangelical visitation, appointing people to the task so that we encourage and assist one another in the confession of Christ before the world. In our Synod, we come alongside one another to advise one another from the word of God. The focus of our visitation of one another is faithfulness both to the mission of Christ through the church to the world and to our clear confession of Christ’s saving work. Visitors are enjoined to come to the pastors and congregations and mission stations as a brotherly advisor, reminding them of the joy of serving in the mission and ministry of the

church. Visitation is a continuing task in the church, carried out through all segments of the church’s life together. When we visit our partners around the world, it must also be in the same Christ-centered spirit as the Lord’s apostle who, before his visitation with them, writes to the Romans, “I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you — that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith, both yours and mine” (ROM 1:11–12).

**20. Two kingdoms/discipleship.** Luther observed that the kingdom of Christ is one of hearing while the kingdom of the world is one of seeing. Discussions of the place of the church in the public square inevitably lead us to reflect on how the Triune God is active in his creation. Luther’s teaching on the two kingdoms does not segregate God’s activity into the holy sphere of church leaving the world to its autonomous devices. God is at work in the world in two different ways, with different means and with different ends. Hence Luther can use the imagery of the ear to indicate God’s right hand governance whereby he causes his gospel to be preached to bring sinners to faith in Christ and through faith inherit eternal life. On the other hand, the left-handed work of God is identified with the eye, with seeing. In this kingdom, God uses law to measure and curb human behavior so that his creation is not plunged into total chaos and so that this world, subjected to futility (ROM 8:20), is preserved until the last day. Authorities in the kingdom of God’s left hand evaluate on the basis of evidence that is observable. Here distributive justice is the order of the day. But in the kingdom of his right hand, God’s verdict is the absolution, the proclamation of a forgiveness of sins not achieved by merit or worth. When the two kingdoms are mixed or muddled, law and gospel are confused.

Lutherans are concerned to keep the teaching of the two kingdoms straight and clear for the sake of the gospel, which alone gives forgiveness of sins and eternal salvation. Luther fumed that the devil is incessantly seeking to “brew and cook” the two kingdoms together.<sup>34</sup> Satan would like nothing better than to dupe folks into believing

<sup>32</sup> Ludwig Adolph Petri, *Mission and the Church: A letter to a friend (Die Mission und die Kirche: Schreiben an einen Freund)*, trans. David Buchs (Fort Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 2012).

<sup>33</sup> This is not to deny the necessity of liturgical change as the church enters new settings. An obvious example of necessary change is the use of vernacular language for worship. That may also entail some change of terminology itself where words or concepts are completely alien. However, the concern of this section is that liturgical change not take place in a way that is contrary to the Lutheran confession of faith — a confession that rightly stands in the western creedal tradition. Thus, liturgical change, where it occurs, is always to take place in a collaborative manner or a way that is *catholic* in nature. In such a way not only are the concerns and needs of a local church considered, but so also the needs of the wider contemporary church, and, even the church of the past has a hearing.

<sup>34</sup> “The devil never stops cooking and brewing these two kingdoms into each other. In the devil’s name the secular leaders always want to be Christ’s masters and teach Him how He should run His church and spiritual government. Similarly, the false clerics and schismatic spirits always want to be the masters, though not in God’s name, and to teach people how to organize the secular government. Thus the devil is indeed very busy on both sides, and he has much to do. May God hinder him, amen, if we deserve it!” (Martin Luther, “Psalm 101,” 1534, *American Edition*, Vol. 13, 194–195.)

that salvation comes through secular government or conversely that the church is the institution to establish civil righteousness in the world. Either confusion displaces Christ and leaves sinners in despair.

The teaching of the two kingdoms is necessary for the sake of the gospel. This teaching guards us from turning the gospel into a political ideology. The gospel works eschatologically, not politically, as it bestows pardon to sinners and establishes peace with God. It is a faith-creating word of promise heard with the ear, trusted in the heart, and confessed with the tongue. Christians, who live by faith in this promise, also live in this world where we use our eyes to see, to discern, to evaluate. The realm of the political is not to be dismissed as ungodly or unworthy of the Christian's involvement. God is at work here too. But he is at work here to protect and preserve his creation, making it a dominion where life can flourish. God's left-handed work is not to be confused with salvation, but it is a good gift of daily bread to be received with thanksgiving by those who know the truth.

So Lutherans neither put their trust in political processes nor do they eschew political involvement. The teaching of the two kingdoms is an indispensable gift in an age beset by temptations both to secularism and sectarianism.

**21. Stewardship.** The question of stewardship begins not with what I have but with what the Lord has given me. Therefore, stewardship begins with the gifts of the Triune God. This is reflective of the way that the apostle Paul deals with stewardship in 2 Corinthians 8. Paul does not start with an assessment of the resources of the congregation or with legalistic instructions about how much they should be doing to meet their quota. Rather, he begins with God's grace, with God's undeserved gift in Christ. Christians give not to win God's favor but on account of his prior gift, salvation in Christ Jesus. In 2 Corinthians, stewardship is connected with assisting those in need, in showing mercy.

This is the pattern of Christian stewardship. Just as in Romans 12, where Paul makes his appeal to Christians that they present their bodies as living sacrifices by the mercies of God, so here Paul wants his hearers to know first of all about God's grace. Anchored in the unmerited riches of God's mercy for sinners in Christ, the Macedonians are eager — yes, begging — for the opportunity to take part in the offering. They exceed the apostle's imagination or expectation. What do they do? They give

themselves first to the Lord and then, Paul says by the will of God, they give themselves to us.

Lutheran missions seek to be good and faithful stewards of the resources the Lord has given to his church. Faithful stewardship seeks to build capacity in partners while not creating harmful dependencies. In this way, the entire body of Christ may be strengthened in its stewardship. We recognize that we are accountable to each other in our mutual confession of the faith and in our handling of valuable resources — human, financial, and property. The financing of missions and use of funding requires transparency at every level lest the witness of Christ be diminished, mercy be overshadowed by greedy self-interest, and our life together fractured.

**22. Lutheran identity.** Mission, as with the entire life of the Synod, will be guided by confessional identity and integrity. Bound to the Holy Scriptures as the infallible word of the Triune God and convinced that the Book of Concord confesses what the Bible teaches, we will joyfully and without reservation make this good confession before God and the world in light of the last day (see **MATT 10:32**; **2 TIM 4:1–8**). We will not be ashamed to be Lutheran in all that we do. Like our forefathers at Augsburg, we will speak God's testimonies before kings and not be put to shame (**Ps 119:46**). We will teach this theology without duplicity at home and globally to any and all who are open to hear our confession. Given the seismic shifts in world Lutheranism away from the historical confession of the Lutheran church, we will seek to strengthen lonely and disenfranchised Lutherans who seek to be faithful in doctrine and practice.

**23. Theology of the cross.** The “theology of the cross” (see **1 COR 1:18–2:5**) stands in sharp contrast to the prevailing theology — the “theology of glory.” The theology of the cross shows God at work under opposites, giving life through death, showing mercy in wrath, making himself known in his hiddenness, and manifesting strength in weakness. The theologian of glory attempts to access God by way of various ladders: moralism, rationalism or mysticism. The theologian of the cross confesses God condescending to humanity in the weakness of the baby of Bethlehem and the man of Calvary. The theologian of glory would judge a church successful on the basis of how well it accomplishes certain goals defined by the tenants of this world. The theologian of the cross recognizes that the church is hidden under suffering and defeat.



Christ's church faces many enemies from within and without. She bears the mark of the holy cross, not as an identifier for its own sake, but as a consequence of bearing witness to and proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ. The church in every place bears the Holy Cross to some degree. The church in some places bears what appears to be a smaller cross than the church in other places, yet no matter how small or big the cross, it serves the same purpose: A witness (*martyria*) to the world and, as Formula of Concordia XI confesses, "to conform us into the image of the image of the crucified Son of God." It should not surprise us, the Lord's people, that his holy church takes on the appearance of the crucified Son of God. In fact, it is a great honor and joy that the Lord conforms us into his image. This is why St. Paul says in Romans 8, "I know all things work for good." The life of the church is cruciform in shape. The apt words of Hermann Sasse ring true: "All that we think and do in the church has to be cleansed by the theology of the cross if we are to escape the perils of a theology of glory."<sup>35</sup> The theology of the cross will forever be a litmus test of the genuineness of *Witness, Mercy, Life Together* in our midst.

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<sup>35</sup> Hermann Sasse, *We Confess Jesus Christ*, trans. Norman Nagel (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1984), 52.

# BOOK REVIEW AND COMMENTARY

## ***Afraid: Demon Possession and Spiritual Warfare in America***

by Robert H. Bennett (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2016)

by Leonard Astrowski

**D**R. ROBERT H. BENNETT'S SECOND BOOK, *Afraid: Demon Possession and Spiritual Warfare in America*, is his latest installment in a series focusing on phenomenology. In these works, Bennett focuses on demonic oppression, possession, and the manifestation of evil forces.

While Dr. Bennett's first book — *I Am Not Afraid: Demon Possession and Spiritual Warfare: True Accounts from The Lutheran Church of Madagascar* (Concordia Publishing House, 2013) — deals primarily with accounts from places removed from the contemporary American church by both distance and time, his second work sets its gaze on domestic soil. It, perhaps, is easier to dismiss Bennett's first work, rationalizing his arguments away as things that happen over there, or as things that happened then. Regardless of the primary source evidence recorded and analyzed by Bennett, alongside the record of Scripture and esteemed Lutheran sources such as Martin Luther and C.F.W. Walther, the reader may still remain the sceptic.

Turning his analysis to contemporary America in this second installment, *Afraid*, Bennett again produces primary source evidence — often the experiences of the author himself — collected from around the nation. Dr. Bennett takes the reader from the Midwest, through New Orleans, and to the American Southwest. He sets before the reader evidence found in mundane American life. The reader is asked to consider the testimony of witnesses found in otherwise unremarkable everyday life — suburban homes, a rural parsonage, hotels, tourist traps, and television. The desire is to confront the skeptic, especially the Christian student of contemporary Western thought, with the spiritual reality around him. Bennett confronts

the reader with this reality, which is often routinely confessed, but is more routinely ignored, by an individual believer. Bennett brings to center stage the truth that is always present but often dismissed although it exists right next door, if not in the reader's own life experience.

The title of Dr. Bennett's work might lead the bookstore browser to think of this as a sensational piece. After all, who doesn't like a good ghost story? Indeed, Rev. Dr. Bennett is an ordained minister in a confession that prides itself on the scholarship and the ability of her ministers to analyze and communicate deep theological concepts. Dr. Bennett is a member of a church body that takes great pains to rightly point out the fraudulent claims of those

that allege ecstatic experience. It is a church body that crinkles its nose at the slightest whiff of sensationalism. This makes it all the more remarkable that this work is destined to be found on the shelves of Lutheran clergy and laity, as well as the clergy and members of other confessions.

The reason for this leap from bookstore shelf to trained pastor's study is simple. Dr. Bennett presents his work as one of scholarship. Indeed it is. Bennett's research allows the evidence to speak for itself. The reader might be disappointed to discover that absent from this work are accounts of rotating heads and levitating bodies. Bennett simply presents everyday lives influenced by fear. He presents the accounts of people who are afraid. According to Bennett and the evidence he shares with the reader, it is often fear that influences the individual's actions. It is this fear, as Bennett convincingly argues, that opens the individual to spiritual attack.

Remedies offered to people under such attack, notes Bennett, are not found in special incantations, the use of

The book shines as a solid analysis of Scripture and as blossoming from a well-thought-out confession of Christ.

With this work in hand, both clergy and laity will find their fear of speaking of unexplained occurrences abated.

sacred objects, or the visitation of “holy” sites (Bennett notes that these are often the source of trouble), but in Christ alone. No bells, no whistles, no whiz-bang and light shows. Only Christ is offered as remedy. This is what makes this book special. This is what makes this book a source of comfort. This is what keeps the work out of the morass of sensationalism and in the realm of scholarship. The book shines as a solid analysis of Scripture and as blossoming from a well-thought-out confession of Christ. Hollywood is nowhere to be found in this work.

In *Afraid*, Dr. Bennett shares his scholarship with the reader through a number of vignettes. While certain details are changed to protect privacy, these vignettes serve as the source material for Bennett’s analysis and conclusions. Woven throughout these vignettes are glimpses of how the church, particularly the Lutheran church, throughout time has always aided people under the influence of demonic forces — how the church rescues people from fear. Bennett does this by referring the reader, as the church has and should, first and foremost to Christ. Bennett demonstrates, using Scripture, how Christ is the One who has already defeated Satan and his demons. Dr. Bennett also draws from the church’s liturgy and hymnody and how these point the hearer repeatedly to Christ’s victory. Repeatedly, throughout the book, the reader is invited into the life of an individual under demonic oppression or possession. Repeatedly, the reader is shown how these demonic forces are overcome through the word of Christ and his victory spoken through the mouths of simple men. The reader is left to clearly understand that it is not the individual, or even the pastor, who does battle with Satan. The reader is left to understand that the Lord Jesus Christ has already defeated Satan. The person under demonic attack is simply pointed to Christ and instructed to cling to Christ’s victory. This again leaves no room for a television mockumentary. One is struck by the quietness of these events. Simple prayers prayed. Familiar Scriptures read. Christ proclaimed. The result? No thunderous voices and dripping walls. Just simple and yet profound peace — the peace of Christ.

Also, Dr. Bennett avoids the pitfall of trying to solve mysteries that cannot be solved by human beings. Bennett notes that it is often difficult to draw strict lines, or even recognize the lines, between demonic influence and mental illness. Yet Bennett indicates that the various health care vocations — all a gift of God — work alongside the spiritual caregiver to affect healing. These vocations each have a unique God-given role in the well-being of

the individual. Each, according to Bennett, are to be used as necessary. Pastors are not to wash their hands of an individual requiring medical attention. Rather, they are encouraged to expand the circle of care as required while never relinquishing responsibility for spiritual care.

In Bennett’s analysis of the hodgepodge of American spirituality, one will find many reasons that may cause fear. However, while there are many reasons a person might be afraid, Bennett gives reason to *not* be afraid. With this work in hand, both clergy and laity will find their fear of speaking of unexplained occurrences abated. They will find courage to speak and to listen. They will find the Christ who repeatedly instructs us to not be afraid. This is the benefit of this book.

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# BOOK REVIEW AND COMMENTARY

***Build on the Foundation of the Apostles and Prophets: Sola Scriptura in Context*** (Cambridge: Evangelical Lutheran Church of England, 2013)

by Brian Flamme

**B***uilt on the Foundation of the Apostles and Prophets: Sola Scriptura in Context* is a collection of six papers presented at the Westfield House International Symposium in August 2012. The volume spans a readable 174 pages. The six major contributions cover the topics of biblical hermeneutics, the Christological basis of Scripture and its attributes, the status of Lutheran confessions as drawn from Scripture, the word of God according to both Islam and Christianity, the danger of enthusiasm at the time of the reformers and in modern contexts, and finally the danger of biblicism.<sup>1</sup> Of the six papers, the volume includes prepared responses to five of the papers, save for Dr. Bombaro's paper on biblicism. The editor, Dr. Anssi Simojoki, admits "this is unfortunate, since this paper elicited a stronger reaction than anything else at the entire Symposium" (vii). Apparently there was some concern that Dr. Bombaro "was verging dangerously close to Gospel reductionism — a charge he categorically denies" (vii). There are some important questions that should be asked in light of Dr. Bombaro's paper, but more on that later.

<sup>1</sup> The following is a list of the major papers' titles and authors with their respective respondents. I. "Wast is das? The Nature and Basis of Biblical Hermeneutics" by Jeffery Kloha with a response by Boris Gujevic (3–42). II. "The Word Was God: Inerrancy or Christology" by David P. Scaer with a response by Daniel Johansson (45–66). III. "Quia-Quatenus: Scripture and Confession" by Armin Wenz with a response by Joseph Randrianasolo (69–98). IV. "God has spoken through the prophets...and by the Son: Word of God in Islam and Christianity" by Adam Francisco with a response by Martti Vaahtoranta (101–120). V. "Letter or Spirit? Modern Enthusiasms" by Anssi Simojoki with a response by Jonathan Mumme (123–150). VI. "Biblicism and the Imminent Death of American Evangelicalism" by John Bombaro (153–174).

Overall, I found the volume to be a challenging dialogue on the timely topic of what confessional Lutherans can and should say about the use and attributes of the Holy Scriptures. The prepared responses ask perceptive questions of the presenters that give context and clarity to the issues raised by the papers. Some of the most edifying contributions came from international authors from outside the Missouri Synod, like Dr. Randrianasolo's response to Dr. Wenz's paper in which he stresses that the divine authorship of the Scriptures demands a robust *quia* appropriation of our confessions. Also, I was pleased with Dr. Simojoki's keen identification of enthusiasm in contemporary hermeneutical trends that rends the Holy Spirit from the text of Scripture.

Of course, the responses do not cover all the critical questions that could be put to the presenters, though no doubt much of the ensuing discussions at the Symposia must have addressed more than is contained in the book.<sup>2</sup> Two papers brought up, in my mind, important concerns that I will try to articulate.

First to consider is Dr. Kloha's paper on biblical hermeneutics. His major problem is multiple interpretations of Scripture and the meaning of the text (8). It seems that Kloha understands a text's meaning as not intrinsic if the text is read with the right hermeneutical principles, but rather created through an interplay between the text and the conditional circumstances of the reader or hearer. "One's situational concern produces the 'meaning' that the reader draws from the text" (12–13). The result appears to be that the text can have as many meanings as there are readers and contexts. Though Kloha gives the impression

<sup>2</sup> The editor regrets that the extended conversations and the panel discussion must wait for a later edition (vi).

Theologians will find this to be a challenging dialogue on the timely topic of what confessional Lutherans can and should say about the use and attributes of the Holy Scriptures.

Jesus himself assures us that his church that clings to her confession will endure against hell's gates.



that some created meanings can be flat out wrong, he does leave room for a given text to have multiple interpretations that are acceptable. Indeed, he writes that there are “multiple possible faithful ways to hear a text” (13). How do you ensure a faithful reading? The solution is to have a right goal or telos. According to Kloha this is the end of “double love” toward God and the neighbor, which he obtains through looking at Augustine, Falacius, Luther, and the Scriptures (32–35). With the right goal, faithful interpretations presumably result.

First, how do we actually know if we have obtained an appropriate goal? According to Kloha’s model it seems that multiple goals could present themselves through trying to discern the meaning of the text given the varied circumstances of the reader. Is the goal discerned from a tradition of interpretation, say the faithful writings coming from the church? Which church, creeds, or theologians should we heed? Could we feasibly think of better goals, like faith toward God and love toward the neighbor, since this includes the com-

Our prayer is to remain faithful in the midst of the condemnations of the world.

fort of Jesus’ cross and precludes the possibility of mere legalistic readings of Scripture? Second, if meaning is “created” and not intrinsic to the text, can the Christian have certain comfort for his conscience that he is reconciled to God and forgiven for Christ’s sake? I would hope that the preaching of the gospel has an objectivity that is prior to a person’s attempts at creating meaning, that the meaning grabs ahold of the sinner dead in his trespasses who cannot but twist the promises of the gospel into killing words of law.

My second group of concerns centers on Dr. Bombaro’s scathing critique of biblicism. I was surprised by the caustic tone that was seemingly directed against Lutherans, like myself, who in the simplicity of our faith trust in the inerrancy (Ps 119:160; JOHN 17:17), infallibility (JOHN 10:35), efficacy (ROM 10:17; HEB 4:12), sufficiency (2 TIM 3:16–17), and clarity (Ps 119:105; 2 PET 1:19) of the Bible.<sup>3</sup> These attributes, to which I contend the Scriptures themselves testify as well as the teachings of our Lutheran fathers, are to Bombaro the marks of biblicism (157ff) that are


killing the possibility of witnessing to our world.<sup>4</sup> I do not have enough room for a point by point challenge of the paper, though in another place that might well be necessary, but I will challenge him on two points. Bombaro is concerned that our adherence to six-day creation as the first two books of Genesis describes and our preaching of sexual ethics makes biblicists a laughing stock in an “enlightened society” (159). He writes, “No one is listening” (172). So what? Jesus said that his saints would be hated by the world (JOHN 15:18). And if the world is not listening, that does not mean that sinners are not hearing the preaching of forgiveness for their salvation, even if we preach the Scriptures’ doctrine to dwindling congrega-

tions. Jesus himself assures us that his church that clings to her confession will endure against hell’s gates (MATT 16:18). Our prayer is to remain faithful in the midst of the condemnations of the world (MATT 10:32–34; LUKE 12:8).

Second, Dr. Bombaro argues that the Lutheran teaching “about the Bible as the ‘sole source’ and ‘sole rule’ is a departure from the Lutheran principle of sola Scriptura,” which is patently false (165). I do not know how else to take it when we “confess our adherence to the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments, as to the pure, clear fountain of Israel, which alone is the one true guiding principle, according to which all teachers and teaching are to be evaluated and judged” (SD [Kolb–Wengert, 527]). We grant other authorities besides the Scriptures as taught by the Fourth Commandment. But when it comes down to it, “We must obey God rather than men” (ACTS 5:29). Scripture stands in judgment of all other authorities, even in matters pertaining to history, ethics, and science. If we lose one jot of Scripture, even a gospel reductionist principle must be called into question. This is not to say that Christ does not indeed stand at the center of the matter of Scripture as its formal principle. This is one of the major emphases of the Symposium that I wholeheartedly agree with. However, when the other doctrines of history, ethics, the angels, or anything else that can be discerned through careful study of the text is attacked, it comes at a price of denigrating the glory of Christ, even if we do not realize it because of the ignorance of our flesh.

<sup>3</sup> “Biblicism’s characteristics as all-authoritative, sufficient, infallible, inerrant, and wholly inspired are a massive and unavoidable obstacle to the ability to proclaim the gospel today not just for American biblicists but for confessional Lutherans” (166).

<sup>4</sup> Given Dr. Bombaro’s description of biblicism’s marks, I am not ready to concede the pejorative for use against the vast majority of pastors and congregations in the Missouri Synod.



Words, spoken and written, are seemingly weak. They can be abused and misunderstood. But just because a person's words can be twisted and misunderstood, that does not mean that what they said or written have been destroyed. How much more so for God's words that he has seen fit to set into human writing and placed on human lips for delivering to us the fruits of his Son's death and resurrection. "For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe" (1 COR 1:21).

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# BOOK REVIEW AND COMMENTARY

## ***Martin Luther: Preacher of the Cross — A Study of Luther's Pastoral Theology***

by John T. Pless (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2013)

by Ely Prieto

This book provides a solid pastoral resource for a true evangelical *seelsorge* (care of souls) that directs sinners to the cross of Christ.

WITHIN THESE PAGES, Professor John T. Pless shares with his readers one side of Luther that is rarely discussed or even known by many people — Luther's pastoral heart! As we approach the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, many books about Martin Luther have been (and will be) released. These books certainly offer interesting aspects of Luther's life, talk about the Reformation movement, and share Luther's theology and many other facets of the Reformer. However, not many of them will talk about Luther as a pastor and a preacher. Next to his work in the classroom, a great part of Luther's daily life in Wittenberg was taken up with pastoral duties more than anything else.

In his years serving as a pastor, Pless says that Luther was a constant source of inspiration, curiosity, and challenge. The more Pless studied Luther and his theology, the more he saw how his own pastoral practice was influenced by the pastoral Luther. When he accepted the call to the seminary in Fort Wayne to teach practical theology, Pless was determined to use Luther's writings to teach the care of souls. This book condenses fifteen years of teaching experience and reveals how Luther put his evangelical theology to work in actual cases of pastoral care (11, 14).

Right at the introduction of the book, the reader is reminded that for Luther, genuine pastoral care is a theological undertaking. This has nothing to do with finding psychological or sociological solutions for the problems and struggles of life, but instead addressing the human being with God's word, applying law and gospel (14). For Luther, the task of theology is very specific: To deal with man as sinner. "The proper subject of theology is man guilty of sin and condemned, and God the Justifier and

Savior of man the sinner. Whatever is asked or discussed in theology outside this subject, is error and poison" (15). Pless says that, "for Luther, distinction between Law and Gospel is not a theoretical identification of specific texts as either Law or Gospel; it is instead a functional distinction that is critical for pastoral diagnosis of a person's spiritual condition before God" (15). However, this functional distinction between law and gospel is not something that pastors can attain by themselves. It is only under the tutelage of the Holy Spirit, it is through *oratio*, *meditatio*, and *tentatio*, that true pastors are made.

Proper pastoral care is grounded in the theology of the cross and not in the theology of glory.

*Oratio* is anchored in the reading and hearing of God's word and it is this word that creates faith in Christ Jesus and kindles prayer. True *meditatio* is not an internal thing as if something magical would happen as someone tries to clear up his mind. Meditation is grounded in the *externum verbum*; it draws one outside of himself into the promises of Christ (faith) and into the need of the neighbor (love) (15, 18-19). *Tentatio* is nothing new in the life of a pastor, and Luther was bold to say that the devil is

the best teacher of theology. Temptation is necessary for the Christian life in general, but especially for preachers of the word. According to Luther, *tentatio* turns the student of God's word into a real theologian. It prepares and equips the pastor to serve as an "instructor of consciences" by granting him the capacity to distinguish the law from the gospel (21). Pless concludes by saying that Luther's triad, *oratio*, *meditatio*, and *tentatio*, shapes the ongoing life of the pastor, as he is forever dependent on the power of God's promises (22).

For Luther, proper pastoral care is grounded in the theology of the cross and not in the theology of glory. Luther also understands that the work of pastoral care

is to be directed by the word of the cross delivered in sermon and sacrament so that living faith in Christ might be created and sustained (22, 25). Pless is quick to remind the reader that along with preaching and the Lord's Supper, Luther prizes confession and absolution as a means of pastoral care. The ultimate goal is always to comfort the consciences of terrified believers and strengthen their faith to live under the cross in the lively hope of the resurrection (27-28).

After establishing the foundation for the art of pastoral care, Pless moves on to show how the pastor Luther applies his evangelical theology in real situations of care of souls. In the following chapters, Pless's many years of Luther studies shine through. By quoting the catechisms and *Luther's Letters of Spiritual Counsel*, the reader is exposed to Luther's pastoral heart in a deep and meaningful way.

Chapter one talks about the general visitation of Saxony, which provided a clear x-ray of the spiritual reality of those days. The ordinary people knew absolutely nothing about the Christian faith, and unfortunately many pastors were unqualified to provide religious instruction. On top of that, they were poor preachers. This sad diagnosis prompted Luther to write his catechisms, which provided a basic summary of Christian doctrine, along with a template for teaching the faith. Soon, the catechisms became a reliable guide for both pastors and people in the parish, helping God's people to live under the cross and in hope of the resurrection (39-41).

In chapters two and three, we learn how Luther provided pastoral care for people facing melancholy, depression, doubt, and despair. As someone who also faced depression and doubts in his own life, Luther directed people not to their own thoughts and feelings, but instead he drew them away from self-absorbed reflection and led them to the baby of Bethlehem, the man of Calvary, the true Son of God! God is for us in every way and Satan cannot harm God's children, for they have another Lord. Yes, faith may be weak and wobbly, but Christ is strong and sure (44-45)!

Chapter four brings us to the arena of pastoral care in light of vocation, which is another genius theological contribution from Luther to the church. The Christian is the *larvae dei*, the mask of God, and his or her vocation is to serve. God does not need our good works, but our neighbor does. Christ sacrificed himself for us on the cross; we now give ourselves sacrificially to our neighbor in love

(65). In this chapter, the reader finds helpful insights from Luther in terms of pastoral care for those whose callings place them in dangerous places, where epidemics and health issues become a threat to caregivers and pastors. Luther also has a word of wisdom for soldiers, helping them to understand their vocation in light of both faith and love, devoting themselves to their work with clear consciences before God (72).

As we face more and more conflicting ideas about what marriage is and isn't in our society, chapter five offers a breath of fresh air on this topic. Luther sees marriage as grounded in creation. He says, "Who is there who does not know that marriage was founded and ordained by God, created in Paradise and confirmed and blessed outside Paradise?" (74). Pless adds a great comment when he says, "God's Word establishes marriage in honor. It is the devil who shames and slanders marriage" (76). Luther has much to say about marriage and in this chapter we find him applying law and gospel in difficult marriage situations. Luther reminds us that marriage is a state under the cross, and the cross puts an end to the romanticism that sees marriage as an instrument of self-fulfillment. Pless concludes the chapter by saying, "Luther knows that all of human life, including marriage, is hallowed and received as a gift" (80).

Mercy is one emphasis of the LCMS, and in chapter six, we find lots of it. Luther was a man who received mercy and he knew how to show mercy to those in spiritual and bodily need, offering pastoral care for the poor, needy, and persecuted. Faith is active in love, and justification by faith frees the Christian to give and serve his/her neighbor. We labor not for ourselves but for the well-being of the people that God has placed in our paths. Luther saw greed as idolatry and a sin against both faith and love; generosity is the way to go when dealing with our neighbor (81, 82). The Reformer was not afraid to speak on behalf of the destitute and persecuted and comfort the imprisoned, pointing to Christ, the One who became flesh to live among us. "The presence of Christ is not an abstraction for Luther. Christ is bodily present through His Word, and no jail cell is so secure as to keep Him out" (86). Christ's presence with his Christians, in suffering, agony, and even death, is a source of real comfort and peace.

The last two chapters deal with the frailty of human life — sickness and death and how to provide pastoral care for the grieving. Sickness and death was an ever-present



reality in Luther's day. The Reformer himself experienced it in his own family when two of his daughters, Elizabeth and Magdalena, died at young ages (109). Luther found comfort in the risen Christ and the doctrine of justification by faith. The Lutheran Reformation provided a new understanding of death and brought to an end the *ars moriendi* practiced in the sixteenth century. As Pless states, "For Luther, the pastoral care of the dying would be marked by the forgiveness of sins for Christ's sake and, within that absolution, the sure and certain promise of the resurrection of the body to life everlasting" (102-103).

The book also includes an appendix, "Baptism as Means of Consolation in Luther's Pastoral Theology," which was originally delivered at the International Congress for Luther Research meeting in Copenhagen in August 2002 and later was published in *Concordia Theological Quarterly* (January 2003). In this essay, we learn that Luther did not limit baptism to the moment of the rite, but asserted the enduring benefits of baptism both for daily life and finally for the approach of death itself (119-120). Here we also find Luther ministering to his own mother, Margaret, when she was seriously ill where through a letter he comforts her, directing her to word and sacrament. At the end, he writes,

God has graciously called you. In the Gospel, in Baptism, and in the Sacrament (of the Altar) you possess his sign and seal of this vocation, and as long as you hear him addressing you in these, you will have no trouble of danger. Be of good cheer, then, and thank him joyfully for such great grace, for he who has begun a good work in you will perform until the day of Jesus Christ. We cannot help ourselves in such matters. We can accomplish nothing against sin, death, and the devil by our own works. (120-121)

A lengthy bibliography is also provided at the end of the book for further reading and study of Luther's theology and care of souls.

In *Martin Luther: Preacher of the Cross*, Prof. John Pless has done a magnificent work harvesting Luther's thoughts and insights about his pastoral theology. With its many examples and rich quotations from Luther's own pastoral practice, it provides a solid pastoral resource for a true evangelical *seelsorge* (care of souls) that directs sinners to the cross of Christ. With the upcoming anniversary of the Reformation in 2017, I highly recommend pastors reading, studying and discussing this book in their conferences and meetings as they sharpen their

pastoral care skills. I also could see some examples and stories of Luther's pastoral care being used as sermon illustrations and shared in Bible classes as a way of edifying the faithful in the congregation.

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The timeless and eternal power of God's word and the means of grace is what brings new life into a world of death.

# BOOK REVIEW AND COMMENTARY

***Becoming a Level Five Multiplying Church: Field Guide***  
by Dave Ferguson, Alan Hirsch, Todd Wilson (Ebook)

by Tim Droegemueller

OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST SPOKE DECISIVELY IN MATTHEW 28:18–20:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

These words, known as the Great Commission, are our commission. And we sincerely thank God for all believers in Christ who consider these words, care about these words, and seek to do what our Lord commands here. It should be clear to all of us that the thrust of the “Becoming Five” concept is the desire to make disciples, and that intention is beautiful.

Secretly, I am always optimistic when reading a book or article that has as its goal the furtherance of making disciples of our Savior. As a church planter and pastor, I want to learn. I want to grow. I want to be held accountable. I want to unlearn bad habits and rejoice in eternally great things. You are reading this mission journal because you feel the same way. Both you and I want to see God's kingdom flourish. We want people to be baptized. We want people to grow strong in the word of God. We want them to learn all things our Lord Jesus commanded for our blessing. We want to see churches planted and churches multiply. And so we all share that commonality with the authors of this book. These authors want to see the Christian climate in our nation change. They want it to improve and so do we! But as G. K. Chesterton once wrote, “The reformer is always right

about what is wrong. He is generally wrong about what is right.” As we all know to be true, proposed solutions to our issues can possibly even lead us into deeper problems. The remedy could prove to be more fatal than the illness. I do not think that this is the case here, but there is the pressing need for bright objectivity.

In this review, I have a frightfully simple goal: to affirm what is good and to reject what is bad. From my perspective, the following are points from “Becoming Five” that are very good:

If we think Jesus' church needs saving, we are functionally screaming every minute of every day against the finished work of Christ on a cross.

1. We want to make biblical disciples and not cultural Christians. Yes.
2. We need a stronger biblical culture within our churches. Yes.
3. We have to ask why we are doing the things we are doing. Yes.
4. Vision, strategy, budget, and priorities matter. Yes.
5. We need to reframe evangelism in the context of discipleship. Yes.
6. The situation is bad and the patient (the church in our country) is mostly sick. A diagnosis should be made. Yes.
7. The methods of mega-churches aren't helping the cause. Appeasing human beings and treating them like customers is wrong. Yes.
8. Catering to cultural Christians in order to get them to stick around is bad. Yes.
9. Jesus' church on earth will always be living with tensions (i.e., the devil, the world, and the fallen flesh). Yes.

10. There is a reasonably large gap between our aspirations and our practices. Yes.
11. The priorities of an addition-focused scorecard will actually become the things that hold us back from multiplication. Yes.
12. Something of little importance can easily become a major focus. This focusing becomes a distraction. Yes.
13. Risk is necessary. Yes.
14. Courage is needed. Yes.
15. Accountability is healthy. Yes.
16. We need strong, faithful, and biblically defined leadership. Yes.
17. The shackles of the status quo need shattering. Yes.
18. Putting an eye on our weaknesses is never easy. Yes.
19. It is hard to break free from bad or obsolete ideas. Yes.
20. The atmosphere of “faking it” is commonplace. The horrible shock of this atmosphere is that people almost have to be meticulously trained to be so contrived and impotent. It requires a dedication to a bad framework and illegitimate vocabulary. Yes.

In addition to the list above, I will also add this: The identification of thoughts and behaviors that contribute to scarce or additional thinking are helpful. They are a pretty exhaustive list and I believe they would be beneficial for a discussion. Many of the goals for starting churches are good goals for us to consider. They push us to think beyond the common misconceptions and pitfalls that keep some congregations from planting churches. Also, the stress on being held accountable is noble. Sometimes we don't want to look honestly at our own situations. And once looking, we certainly don't want someone to hold us accountable to what is really going on! We simply want to exist on the outside of the glass and criticize without ever being in the arena. All of these things can help kick up some dust and get us thinking about our ongoing need for persistent repentance!

And now, as we shift from affirming the good to rejecting the bad, please know this. This critique comes from someone who is in the arena. It comes from someone who cares a great deal about our Lord's Great Commission. It comes from someone who by nature is a

stat junky and addition addict. As a recovering alcoholic once told me, “You can spot it, if you got it.” Remember, at the beginning of this review, I shared my secret optimism about reading something new about church planting or our life of witness. And yet, the other shoe usually drops. Optimism turns to disappointment in a hurry. The disappointment ensues because of a particular void. The void has become typical and commonplace, but it is certainly deafening. And it almost always seems to go unidentified.

This is the same book that has been written in our nation for decades. It is a best seller. The title changes, the costs vary, but the chapters go on and on and on. We have all read it. We have all written it. Lord, have mercy on us all, for we have all recommended it. We love the book because of what it promises. It promises to make Jesus' kingdom work. It tells us that the bride of Christ will finally improve. Each paragraph of each page heralds a future of success if we just do what is asked. We think that by embracing the principles of mission experts, we will become mission experts. Once we are mission experts, we can create other mission experts. All we have to do is

take with water and swallow. In all fairness to the authors here, they say very clearly that their only intent is to champion multiplication, and they do a good job in that task. But still, these are only good chapters of the same book that we keep reading again and again and again. We can't help ourselves. With optimism, we keep reaching for the orange, plastic pill bottle to cure the nausea. But what if

our recipes for success beyond cultural Christianity don't actually cure it, but instead create it?

This is what is bad about “Becoming Five”:

1. The problem is actually worse than we think. This is why we keep swimming in it regardless of our next effort. We can't choose our way out of it. The problem is as big, large, expansive, and inclusive as the spiritual death we inherited from Adam and Eve (ROM 5:12). Perhaps, though we are scared to admit it, original sin and its condition continues to be a bit of a problem. It really is. We are actually not the solution. Ever. Or at all. Pragmatic solutions may not even solve pragmatic problems, let alone an unfixable one.
2. A stronger focus on what we do will not cause us to leave Egypt. More behavioral management will not end the zombie apocalypse (EPH 2:1). Our big problem is

Every step of  
the way, the  
bride of Christ  
will be fighting  
for her life.

our focus on us. Permit me to be so offensive. How well we dedicate ourselves to manmade principles of the law has little to do with the growth of the kingdom of God. And if we succeed, it will only end up being a bigger bang of a bigger hammer on a bigger gong at the end of the show.

3. As long as the content of our public preaching is about what we can do to be better at doing stuff for Jesus (including reaching out for Jesus) and not Christ and him crucified (from the powerful authority of a biblical text!), the hamster will keep flipping on the wheel. There may be movement, but it won't last long.
4. The theology of glory cannot be "Lutheranized." It just can't. It is not possible. At the very point we do, we "un-Lutheranize" ourselves. We can do it if we want to. No one can keep us from doing it to ourselves. People keep trying and succeeding. But how will it help us? I am not saying that there isn't something we can learn about accountability, the laws of creation, system dynamics, common sense, or the aspects of leadership. We can and we should. But these things are gifts of creation and shouldn't replace the Second and Third Articles of the Apostles' Creed. The exact moment we turn to the mammon plan, we have the wrong operating system. No one can serve two masters. It will either be God or mammon (MATT 6:24). Our confidence will either be Jesus' cross or manly glory. A hybridization won't work. If we have the wrong operating system, we will be failing even as we are succeeding — and multiplying.
5. Human beings have needs so deep that we can't even perceive them. Human beings can't change themselves and their church by targeting Jesus and crafting some goals to help Jesus. That puts us where Jesus should be, and it puts Jesus where we should be. It's not just semantics. If we think Jesus' church needs saving, we are functionally screaming every minute of every day against the finished work of Christ on a cross. It works the other way around. It always has and it always will until judgment day. Jesus targets us and delivers the deeper solution to any physical paralyzation we have through the forgiveness of sins.
6. In "Becoming Five," the spiritual scorecard was criticized. It was done quite skillfully and was even enjoyable to read. And it was meet, right, and salutary to do! And yet what was the solution? A new spiritual scorecard! And in a few short months, this new spiritual scorecard will be criticized. And what will be the solution? Another new spiritual scorecard! Maybe success isn't the creation of a new spiritual scoreboard, but the cheerful and joyful destruction of all of them. Going scorched earth on the theology of glory may actually not only be fun, but eternally valuable as we live under the singularly different contours of the mercy of the cross!
7. What is necessary isn't a movement of mathematics. The language of measurements, layers, and levels is the language of the law. It works well in Pokémon or Skyrim, but it is the very vocabulary that confuses the church about God's grace. A better movement would be the one that Jesus began in a sealed room with cowardly people in John 20:19-31. It is a movement that defies statistics and probabilities. As part of God's people living in the United States of America today, we could actually see many people rediscover the clearly defined sin snapping and power of God's word and sacraments. Wouldn't that be something?
8. If you want to plant a church, wouldn't you want to actually understand what church is? In fact, isn't that probably the best place to start? And in fact, if you don't know what church is, could you actually be multiplying something different than what our Lord has called us to multiply? The "they" of Acts 2:46-47 only comes after the "they" of Acts 2:42. The early church "they" were gathered around the apostles' teaching, the fellowship, the breaking of bread, and the prayers. They gathered around the place where Jesus promised to be (the gospel preached and the Eucharist delivered). As a by-product of the word and sacraments, there were miracles, awe, generosity, praise of God, favor with the people, and growth. You can't put the cart before the horse. You also can't produce a horse by building a cart.
9. The Great Commission is not what we do for Jesus' Great Commission. There is no need to look for a new interpretation of disciple making. Jesus interprets it himself. He says to make disciples by "baptizing them" and "teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (MATT 28:19-20). The first part of what we are called to do until the Parousia of Jesus is to baptize all people in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. I'm not trying to be picky, obstinate, or a killjoy, but the word *baptism* should make the radar. It should be in the book. Jesus said it himself.



10. A very large part of what Jesus commanded us to observe, which is the second part of Christ's Great Commission, is Holy Communion. How is it possible to walk in unity as the body of Christ when we can't even "Amen!" where Jesus gives us his powerfully unifying gifts? If we cannot agree on where Jesus does his unifying (i.e., the means of grace), should we expect anything beyond division?
11. A paradigm will not unlock Jesus' people, but it could certainly make them sick. If the bride of Christ has been feeding on a multitude of paradigms for a very long time, she might not even know which "medicine" is killing her. She is suffering more from misdiagnosis than anything.
12. What about the sabotage of Christian marriage over the last few decades? How has it affected the church? After the slow, steady dismantling of any love or respect for this gift over the last fifty plus years, it has to be addressed. It has to be addressed constantly and repeatedly. If husbands and wives aren't equipped for their commission and roles, won't we continue to multiply sad standards and dysfunctional spiritual behavior?
13. What about kids? What about having a little longer term plan? How can we raise babies in an environment where they can hear the word, grow in a confession of Christ, and get extremely used to confessing their own sin and rejoicing in the good news of Jesus' mercy for sinners? How can this become commonplace for baptized and redeemed saints? How does the liturgy affect this training? How about something like the Lord's Prayer? Or the expectation of all our families to simply attend Bible study and Sunday school?
14. Every step of the way, the bride of Christ will be fighting for her life. Babylon wants her back and there is always the temptation to regain friendship with the world (Jas 4:4). Throw in the seductive proposals of the demonic realm. And now add the biblical truth that we are also always fighting ourselves. Romans 7 gives us a good look at this corrupt nature! Let's just say, there will be a measure of messiness in the church! It will not be heaven on earth! However... and yet ... in spite of this colossal messiness, Jesus is still Lord of it!
15. Part of the beauty of what all Christians should hold dear is how we are called to enter this messiness with the very mercy of the cross! Works of mercy have become an endangered species in our land as more and more people focus on "getting the results." Only the theology of the cross grasps the heart of the unreasonable love of God for broken people in Christ. Ongoing mercy ministry would be extremely important in terms of engaging a society that has forgotten what love is. Again, this was not the focus of the authors, but this is a crucial need in not only our mission churches, but in all our churches.
16. God continues to work through people who aren't very skilled. My closest advisor often encourages me with these words: "Lots of people dumber than us have done this." What a comfort! The Lord works through his people in spite of all their weaknesses. In fact, those weaknesses can even be the very megaphone where he proclaims the mercy of his Son through our lives!
17. The Christian church grows and multiplies best within the context of persecution. I know of one Mekane Yesus church in Debre Zeit, Ethiopia, that gave birth to fifteen other churches within a few days! It was at the same time that the bullets were raining down upon the saints who steadfastly refused to give up the preaching and teaching about Jesus Christ our Lord. Lives were lost repeatedly at the hands of the socialists, but in the end, the gospel of Christ triumphed! It will be hard for congregations to grow the right way in an environment of apathy and affluence. It just will. Perhaps we need to begin a process of humbling ourselves and start relearning some things from our Lutheran pastors coming from different parts of the world. They know what it's like to stand close to the fire. They have been tested in it and by it. Many of them have given up everything for the sake of biblical conviction. They have no pension, no trust fund, no savings, and sometimes no idea even where they are going, but they trust the Lord of the church as they "Go" (GEN 12:1-3)! There is much to learn from them.
18. Teaching what is true about the Bible matters. We could even get to the point where we call this true teaching "sound" or "healthy" doctrine. We want to eat healthy food; don't we want healthy and accurate teaching from the Bible? People keep saying ad infinitum and ad nauseam that doctrine doesn't matter. They say in essence, "all that matters is what we do for Jesus." That isn't true! The content of your mission is like the contents of a doctor's syringe. The doctor

could do a double back flip before the inoculation, but if there is water in the syringe, it won't cure the disease. There is only one antidote! If the antidote isn't there for our deadly disease of sin, we are lost! The fact that Jesus reconciled a spoiled, sinful humanity to himself through his innocent blood even before we loved him is a doctrine. That truth matters! That is the central doctrine of not just the Lutherans, but all Christians, and it is called justification! Accurate biblical doctrine matters. It is always a matter of eternal life and death. Looking at the lack of godly offspring in our nation should cause every one of us to repent. We have not passed down the faith. If we pass down the word of God as we have been called to do, we could actually see a turnaround for the churches of the USA in two decades. Now that's not a quick solution, but it may be just what the Great Physician ordered (DEUT 6:6-9).

Summary: The one problem is this simple. We trust our plans to help Jesus succeed in his mission. If we continue to do this, expect more of the same. And if any of us linger on as stat junkies and addition addicts, the jitters are probably going to get worse. And yet, for all preachers of paradigms and followers of fads, there is a bright and eternal road. The great thing about reading a book like this and considering the plummeting numbers is to rejoice that Jesus already undid the math. He himself fills the broken equation with his divine word and blessings. The stuff that he does goes way beyond improving situations and adjusting our plans. He actually raises people from the dead so that they no longer trust the methods of this age (COL 2:8-12). Yes, we will always be trying to reform something in this life. Absolutely. But what makes Christians different is that they have actually been discovered by the Solution. And now as we live under the eternally fresh riptide of our baptism into Christ (1 COR 6:9-11), the greasy helpings of platitudes just don't taste the same.

Consider this: Whether or not you actually believe the divine word of the Son of God who miraculously delivers forgiveness, salvation, and even a new identity from beyond the grave actually makes a pretty big difference in how you see life, mission, family, and church (ROM 6:3-5; COL 2:11-12). The timeless and eternal power of God's word and the means of grace is what brings new life into a world of death. So this is what we trust as we are "going into all the world" wherever our vocations find us. Period.

This shouldn't slow us down in our church planting, but rather send us out in confidence even in the midst our colossal failures!

For anyone interested in church planting, I would suggest reading something quite shocking. In *Luther's Works*, Volume 41, pp. 148–165, there is an arsenal of powerful weapons against the devil, world, and flesh that perfectly equip us for the days ahead. The reason the weapons are powerful is precisely because they weren't crafted by us. If you have become curious enough after reading this, investigate them for yourself. We are not alone nor are we left alone (JOHN 14:18). Christ reigns at the right hand for such a time as this and he has rained down his comforter, the Holy Spirit, upon his people. Until the close of the age, there will be a people on this planet with whom our triune God will dwell! What joy and comfort and courage this gives us for our future! The true miracle is this: In spite of all our efforts to improve Jesus' kingdom on earth, his kingdom has not only survived, but grown! The miracle of all of this is that for all the bad medication we have been doling out to the bride of Christ, she keeps springing out of her chair. Like an annoying or obnoxious gnat, she keeps exasperating all those still trapped in the common philosophies of this age. May all look in on her wonder and rejoice in her Groom! His beloved church cannot fail and will not go away. We have our Lord's promise on it (MATT 28:20).

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age. Matt 28:19-20

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# BOOK REVIEW AND COMMENTARY

Anyone engaged in Lutheran mission and preaching today will find challenges and encouragement in this volume.

## ***Feasting in a Famine of the Word: Lutheran Preaching in the Twenty-First Century***

Edited by Mark W. Birkholz, Jacob Corzine, and Jonathan Mumme. Forward by Jonathan Fisk (Eugene: Pickwick, 2016)

by Joshua C. Miller

St. Paul states in Romans 10 that faith comes by hearing the gospel through a preacher. In the Augsburg Confession, Phillip Melancthon declares that God has established the preaching office in order to bestow justification on sinners. The Lutheran sense of mission is built on the preaching office, since it is through it that sinners are saved and believers comforted. In this volume, seventeen contemporary Lutheran pastors and theologians reflect on the nature of preaching guided by the theological understanding that salvation in Christ is given through preaching (xvii).

In his opening chapter, John Bombaro gives a survey of American homiletics describing what kinds of preaching prevail today and demonstrating the unique charism Lutheran preaching has to offer in the situation. Bombaro evaluates many of the homiletical styles popular in contemporary Christianity, finding helpful things in some of them, but also finding many lacking in terms of how they often do not actually deal with a biblical text and “routinely abandon gospel proclamation for thematic exploration resulting in moralizing or patronizing” (17). In Bombaro’s estimation, the main reason for such preaching today is the prevalence of consumerism. He maintains that preachers often preach poor sermons out of a desire to fulfill the consumeristic desires of their hearers rather than out of a deep understanding of the true task of the preacher (26). Drawing on the work of Gerhard Forde, Johann Micahel Reu, C. F. W. Walther, and Timothy Wengert, Bombaro identifies the true task of the preacher as proclaiming God’s condemning law and God’s saving gospel in first person address to the hearers of the sermon (20–26).

In the following essays each author expounds on important aspects of this task. Mark Birkholz emphasizes the necessity of certainty when preaching. St. Peter rested his case on the certainty of Jesus’ death and resurrection, proclaiming Christ’s work for hearers (36–39). The preacher today can also boldly proclaim that the forgiveness of sins and salvation is certain, trusting the Holy Spirit to work faith in hearers’ hearts (40–42). Paul Elliott argues that typology can be an appropriate tool for preaching the Old Testament because the apostle Paul preached that “in Christ” Christians are part of “Israel reduced to one” (55–56). Elliott identifies the texts about ancient Israel as a nation, Israel’s institutions, and the Psalms (especially those of lament) as appropriate venues for using typology about Israel to speak to Christians today (61).

Richard Serena, Roy Coates, and Jacob Corzine all bring insights from historical figures into the conversation. Serena comments on Nicholas of Cusa as a preacher. While Serena rejects the idea of Cusa as a proto-reformer, he does note certain parallels between the Lutheran

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understanding of the preacher giving Christ to hearers and Cusa’s own notion of the preacher as a chef who serves up the word of God to the hungry (71). Coates discusses how Johann Gerhard understood systematic theology and preaching to exist symbiotically, as preaching keeps systematic theology from becoming philosophical and speculative while systematic theology gives content and basis to preaching so that it does not devolve into sheer moralism (79, 95–96). Corzine utilizes Johannes Brenz’s distinction between *fides visibilia* (faith evident in visible confession) and *fides invisibilia* (the faith of infants

and children flourishing into confession) (101–111). One of Corzine’s central points can comfort preachers and hearers alike. Doubt, he says, is not an absence of faith (unbelief) but an expressed need for assurance that Christ gives through the preacher (115–116).

Jonathan Mumme and Steven Paulson highlight the importance of direct address. Mumme explores the use of such differentiated address by Paul and Luther, identifying the preacher as the medium for the voice of God directly to the hearers (137). Similarly, preaching, says Paulson, “is not merely speaking about God, but speaking for God” (143). Eschewing analogy, Paulson argues for a homiletic that really preaches Christ directly to hearers in the effective words, “I forgive you!” (143–155).

Other authors expound on aspects of the preacher’s task or connections between preaching and divine service, theology, and the Christian life. Hans Jörg Voigt navigates the troubled waters of paraenesis (exhortation to good works), counselling that the preacher must be careful not to confuse law and gospel. Paraenesis should be understood as the law in its third use, so as not to portray the gospel as making demands. At the same time, the law does not empower the believer to bear the fruit of the Spirit that flows from faith; only the gospel can do that. Moreover, the preacher should proclaim the gospel louder and larger than the paraenesis itself, ensuring that the hearer is comforted (163–164).

John Pless, John Kleinig, and David Petersen address the connections between preaching, the liturgy, and communion. Pless emphasizes that liturgical preaching should be evangelical. The preacher should not merely talk about liturgical or sacramental action but actually perform it. Drawing on Forde and Oswald Bayer, Pless says that the sermon should “deliver the goods of the promise and not get lost in analogies to washing and meals” (177). Likewise, Kleinig admonishes that the preacher should not just say that life is available but identify where (i.e., in the Lord’s Supper) and then give it to the hearers (179, 190). Petersen encourages preaching in every service and emphasizes that the preacher should preach the promise of the gospel in Scripture directly to hearers and not simply impersonally read the text (208).

Esko Murto underlines the connection between preaching and the doctrine of original sin. Abandoning this doctrine, says Murto, leaves the door open to works righteousness. Then, warns Murto soberly, salvation is up to the supposedly free will of the individual and the preaching office becomes merely a marketing venture (223).

Jeremiah Johnson and Jakob Appell connect preaching with pastoral care. In what is perhaps the most touchingly pastoral essay in the book, Johnson stresses the importance of preaching lament for Christians undergoing suffering. He offers lament (crying out to God on the basis of God’s promise in the midst of suffering) as a gift from God through which the Christian may find a vehicle for the anger and grief that comes

in suffering (226, 238–239). Appell addresses preaching as the cure of souls, wherein the pastor is a physician administering the word and sacraments to the patient (255–256).

In the final two chapters of the book, Daniel Schmidt and Gottfried Martens address some practical homiletic concerns. Schmidt encourages preaching in the present tense to be present to their hearers (274). Martens admonishes the preacher to bring out the law and the gospel in the text rather than to woodenly (in the “Prussian” style) force categories of generic law and gospel on the hearers, as well as to preach the promise of the gospel indicatively to hearers (296–298).

Anyone engaged in Lutheran mission and preaching today will find challenges and encouragement in this volume. Though it focuses much on theory, the book also highlights significant practical concerns, including the use of direct address, personal pronouns, and present tense, and faithfulness to the text. Each essay is focused but never loses sight of the goal of preaching — to give salvation to the hearers. The authors here present a much more evangelical approach to preaching than some popular consumer-centric methods, one that recognizes and proclaims the truly effective means of mission and preaching — the preached gospel of Christ that is the means of grace itself. Preachers reading this volume will find encouragement to be faithful in their callings, but they also may find their own faith strengthened by the gospel.

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