

LUTHERAN THEOLOGICAL REVIEW

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STANDARD ABBREVIATIONS

- AE *Luther's Works*. American edition. 55 vols. St Louis: Concordia, and Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1958- .
- Bauer, Walter. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 1st ed., edited by William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, 1957.
- BAG 1st ed., edited by William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, 1957.
- BAGD 2nd ed., edited by F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker, 1979.
- BDAG 3rd ed., edited by Frederick W. Danker, 2000.
- BELK *Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche*. 12 editions. [Cite edition used.] Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1930- .
- BHS *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1984.
- LW *Lutheran Worship*. St Louis: Concordia, 1982.
- NA²⁷ *Novum Testamentum Graece*. Ed. Kurt and Barbara Aland, et al. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1993.
- TDNT Kittel, Gerhard, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley. 10 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964- .
- TLH *The Lutheran Hymnal*. St Louis: Concordia, 1941.
- W² Walch, Johann Georg, ed. *D. Martin Luthers sämtlichen Schriften*. 2nd ["St Louis"] ed. 23 vols. St Louis: Concordia, 1880-1910.
- WA *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*. Weimarer Ausgabe. ["Weimar ed."] Weimar: Hermann Böhlau, 1883- .
- WA DB Weimarer Ausgabe Deutsche Bibel [German Bible]
- WA Br Weimarer Ausgabe Briefe [Letters]
- WA Tr Weimarer Ausgabe Tischreden [Table talk]

Abbreviations for the Lutheran confessional writings:

- AC Augsburg Confession
- Ap Apology of the Augsburg Confession
- SA Smalcald Articles
- Tr Tractate/Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope
- SC Small Catechism
- LC Large Catechism
- FC Ep Formula of Concord, Epitome
- FC SD Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration

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EDITORIAL FOREWORD

This issue of *Lutheran Theological Review* focuses on the topic of missions. The plans for putting out such an issue arose from the establishment of the Missionary Study Centre at Concordia Lutheran Seminary, Edmonton, in the fall of 1997, and from the missions symposium held at that seminary on 6-7 November 1998. We are grateful to the Missionary Study Centre for providing the funds for the publication of this issue.

This issue begins with a paper by Dr Steven Harold discussing evangelism as it takes place in conformity with the theology of the Augsburg Confession; a Gospel-centred evangelism which defends a divine monergism over against the synergism of so many evangelism programmes.

From there we move into two case studies on the relationship between the Gospel and culture. Dr Jonathan Naumann reports on the efficacy of the means of grace as demonstrated in the work of the Lutheran Church in Sudan. Dr Henry Rowold looks at how the Gospel may be and is being proclaimed among Chinese emigrants to North America.

Moving on, Dr Glenn Schaeffer demonstrates what it means to be a child of God, a receiver of the restored image of God, and thus a participant in God's mission to the world.

There follow two biblical studies on evangelism and mission. Dr Ken Schurb notes how we are to properly understand evangelism as it is presented in Acts, and Dr John Wilch notes the models of evangelism set forth in ancient Israel in the lives of Naomi, Boaz, and David.

The issue concludes with a sermon by Dr Thomas Winger on repentance and the Father's loving heart.

Finally, a note of correction and apology. In the previous issue, the author of the article "'Faith in Christ' or 'The Faith of Christ'" was given as "Steven L. Chambers". The name is actually "Stephen L. Chambers". We apologize for the misspelling.

We trust that the reader will find the material herein beneficial to them as they strive to bring the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the world today.

EGK

Monday of the Tenth Week after Pentecost, 2003

AUGSBURG EVANGELISM

Steven E. Harold

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

A Lutheran layman, a solid churchman who loves his church and her pastors made the following observation about evangelism: “Ask a Lutheran pastor whether he knows any Greek, and he will say ‘Yes, I studied some in seminary.’ Ask an Assemblies of God pastor and he will say, ‘Yes, I know one who runs the restaurant on the corner and I’ve been calling on him for the past couple of weeks.’”

The Lutheran Church needs to **do** evangelism **with** theological integrity. This lesson was one of many learned by the author as his sabbatical from the Edmonton seminary found him serving a local LCC congregation as fulltime pastor. Evangelism with integrity requires the trust and support of the entire church. In order to merit this support the church should avoid doing evangelism on the basis of a theologically alien foundation that might bring her work into contempt or cause it to fall into suspicion or abandonment. Therefore the search for a theological and ecclesiological rationale for evangelism is necessary. That is to say, a rationale must be found that squares with both what we believe (theology) and how we live out this belief as church (ecclesiology). At the brink of the third millennium this search cannot be postponed. At the beginning of the third millennium in a church body whose membership is not growing but is at best remaining stable, this search cannot be postponed. At the beginning of the third millennium in a church body whose membership is not growing but at best remaining stable, located in a nation filled with people hungry for the good news of Jesus which is ours to give away, this search cannot be postponed.

This need for theological integrity leading to lively outreach in the Canadian context was underscored in the Fall 1996 edition of *Context*, a journal of World Vision–Canada.¹ In an article entitled “Frosty Reception: Christian Witness in Canada”, it was reported that in a national study, this question was asked: “Do you feel it is important to encourage non-Christians to become Christians?” The following statistics are directly pertinent to the District where the author serves: The majority of British Columbians (54%) and almost as many Albertans (45%) strongly disagreed. Only twelve per cent in BC and thirteen per cent in Alberta agreed that non-Christians should be encouraged to become Christians.² Now these numbers, though not

¹“Frosty Reception: Christian Witness in Canada”, *Context* 6.2 (1996): 6-7.

²The “strongly disagree/strongly agree” percentages for the rest of Canada are: SK/MB, 39/20; ON, 49/10; PQ, 41/10; Maritimes, 37/22.

encouraging, should not come as a surprise to any of us as we realize that today pluralistic acceptance is a hallmark of what it means to be Canadian.

What is surprising and discouraging is that nationally 24 per cent of church-going Canadians strongly disagree with encouraging non-Christians to become Christians and the majority have no opinion one way or the other. The study was not specific enough to comment on our Lutheran Church–Canada. What do you think our “numbers” would be? What about your congregation? Reading between the lines of this study one sees not just a lack of desire for Gospel outreach. One can also see a church people who need a vital connection between solid theology and compassionate practice and who are growing increasingly tired (dare one say fed up?) with an absence of both.

Evangelism is normally perceived as a righteous effort. The key issue seems to be one of pragmatics, i.e. “Does it work?” One result of this can be a serious gap between the theology which a church proclaims and the methods it uses in evangelism. The author is reminded of a church near where he first served as a young pastor. The flyer delivered to the front door of our house declared: “Crisp new \$5 bill! Under the seat of a bus coming to your neighbourhood this Sunday some lucky child will find a crisp new \$5 bill. Come to Sunday school with us this Sunday and the \$5 could be yours!” That was almost 20 years ago. It would take at least \$10 to get my 17 year old son on that bus today. (I might do it for \$20.)

But lest one get smug in pointing fingers at “bus driving churches”, how about a quick glance at our own? A former congregation served by this author had an interesting (but by no means unheard of) practice in tying together the Lord’s Supper and evangelism. The practice was basically a “wide open, no holds barred, makes no difference what you believe” policy for reception of the sacrament. Upon first arriving to serve this congregation the leaders were asked the rationale regarding the policy. The reason given was that the congregation was “dying” and they thought it best to not put up any barriers for new prospects. How wonderful it was for the entire congregation to discover that proper biblical teaching and pastoral practice regarding this issue and many others was the means that God used to grow His church twofold in four years.

Jesus did not give blanket approval to all evangelistic efforts. He spoke of some evangelists in this way: “Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel about on sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he becomes one you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves” (Mt. 23:15 NASB). Passion and numbers do not appear to be Jesus’ main criteria. If this were the case, our church today should look to the Mormons or Muslims. What are our motives for evangelistic outreach? Ideally, our prime motivation should flow from the very nature of God. As early as creation’s garden the essence of God’s nature was seen in His seeking out

the lost: “And the LORD God called to the man and said to him, ‘Where are you?’”(Gen. 3:9 NIV).

In Christ, Almighty God came to our sinful world to seek and save those who were lost. In Christ, Almighty God did not only travel over sea and land to win a single convert, He moved from perfect heaven to sin-filled earth. God so loved the sinful world that His Only-Begotten was given. We are told in the book of Romans that “while we were still powerless ... while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:6-8 NIV). St Luke tells us straying sons, “But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him ... and ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him” (Lk. 15:20 NIV). If we are to reflect God’s nature and image, we too must seek out the lost. We too must be evangelists.

Yet, as Lutheran Christians, we realize that we live on this earth simultaneously justified and sinful. As a result, our motivation in evangelism is never simply pure. There are some pretty selfish motivations for evangelism. A sagging budget can prompt many a congregation to increase its evangelistic efforts.

Inasmuch as improper theology and sinful motivation can pervert evangelistic efforts, it is salutary to consider the teachings of the Augsburg Confession. This is true because we believe and teach that the Augsburg Confession is a faithful exposition and application of God’s Word (cf. the rite for reception of new members or the installation of a pastor in the *Lutheran Worship Agenda*). It is salutary because we remember that this document gave birth to our evangelical church almost five centuries ago and continues to safeguard that precious evangel which is the foundation of our very existence as a church. It is salutary because we are seeking a solid theological foundation for our ongoing practice of evangelism. At this point, a brief historical explanation of the Augsburg Confession is in order.

On 21 January 1530 Emperor Charles V commanded a theological meeting for the following April in Augsburg, Germany. He desired a united front from his subjects in regards to his military operations against the advancing Turks (the Muslims). The unity of his subjects demanded an end to the religious disunity which had been introduced as a result of the Reformation. In keeping with this summons, the political leader of Saxony asked his theologians at Wittenberg to prepare an account of the beliefs and practices in the churches of his land. These documents were then taken to Augsburg. There it was decided to make a common Lutheran statement to be submitted to the emperor. The document, which came to be known as the Augsburg Confession, was prepared by Philip Melancthon, a contemporary of Martin Luther. Luther, who was not present in Augsburg, was consulted through correspondence, but revisions were made up until the time of the formal presentation to the emperor on 25 June 1530. This confession

immediately achieved importance as a public declaration of the Lutheran faith.

Today as we consider the Augsburg Confession we must be aware that it does not address itself directly to the task of evangelism. In fact the Tappert edition of the entire Book of Concord does not have a single reference to evangelism in the index. Why would this be? Evangelism (as we know it) was not an issue in the time of the Reformation. In that era and society one was simply “born into” the church. Weak or unfaithful members had to be cared for, but not under the umbrella of what many today call evangelism. Our concept of evangelism has arisen in what is sometimes called the post-Christian age, an age in which one is not automatically a member of the local congregation. One must ask, therefore, whether a sixteenth-century confession about the church, without any mention of evangelism, has anything valuable to say for the witness of today’s church. That is to say, can this 470-year-old document be of any benefit to the evangelistic efforts of Lutheran Church–Canada today? Answering this question is precisely the task of this paper.

Since the Augsburg Confession is by no means a dissertation on evangelism, we must look at several articles of the confession that relate to evangelism and try to see their implications for evangelistic theology and practice today.

Before examining the articles of the Augsburg Confession, it is important to define what we mean by the term “evangelism”. There are numerous definitions available. It is not within the scope of this paper to list and evaluate each of these definitions. Emerging from a twelve-year crucible of parish ministry and ten years of seminary teaching and research, the following definition is submitted. This definition comes from a classic book on evangelism, written by a conservative Lutheran pastor in 1954. In *The Theology of Evangelism*, T. A. Kantonen writes, “Evangelism is the activity of the church which has as its purpose, and results in, a) the deepening of the spiritual life of the believers, and b) the leading of non-believers to a living faith in Jesus Christ and into the fellowship of the church, through the power of the living Word.”³

This definition also seems to be found in a very basic biblical text about evangelism, I John 1:1-5, particularly verse three: “That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, that you also might have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ” (NASB).

Pastor Jerry Reimer, in his article entitled “Toward a Lutheran Theology of Evangelism”, has these comments about this text:

³T. A. Kantonen, *The Theology of Evangelism* (Philadelphia: Muhlenburg Press, 1954) 5-6.

“So that you might have fellowship with us”—Here’s a jolting surprise! What is the purpose of the evangelistic task? Why do we proclaim what we have seen and heard? Can it really be that John says, first, it is to establish a fellowship **with us** (and then with God?) “And our fellowship is with the Father and with the Son Jesus Christ”—John could have reversed the logic of these last two clauses. And most of us would have, too, if we had [been] asked to state the “purpose-task-result” sequence of evangelism. But this text will not allow that. It suggests quite strongly that fellowship with God is established only as fellowship with the **people** of God occurs.⁴

Reimer declares, as did Kantonen, that evangelism is that proclamatory activity that God uses to both create and nurture faith, i.e. to both call and keep people by gathering them into His Body, the Church.

We now draw our attention to a time-tested confession of this church. The investigation will focus on selected articles of the Augsburg Confession as they address evangelistic principles.⁵

ARTICLE II [ORIGINAL SIN]

It is also taught among us that since the fall of Adam all men who are born according to the course of nature are conceived and born in sin [Psalm 51]. That is, all men are full of evil lust and inclinations from their mothers’ wombs and are unable by nature to have true fear of God and true faith in God. Moreover, this inborn sickness and hereditary sin is truly sin and condemns to the eternal wrath of God all those who are not born again through Baptism and the Holy Spirit. Rejected in this connection are the Pelagians and others who deny that original sin is sin, for they hold that natural man is made righteous by his own powers, thus disparaging the sufferings and merit of Christ.

This article declares that since the fall of Adam all are born in sin and by nature are unable to have true faith in God. Condemned herein is the heresy of Pelagianism which holds that man may be made righteous by his own efforts.

Popular evangelistic methodology often leaves salvation up to the hearer to “make the decision”. Though well intended, this is simply the Pelagian heresy in modern guise. Initial and ongoing certainty of this salvation and God’s favour is intricately connected to the strength of my search, decision, and especially my work of faith. Ultimately, the article suggests, this disparages the work of Christ. Here a picture is worth a thousand theological

⁴Jerry Reimer, “Toward a Lutheran Theology of Evangelism”, *Currents in Theology and Mission* 4.2 (1977): 89.

⁵The source of the Confession is the Tappert edition, the German text. The biblical texts noted in brackets are referred to, but not directly quoted, in each article.

words. An account from previous parish ministry illustrates what is at stake in this article.

It was Wednesday night during a large adult Bible class when he walked in the room and sat at the back and put his head down on the table. We went to my study and spoke for three hours and our topic was the errors of Pelagianism, though that word was never used. He told me he was on his way to Puget Sound to hop on a ferry, cut his wrists, and jump into the icy waters. Our church building sat between him and the water, and, in his words, “I wanted to give a preacher one last chance to keep me from what I was planning.” His story was heart wrenching. In the space of one month he had lost his farm to the bank, his wife ran away with a friend, and his little girl had been diagnosed with an inoperable brain tumour. In his despair he fled to (for lack of a better term) his church to speak with (for lack of a better term) his pastor. There he was told by the pastor and leaders of this group that if only he had enough faith and could have mustered up in himself enough trust, none of these things would have happened. Theirs was a “faith” church and they could teach him how to create enough faith and depend on the strength of his faith to be an “overcomer”. In essence, he was told that these tragedies were his fault. This was more than he could take. It drove him to the kind of despair that brought him to me, just before the ferry ride. For three hours we spoke of the errors of such Pelagian synergistic sand and of the rock of Christ in the midst of life’s evil storms. After praying and saying farewell, I never saw him again. To this day, some fifteen years later, I have no idea what happened to him, though I often think of him.

Old heresies live on in our day. They resurface in real people’s lives (not just dusty seminary textbooks). Pelagianism and its derivatives prowl in our midst like a roaring lion, seeking whom to devour.

The sainted Dr Robert Preus paints well the scene of a botched Lutheran evangelism visit. Two people are trying to present the Gospel to someone. One shares the good news in all its sweetness—the boundless grace of God for all sinners. To this the person being visited responds, “What a wonderful message for a poor old sinner.” But then the second visitor interrupts and says, “Wait—you have to **believe** this message! Everything my friend here has said is of no value to you unless you believe it.” What has happened, then? Those statements intimate that justification depends on the man’s faith, rather than his faith being a result of the gospel’s work. It is as if one were making the appreciation of a beautiful sunset the basis of its beauty.⁶

What is especially sad in this case is that the Holy Spirit, through the proclamation of the Gospel, did create faith (“What a wonderful message for a poor old sinner!”) but synergistic methodology (“Wait, you have to believe

⁶Robert D. Preus, “Perennial Problems in the Doctrine of Justification”, *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 45.3 (July 1981): 179.

it”) robbed the person of God’s dependence and threw him back onto the sands of Pelagian self-dependence. The second article of the Augsburg Confession makes it clear that evangelism is to be done but that any form of evangelism which ignores the desperate plight of people apart from God will not be adequate. If there is to be true deliverance from the state of sin, it must be a rescue from outside the self, not a rescue or a certainty of rescue anchored in self. As eighteenth-century hymn writer Augustus Toplady said it, and as we sing it (*LW* 361, st. 2, 3):

Not the labours of my hands
Can fulfil Thy law’s demands;
Could my zeal no respite know,
Could my tears forever flow,
All for sin could not atone;
Thou must save and Thou alone.

Nothing in my hand I bring;
Simply to thy cross I cling.
Naked, come to Thee for dress;
Helpless, look to Thee for grace;
Foul, I to the fountain fly;
Wash me, Saviour, or I die.

ARTICLE III [THE SON OF GOD]

It is also taught among us that God the Son became man [Jn 1:1-3, 14; Lk. 2; etc.], born of the Virgin Mary, and that the two natures, divine and human, are so inseparably united in one person that there is one Christ, true God and true man, who was truly born, suffered, was crucified, died and was buried in order to be a sacrifice not only for original sin but also for all other sins and to propitiate God’s wrath ... and to comfort all who believe in him, that he may bestow on them life and blessing, and that he may protect and defend them against the devil and against sin.

The third article proclaims Christ as the only answer to the problem of sin pictured in article two. This means that Augsburg evangelism will always be **Christocentric**. This might seem blatantly obvious. However, there are many other options out there today in the religious marketplace. People are searching for God (whatever He or it may be) and searching for a solution to life’s deepest needs.

Lutheran theologian Robert Kolb in his classic book on evangelism tells us that are two mistakes church folks make regarding evangelizing people

outside the church.⁷ The first is thinking that because they do not go to church they are not religious; that is, they do not have concerns regarding God. The second mistake is thinking they track reality the same way we do; that is, they use the same god-language we do and understand our religious lingo. Having both or either of these misapprehensions about modern un-churched people impedes our hearing and knowing them, and thus being able to compassionately speak and live the Gospel on their behalf.

Just listen to the yearning and searching expressed in this recent song sung by Joan Osborne. It is, by the way, a song not to be found on an “easy-listening” radio station. Perhaps it is a good thing if you have a picture of the singer. Her nose-ring and unique appearance might get in the way of hearing the religious yearning she is expressing. The song is entitled “One of Us.”

If God had a name, what would it be?
 And would you call it to his face?
 If you were faced with him in all his glory,
 What would you ask if you had just one question?

What if God was one of us?
 Just a slob like one of us,
 Just a stranger on the bus,
 Trying to make his way home?

If God had a face what would it look like?
 And would you want to see if seeing meant that you
 Would have to believe in things like heaven and Jesus
 and the saints and all the prophets?

What if God was one of us?
 Just a slob like one of us,
 Just a stranger on the bus,
 Trying to make his way home?
 Back up to heaven all alone,
 Nobody calling on the phone,
 'cept maybe for the Pope in Rome.

(Eric Bazilian, 1995)

Can we church people listen long enough to get past the nose-ring and melody to hear the yearning: Is there a God out there? Could He possibly understand what it feels like to be a human being, lost and alone? What if He were one of us? Would He understand and could I approach him with all my questions? Such irony! God laid aside His glory and did become one of us. He does understand. He does love and is approachable and will not turn us away. What a wonderful message we have to share with a dying world!

⁷Robert Kolb, *Speaking the Gospel Today: A Theology of Evangelism* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1995) 12-13.

The Christocentric principle of evangelism as found in article three means a great deal for the methodology of evangelism. It powerfully reminds us of what St Paul declared in Rom. 1:16: "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew then for the Gentile" (NIV).

It is the Gospel, the person and work of Jesus, that is to be the very core of our witness. The Gospel alone is the answer to people's deepest needs, even if they cannot clearly vocalize (on our terms or in our lingo) these needs. Any witness to our faith or our victories or our blessings or our doctrinal purity (and a promise of the same for others) is really no witness at all. When such witness points to the glory within the self, it inevitably becomes a matter of appealing to the sinful desires of man. Such witness wonderfully caters to the sinful man whose first question, even of things spiritual, is, "What's in it for me?" Such witness could also reveal a selfish agenda belonging to the witnesser (not the least of which might be a passion for numbers/results rather than for spiritual care-giving). A former congregational member, previously a travelling carnival worker, called this technique "the old bait and switch" method. The skilled booth worker gets a person to play his game that he might get more and more of the player's money. The worker promises one thing (the bait) but the player ends up getting something he did not bargain for, or something quite less than he expected (the switch). The game is built on the selfish foundation of, "What's in it for me?"

In our self-centred fallen state (so said article two), we naturally desire to be happy, healthy, wealthy, and wise. A Christian witness that promises, if we but turn to Christ we shall receive everything our sinful hearts desire, is no witness at all. What kind of witness is that to the yearning person who asks, what **if** God was one of us? What kind of witness is that to a person whose personal heartaches and failures continue regardless how much they place their faith in Jesus? Augsburg's third article points away from ourselves and always and only to Christ Jesus. Faith in this Saviour is a cross-shaped faith which at times can mean sorrow as well as joy, yet always means an assurance of sin forgiven. With John the Baptist we are to proclaim: "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (Jn 1:29). We are not to try to make Jesus more appealing by pointing to ourselves or a list of personal benefits that come with faith as sort of a package deal.

Article two's message is one of sin and helplessness before a holy God. We Lutherans call that "Law". Article three declares the person and work of Christ Jesus. We call that "Gospel". The Law is needed in all its starkness and the Gospel in all its sweetness to create and nurture authentic faith in both those in and outside of the Church. What can this mean in a practical sense for congregational evangelism? It means asking the Law/Gospel

question of every sermon, Bible class, instruction class, confirmation class, home visit, prospect visit, hospital call, counselling session, etc. The question is, simply, are both being proclaimed and then intentionally related to daily life?

The importance of this effort was underscored just this week by a young man who spoke to the writer of these words. The speaker is new to the church and the Christian faith, having recently completed four months of instruction class. He related how crucial it is for him that from pulpit, classroom, and living-room God's Word is not related as a "boring history lesson" but as something that "convicts my heart" and "helps me see just how Jesus fits in and makes a difference in my everyday life." He "wants more of this kind of stuff" and has friends he wants to "bring with me who need to hear it too." Sounds like pretty decent evangelism.

ARTICLE IV [JUSTIFICATION]

It is also taught among us that we cannot obtain forgiveness of sin and righteous before God by our own merits, works or satisfaction, but that we receive forgiveness of sin and become righteous before God by grace, for Christ's sake through faith [Eph. 2:8-9], when we believe that Christ suffered for us and that for his sake our sin is forgiven and righteousness and eternal life are given to us. For God will regard and reckon this faith as righteousness, as Paul says in Romans 3:21-26 and 4:5.

This article is central to all that it means to be a Lutheran Christian. Again, stanzas from Toplady's hymn (st. 1 and 4) illustrate its truths:

Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee;
Let the water and the blood,
From Thy riven side which flowed,
Be of sin the double cure
Cleanse me from its guilt and pow'r.

While I draw this fleeting breath,
When mine eyelids close in death,
When I soar to worlds unknown,
See Thee on Thy judgment throne,
Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee.

Justification by grace through faith is the very essence of any authentic evangelistic message. It is, as some say of John 3:16, "the Gospel in a nutshell". If the Gospel is indeed the centre of Christian life, the Gospel is what dictates the difference between church and world. Without the Gospel, the church has nothing to say to the world and has no reason to be at

variance with it at any point. Richard John Neuhaus says the Gospel brings with it “a distinctive worldview, with distinctive vocabulary, distinctive moral sensibilities, and a distinctive way of being in the world. The gospel is what the church presents to the world in evangelism, and this gospel must dictate **how** it is presented.”⁸

A continuing controversy in the modern church is the style of worship in light of the desire for evangelism. The Sunday morning worship is the major gathering of the Christian congregation, not simply as a place to meet each other, but as where the body of Christ finds its centre and source of community in the Gospel: the speaking and singing of the Word, the Lord’s Supper, Holy Baptism. If people are to be brought into the church, this is where, in the final analysis, they should find themselves. The current quandary seems to be whether the liturgy of the church is a barrier to would-be converts, and if so, whether this can be rectified by creativity in worship. This being said, there are some key issues of faithfulness which need to be observed so that creativity serves the Gospel.

Lex orandi lex credendi. This Latin phrase has become sort of a cheer in the seminary worship class and battle cry in some circles of our church. It can be translated: the law of worship is the law of belief. What it can mean is how we worship determines or declares what we believe. Public worship is the place we declare to fellow believers and outsiders what it is that we hold dear, what is most important to us, what we are all about. Week after week, how we worship feeds and shapes our faith and the faith of our children.

After his translation of the New Testament into the language of the common man, Luther’s very next series of writings was about worship. Any guesses why? In worship, in theologically solid worship, the Gospel is the main course served to feed the believer and to whet the appetite of the seeking unbeliever. Some scholars suggest that Luther’s worship reforms were the catalyst for the Reformation. In public worship, the common man can learn good theology, be taught to spot error, be strengthened by the Gospel, and be enabled to give that Gospel away to others.

The worship of the church shapes the beliefs of those who participate in it. Harold Senkbeil asks a penetrating question in this regard: “Is it possible that the reason we are confused on how we ought to [worship] is because we have forgotten what it is we believe?”⁹ Senkbeil seems to be telling us that **less CREDENDI** translates into **less ORANDI**. The less we know and are taught about what we really believe as Lutheran Christians, the less our public worship will be all it could be as a clear proclamation of the Gospel.

⁸Richard John Neuhaus, “The Lutheran Difference”, *Lutheran Forum* 24 (Aug. 1990): 22. Emphasis mine.

⁹Harold Senkbeil, “The Liturgy is the Life of the Church”, *Lutheran Forum* 24 (Feb. 1992): 29.

Pastors and teachers of the Church: we can do a better job in our catechesis than we are doing at present. Current parish service has surely brought this lesson to this writer. Never underestimate the need for continual, lively instruction in basic catechism and apologetics. Our people increasingly need to know what we believe and why we believe what we do. They will bless you for your efforts in this regard. The seminary would do well to intentionally address this issue for pastoral preparation.

The question for each congregation is whether the faith of the Church, namely the Gospel, shapes and determines the congregation's worship. Another way of looking at this issue comes by way of personal analogy. I have a very unique office decor at the seminary. It is immediately obvious what I treasure and what I love to talk about. Covering the wall in my office are autographed photos of Mickey Mantle, Willie Mays, Whitey Ford, Joe Dimaggio, Yogi Berra, and other baseball greats, as well as team photos of the boys I coach. It is quite obvious to any visitor what is important to me. When someone visits your church for Sunday worship, what impression do they get? What would they say is important to you? What would they say you treasure? What would they say you like to talk and sing about? What would they say to a large degree defines who you are as Lutheran Christians? If it is anything less than or instead of the Gospel of Jesus, then our *orandi* is not matching our *credendi*. Article four tells us that justification by grace through faith is our *credendi*. Is this what our *orandi* is proclaiming? This clear and consistent Gospel proclamation is the most valid argument for the continuing use of the historic liturgy of the church; it is a faithful **vehicle** of the Gospel for believer and unbeliever alike.

The current discussion on worship and evangelism challenges the church to consider very carefully the direction of interaction between God and people in the worship life of the church. Primary in the liturgy is God's Word and action towards us (*Gottesdienst* "Divine Service"), and secondary, although essential to worship, is our participation, our response to His goodness (*homologia*, our "echo", our saying back to God what He has first told us about Himself in praise and thanks). The direction from above to below is essential. This is another way of stating article four: the Gospel is central.

When undue emphasis is placed on the "below to above" aspect of worship, i.e. on the man- not God-centred (anthropo- not theo-centric) aspect, the Gospel, the action of God, can be obscured. This can be seen today in churches that cast aside anything they think gets in the way of growth, and often what is cast aside is that faithful vehicle of the Gospel, the liturgy. Please permit another personal observation. I must confess that my heart is broken almost every time I return the church of my youth for worship. There the decision has been made to have very little liturgy, no hymnal use, no robe or clerical collar for the pastor, no use of the three-

lesson biblical pericopal system, no textual sermon. All such matters were deemed to get in the way of growth and outreach. The reality is the place is packed! But the article four issue is: what are the people being fed? In my last number of times there it was not the clear Gospel.

So what? St Paul has told us so what; it is only the Gospel that is “the power of God for salvation”. The hymn has told us, “nothing in my hand I bring; simply to Thy cross I cling”. Pastor Russell John Briese from the Lutheran Church of Australia has these words to say in his article, “Theses for a Lutheran Theology of Evangelism”:

Transforming worship into entertainment [i.e., a means to attract people and give them what they want] turns the whole direction upside down. While entertainment in lieu of worship might entice more people inside the four walls of the church building, what is essential, namely God’s word and action towards us, has been pushed aside. The relationship between worship and the goal of evangelism is the opposite of this: the church does not worship so as to recruit members; it recruits members so as to form them into worshippers ... and the [result is the] enablement to witness to those outside of the church.¹⁰

This 20th-century viewpoint is actually very close to the reality of the New Testament church and the church of the Reformation. History tells us that even in what was likely the greatest mission era of the church, the first two centuries after Christ, we find the Saviour’s witnesses looking for opportunities to proclaim the Gospel away from their public worship. Only after instruction were the non-baptized invited to worship.¹¹

Despite his deep commitment to the common man and his determined effort to make worship something in which the common man could participate, Martin Luther did not consider the regular Sunday service to be the primary entrance level for many in Germany who were non-believers. They needed simple instruction. Luther said, “The German service needs a plain and simple, fair and square catechism. Catechism means the instruction in which the heathen who want to be Christians are taught and guided in what they should believe, know and do, and leave undone, according to the Christian faith.”¹²

Milton Rudnick, in his helpful book *Speaking the Gospel through the Ages*, tells us that even a cursory study of church history reveals it was not until the dawn of 18th- and 19th-century American revivalism that the church

¹⁰Russell John Briese, “Theses for a Lutheran Theology of Evangelism”, *Dialog* 32 (1993): 126.

¹¹A helpful discussion of this practice is found in Werner Elert, *Eucharist and Church Fellowship in the First Four Centuries*, trans. Norman E. Nagel (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1966) 75-76.

¹²Martin Luther, “The German Mass” (1526), AE 53:64.

considered its corporate worship to be a forum for evangelism. Rather, it understood that initiation into the Christian faith was better accomplished through forms of education and fellowship.¹³

Pastor James Tiefel, professor of worship and education at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in Mequon, Wisconsin, asks:

Does all of this mean that pastors and evangelism committee members ought to stand guard at the doors of their churches and refuse entrance to any unchurched or non-Lutheran visitor? Of course not. **It does mean that we ought not put too many of our outreach eggs into the corporate worship basket.** The front door may still be a valid entrance point for some searchers, but at the very least it should be only one of several entrance points. ... [A] pastor is wise to spend a good share of his time developing side-door approaches to reach the sheep which are still not found.¹⁴

What are examples of “side-door” entrances? Here is a sample from the recent ABC District brochure, “For the Sake of the Gospel”:

- English as a second language classes (Trinity, Richmond)
- Martial arts classes (Faith, Surrey)
- Inner-city social ministry (St Peter’s, Edmonton)
- Start up of new Lutheran schools (Zion, Prince George)

Through these efforts, people who might never on their own come through the front door on Sunday morning are being brought under the umbrella of Gospel ministry and rubbing shoulders with Gospel people. What about the church softball team, the Vacation Bible School, the youth group, the preschool or day-school, day-care, the AA group, the instruction class, the LWML, and on and on and on? Surely the reader can list excellent examples fitted to his own specific context. Article four would have us ask this question of all these activities: how might they be intentionally used as a side door **for the sake of the Gospel**? That is, how might each activity of the church be seen through Gospel outreach lenses instead of just as an “in-house”, “let’s take care of ourselves” concern? How might each of our congregations be stronger Gospel churches, that is, evangelizing churches, if we intentionally asked the article-four question of all our activities; from how we run a stewardship program, to setting congregational policies, to exercising church discipline, to what we do with our youth, etc.

¹³Milton Rudnick, *Speaking the Gospel through the Ages: A History of Evangelism* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1984), chapters four and five.

¹⁴James Tiefel, “Liturgical Worship for Evangelism and Outreach”, *Logia* 2.3 (1993): 31. Emphasis mine.

ARTICLE V [THE OFFICE OF THE MINISTRY]

To obtain such faith God instituted the office of the ministry, that is, provided the Gospel and the sacraments. Through these, as through means, he gives the Holy Spirit, who works faith, when and where he pleases, in those who hear the Gospel. And the Gospel teaches that we have a gracious God, not by our own merits but by the merits of Christ, when we believe this. Condemned are the Anabaptists and others who teach that the Holy Spirit comes to us through our own preparations, thoughts, and works without the external word of the Gospel.

This article clearly tells us that faith is a gift (Eph. 2:8-9) and it comes through the means of grace that God provides (I Cor. 4:1-2). The point of the Augsburg Confession's fourth and fifth articles is that conversion to Christianity is always a miracle. It is truly a miracle that self-centred people come to trust the Saviour who calls them to the way of a cross. Without the work of the Holy Spirit through the means God has chosen (the Word and sacraments) it is impossible to imagine such a response. We are once again reminded of Paul's words that it is the Gospel which is the power of God for salvation (Rom. 1:16).

Faith is a gift and miracle. This truth speaks a word of caution to our propensity for popular evangelistic techniques. Article five reminds us that we should not place too much faith in human techniques ("our own preparations, thoughts, and works") lest the Gospel be obscured. On the other side of the coin is an equally deficient reality. This reality has sprung from a misreading of this very article. It sounds something like this on the lips of some pastors: "All I have to do is preach the Word and administer the sacrament and God will do the rest." In some cases, this claim can be used to piously cover up laziness or insecurity. It can be an excuse not to risk using God's gift of creative imagination.

Yes, God and God alone by His means of grace both creates and nurtures faith (once people are under the umbrella of word and sacrament). Thus say the words of article five: "[T]hrough these ... He works faith ... in **those who hear** the Gospel" (emphasis mine). Our task, call it technique, method, "side doors", or whatever, is to compassionately seek out, befriend and welcome all for whom Jesus died and bring them where the real action is, to the life-giving Word and sacraments. It is precisely because this article reminds us that we can count on the Gospel to do its work that we are freed to use God-pleasing and people-loving techniques. We do not have to depend on them or be enslaved to them, but we can use or discard them as the context of our ministry dictates.

These last months back in the parish ministry have taught many valuable lessons. One that especially applies to pastors and seminary professors is this: we need to put into the hands of the laity tools for personal Gospel

proclamation. There are numerous such tools available for the pastor who will take the time to study them and select one that best suits his ministry context. A few years ago an addition was made to both the Edmonton seminary and university college evangelism classes (both taught by this writer): an intense instruction and modelling of personal Gospel proclamation that can be taught in the congregational setting. More than a few veteran pastors have commented that they had been trained to preach to hundreds but had never learned a winsome and theologically sound way to share the faith one-on-one. No wonder their laity are not being taught to do the same. It is time for a change.

At the May 2000 Alberta–British Columbia District Convention a brief presentation was made regarding a new concept in congregational health and outreach entitled *Natural Church Development*.¹⁵ Each district of LCC has a consultant available to assist congregations wanting to use the materials. The evangelism classes of both the Edmonton seminary and university college will read the major textbook and receive a thorough overview of the programme by the district’s director of parish services. The materials grow out of an extensive research project conducted by Germany’s *Institute for Natural Church Development* from 1994-96. The research involved 1000 churches in 32 countries and six continents. The project clearly calls into question many classic “Church Growth” principles and practices and offers a refreshing alternative. It unequivocally declares that if a (church growth) concept contradicts biblical truth, Christians should reject it, even if it appears to have been used with “success”.

Natural Church Development rejects merely pragmatic and a-theological approaches (“The end justifies the means”) and replaces them with a principle-oriented point of departure. It has no quantitative approach (“How do we get more people to attend services?”), but looks at the quality of church life as the key to church development. The eight quality characteristics focused upon are: (1) Empowering Leadership, (2) Gift-oriented Ministry, (3) Passionate Spirituality, (4) Functional Structures, (5) Inspiring Worship, (6) Holistic Small Groups, (7) Need-oriented Evangelism, and (8) Loving Relationships.

This is by no means a “one size fits all” programme. The key to NCD’s programmatic aspect is its built-in ability to be context specific for each congregation. This material is not the be all and end all for congregational health and outreach. It is, however, a refreshing alternative and worthy of

¹⁵Originally published as *Die natürliche Gemeindeentwicklung* in 1996 by Christian A. Schwarz, the Canadian edition was printed in 1998 under the title *Natural Church Development* by The International Centre for Leadership Development and Evangelism, P.O. Box 41083, RPO South, Winfield, BC V4V 1Z7, phone: (250) 766-0907, fax: (250) 766-0912, e-mail: LeadEdge@bc.sympatico.ca, internet: www.GrowingLeadership.com.

investigation, especially for those who will keep article five concerns at the forefront.

ARTICLE IX [BAPTISM]

It is taught among us that Baptism is necessary and that grace is offered through it. Children, too, should be baptized, for in Baptism they are committed to God and become acceptable to him. On this account the Anabaptists who teach that infant Baptism is not right are rejected [Mk 16; Mt.28; Acts 16; Col. 2].

What could Baptism and evangelism possibly have in common? “Not much” might well be the answer of many North American churches. A number of church historians trace the current popular concept of evangelism to the revival meetings of the 18th and 19th centuries. (For a concise but helpful treatment of this topic see the book previously-mentioned, Rudnick’s *Speaking the Gospel through the Ages*.) Revival meetings (church buildings, tents, open air exposed people to a vigorous call to repentance and faith, an emotional decision and memorable conversion experience, “being born again”, cf. Jn 3). Baptism was viewed as only for those who had made the decision and come to faith. As such, Baptism represented a public stance for faith in Christ. This emphasis continues today in many protestant churches. In the final analysis, Baptism is seen not so much a sacrament (God acting) as it is a sacrifice (man acting). Emphasis is placed upon the decision and deed of the individual. One is here reminded of the commentary on Pelagianism in article two.

In contrast to this view, article nine of the Augsburg Confession portrays infant Baptism as a beautiful expression of God’s own evangelism. God is the principal actor, we are the grateful receivers. In infant Baptism we see God’s grace being delivered to the child who is utterly helpless. Before we were able to do any good deed, make any personal decision, before we could do anything except make obnoxious sounds and aromas, God was seeking and accepting us (cf. Lk. 15:20, “and while the son was still afar off, the father came running”). Baptism is a promise that our spiritual status is not dependent upon something as flimsy as a human deed or decision, but upon the very nature of our evangelizing God. How does this relate to evangelism?

Here one is reminded of the definition of evangelism with which this discussion began (“the deepening of the spiritual life of the believers, and the leading of non-believers to a living faith in Jesus Christ and into the fellowship of the church”). Preaching, teaching, counselling, pastoral care, and intentional evangelism should not encourage the hearers to look to themselves for evidence of their salvation and God’s favour, but to look to

what God has done for them. This is what Luther meant when he said “I have been baptized!”¹⁶ Article nine declares good news to us, evangelizes us, as it reminds us that our present and eternal assurance comes when we look away from ourselves to the graciousness of God toward us: the evangelization of the baptized! That is what the Reformation in the sixteenth century was all about: leading the confused or anxious person to a confident trust, a spiritual awakening, and a deeper walk with Christ Jesus. All in favour of such a revival in our church today say “Amen!” To preach Baptism **is** to be a revival preacher!

We conclude our discussion of Baptism and evangelism with one final point: the evangelization of the baptized unbeliever. Credit for this phrase goes to Professor T. R. Skarsten, then of Trinity Lutheran Seminary (Columbus, Ohio), in his 1983 lecture delivered to the South Australia District Pastors’ Conference of the Lutheran Church of Australia.¹⁷

We have said that Baptism is great source of Gospel for the believer. Often, says Skarsten, we have been blind to one of the great target areas for evangelistic effort, the baptized unbeliever. Here is a large mission field that exists right under our very noses.

Reformation studies reveal how Luther battled against the Roman Catholic concept of Baptism as a sacrament that worked *ex opere operato*, whether faith was present or not. It is not our faith that makes Baptism a sacrament, nor is it our faith that makes Baptism “work”. God’s promises and actions are real and efficacious whether we believe them or not. Yet, without faith the on-going blessings of Baptism can be lost, not because God does not want to give them to us, but because we can disparage them and thereby lose them. God does not turn His back on us, but we can turn our back on Him. Skarsten says:

A one-sided emphasis on the grace of God and his desire to save, without recognizing the possibility that one can fall away and renounce one’s baptismal covenant, is ironically succumbing to the very trap that such an emphasis seeks to avoid. It makes baptism into a human work whereby one trusts in the work itself—*ex opere operato*—apart from faith in the living God.¹⁸

Luther himself said, “Just because everyone in Saxony is baptized does not mean that everyone in Saxony is a Christian. Of course it happens that many leap overboard into the sea and perish.”¹⁹

In Walther’s famous lectures on Law and Gospel, he states:

¹⁶E.g. LC 4:44.

¹⁷T. R. Skarsten, “The Evangelization of the Baptized”, *Lutheran Theological Journal* 17.2 (Aug. 1983): 46-55.

¹⁸Skarsten 51.

¹⁹“The Babylonian Captivity of the Church” (1520), AE 36:61.

If the mere act of being baptized and partaking of Holy Communion brings grace to a person, the Gospel manifestly has been turned into a law, because salvation then rests on a person's works. ... One would indeed think it to be utterly impossible for a Christian minister to teach that the Sacraments produce salutary effects *ex opere operato*; still, that is what happens again and again. This awful error is taught by the very men who wish to pass for genuinely strict Lutherans, every time they discuss the Sacraments. When they have finished unfolding their doctrine of Baptism, every hearer has received the unmistakable impression that, in order to get to heaven, it is merely necessary to submit to the act of being baptized ... because God has attached His grace to this external action. ... This teaching is diametrically opposed to the Gospel.²⁰

On this point it seems that some modern Lutherans are nearly Crypto-Calvinists. It is as though some Lutherans believe in the Calvinist doctrine of eternal security. However, instead of the "once saved, always saved" motto of the Calvinists, their motto could be "once baptized, always saved". It is no wonder we do not see the mission field right under our noses when we forget article twelve of the Augsburg Confession. This article clearly rejects "those who teach that persons who have become godly cannot fall again". Let us look right under our noses in our own congregations and communities for the numbers of dear souls who have wandered or are in the process of wandering away. Just imagine what a Gospel harvest there would be if only 50% of these people were welcomed back into the active fellowship of the church. How might we go about the task of evangelizing these baptized people for whom Jesus died? Skarsten says:

1) We must not be afraid to preach a message of repentance and conversion to baptized and unbaptized alike, for, as Luther said in the very first of his ninety five theses, God has willed that the entire life of believers to be one of repentance. There are usually two kinds of people who sit before us each Sunday—the saved and the unsaved. While we cannot preach to and teach the baptized unbelievers who never see the inside of our churches, clergy and lay people can expound the Gospel in such a way that those who hear will be led to "walk in the waters of their baptism" each day through daily repentance and faith. At the same time, those who worship in our congregations, who may not know Jesus as their Saviour, and who come under the hearing of the Word, will, by God's working, come to repentance and faith in the love of God which is part and parcel of the baptismal covenant.

2) We need to distinguish Law and Gospel aright in our pastoral counselling and in our pastoral and lay visitation as they relate to Baptism. It does no good to tell an unrepentant and unbelieving person, "You have been

²⁰C. F. W. Walther, *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1928) 351.

baptized”, and thereby give the impression that God’s grace will make everything all right. That’s like giving a sleeping pill to a comatose patient.

When Luther counselled that we should say “I have been baptized”, he was a *Seelsorger*, one who seeks to comfort and assure a troubled repentant person of God’s mercy and forgiveness. But spiritually hardened, baptized unbelievers, we need to awaken with a call to repentance, and **then** lift high the cross and proclaim God’s stupendous love for them.²¹

The Lutheran Church needs to do evangelism with theological integrity. These are not mutually exclusive realities. May God grant us a proper balance of holy aggressiveness and dependence on Him. This is Augsburg evangelism.

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²¹Skarsten 53.

THE MEANS OF GRACE IN SUDAN

Jonathan C. Naumann

“**S**ince we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit” (Gal. 5:25). So wrote St Paul to the Galatian Christians. We know that the Galatian church frustrated the Apostle by “deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and ... turning to a different gospel...” (Gal. 1:6). The heresy of a false gospel may not be a problem in many Lutheran churches today. Yet, like the Galatian Christians, Lutherans need to hear the same message of Scripture that those who “live by the Spirit” are to “keep in step with the Spirit”. One Lutheran church that seems to be hearing and acting on that message today is in the war-torn African country of Sudan.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Sudan (ELCS) is a growing church in a difficult environment. Since it was first organized only six years ago, the ELCS has grown to six thousand members, despite the fact that it has had only one ordained pastor during its initial years of existence. Even as these words are being written, the ELCS is adding new members at an almost alarming rate. The ELCS’s only pastor, Bishop Andrew Mbugo Elisa, is quoted as saying: “The service of 1 March [2002] lasted for five hours as I struggled to deal with the baptism of 138 people, the second biggest number I have baptized in a day.”¹

Here we see a living example of how the word of the Lord grows even in a society that is hostile to Christianity (Acts 19:20). Equally true is that the growth of this church is part of a complex equation, involving many variables such as the quality of its leadership, the strength of outside support from other Christians and, not least, the Holy Spirit Himself. It is to the Divine variable that I refer with the title of this paper.

MISSION FIELDS AS TESTING GROUNDS FOR LUTHERAN DOCTRINE

I have often wondered whether or not my own mission field is a kind of “testing ground” for the effectiveness of the Lutheran use of the Means of Grace. Twenty years of experience between Scotland and England have brought me to one certain conclusion: Great Britain is a place where any growth in Lutheranism must be traced to the Means of Grace, rather than to other factors such as German or Scandinavian heritage, or large numbers of Lutherans immigrating or moving to our churches.

¹Jonathan Naumann, “God’s Work in the Sudan”, *The British Lutheran* 45.1 (2002): 7.

In January and February of 2002, while serving as a guest professor at our sister Lutheran Seminary—The Concordia Lutheran Institute for the Holy Ministry in Khartoum—I quickly recognized a parallel situation. Like Great Britain, Sudan is a country with a rich mix of cultural environments where, if Christianity (and Lutheranism) is to grow properly, it cannot expect that growth to come from the name or reputation of Luther, or from any of a wide variety of modern “gimmicks”, but from the divine Means of “church growth” that Lutherans call the “marks” of the church.

Centuries ago one of the founders of the Lutheran Reformation wrote of Lutheran ecclesiology:

We are speaking not of an imaginary Church, which is to be found nowhere; but we say and know certainly that this Church, wherein saints live, is and abides truly upon earth; namely, that some of God’s children are here and there in all the world, in various kingdoms, islands, lands, and cities, from the rising of the sun to its setting, who have truly learned to know Christ and His Gospel. And we add **the marks: the pure doctrine of the Gospel [the ministry or the Gospel] and the Sacraments** ... (Ap VII/VIII:20; emphasis added).

Because Melancthon is describing how to recognize not just the Lutheran Church, but the *una sancta*, Lutherans would expect that wherever the one holy catholic and apostolic Church is found it will be recognized by certain marks. Presupposed is that God’s Word and Sacraments are the same life-giving gifts, causing the church to grow and thrive wherever they are actively and faithfully used by Christians throughout the world. While we have to speak of an “invisible” Church (because we cannot visually identify those members of that church where everyone is going to heaven), we are nevertheless able to speak of a Church made identifiable to us by its use of the marks of the true visible Church (Ap VII/VIII:5).

UNIQUE CHALLENGES

Churches in different cultures, using the same Word and Sacraments, nevertheless encounter challenges to their growth and generally to the Church’s ministry that may be unique to their situation.

As already mentioned, the ELCS is challenged by a shortage of ordained clergy. At last count there were 31 Lutheran congregations in Khartoum and southern Sudan, plus some developing preaching stations.

The Islamic government and Muslim culture provide another huge challenge for Sudanese Christians. Can we imagine what it is like to live in a place where Sunday is a school day and a normal business day, where employers favour Muslims over Christians? Many Christians in the south

have their faith tested when they are “targeted” by the government and unwillingly get caught up in “political problems” related to the civil war.

Poverty could be considered another threat to church growth and stability, but to my delight the Sudanese people appear to be opening their arms to the Good News of Jesus Christ, continuing to learn about Him and share Him with others, even if they live in a state of poverty which is difficult for westerners to comprehend. Yes, many Sudanese Christians live in poverty—yet they are joyful people, and also genuinely grateful for what other Christians have shared with them.

SPREADING THE WORD

Members of the ELCS desire to remain faithful to the doctrine of the Holy Ministry as found in the Lutheran Confessions, and, with the financial support of the Lutheran Heritage Foundation,² have established an educational programme to train indigenous pastors from Sudan and neighbouring African countries. My seminary lectures were delivered to 15 seminarians (plus an additional eight men and six women who were just auditing the class). By 2003—contingent upon God’s will and a continuous flow of guest lecturers into the Khartoum seminary—five seminary students are planning to be ordained for Ministry in Sudan, with another fifteen to follow within the next five years.

The Institute for the Holy Ministry also holds courses for “lay evangelists”, as well as Bible and doctrinal workshops for women, and is hoping to establish a deaconess programme in the near future. My duties included teaching seminar lectures on the Sacraments to some of the ELCS’s “Evangelists”—a group of 15 men—and providing workshop sessions for women’s seminars or retreats as needed, on topics such as the Lord’s Prayer and the Sacraments.

To those of us who live in or originate from North America and other western countries, this many-streamed educational model, established almost from the outset of our sister Sudanese synod, is very fascinating. We might wonder whether or not they have chosen to copy our own time-tested pattern. Or have they created different “job descriptions” for their graduating students in order to assist the church’s survival and growth?

²Lutheran Heritage Foundation, P. O. Box 46, Sterling Heights, Michigan 48311, USA.

COPING WITH A SHORTAGE OF CLERGY

There is no doubt that the shortage of ordained clergy in Sudan has caused the ELCS to place a great deal of emphasis on training lay people to spread the Christian Gospel in their communities, and to help develop churches that are true to the Lutheran Confessions in those communities. They are trying to do this in an “orderly” manner, and although they may seem unconventional to us, some of their ways of organizing lay people are quite ingenious.

Lay people, particularly the principal male congregational leaders, officially called “Evangelists”, are expected to evangelize and catechize individuals and organize congregations along the lines of confessional Lutheran doctrine, even when that means that the sacraments are for the time being only rarely available in those congregations. This is, of course, because the ELCS’s understanding of the Lutheran doctrine of the Ministry precludes lay people from offering their congregations Holy Communion or even Holy Baptism.

“Does this work?”, we might ask as though speculating about a theory. The short answer is “yes, it is working”, not just as a theory, but as a deployed strategy. One of the lay evangelists I taught was a middle-aged Sudanese man who was so enthusiastic about the Lutheran Christianity he had heard and read about that he started a Lutheran church with 150 people in attendance before he was even baptized.

St Luke’s references to the importance of “many prominent women”³ in the development of St Paul’s congregations are also reflected in the story of the Lutheran Church in Sudan again and again. Although they do not lead Divine Services, the women of the ELCS are vital to the founding and organization of many Sudanese missions. At one of the women’s retreats I attended, an elderly woman was applauded for founding a congregation that had seven preaching stations, for which she also helped to organize male preachers. Startling and incredible as it may seem, Sudanese lay people, trained to use the Holy Scriptures, as expounded by the Lutheran Confessions, have been extremely instrumental in the steady growth of the ELCS since 1996.

Zeal for outreach like this is not something to be overlooked or left out of the equation when trying to understand the development of the Lutheran Church in Sudan. The ingredient of a warm zeal, enthusiasm and love for Christ and His church seems to have been regarded as essential to the Church in God’s estimation if indeed this was the *πρώτην ἀφῆκες* that the church in Ephesus was rebuked for losing.⁴

³For example, Acts 17.

⁴“First love” (lost by the church of Ephesus in Rev. 2:4).

BAPTISM AND HOLY COMMUNION

Baptism of adults is common in the ELCS and follows instruction at the level of catechesis that western churches would normally require of communicants. Admission to the Eucharist takes place for adults on the same day that they are baptized, which may be the last time they see Pastor Elisa for a long time, and therefore the first and last opportunity they have to receive Holy Communion for a long time.

At the Khartoum seminary, also headquarters of the ELCS, Holy Communion is offered weekly. This is noteworthy, not only because it reflects the high regard for the Lord's Supper consistent with Confessional Lutheran theology, but also because it is difficult to manage in a country where Islamic law forbids alcoholic beverages of any kind. Only with special permission from the government and police are authorized persons allowed to handle wine in strictly monitored quantities.

Sudan, like many African countries, is not renowned for its hygiene or health and safety. Yet, with no regard for the sort of caution that drives many "western" Lutherans to avoid the "common cup", Sudanese Lutherans only partake of our Lord's Blood from the blessed chalice. When I expressed my admiration for this practice to the Bishop, he asked me how Lutherans could have any other attitude than that the contents of the chalice are truly the blood of God's Son, Jesus Christ, and could not cause harm to those who come to the sacrament worthily for the healing that the blessed Sacrament gives. When I mentioned that many North American Lutherans use individual cups for Communion to avoid spreading germs, he shook his head with disappointment and said, "Lutherans have to make up their minds. If the wine is not the Blood of Christ, then by all means take precautions to avoid germs. But if the wine is the Blood of Christ, then how can we insult Him by fear of getting diseased from that which the Lord Himself gave to heal His people?" There seemed to me no argument with that reasoning!⁵

⁵I later asked a non-African missionary about the use of the common cup in an adjoining African country. He told me that he had served African Lutherans with the common cup for fifteen years and never caught any disease as a result. He mentioned the story of a woman who asked to be the last to commune because she had a contagious disease. He protested to her that it was not necessary, but conceded to her wishes and communed her "last". His practice was that of the historic church in which the contents of the consecrated wine remaining after the distribution of the Sacrament are consumed by the pastor. This he did with no hesitation, and experienced no ill effect afterward.

KEYS AND CONFESSION

Wherever the ELCS's pastor Andrew Mbugo Elisa goes, there follows a steady stream of people seeking him for private confession. When these confessions take place in his busy Khartoum office, "privacy" may be limited. Sometimes the only way to speak to the Bishop in private is to use a language that no one else in the room understands, but the forgiveness of sins is sought and gained through their pastor, with or without privacy.

Once after a penitent left the room, Bishop Elisa asked me, "Do you get this [endless stream of people coming to confess their sins and receive forgiveness] in your church?" I had to admit that it only happened rarely that I was sought out for private confession and absolution. He told me it happens "all the time" in Sudan. Some days he can hardly get anything else done but hear people's confessions and pronounce for their ears those precious words, "... in the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ, I forgive you all your sins, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit".⁶

As forgiven children of God, the Sudanese are eager to share their faith with everyone they know, to spread the peace that only Christ can give. I heard many examples of people bringing the news of Jesus to their neighbours, particularly pious women who would rally round neighbours who needed comfort when going through a "bad patch". But I was most impressed with how these people took great care to teach their own children about God's saving love.

Perhaps there is an urgency in a poor war-torn country that we do not often experience in prosperous western countries. My bodyguard was very worried about his daughter, who was suffering with malaria, and while I was teaching the daughter of one of my students died from another disease. A few days after returning to England I had the sad duty of taking our 12-year-old daughter to the funeral of her classmate who had committed suicide. The sadness and irony of the situation overwhelmed me. In Sudan the Christians are hungry for the Gospel, teach their children that God loves them, and then their children often die. In the so-called "Christianised" western world, parents don't bother to teach their own children about the love of Jesus for them, and even in the midst of affluence they kill themselves.

⁶The popularity of the practice of the "third sacrament" in Sudan may owe something to the Roman Catholic missions which preceded the Lutheran mission and from whom some of the ELCS's Lutherans come. A few of the men in my class preparing for the Lutheran Ministry were former Roman Catholic seminarians.

EAGER TO WORSHIP

The combination of the faith of these people and their worship practice, including reverent use of the historic liturgy celebrated with great dignity amid the most primitive of conditions, left an impression on me that I shall never forget. The vivid mixture of imagery—the processions of robed choirs and clergy in full eucharistic vestments making their way through congregations singing rhythmic African hymns; the throngs of poor people under flimsy thatched shelters with dirt floors, sitting on odd benches and plastic chairs; the congregation that met outdoors with the mud dwellings and mud streets of Jebel Aulia (a makeshift village for displaced persons) in the background—all connected to the Word and Sacraments—speak eloquently of what the ELCS represents and is: namely a true church of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

So one is left asking the primary question: what causes a church to be this vibrant—this important—to those who make up its body? If my observations are correct (and I believe they are!) the answer is to be found in the same Means of Grace that are used wherever Christ's great commission is being faithfully obeyed. The Means of Grace are cherished and deployed by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Sudan, and made effective by the Holy Spirit. The zeal for the body of Christ that is so characteristic of the ELCS (and so lacking in many other churches) is not something added to the Means of Grace, but something that results from them, in the power of the Holy Spirit.

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THROUGH A CHINESE LOOKING GLASS: MINISTRY AMONG CHINESE IN NORTH AMERICA¹

Henry L. Rowold

What a pleasure to be here today! To be at a seminary I have long admired, to share the platform with people I have long respected, and to discuss matters of mission and ministry with people of common faith and commitment is a singular honour, and I'm flattered.

The flip side of flattery, however, is the confession that I don't have magical answers: I'm not even richly experienced in North American ministry among Chinese. What I do bring is (1) a strong commitment to this ministry, and (2) enough experience living among Chinese (as myself a minority person on their turf, and as one who has tracked Chinese friends and colleagues who have moved to North America) to have a feeling for some of what's at stake, and to have a few thoughts about how the church in North America can respond.

INTRODUCTION

First, a few basic observations. When we talk about ministry among Chinese in North America, we are really talking about a wide range of ministries which, for our purposes, we will link as parts of a process, but which in reality may be happening all at one time. In broad strokes, we're going to divide that process into three stages: (1) ministry among newly-arrived Chinese, who face enormous difficulties adjusting to life in a society where they are at a cultural and linguistic disadvantage; (2) ministry among second-generation Chinese, who face the even more difficult task of sorting out who they are, with parents pulling in one direction and society pulling the other—are they Chinese or American or hybrid or neither? (3) ministry among Chinese of the third generation and above, who have attained a level of bicultural integration and comfort. By the time we have reached the third, we will find that ministry among Chinese in North America has as much to say about the character and culture of the North American church as about North American church programmes of outreach to the Chinese.

¹This paper was originally presented at the Missions Symposium held at Concordia Lutheran Seminary, Edmonton, Alberta, 6-7 November 1998.

MINISTRY AMONG NEWLY-ARRIVED CHINESE

Let's begin by putting ourselves in the place of these Chinese. For the newly arrived, leaving home (China, Hong Kong, Taiwan) may have come with some excitement and anticipation—whether they are students, refugees, or immigrants—but making life work in North America is tough. There is inevitably a dislocation, a sense of rootlessness and helplessness that saps all joy from the heart, and reflecting on this brought back to mind our own move to Taiwan some thirty years ago. For the newcomer, nothing makes sense—not traffic, not radio or television, not food (in grocery or restaurant), not banking, not school, not getting around town, nothing. If ministry genuinely means service, this is where ministry among Chinese (newly arrived Chinese) in North America begins. They need help surviving: how to register legally, how to move toward citizenship, how to find housing, how to make major purchases (automobile, household appliances), how to get a driver's licence, how to get around town, how to work a self-service petrol pump, how to get a job, how to interview, how to open a bank account, how to understand what the different taxes are for, how to apply for credit, how to get children in school, how to find groceries and household items familiar to them. They need help making sense of daily life when the ground rules aren't obvious, and they don't understand what or why or where or who, and when people around them don't show much patience with their halting English. No matter how educated, affluent, or experienced the newcomer may be, these and other questions multiply and sap the spirit.

If this is the starting point for ministry, then the church has to position itself so that it can offer its ministry quickly and effectively. Chinese people, like people everywhere (only more so) place great emphasis on relationships, and when a relationship has begun at point of need, with concrete, immediate help, the foundation is laid for the deeper relationship that will allow a deeper ministry. To do this well, the church needs to make itself and its willingness to serve known to those agencies that touch the newly arrived (governmental, educational, real estate, and members of the church itself), and to gear itself up with people and resources, including a checklist, to follow through on its offer to help. Conversely, the longer it takes the church to respond or the less efficiently it follows through, the more likely people are to find alternate help, and the more irrelevant the church will appear.

(Let me register one parenthetical caution about financial help. Giving financial help without destroying dignity or being open to abuse is a very delicate art. Some newly arrived Chinese have more money than many of us here, and many of those without much money refuse to accept any. For the sake of the long-term relationship, the church does better to provide the means toward money [job, help in getting maximum use of money, introduction to re-sell-it shops, etc.] than the money itself.)

There is more at stake in this ministry than simple survival skills, however. What the church wants to do is to help the newly arrived past a sense of dislocation so intimidating as to be debilitating and lead to withdrawal into a ghetto-type existence, whether physically or psychologically. This is not an easy task, because Chinese do not open themselves easily to people they don't know or trust—that's the way it was in the "old country", too. The church needs to work toward a relationship, therefore, not just a series of programmes. It needs to exhibit an interest in helping people for the long haul, without ulterior motive, without price, without pay-back, but with much patience and time.

Balancing their cautious side, Chinese new-comers to North America also have a high level of curiosity about how life works here. Away from the loyalties toward family back home, they are willing to look at things and consider options they would never have thought twice about before. You can bet they will be looking closely at how life and morality and faith work in people around them, and particularly in people they are building a relationship with. This is not a call to be sanctimonious, because that smells as bad in Chinese nostrils as in any other. This is a call to let our lives reinforce what our words and our programmes are saying.

One variation on the life of the newly arrived should be specifically mentioned, namely the phenomenon of absentee fathers, many of whom maintain businesses back in their home country (Hong Kong, People's Republic of China, Taiwan) and thus spend considerable time back there running those businesses. The devastating effect this has on families can hardly be overestimated: the wife resents being dragged to a new country, often without language or coping skills, children feel ignored, both husband and wife are subject to temptations and suspicions about marital fidelity. The opportunity for the church to serve as supportive family is critical.

Very gently and by intention somewhat slowly, we have been moving to another level of ministry, namely that of sharing not just our culture but our faith. While we need to be very careful that we do not make church affiliation the price for our service or friendship, or, put differently, that we do not use our timetable to short-circuit the Spirit's work, we do want to be sensitive to the timely moment for sharing our own faith and for inviting the newly arrived into our Christian fellowship.

This is sacred ground, of course. If the newly arrived feel reluctance and suspicion about matters of daily life, that is doubly true of matters of the heart and of religious conviction. Changing religious convictions is not merely an institutional realignment, like changing schools or internet providers. There are deep loyalties involved, including one's ancestors and one's own identity as a child of China. There are suspicions involved too, suspicions about North America generally, often from the movies they have seen or the propaganda they have heard. Those suspicions also include the

viability of Christianity, given the moral bankruptcy of large segments of society and family in what they have always considered the Christian West. They likely need, in other words, to see Christianity at work for a while, in daily life, in the quality of life and family. They are a practical people, and they need to feel that there's something substantive and something positive about the Christian faith for them. They are also a proud people who are looking for something that will help them be a better person, that is to say, a better Chinese person.

This fundamental caution likely means that an invitation to a worship service may not be the most effective first step toward sharing our faith and fellowship. Indeed, many Chinese tend to think of the church as they think of a temple, namely as the residence and power base of a god, one they have never dealt with. Understandably, they would feel no more comfortable in a church service than we would feel in temple worship. A more natural bridge to the Christian fellowship is the warmth of home and family.

During this entire process, as many helps need to be provided as possible, so that newcomers can understand the Christian faith in terms of their language and culture. At the very least, this includes a Chinese language Bible and other devotional and religious literature in the Chinese language. Optimally, this also includes ethnic Chinese mentors, people who can understand the concerns and fears people have, and can answer them helpfully and invitingly. When the time is right, the pastor should be folded into the relationship, earlier if he is Chinese himself or can speak some Chinese, and perhaps a bit later otherwise.

As the newly arrived Chinese move toward church membership and worship, they will best be served by a congregation that reflects their home culture—a Chinese congregation, in other words. Here the language and artistic expressions are Chinese (Scripture reading, preaching, hymns, prayer), and people learn to sanctify their own language with worship and prayer. Here the traditional festivals can be observed (Spring Festival, Moon Festival, Mid-Autumn Festival), because they are more meaningful than Thanksgiving or the Western folk traditions relating to Christmas or Easter. Here they can enjoy food from home—and many Chinese congregations share a meal after worship every Sunday. Here children can hear Chinese and grow up among Chinese friends. Some churches even operate Chinese schools to teach children the ancestral language—both a ministry of outreach and a ministry of nurture. These desires for the old languages and the old ways don't lend themselves to easy blending with an English-language fellowship, nor should that be forced—it surfaces on its own, as we will see, with second generation Chinese. What is important is (1) that it be a truly Chinese church, run by Chinese, with their forms of decision making, structure, relationship between genders and age groups, discipline, and

conflict resolution, and (2) that it be a respected part of the church's ministry—not second-class and not given leftovers of space and time.

It should be mentioned parenthetically that of all North American Chinese, those of the first generation generally keep closest ties with friends and relatives in the old country. Though that generation may never assimilate easily into an English-speaking congregation, that generation has the greatest potential for extending the Gospel back through family ties into the old country. Ministry among Chinese in North America needs to be aware of this potential, and both equip these people for their ministry and link them with mission personnel serving long-term in the China region. The Lord seldom works in straight lines.

MINISTRY AMONG SECOND-GENERATION CHINESE

Ministry among Chinese in North America cannot stay fixed on the newly arrived for long, however. As difficult as the problems of dislocation and unrootedness are, they are merely a prelude to even more complex problems of the second generation.

First generation people at least know who they are, even if they feel under threat. They are Chinese who happen to live in North America, and are coping the best they can. Second generation Chinese don't have that close link with China. They go to school with other North Americans, speak the same language, listen to the same music, watch the same television, root for the same teams. They're North American. But are they? When they go home, it's like going back to China. Their parents want them to speak Chinese, and even give up afternoons and weekends to go to Chinese school. Their parents want them to succeed in school, especially academically, but don't want them to be part of the school (sports, parties, dances) and don't want them to be like other American children (independent). Their parents want them to be Chinese: obedient, diligent, docile, loyal. But the minute they step out of the door, they are in a different world. They get laughed at if they bring chicken feet and fish heads to school to eat. They are resented if their grades are too good. They are talked about if they don't stand up to their parents, or if their parents can't even speak English. They are misfits ... because they're Chinese. But are they? Actually, they're not Chinese! Nor are they American, at least not like they might want to be. So what are they?

Life can be very difficult for that second generation, and it can move in several potentially unhealthy directions. Some, very few, give in to their parents, and simply opt out of normal North American life. Some others feel that fitting in outside the house means rejecting what their parents are and want; they refuse to attend Chinese school, refuse to speak Chinese, refuse to eat Chinese food, refuse to study for hours at night. They get tired of

explaining constantly to their parents what they know their parents won't understand or accept. Some find that, much as they try, American culture doesn't have a place for them—Americans can be cliquish and racist and exclusive also—and they refuse the old culture, so they end up rejecting both, and that is what gives rise to ethnic gangs, most of whom vent their violent wrath on their own people or on other ethnic gangs. Most of the second generation, however, try hard to be responsive to both cultures that tug at them, but may end up living one level or another of a schizophrenic existence.

This dilemma is no easier on the parents, who may feel that their worst nightmare has come true, namely that their children have rejected the values and customs that have made them who they are—and have rejected their parents in the process. They feel guilty and inadequate—their language gives them away; they feel angry and bitter. They feel alone and betrayed, they feel panic and despair—all things they never would have felt back home. (What if they also feel that their child's attraction to the Christian church is a form of protest against their parents and their culture?)

Both generations need help—that's another word for ministry. Ministry among Chinese in North America, in the second generation, is beyond survival in terms of daily life, but deals with survival of the family, survival of the heritage that the younger children do not want to be imprisoned within, but that the older generation does not want to see written off, and survival of the future that appears very different to the children than it does to the parents.

Ministry among Chinese in North America, in the second generation, needs to listen sympathetically to the pain and bewilderment of the first generation parents in order to help them understand the pressures the next generation is feeling and why the old ways just don't transfer to America, and how their children are trying to combine love for their parents with integration into America. Ministry among Chinese in North America also means listening sympathetically to the frustration and anguish of the second generation in order to help them understand the bewilderment of their parents, to keep in healthy balance the competing demands for integration in North American and Chinese culture, and to use their patience and love as bridges to ease their parents' transition into life in America.

If meaningful ministry to first generation Chinese Christians in North America calls for a Chinese church, meaningful ministry that includes the second generation calls for a bilingual church and ministry. Use of Chinese is important for the first generation, keeps the family together, and provides a non-coercive context within which Chinese can be heard and learned. English, however, is the language of preference, and enforces the language learning that is done in regular school. Hopefully, this kind of congregation will gather enough second generation Christians together to provide both a

critical mass, so they don't feel they are isolated misfits, and a peer group which can help individuals through difficult times. Third generation Chinese Christians, who have made the adjustments and integration, can serve as very helpful mentors and leaders, with a balanced view (appreciative while critical) of both Chinese and North American cultures. As above, the opportunity for pastoral ministry is crucial, though parenthetically it should be added that the pastor most ideally prepared for this ministry is one who is not a recent immigrant himself.

MINISTRY AMONG THIRD-GENERATION CHINESE

There is another level of ministry among Chinese in North America beyond both the first and second generation arrivals, each with their unique sets of problems and adjustments. Ministry among Chinese of the third generation is ministry to people who are much closer to a level of integrated bicultural self-identity, in which a person is at ease in, and comfortable about, both the Chinese and the North American cultures. If the first generation person sees him/herself as a Chinese who lives in North America, and if the second generation person sees him/herself as somewhat schizophrenic, both but neither Chinese nor American, the third generation person will likely see him/herself more as North American who happens to have Chinese ancestry. By language, custom, aspirations, life-style, community involvement, occupations, recreation, he is largely North American. While the same process takes place with Norwegian immigrants and Russians, the difference with Chinese is that they have such a strong ancestral culture, reinforced by Chinatowns and by Chinese restaurants, with the result that long after the Chinese themselves identify themselves primarily as North American, many Caucasian or African-Americans expect them to continue to be primarily Chinese. The irony is that many no longer speak the old language, don't observe the old festivals, and opt as readily for pizza and brats as for dim sum.

The challenge to the church is to affirm and to reflect their bicultural integration in the church itself. Some third generation Chinese may still enjoy attending a Chinese worship service for the fellowship and the cultural heritage, perhaps for their parents, perhaps to help their children appreciate their heritage. Increasingly, however, they function better in the English language, and need translation to understand Chinese.

Others, however, without family loyalties may opt no longer to attend a Chinese church, but prefer being part of the larger mix of a North American congregation. Hopefully, in the process, however, the North American church will also have achieved an integration of cultural heritages. By all accounts, the ideal church is neither a mono-cultural church, nor a common-

denominator amalgam of cultures, but a mosaic of cultures and heritages that reflects and is enriched by all cultural traditions represented in the church: Chinese and other Asian, Swedish and German and other European, Russian, African, Hispanic. Clearly, not every congregation has all these cultures, but what it has, it has from God a rich, unique blend that reflects the manifold gifts of God.

As I hear people from other countries speak about the English language, some call it a language of prepositions. So many nuances are carried by prepositions, and they are the most difficult part of the English language for newcomers to learn. I think it is not by accident that the title given to this presentation is ministry **among** Chinese in North America; not ministry **to** or ministry **for**, but ministry **among**. We have already noted several times that the most important and effective tool of ministry among Chinese in North America is North American Chinese Christians, especially (though not exclusively) the third generation Christians. They have attained the bicultural integration that makes life comfortable and fulfilling and serves as a model for those who are still struggling. They bring hope, comfort, and encouragement for both the first generation people who are bewildered and intimidated by North American culture, and for the second generation young people who struggle to bring two strong but competing cultures into balance. If there is one group of people to invest in heavily, in terms of time and energy for equipping ministry, it is these third generation Chinese Christians.

Beyond this, one hopes that from these people can come also a corps of North American Chinese pastors, teachers, youth workers, deaconesses. Of course, as intentional as we are about this, we don't want to reduce those ministries into professions for which we recruit people; we are talking about sensitizing your people to the call and the moulding of God in their lives. My vision is not that these full-time church workers need necessarily all serve Chinese congregations, as well suited as they are for that ministry. They can serve also the wider church of God, expressing in their ministry the cultural outreach and integration that is the model for every North American Christian and every North American church. They help transform the church of Jesus Christ, even our Lutheran expression of that church, into a genuinely ecumenical body—ecumenical not primarily by denominational mix but by global, cultural, ethnic mix. They form the role model which takes the Gospel into every culture, and refracts the Gospel through every culture. They are very uniquely among those gifts that Paul talks about in Ephesians 4:

apostles and evangelists and pastors and teachers (who) prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ, ... (from

whom) the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

CONCLUSION

What a magnificent vision, though admittedly not easily fleshed out! We're talking a long-haul ministry, characterized by patience through many problems and difficulties. We're talking a somewhat mobile population, which in the nature of things doesn't have the roots and the loyalties that long-term Anglos do. "Long-haul" isn't bad for the Christian church, however, because we're talking less a programme than an attitude, a commitment, a church life-style that is open.

As we said at the beginning, we tidied up the picture a bit by dividing things in terms of generations. In reality, all generations live side by side, and they spill over into each other. While that may seem confusing and even intimidating when looking in from the outside, it does allow some identifiable needs and opportunities for ministry toward which the church can marshal its resources. English classes, opening up church facilities (kitchen also) for social and festive events, cooking classes, youth groups are but a few examples of such ministry opportunities. It further helps to understand that some of the tensions are a predictable, virtually inevitable part of the process of integration.

As the relationships are made and the specific needs identified, a team of people, including hopefully Chinese of all generations (and especially the third generation), can put together a longer range programme, that will integrate all of these generations and eventually all of the cultures that God has brought together in one place—a combination of ministry among Chinese in North America, and ministry by Chinese to the church in North America.

We end where we should, with what God hath wrought, in our society, in our church, and in our hearts. Our response is our ministry ... among Chinese ... in North America. May His blessing rest on us all.

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THE *MISSIO DEI*:
THE MAN'S "HIDDEN" RESTORATION OF
HUMANKIND'S CO-REGENCY OVER ALL CREATION

Glenn E. Schaeffer

INTRODUCTION

The angel Gabriel announced to Mary,
“Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favour with God. You will be with child and give birth to a Son, and you are to give Him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David, and He will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; His kingdom will never end.” “How will this be,” Mary asked the angel, “since I am a virgin?” The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God” (Lk. 1:30-35).

A short time after this announcement, Mary was found to be with child. She gave birth to a boy, who was named, Jesus. Of this man, Jesus, St John wrote, “The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father’s side, has made Him known” (Jn 1:14, 18).

The incarnation of God’s Son is the fleshly manifestation of the *missio Dei*. The King of kings left His throne in heaven to take the form of a servant so that He might overthrow the “prince of this world” and restore men and women to their rightful place as co-rulers of God’s creation.

MAN’S CO-REGENCY IS ESTABLISHED ON EARTH THROUGH GOD’S ACT OF CREATION

The theses of this paper are:

1. God has accomplished His mission to defeat the “prince of this age” through the Man, Jesus Christ.
2. That the same Man rules in heaven on behalf of humankind. As King, He is sealing the elect through the Church which administers the Word and sacraments, so they may rule with Him for all eternity in the new heaven and earth at the Second Coming of the Man, Jesus Christ.

GOD ELECTS HUMANKIND TO BE HIS CO-REGENT ON EARTH

In Genesis 1 Moses reveals that God observed His creation and saw it was good. On the sixth day of creation God said, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule ... over all the creatures that move along the ground” (Gen. 1:26). God then took some dust of the earth and moulded man out of it and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and man became a living being. “So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them” (Gen. 1:27). When God had completed His creation He saw “it was very good” (Gen. 1:31). The Creator has a love for humankind and the whole of creation that surpasses all human understanding.

God’s creation manifests His glory as Ps. 19:1 declares: “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands.” But humankind’s flesh and soul manifests God’s glory in a unique way because men and women were created in the image of God.¹ It was through God’s image-bearers that God planned to rule the earth.²

¹Ap 2:18, Tappert 102-3; The word **צֶלֶם** refers to a representation, a likeness. It often refers to an idol which refers to the image as a representation of the deity. The use of **צֶלֶם** in reference to Adam means that he was a representation of God. See R. Harris, R. Laird, Gleason Archer, and Bruce Waltke, eds., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 2 vols. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980) 2:767-68. Also, Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles Briggs, eds., *The Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, n.d.) 853.

²Commenting on the various interpretations of **צֶלֶם** Gordon J. Wenham writes:

The image makes man God’s representative on earth. That man is made in the divine image and is thus God’s representative on earth was a common oriental view of a king. Both Egyptian and Assyrian texts describe the king as the image of God (see Ockinga, Dion Bird). Furthermore, man is here bidden to rule and subdue the rest of creation, an especially royal task (cf. 1 Kgs 5:4[4:24], etc.), and Psalm 8 speaks of man as having been created a little lower than the angels, *crowned* with glory and made to *rule* the works of God’s hands. The allusions to the functions of royalty are quite clear in Psalm 8. Another consideration suggesting that man is a divine representative on earth arises from the very idea of an image. Images of gods or kings were viewed as representatives of the deity or king. The divine spirit was often thought of as indwelling an idol, thereby creating a close unity between the god and his image (Clines, TB 19[1968] 81-83). Whereas Egyptian writers often spoke of kings as being in God’s image, they never referred to the other people in this way. It appears that the OT has democratized this old idea. It affirms that not just a king, but every man and woman, bears God’s image and is his representative on earth.

Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15, Word Bible Commentary*, vol. 1 (Waco, TX: Word Book, Publishers, 1987) 30-31.

Humankind's Co-Regency is Usurped by Sin and the Prince of this Age

Tragically, humankind was not content to be co-regent with the Lord. Adam and Eve did not want to be a reflection of God's image; they wanted to be God. Moses recounts, "When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her and he ate it" (Gen. 3:6). Immediately, the relationship between the man and the woman was changed (v. 7), but even more tragically, God's perfect creation was cursed with corruption. Satan would inflict enmity upon Adam's offspring (15) as Satan now ruled the world in which man lived. Man's relationship with God was severed. Man cowered in the presence of God (10). Man blamed God for the Fall (12). Man was no longer co-ruler of God's creation; he was now a slave to the cursed creation (16-19; Rom. 8:20-21).³

God Promised Restoration to Humankind through the Promised Man

In one of the darkest moments in history, God delivered a sentence of doom to the "prince of this age" but a gracious promise to man and all creation: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; He will crush your head, and you will strike His heel" (Gen. 3:15). The promise was that a Man—the offspring of Adam—would שָׁרַף ("crush") Satan. The scenario was set then for the *missio Dei*. The Son of God would become incarnate so He could destroy Satan's kingdom and re-establish humankind's co-rulership over creation.

Humankind Waited for the Man

From that time on, Adam's descendants anticipated the arrival of the Man and all of creation groaned for the Man's arrival. In Genesis 4, shortly after Adam and Eve had been banished from the Garden, Eve gave birth to a son whom she believed to be the incarnate Man. She exclaimed, "I have gotten a man, the Lord" (4:1).⁴ Eve was quickly disappointed to discover that Cain was not the promised Man.

The Old Testament is filled with God's promises to send the Man. God's people impatiently awaited the arrival of the Man, but it was not until "the time had fully come, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under the law

³"The creation was drawn into the fall of man, and compelled to share its consequences, because the whole of irrational creation was made for man, and made subject to him as its head; consequently the ground was cursed for man's sake . . ." C. F. Keil, and F. Delitsch, *The Pentateuch, Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 1, trans. James Martin (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1949) 98.

⁴Cited from William Beck, *The Holy Bible: An American Translation* (New Haven, MO: Leader Publishing Company, 1976).

to redeem those under the law, that we might receive the full rights of sons” (Gal. 4:4).

Humankind Waited for the Man in Slavery

The Fall of humankind resulted in the destruction of man’s co-rulership with God over the earth. As was referred to above, in reference to Gen. 3:16-19, humankind was now the slave and victim of the cruel acts of nature.⁵ As a result of Adam’s and Eve’s sin, Satan had assumed control of the earthly kingdom and of man’s heart. Even Jesus recognized that the devil was the “prince of this world” (Jn 12:31) and that this prince had an obedient following (Jn 8:41, 44).

The crown of God’s creation—humankind—had lost its true humanity. Men and women were no longer conceived in the perfect image of God (Ps. 51:5). Humankind’s original righteousness and perfect knowledge of God had been bastardized. Like Adam’s son, Seth, all people—with the exception of the Man—are born in Adam’s image (cf. Gen. 5:3). All men stand under God’s condemnation when St Paul pronounces, “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23).⁶

HUMANKIND’S CO-REGENCY IS RE-ESTABLISHED IN HEAVEN AND ON EARTH THROUGH THE MAN’S REDEMPTIVE ACT

This situation was not satisfying to God. He desired to overthrow the kingdom of Satan and restore humankind to its rightful role as co-regent over the earth. God desired that humankind know Him as was intended. God desired to release the entire creation from the curse of sin. From all eternity, God had devised a plan, the *missio Dei*, in which “God becomes not only the Sender but simultaneously the One who is sent.”⁷ Therefore, in the incarnation of Jesus Christ, we have the essential antecedent for God’s mission through His Church.

God Sends the Promised Man to Restore Humankind

As the Man sent by the Father, Jesus’ function was twofold: (1) God’s Son was incarnated to reveal the Father; and (2) God’s Son was incarnated to destroy Satan’s rule and re-establish man’s co-regency over creation.

⁵The Flood of Genesis 6 and the Plagues of Exodus 7-11 are vivid accounts of nature’s merciless control over man.

⁶See AC 2 (Original Sin).

⁷Georg Vicedom, *The Mission of God*, trans. Gilbert A. Thiele and Dennis Hilgendorf (St Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1965) 7.

1. The Man Reveals His Father

The Son of God—the Son of Man—was ἀποστέλλειν and πέμπειν on a special mission by the Father so fallen humanity might know God. This reality of Jesus being the One sent by God to reveal God to humankind is a major motif of John’s Gospel.⁸ In Jn 1:18, the apostle John writes, “No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father’s side, has made Him known.” The signs (miracles) that are recorded in John’s Gospel reveal Jesus’ glory as the Son of God **and** the Father’s glory. Jesus himself explains in Jn 14:9-11:

Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father Don’t you believe that I am in the Father and that the Father is in Me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in Me, who is doing His work. Believe Me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves.⁹

St Paul testifies to the same truth regarding Jesus Christ when he writes in II Cor. 4:4-6:

The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake. For God who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” made His light shine in our hearts, to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

Luther had a clear understanding of what Jesus’ words meant for the salvation of humankind. Luther writes in the Large Catechism,

⁸See Calvin Mercer’s article, “Jesus the Apostle: ‘Sending’ and the Theology of John”, *Journal of Evangelical Theological Studies* 35.4 (Dec. 1992): 457-62 for a more thorough discussion of this motif in John’s Gospel.

⁹For an insightful commentary on this text see AE 24:56-192. The following sample of Luther’s commentary is taken from p. 141:

The first and foremost point about Christ’s being in the Father is this, that we do not doubt that everything this Man says and does stands and must stand in heaven before all the angels, in the world before all tyrants, in hell before all the devils, in the heart before every evil conscience and one’s own thoughts. For if we are sure that everything he thinks, says, and wants reflects the will of the Father, I am able to defy anyone who would be wroth and angry with me. In Christ I have the Father’s will and heart. And if God is for us and with us, then, as St Paul declares (Rom. 8:31), what is there to harm us? Therefore it is important for us to look solely to him, to disregard whatever any other god says, and to reject any other preaching or doctrine regarding ways and means, angels, saints, death, and life. In brief, if you comprehend and see this, then you comprehend and see Christ in the Father and the Father in Christ; then you see no anger, death, or hell, but sheer grace, compassion, heaven, and life.

As we explained before, we could never come to recognize the Father's favor and grace were it not for the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the mirror of the Father's heart. Apart from him we see nothing but an angry and terrible Judge.¹⁰

We cannot salvifically know God except as the incarnate Son of God reveals Himself to us in His Word as the law accuses us of our sin and the Gospel assures us of God's forgiveness for our sin. The Man also reveals the Father to us and grants us His grace in the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

2. *The Man Destroys Satan's Rule and Re-establishes Humankind's Rule*

The second reason the incarnate Son was sent by the Father was to destroy Satan's rule and re-establish humankind's co-regency over creation. John reveals, "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work" (II Jn 3:8). The writer to the Hebrews states, "Since the children have flesh and blood, He too shared in their humanity so that by His death He might destroy Him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death" (Heb. 2:14-15).

Jesus was the perfect Man for us. Since "He was conceived by the Holy Ghost and born of the virgin Mary", He did not inherit the curse of sin from Adam. As a human being He was "tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin" (Heb. 4:15). The reality of Jesus' purity and ability to withstand temptation is seen in the temptation account (cf. Mt. 4:1-11; Lk. 4:1-13) when Satan failed in his attempt to entice Jesus to assert independence from the Father.

Jesus lived a sinless life and in so doing He overturned the consequences of Adam's disobedience. In Rom. 5:12-21 Paul draws a comparison between the first Adam and the second Adam. "Sin and death," Paul says, "entered the world through one man. But God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many." Paul concludes his argument by drawing the following conclusion:

¹⁰LC 2:65, Tappert 419. See also David P. Scaer's comments about Luther's understanding of the incarnation in his book, *Christology* (Fort Wayne: The International Foundation for Lutheran Confessional Research, 1989) 31, esp. n. 20. See also the Luther sermon quotes in Paul Althaus's book, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, trans. Robert C. Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966) 186-89, and 183, where Luther is quoted as saying, "Whoever wishes to think about or to meditate on God in a way that will lead him to salvation must subordinate everything else to the humanity of Christ." Carl E. Braaten, *The Apostolic Imperative* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1985) 22-23 quotes Walter Kasper as saying, "For Luther the hidden God is the God hidden in the suffering and the cross We cannot find God except in Christ; anyone who tries to find him outside Christ will find the devil."

Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.¹¹

The incarnate Man's obedience¹² earned God's grace and justification for the sinner, but He accomplished even more through His obedience: the Man crushed Satan's head; that is, He destroyed Satan's rule. Jesus said in John 14:30, "I will not speak with you much longer, for the prince of the world is coming. He has no hold on Me." Again, Jesus said in John 16:11, "The prince of this world now stands condemned." The incarnate Son of God, the Man, Jesus, conquered Satan through His life, death, and resurrection from the dead. This truth is affirmed in Paul's words in Phil. 2:6-11:

Although He was God, He did not consider His being equal with God as a prize to be displayed, but He emptied Himself, made Himself a slave, became like other human beings, and when He appeared in the form of a man, He became obedient and humbled Himself even to the point of death, yes, death on a cross. That is why God also highly exalted Him and gave Him the Name which is above every other name, that at the name of Jesus *everyone* in heaven and on the earth and under the earth *should kneel*, and that *everyone should confess* that "JESUS CHRIST IS LORD" *to the glory of God the Father*.¹³

Jesus did not dethrone Satan by overthrowing the devil from His throne in heaven. Jesus conquered Satan by "emptying Himself"; by making Himself a slave; by placing Himself under the tyranny of sin, death, and the devil; and by subjecting Himself to death as the incarnate Man. This truth is restated in Luther's Small Catechism in the Explanation of the Second Article:

I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the virgin Mary, is my Lord, who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, delivered and freed me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with silver or gold but with his

¹¹See Irenaeus' treatment of this text in *Against Heresies*, Book 3, 21:10; chap. 22; chap. 23 in Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1 (American reprint of the Edinburgh edition; Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1885, reprinted July 1985). See also AE 26:276-91 and 53:219-20 for two examples of Luther's thought.

¹²Jesus' obedience included assuming to Himself the sinfulness of all men and God's condemnation for that sin. Cf. II Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:13; I Pet. 2:24. See AE 26:276-91; 53:256-57.

¹³Cited from *The New Testament: God's Word to the Nations* (Cleveland: Biblion Publishing, 1988); italics and caps original. See Althaus 187-88, where he quotes some comments from a sermon by Luther on Phil. 2:5ff.

holy precious blood and with his innocent suffering and death, in order that I may be his, live under him in his kingdom, and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, even as he is risen from the dead and lives and reigns to all eternity. This is most certainly true. (SC 2:4, Tappert 345)

ὁ ἄνθρωπος, presented to the people as king by Pilate and ridiculed by the people in John 19:5, was and is the King who conquered Satan. Phil. 2:6-11 celebrates the truth that God has exalted this obedient and suffering ἄνθρωπος.¹⁴

Humankind's co-rulership over creation has been reinstated in, and through, the suffering Man, Jesus Christ. He has overthrown the kingdom of Satan through His death and resurrection from the dead. Jesus' ascension to heaven reinstates man to his proper place as co-ruler over the earth. All things, including Satan, have been placed under the feet of this Man as Paul asserts in Eph. 1:20-23 and again in Col. 1:15-20. Therefore, through this Man all believers in Him co-reign over all creation (including Satan). The great Ascension hymn, "See, the Conqueror Mounts in Triumph" states this wondrous truth in stanza five:

Thou hast raised our human nature
On the clouds to God's right hand;
There we sit in heavenly places,
There with Thee in glory stand.
Jesus reigns, adored by angels;
Man with God is on the throne.
Mighty Lord, in Thine ascension
We by faith behold our own. (TLH 218)

Characteristics Of The Kingdom

The Man, Jesus Christ, has ushered in His kingdom. What are some of the characteristics of His kingdom in which regenerated man co-rules?

1. There is One Kingdom which is not Visible to the Human Eye

Martin Luther, commenting on Jesus' kingdom writes:

The kingdom of faith and the kingdom of future glory are one kingdom, but they are distinguished in that what is offered to us here in the kingdom of faith through the Word and what we receive and grasp by faith will be presented to us there in that revelation Therefore there is one kingdom, only there is a difference in knowledge. Now we hear it in the Word, then we shall have it in sight. Now we believe and hope for it with all Christians on

¹⁴See AE 24:191-92.

earth, then we shall possess it with all the holy angels and God's elect in heaven.¹⁵

The kingdom of Jesus is not visible to the human eye here on earth; nevertheless, the Saviour is incarnately present among His creation as He continues the *missio Dei*. Don Zinger writes, "Luther believed that the divine property of omnipresence was now communicated to the humanness of Jesus Christ."¹⁶ Zinger continues:

To be sure, Luther is a theologian and not a scientist. Though his God is "present in all creatures ... in stone, in fire, in water, or even in a rope," yet Christ does not want us to find him apart from the Word. So we "grope" not for the rope but for the Word of God, which allows us to return to the sacramental character of the Christian faith and to the presence of the true body and blood in the Lord's Supper.¹⁷

2. *The Kingdom Comes to Humankind through the Church in Missio*

As the ascended Incarnate Man, Jesus does not remain localized in heaven.¹⁸ St Paul wrote concerning the exalted Man, "And God placed all things under His feet and appointed Him to be head over everything for the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills everything in every way" (Eph. 1:22-23). The incarnate Man continues to seek and save the lost through His Body, the Church Militant, as it receives life and energy to fight, through His Word, Baptism, and Lord's Supper.

Jesus, the Incarnate Son of God, continues to seek and save the lost for He is the very content of the kingdom. In Jn 16:26 Jesus said, "When the Counsellor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, He will testify about Me." The Spirit of God will testify of the truth. Who is the truth but Jesus Himself? He has said of Himself, "I am the way and the truth and the life" Thus, Jesus can say, "He will testify of Me." Paul's discussion in I Corinthians 1 and 2 about the wisdom from the Spirit emphasizes that the wisdom of God revealed by the Spirit to man, through the Word, is the crucified and resurrected Incarnate Man, Jesus (cf. 1:23-24; 2:13-16). Luther adds,

¹⁵AE 12:118.

¹⁶Don H. Zinger, "Lutheran Reflections on Nature: Prolegomena to a Theology of the Environment", *Currents in Theology and Mission* 19.4 (August 1992) 284.

¹⁷Zinger 285.

¹⁸Herman Sasse, *We Confess the Sacraments*, trans. Norman Nagel (St Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1985) 152. Sasse writes, "Christ does not just appear as a man like an angel in the Old Testament or an avatar in Hinduism, like Krishna in the Bhagavad-Gita, a god in the human form, which he sets aside again in order to return to the divine world of the spirit. The risen and ascended One also remains the Incarnate, as He remains the crucified. *Quod semel assumpsit, numquam deposuit*—what he once took up, he has never laid aside, as we theologians say."

How, then, do we have Christ? After all, he is sitting at the right hand of the Father; he will not come down to us in our house. No, this he will not do. But how do I gain and have him? Ah, you cannot have him except in the gospel in which he is promised to you.¹⁹

George Vicedom, in his classic mission book, *The Mission of God*, states, God's reign and Jesus Christ are one and the same thing. Therefore he who proclaims the name of Jesus also proclaims the reign of God (Acts 8:12; 28:31). Jesus is God's answer to man's quest and therefore the content of the proclamation of the Kingdom (2 Tim. 4:1).²⁰

The Man is the incarnate content of the message. Whenever and wherever the Gospel is read, preached, spoken, and heard the glorified Lord is incarnately present conducting the *missio Dei* through that medium of communication. At that moment Christ is trying to open a person's eyes to the reality that Satan has been bound and sentenced to eternity in hell; while the believer through Christ reigns triumphantly.

3. *The Kingdom Comes to Humankind through the Administration of Baptism*

The incarnate Man is also actively involved in mission through the Church's administration of Baptism. Baptism is one way in which God works a spiritual rebirth in a person (Tit. 3:5-6; Jn 3:5). The baptized is baptized into the death of Jesus and also united with Jesus in His resurrection (Rom. 6:4-11).

Christ is not only the content of Baptism but also the active agent in Baptism. In the Large Catechism Luther states, "To be baptized in God's name is to be baptized not by men but by God himself. Although it is performed by men's hands, it is nevertheless truly God's own act" (LC 4:10, Tappert 437). As the active agent in Baptism, the incarnate Man grants salvation to the baptized and ushers that person into the kingdom in which humankind co-reigns with Christ over creation. Luther states, "To put it most simply, the power, effect, benefit, fruit, and purpose of Baptism is to save To be saved, we know, is nothing else than to be delivered from sin, death, and the devil, and to enter into the kingdom of Christ and live with him forever" (LC 4:24-25, Tappert 439).

4. *The Kingdom Comes to the Co-rulers through the Administration of the Lord's Supper*

The Man Jesus also continues the *missio Dei* incarnationally in the Holy Supper. Jesus said to His disciples, "Take and eat; this is My body. . . . This

¹⁹AE 51:114.

²⁰Vicedom 23.

is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now until that day when I drink it anew with you in My Father's kingdom" (Mt. 26:26-29).

In His holy Meal, Jesus feeds us with His Body and Blood—the very Body and Blood that was crucified, buried, raised from the dead, and glorified²¹—so that His followers might have their sins forgiven, their faith strengthened, and receive a foretaste of the victory feast that awaits them in heaven when they are crowned as victors over Satan and established as co-regents over the new heaven and earth.

5. *The Kingdom Comes to Humankind as the Man Enlivens His Church through Word and Sacrament*

The Man Jesus Christ continues the *missio Dei* in the world today through His Word (including confession and absolution) and the sacraments; that is, Baptism and Lord's Supper. This also means that He conducts His mission to save people through His Body, the Church Militant; for the Church is the channel through which the life-giving message of the kingdom is communicated to those who are daily attacked by worldly ways, their sinful flesh and the devil.²²

It is through the Word and sacraments that the incarnate Man comes to dwell within His Body and grants it life to carry on the *missio Dei*. Jesus has promised His Church: "Surely I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Mt. 28:20); "For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them" (Mt. 18:20); "Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood remains in Me, and I in him" (Jn 6:56); "Remain in Me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in Me" (Jn 15:4); and "The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, 'Here

²¹See Ap 10, Tappert, 179-80.

²²Peter Beyerhaus, *Shaken Foundations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1972) 40-41 quotes a statement from the Second Assembly of the World Council of Churches that supports that the Church's mission is the continuation of Jesus' earthly mission. The statement says,

To evangelize is to participate in His life and in His ministry to the world. This ministry is the ministry of the risen and ascended Christ: Christ as He is today. It is the ministry of God become man, by which God's Kingdom is come to among men. It is the ministry of Christ's life on earth by which God is revealed as the Father. It is the ministry of His death on the Cross by which the sin of the world is taken away. It is the ministry of His resurrection by which the powers of death and evil have been decisively defeated. It is the ministry of the heavenly Intercessor who does not will that any should perish. It is the ministry of the coming Christ by whose mercy and judgment the world is governed even now.

it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within you" (Lk. 17:20-21).

When a person is baptized in the name of Christ he is baptized into Christ and he receives spiritual life from the head, Jesus Christ (I Cor. 12:13; Eph. 4:4-6; 5:30; Col. 1:18). This is also true of God's Word. Through the Word, Christ comes to reside in a person and grants that person new life so that he can live as a "little christ" and possess the same mind as that of Christ (Jn 20:31; II Tim. 3:16-17). In the Lord's Supper Jesus feeds His followers with His Body and Blood so that their sins are forgiven and they are nourished for the *missio Dei*. The incarnate presence of Jesus in the believer through His Word and Sacraments is why St Paul, one of the greatest missionaries of all time, could exclaim, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20).

The Church's mission is essentially no different than the mission of the incarnate Man. The Church's mission is actually a continuation of Jesus' mission. Through the Church Militant Jesus incarnationally seeks and saves the lost. Luther has said:

The Lord wants to say: You have received enough from Me—peace and joy and everything you ought to have; personally you need no more. Therefore work now, look at what I have done, and imitate it. My Father has sent Me into the world for your sake alone, in order to help you, not to benefit Myself. This I have done; I have died for you and have given you all I am and have. Therefore you should think and act in like manner. Henceforth spend your lives serving and helping everyone; otherwise you would have nothing to do on earth, for through faith you have enough of everything. Therefore I send you into the world as My Father has sent Me, that is, that every Christian may instruct and teach his fellow man also to come to Christ.²³

God's people are to imitate Christ.²⁴ This means His Church is to reveal the Father to the world in word and deed. This the Church does by preaching Christ and Him crucified (I Cor. 1:23), for to know the Man is to know the Father and to know the Father is to possess salvation. St Peter says of Christ's Body, "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (I Pet. 2:9).

As God's people administer the Gospel message through the proper administration of the Word and sacraments they continue to extend Christ's kingdom while at the same time they remind Satan that his reign on earth has come to an end with the triumphant death, resurrection, and ascension of

²³Ewald M. Plass, *What Luther Says* (St Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959) 2:960. This is a translation and citation of WA 12:521.

²⁴Beyerhaus 41ff.

Jesus Christ (Eph. 3:10). Jesus said to the seventy-two disciples who returned from a missionary journey, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven” (Lk. 10:18). Satan’s kingdom experiences the same fate every time the Man, Jesus, works faith in someone through the missionary labours of one of His “little christs”. Vicedom quotes the Conference at Willingen as saying,

The mission is not only obedience to a word of the Lord, it is not only the commitment to the gathering of the congregation; it is a participation in the sending of the Son, in the *missio Dei*, with the inclusive aim of establishing the lordship of Christ over the whole redeemed creation.²⁵

When Christians proclaim the Man, Jesus Christ, they can expect to be ostracized, rejected, and even persecuted by the world. Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me” (Mt. 16:24). There is nothing glorious about the continuation of the *missio Dei* until the coming of the Lord. Peter Beyerhaus writes some sobering words:

This present age is rather an intermediate time. The *de facto* reign of Christ still seems to be limited or even totally subdued by the power of sin, death, and the devil. The triumph of Christ cannot yet be seen in its universal significance. Neither can it be demonstrated by external means. The reign of Christ still takes the form of service, in which His followers often have to suffer and be humiliated. During this interim period the victories of God’s reign cannot always be distinguished from its apparent defeats. It is only when Christ comes again that His kingdom on earth will be visibly established. His power will be beyond challenge. Then finally, all nations will acknowledge Him as their Lord and in His service find their salvation.²⁶

Until the return of Jesus Christ God’s people cling to the trustworthy saying found in II Tim. 2:12, “If we endure, we will also reign with Him.”

CONCLUSION

Jesus’ kingdom continues to come to people around the world through the mission work of his incarnate “christs”; but even as His glory was hidden behind His human flesh so the Church’s glory is hidden by sin and worldly corruption. Yet the Church continues the *missio Dei* in faith knowing that the Man will one day be manifested in His glory and the Church with Him as is promised by Jesus in Mt. 24:30-35. The Church continues to seal God’s elect, confident that when God’s people have been sealed with the Gospel

²⁵Vicedom 5; cf. 46-47.

²⁶Beyerhaus 40.

that “a great multitude ... from every nation, tribe, people and language, [will] stand before the throne and in front of the Lamb” (Rev. 7:9), and they will co-reign with the Man over all creation in the new heaven and earth.

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ISSUES IN EVANGELISM: A STUDY IN ACTS

Ken Schurb

There are no issues or problems in the Good News about Jesus, or in the Lord's desire that His church tell that Good News. Any issues in evangelism are completely concocted by sinners. So it is in any aspect of theology, including those we have come to call "practical theology". Theology as God gives it is perfect, and perfectly edifying. But problems and issues can and do arise in this sinful world. If doctrine is integral to evangelism, and it is, then we must be concerned with faithfulness in the service of outreach. We do not want to reach out with the wrong message.

After the Lord patiently and repeatedly showed the early church that Gentiles are saved by grace through faith in Christ—in other words, that Jews and Gentiles are both saved in the same way—mission work to the Gentile world began with great vigour. More and more, it would have become clear to any observer that Christians were not a bunch of Jews exclusively interested in talking with other Jews. Shortly after recording Paul's conversion and the incident when Peter preached to the family of Cornelius, the book of Acts describes the Gospel going out to a wide variety of people and places. It does so mainly by following St Paul on his voyages. By carefully reading along in Acts we can learn important lessons concerning issues that impinge on evangelism in our own day.¹ However, a bit of a "disclaimer" should first be made.

APPLYING ACTS TO OURSELVES

Acts tells a story, a true one. We always do well to be careful about the way we draw inferences and applications for today from this or any other narrative material in Scripture.

1. The books of Luke and Acts themselves suggest that they were written to be read by a recently-catechized, perhaps recently-converted individual named Theophilus who was quite possibly a minor Roman noble.² He was in a position to know far more about the Roman world than we do. Theophilus

¹Contents of this article, under a different title, were presented to The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod's Indiana District Southern Pastors Conference and to students at Concordia Theological Seminary, Ft. Wayne, Indiana in support of the "Tell the Good News about Jesus" emphasis. The author extends thanks to Dr Paul Grime, the Rev. Paul T. McCain, and Dr Carl Springer for their comments on this article in draft form. Any errors are the author's.

²Lk. 1:1-4; Acts 1:1-5.

would not have needed Luke to describe the obstacles that various cultures presented to faithful proclamation of the Gospel.

Acts was not written as a cross-cultural ministry manual. As William Willimon puts it,

Luke has no interest in the utilitarian question of how people become converted or how the church ought to evangelize, what technique is most effective or what method yields the most certain results These are stories [in Acts] about God's actions, not the church's programs.³

In a way, this is all just as well. Suppose Luke had gone to great lengths to record every one of the moves Paul made upon encountering each new culture. How much good would such detail do us today? Those particular first-century cultural expressions have been long gone for some time. As matters stand, Acts serves us well by providing directions, not directives.

2. A good principle of Biblical interpretation and application says that unless we have a command to go and do likewise, we ought not follow the example of anyone in the Bible, not even that of Christ. Luther forcefully stated this point against Karlstadt. He observed that if Christians set out to follow the example of Christ in everything, we would all seek to do what He did, including refraining from marriage and trying to walk on the sea!

We make use of this principle more often than we may realize, perhaps especially in interpreting and applying texts in Acts. While some people in the Bible worked miracles, we do not assume that we can or should perform miracles. Others spoke in tongues, but again it would be a mistake to think that we must. The same idea holds in the present study. The simple fact that Paul did something or other in mission work does not necessarily give us a reason to think that we must do the same.

When reading a biblical account we should not reckon that the matter of application is as simple as asking “what would Jesus do?” or “what would Paul do?”—or even what Jesus or Paul did do. In Luther's words, “we will admit no example, not even from Christ himself, much less from other saints, for it must also be accompanied by God's Word, which explains to us in what sense we are to follow or not to follow it.”⁴

³William H. Willimon, *Acts in Interpretation: A Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1988) 105, emphasis original. Martin Scharlemann similarly concluded: “First, we see that no fixed methodology can be extrapolated from the record of the expansion of the church as described in Luke's account [in Acts]. Something of a sequence is suggested, to be sure; but it is not a fixed order. That is a point, it should be noted, which was consistently upheld by Lutheran Orthodoxy. While it recognized an *ordo* in the way the Holy Spirit worked, the ‘order’ varied considerably in the experience of each individual, particularly in terms of chronology” (“Evangelism and the Order of Salvation”, *Concordia Journal* 6 [January 1980]: 19).

⁴“Against the Heavenly Prophets” (1525), AE 40:132.

Where do these two cautions leave us? With the need to be sensitive students of Scripture who do not force ourselves prematurely into Paul's footsteps or Peter's. Instead, when we read a narrative account like Acts we wonder how the basic conditions and blessings described there also characterize ourselves and our times. In this process "we should attempt to see how we participate in the same underlying reality and attempt to determine what the story tells us about that reality, and, therefore, about us, our situation, and our destiny."⁵

With these cautions in mind, we look to the account of Paul's second missionary journey in Acts for guidance on three issues: synergism, catechesis, and worship.

Synergism

The subtopic of synergism arises whenever evangelism is discussed in a Lutheran setting. It can hardly be any other way. Our Confessions are definitely monergistic, yet these days so much of the evangelism literature and thinking that surrounds us is based on a synergistic model. Over fifty years ago, at its 1948 Amsterdam meeting, the World Council of Churches defined evangelism, in part, as "... the privilege of so making Christ known to men that each is confronted with the necessity of making a personal decision, Yes or No."⁶

But the problem goes beyond proclamations of official groups or the requirements of programmes on paper. It finally lies in the human heart: the desire to salvage at least a shred of human dignity put in terms of an ability to decide for Christ and salvation. Years ago, the story is told, Dr Francis Pieper was engaged in a discussion on conversion and synergism with a theologian of another synod in America. At one point, Pieper's dialogue partner pleaded, "Geben Sie mir ein kleines Pünglein." He was saying: "Give me just a little bitty place, a small hook where I can hang the dignity of man." Pieper answered, "Nein." He had to, and so do we.

For this is the teaching we find in Acts. In Philippi, on Paul's second missionary journey, the first conversion occurred when the Lord "opened the

⁵James W. Voelz, *What Does this Mean?* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1995) 331 (emphasis original). The same Luther who dug in his heels against Karlstadt also taught that much could be learned from biblical narrative. For example, commenting on the lengthy account of the acquisition of a bride for Isaac (Gen. 24), he said: "I myself wonder why Moses has so much to say about such unimportant matters when above he has been very concise in matters far more sublime. There is no doubt, however, that the Holy Spirit wanted these things to be written and to stand for our instruction; for in Holy Scripture nothing unimportant is put before us, and nothing unprofitable. But 'whatever was written ... was written for our instruction' (Rom. 15:4)" (AE 4:274).

⁶Quoted in A. Karl Boehmke, "Visitation Evangelism in American Churches", *Concordia Theological Monthly* 28 (Oct. 1957): 752.

heart” of a businesswoman called Lydia. She and her family were baptized.⁷ It is easy to overlook that the Acts account of Paul’s work in Philippi begins with an unmistakable reference to the role played in conversion by God alone.

Later, after Paul and Silas had been thrown into prison, the famous midnight earthquake provided the occasion for the jailer to go to Paul and Silas with his all-important question. Literally, he wanted to know “What is necessary for me to do in order that I might be saved?”⁸ If he did not get a response like, “Set us free,” he was probably expecting Paul to say something that would amount to, “Try to get on God’s good side.” In short, the jailer awaited a command. But Paul told him, “Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, as well as your household.”⁹

Wasn’t that a command? To be sure, Paul’s statement was an imperative, grammatically speaking. But it is also every bit as much a grammatical command if you give food to a hungry man with the words, “Here, eat this.” The man knows that as you are using these words, they function as an invitation. Therefore it does not enter his head to complain, “Who are you to give me orders?”¹⁰ So also with the words of Paul to the Philippian jailer: they constituted an invitation, not a directive to do some kind of work.

This point is borne out elsewhere. Subsequently Paul wrote the church at Philippi: “It has been given to you for Christ’s sake not only to believe in Him but also to suffer for His sake.”¹¹ We sometimes forget that this letter came to Philippi not very many years after Paul’s episode with the jailer. He had initially visited Philippi in 49 or 50, early on his second missionary journey. Assuming that the apostle wrote Philippians from Rome during his first stay there, we can date it between AD 59 and 61. That is, about 10 years had passed, 12 at the most. (Of course, if Paul composed Philippians while perhaps imprisoned in Ephesus on the third missionary journey, it would have reached Philippi that much sooner.) In short, the letter we call Philippians arrived at its destination within the probable lifetime of the jailer, certainly of his family members.¹²

“It has been given to you ... to believe in Him.” It is interesting to use a little historical imagination and try to think of the scene that would have ensued as the jailer and his family heard this statement read from the epistle,

⁷Acts 16:14-15.

⁸Acts 16:25-30.

⁹Acts 16:31.

¹⁰See C. F. W. Walther, *The Proper Distinction between Law and Gospel*, trans. from the German 1897 edition by W. H. T. Dau (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1928) 260.

¹¹Phil. 1:29.

¹²The Apostolic Council of Acts 15 took place in AD 49. The chronology in use here is substantially that of Robert G. Hoerber, *Reading the New Testament for Understanding* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1986) 77.

that God gives faith. Is it at all likely that the jailer would have said: “What’s Paul talking about in this letter? Faith is not a gift. On the night of the earthquake, he told me to believe and I did it”? No, if anything the jailer and his family instead would have recalled that they were given faith in the Lord Jesus Christ on that night. While the jailer may have been expecting to hear a command when he first questioned Paul, in the great reversal of salvation by grace he got a gift, purely and simply.

Another point can be made about Paul’s encounter with the Philippian jailer. When the apostle said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ”, Acts does not record the jailer’s immediate response. It would not have been very odd if the jailer had said, “Who?” In other words, at that time the jailer probably did not even know who Jesus was. But his question gave Paul an opportunity. Next came the key moment, the critical time in the jailer’s conversion. He heard the Good News about Jesus, which is God’s own power unto salvation.¹³ Synergistic thinking mixes things up when it attaches great significance to the so-called “moment of decision”.¹⁴ Actually, the unleashing of God’s own creative power in His Word—a word that calls into being things that do not exist—is the crucial factor. Therefore the key time is when the Gospel is presented.

Perhaps attention becomes riveted on the “moment of decision” because it seems psychologically noteworthy. But there is good reason to wonder whether such thinking is even good psychology. In purely secular terms, we know that mental and emotional states are not brought about by giving orders. People will not grow fond of chocolate because they are commanded, “Like chocolate!”¹⁵ Hence, there was wisdom in the old Lutheran pastoral advice that said if a person thinks he made a decision for Christ, in reality he was already converted before that time. For the natural man who is dead,

¹³Rom. 1:16.

¹⁴A point made by Robert Kolb in a workshop entitled, “Faces and Facets of Faith: A Profile for Evangelism and Assimilation,” Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 9 May 1996.

¹⁵As is recognized in the field of linguistics; see Theodore Mueller, “Repentance and Faith: Who Does the Turning?” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 45 (Jan.-Apr. 1981): 27-35. German Lutheran Hour speaker Han-Lutz Poetsch offers an illustration from Joachim Heubach, which has some shortcomings but makes a worthy point: “A little child that is learning to walk will not dare to let go the chair to which he is clinging and go to his father at his peremptory command: ‘Come!’ Mother, on the other hand, gets down on her knees, extends her arms, coaxes and calls out to her child with the invitation: ‘Come!’ Encouraged by the love flowing toward him, the child attempts the first steps and falls into the arms of his mother. It is not the father’s appeal to the will and the possible abilities of the little child that lead to the first attempts at walking. It is rather the love that proceeds from the mother, her coaxing, her ‘supporting’ love that leads the child to its first steps.” Hans-Lutz Poetsch, *Basics in Evangelism*, trans. Henry P. Hamann (Adelaide: Lutheran Publishing House, 1985) 25.

blind, and hostile to the things of God cannot and will not make a “decision for Christ”.

This does not amount to a mere academic exercise. People who think they contributed to their salvation by determining to believe in Christ often want to remain in the faith the same way they think they first entered it. One pastor tells of a woman on whom he made an evangelism call. She told him she was “born again”. As they conversed further, he discovered that she knew little or nothing about Christ. She had gone down an aisle. Her so-called conversion seemingly had everything to do with an emotional experience, and nothing to do with the Gospel. Then she said, “I’m waiting to go down that aisle again.” The pastor concluded that she needed an additional “shot in the arm”, an emotional boost, to maintain the idea or the feeling that she was born again.¹⁶

Such an example may seem extreme. But I submit that it differs more in degree than in kind from the situations that lie in store for all who think they came to Christ by their own efforts and consequently want to stay with Him the same way. Eventually they find that, by their own efforts, they cannot. Their guilt can mount. Despair might even set in. Therefore we stress that God Himself keeps Christians in the true faith, just as He alone brings us to faith in the first place.¹⁷ He gives repentance and forgiveness of sins.¹⁸

So what can we say on evangelism calls, for example, after we have presented the Gospel and we want to know how a person reacts to it? The direct approach has much to commend it. Consider asking: “How do you react to what I’ve just told you?” Or simply say nothing and wait for the other person to break the silence, then respond accordingly.

Acts gives us no basis to think of conversion as a process to which we contribute, nor should we lead others to think in such terms.¹⁹ On the contrary, like the rest of Scripture, Acts encourages us to say: “All glory be to God alone!”²⁰

¹⁶The Rev. Jack Baumgarn, Trinity Lutheran Church, St. Francis Minnesota, interview on “Issues, Etc.”, Jubilee Radio Network, 29 July 1998.

¹⁷See Phil. 1:6.

¹⁸See Acts 5:31.

¹⁹Here are examples of phrases which imply co-operation and therefore should be avoided:

“I now invite Jesus Christ to come into my heart and life.”

“I open the door of my heart and receive You as my Saviour and Lord.”

“I accept You as my personal Saviour.”

“I want You to come into my life right now.”

The problem with these expressions was noted by Erwin J. Kolb, “Save Us from Synergism”, *Concordia Journal* 3 (July 1977): 160.

²⁰Much more could be said about synergism, particularly in its subtle forms that make faith a condition for salvation. See Robert Preus, “Perennial Problems in the Doctrine of Justification”, *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 45 (July 1981): 176-79.

Catechesis

Interesting as it might have been to have seen the jailer run into Paul's cell after the earthquake, or to have heard his family's reactions to the book of Philippians years later, one other scene stands out as an occasion when one could fervently wish to have been a "fly on the wall": the Baptism of the jailer and his family. Acts says that this took place right after Paul spoke the word to them, at the place where the jailer washed their wounds, before he took Paul and Silas home for a meal.²¹ Think of what it must have looked like: "The warden's family and household stood around in the courtyard by the fountain. And here occurred the most remarkable lecture on religion in the Church's history. This was the most abridged catechism course of all time."²²

The rapidity of these Baptisms serves as a healthy reminder of God's grace. The apostle did not make the jailer or his family wait to achieve some superior spiritual state, or moral perfection, or even an advanced level of biblical knowledge. He quickly applied the washing of water and the Word.²³

But Paul certainly was not unconcerned with catechesis. In fact, later on his second missionary journey he acutely missed the opportunity for catechesis when it suddenly closed down at Thessalonica. There Paul had taught in the synagogue, and his teaching had its effect among both Jews and God-fearing Greeks. But some of the Jews incited a riot. Fearing for the safety of Paul and Silas, the recently-converted Thessalonian Christians hustled them out of town.²⁴

You could take the apostle out of the town, but you couldn't take Paul's new brothers and sisters in Christ out of his pastoral heart. He remained deeply concerned about those he left behind. According to Acts, he had held forth at Thessalonica's synagogue for only three weeks, three sabbaths. Even if his overall stay had lasted a bit longer in the city, it was likely quite brief by almost any standard. Paul was forced to leave before taking the Thessalonian converts very far in what might be called catechetical instruction. And he knew the persecution that brought about his own quick exit was going to keep on attacking the new Christians who stayed in

²¹Acts 16:33-34.

²²Joseph Holzner, quoted in Scharlemann 17.

²³See Walther 131. During the "golden age" of the catechumenate in the early church, there was at times "a tendency to want to over-scrutinize the person. The laudable purpose of examining the works and ways of the devil in preparation for renunciation was sometimes overtaken by an examination of life for evidence of the fruits of conversion. At times, this turned the teaching accompanying Baptism into a time of law-oriented moral purification, rather than Gospel immersion"—Andrew Pfeiffer, "Christ and the Catechumenate", in *Mysteria Dei: Essays in Honor of Kurt Marquart*, ed. Paul T. McCain and John R. Stephenson (Ft. Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 1999) 213-14.

²⁴Acts 17:1-10.

Thessalonica. All this could have spelled disaster for the fledgling church there.

Paul had good reason for concern, and so do we. A solid foundation of catechesis is essential. Our catechism itself says: “God Himself is not ashamed to teach [the catechism] daily, for he knows of nothing better to teach, and he always keeps on teaching this one thing without varying it with anything new or different.”²⁵ Considering all the doleful influences surrounding us today, it becomes easy to understand why Paul carried a great burden for the Thessalonians who had heard the teaching of God’s Word from him for only a few weeks.

Later, when Paul was in Corinth, he did some “backfilling” by writing the two epistles to the Thessalonians. In these letters he marvelled at the power packed by God’s Word. It was the Word that had brought his now-distant brethren to faith in Christ. Further, the Word preserved their faith despite all the adversity they had faced.²⁶ Still, the apostle recognized that “holes” in teaching were left remaining after his brief time in Thessalonica, and they required attention. Perhaps not surprisingly, the Thessalonians needed more guidance on sexual purity and on Christ’s second coming.²⁷

Lacking sufficient background in the faith, the Thessalonians were seemingly unable adequately to grasp even Paul’s explanations of the parousia in I Thessalonians. His second letter to them shows that, among others, there were those who ended up taking his teaching about the second coming as an excuse to do no work and simply wait for the Lord to return visibly any day. Paul addressed himself to them in the second letter.²⁸

Here is an important lesson for catechesis: teaching affects life, sometimes quite directly. A misguided view of eschatology resulted in misguided living among the Thessalonians.

But there is another lesson too. Already in his first letter Paul had urged the Thessalonians to work. He said, “Make it your ambition to live quietly, to mind your own business, and to work with your hands, just as we commanded you.”²⁹ When commands are issued in any group, something is often wrong. If historical records show that people were being told to do something, it was probably because they weren’t doing it. There seems to have been a lazy streak, among at least some of the Thessalonians, that Paul noticed already while he was with them. Such an attitude might be called a “presupposition” for these people, if that would not unduly dignify their

²⁵LC Preface 16; Theodore G. Tappert, ed., *The Book of Concord* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1959) 361.

²⁶I Thess. 1:4-5; 2:13-14. See Ken Schurb, “Perseverance in Evangelism: A Study in Acts”, *Missio Apostolica* 7 (May 1999): 42-48.

²⁷I Thess. 4:1-7; 4:13-5:11.

²⁸II Thess. 3:6-15.

²⁹I Thess. 4:11. Compare 2:9 and 5:14.

sloth. While Paul in his letter had no choice but to answer questions that had arisen among the Thessalonians about Christ's second coming, with his answers a door was swinging open for the lazy to turn his text into a pretext to stop working. So Paul had to return to the topic when he wrote his second letter.

Nothing has changed in this regard since Paul's day. Generally speaking, it takes time for Christian doctrine to penetrate to the point of challenging certain of a person's presuppositions—ideas about the world that are so native and comfortable to him that he is hardly aware of them. This is a lifelong struggle. While good and extensive doctrinal teaching is important early on in the Christian life, we all need it repeatedly. For God's Word of Law and Gospel will keep taking us back to our Baptism, to dying and rising with Christ. Catechesis that reaches down to the level of our sinful presuppositions helps to retain those who have been gained.³⁰

One more point on catechesis: At Paul's next stop, Berea, he and Silas went directly to the synagogue, undeterred by the recent outbreak of violence at Thessalonica. They found the Jews there to be "more noble" than their Thessalonian counterparts. Most willingly did they receive the Word from the missionaries. However, they were not gullible. Acts says, "Daily they examined the Scriptures to see if these things were so."³¹ Scripture provided them the final standard by which to check doctrine, even the Gospel proclamation of the apostle Paul. But they knew Scripture well enough to use it because someone had taught them.

Someone has said we need to dispel the myth that Lutheran churches exist to make more Lutherans. This is not a myth, and I pray it is not dispelled! Of course, we do not "make" anyone believe anything. However, we are called upon not only to baptize, but also to teach people to hold onto all of Christ's teaching.³² Catechesis goes together with evangelism.³³

Worship

"Worship" forms an especially challenging subject today, a topic that generates a remarkable amount of heat whether or not any light is shed. While it is unquestionable that no one particular set of syllables or musical notes forms the "only right way" to conduct a church service, it is equally unquestionable that certain elements of these services are indeed given by

³⁰One wonders if contemporary problems with integrating the faith into life arise not because we have devoted too much attention to teaching the faith, but rather because we have given it too little attention.

³¹Acts 17:11.

³²Mt. 28:20.

³³See A. L. Barry, "Doctrine and Evangelism", *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 65 (Jan. 2001).

God and are thus not open to change, e.g. the Words of Institution in the Communion liturgy.³⁴

The account of Paul's speech at Athens in Acts 17 has application to the subject of evangelism and worship in a couple of ways. Perhaps these observations could be called somewhat modest in view of the large-scale challenges in this area, but they are interesting in their own right.

At Athens Paul spoke to the learned Greeks, including a number of Epicureans and Stoics. Clearly, he had studied the city in addition to the Scriptures. He said, "I perceive that you are very religious."³⁵ There even stood one altar to an unknown god. The apostle took this as his opportunity. He said he was there to proclaim the One they ignorantly tried to worship.³⁶ Paul was not shy about connecting with his hearers' natural knowledge of God, limited and one-dimensional as it was. He noted that the true God is not made by human hands, nor does He dwell in buildings made by man. Instead, he gives life to all and is not far from any.³⁷ Paul even quoted Greek poets as he spoke.³⁸

The turning point in Paul's address came next. While God had overlooked past ignorance, he continued, the time was now at hand for everyone to repent. Paul said God has established a coming day when judgement will be exercised by a Man He chose, as He showed by raising that Man from the dead.³⁹ With this remark Paul was getting set to tell the Good News about Jesus, but in reality his speech was over. He had not even rounded the bend in his turning point when he discovered that most of the audience was no longer listening.

³⁴Martin Noland helpfully catalogues a number of items: "What aspects or elements are positively identified in the Lutheran Confessions as being of divine institution? ... Apology XXIV lists the following: the proclamation of the gospel, faith, prayer, thanksgiving, confession, the affliction of the saints, the good works of the saints, ceremonies, praises, and the reception of the Lord's Supper (Ap XXIV, 25-40). In addition, we would have to include holy baptism, the entire Holy Scriptures, the pastoral office, various musical instruments (Ps 150), prayers for the secular authorities (1 Tim 2:1-2), teaching, singing, psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (Col 3:16). None of these are optional or adiaphora in divine worship." ("The Christian Philosophy and the Christian Religion", *Logia: A Journal of Lutheran Theology* 4 [Eastertide, 1995]: 45). There is, one might add, more than one way for some of these things to be done.

³⁵Acts 17:16.

³⁶Acts 17:22-23.

³⁷Acts 17:24-29.

³⁸Acts 17:28. Paul was not approving idol worship, nor was he saying that such worship actually puts people in touch with the true God. On the contrary, he drew a stark and tragic contrast between the God who has all things firmly in control, on the one hand, and the wretched condition of people who grope around perhaps to find Him, on the other hand. The verb for "finding" in 17:27, εὑροίεν, is in the optative mood. See Robert G. Hoerber, "Paul at Athens", *Concordia Journal* 21 (Apr. 1995): 202-5.

³⁹Acts 17:30-31.

By their clustering together of many gods into a pantheon, including an unknown god, the Athenians wanted to ward off any kind of divine punishment. Their religion was one-dimensional all right, a religion of the law. In it people beat up on themselves in order to minimize the prospect that some god would beat up on them. They religiously observed their observances and erected their statues in an attempt to avert a greater problem, supernatural punishment. No doubt the Athenians would have found Paul's message of world-encompassing just judgement outside their zone of comfort.

Furthermore, as typical Greeks they held the physical world in disdain. Their knee-jerk reaction would have been instantly to dismiss any claim about raising a human body from the dead. When Paul talked about God raising Jesus, Acts reports, some in the audience started making fun. The more courteous members of the group said in effect, "Don't call us; we'll call you."⁴⁰ Paul's speech was over. The Gospel was proving to be foolishness to Greeks as well as a stumbling block to Jews. But sooner or later Paul had to speak of Christ's resurrection. How else could he tell the Good News about Jesus, who is the power of God and the wisdom of God?⁴¹

Paul's speech at Athens forms a classic example of Christian apologetics. Richard Longenecker has observed that "From the days of the Fathers, Paul's Athenian experience as recorded in Acts 17 has been cited as the illustration of the 'all things to all men' principle as it is worked out in the Gentile situation."⁴² Citing this speech in a discussion of worship might seem to tend in favour of what could be called "least common denomination" worship. Actually, however, that is not the present purpose.

It is sobering to reflect, instead, on the kind of worship that would have spoken directly and painlessly to the Stoics, let alone the Epicureans. Especially if the name of the true God were attached to it, such worship could sound very "religious" even today. Remember, the Athenians were a very religious people. But this worship would be dreadfully watered-down and finally bereft of Gospel.

It is doubly sobering that we are quite capable of worshipping this way. In the field of music, for example, many songs and even hymns dwell on the attributes of God. Not too long ago a very popular song proclaimed repeatedly that "Our God is an awesome God" who reigns in heaven above with wisdom, power, and love. That is all true. Yet it is not too much of a stretch to say that the Athenians of Acts 17 could sing this same refrain, even

⁴⁰Acts 17:32.

⁴¹See I Cor. 1:23-24.

⁴²Richard Longenecker, *Paul: Apostle of Liberty* (New York: Harper, 1964) 230.

though most of them wanted nothing to do with Jesus and the resurrection.⁴³ In our worship we can never rest content with such music! Instead, like Paul we round the bend to sing of the Good News about the God who reveals Himself in Jesus Christ, the One who died for our sins and was raised for our justification. For only in Christ do we have a gracious God.

Of course, some of the Psalms also extol God's attributes at great length. As in the case of the Psalter, the hymns we sing must be taken as part of a larger context. But it is important to note that songs and hymns of the "Awesome God" sort can begin subtly or not-so-subtly defining the context, especially when these are the very songs featured to capture the imagination and especially the hearts of worshippers.⁴⁴ Over against all such trends, Christian worship needs to stay focussed on Christ and His forgiveness for poor sinners.

This leads to a second application. Paul certainly attempted to start with the Athenians on ground where they were comfortable. He did try to be all things to all men. But he did not invite the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers to a Christian church service in order to do it.⁴⁵ Rather, he went out of his way to go to them, even physically.

The church has always been physically "out there," in the world with people, wherever Christians are. To cast a quick glance at a previous page in Acts, the Philippian jailer had probably been listening along with the other prisoners when Paul and Silas sang their hymns in the night. Thus he was encouraged to approach them and ask about salvation after the earthquake. And Paul and Silas were there to answer his question literally right where he was, at the jail.

When I hear of a church that quite probably out of frustration has placed all its evangelism eggs in the basket of contemporary worship, one of my

⁴³In fairness, it should be noted that the "full version" of the song "Awesome God" refers to events that are unmistakably identified in both the Old and New Testaments with the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Still, these events are depicted almost exclusively from the perspective of law and judgement, including the passion of Christ: "It wasn't for no reason that he shed his blood." Only one line says, more evangelically, "mercy and grace he gave us at the cross."

⁴⁴Emotionalism is a concern in worship. In 1995 The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod said: "The Church Growth Movement often promotes worship forms and practices which focus the worshiper on his feelings and experiences as evidence of God's grace rather than on the objective and gracious work of God delivering His forgiveness of sins for Christ's sake through Word and Sacrament as found, for example, in the historic liturgy of the Lutheran church" (1995 res. 3-09, *Convention Proceedings* 23).

⁴⁵One observer put it this way: "liturgy and evangelism are, for the most part, exclusive of each other. True, worship can be evangelistic while evangelism can occur in liturgy. However, it should not be designed that way, for it is neither an effective way to worship nor an efficient way to evangelize"—Arthur Lyons, "Liturgy and Evangelism", *Lutheran Education* 130 (May/June 1995): 283.

reactions is: please do not underestimate the value of Christians confessing their faith in Christ on the job, at the game, and in the home. After all, if we want to meet unbelievers where they are, those are the best places to do it. A second step can be the deliberate development of “bridging events”, that is, events at church or sponsored by a church—but not regular church services—to which the un-churched can be invited. But such an invitation is unlikely to be considered very seriously unless a Christian friend extends it. All in all, the challenge squarely lies before each of us all the more to tell the Good News about Jesus.

CONCLUSION

From the standpoint of an individual, The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod’s “Tell the Good News about Jesus” emphasis amounts to three things: (1) being in the Word and prayer; (2) telling the Good News about Jesus to those who are around; and (3) helping to make one’s congregation an encouraging place for those telling the Good News and a welcoming place for those who hear it.

The above treatment of “evangelistic issues” based on Acts can help with these challenges, under the grace of God. Disallowing synergism and reasserting monergism encourages Christians to tell the Good News to all who are around, not only those who might be deemed more co-operative or more receptive. Careful catechesis keeps Christians in the Word and gives them something to tell their neighbours. Christ-centred worship makes a congregation both an encouraging place and a welcoming place.

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NAOMI, BOAZ, AND DAVID: EVANGELISTS OF ISRAEL¹

John R. Wilch

I. ISRAEL'S EARLY PREDISPOSITION TO MISSION

For Scriptural bases for mission or evangelism, one commonly turns to the Great Commission (Mt. 28:18-20) or the Book of Acts.² However, one can also utilize to great advantage many passages of the Old Testament, for mission is a theme that is intrinsic to it as a whole, as well as to the calling and self-understanding of Israel as God's people. By way of illustration, let us preface an examination of Naomi, Boaz, and David with a consideration of Moses and his Law.

The Sabbath was a sign instituted by the LORD for Israel that He was sanctifying them (Ex. 31:13). But it was meant not for Israelites alone, because slaves and aliens should also receive its benefits of divine blessing and rest (20:10).³ They should likewise benefit from the sabbatical year (Lev. 25:6). For the LORD reminded Israel that, after all, they had once been slaves and aliens in Egypt (Deut. 5:14-15). In general, slaves in Israel were to be accorded special care and treated humanely (Ex. 21:26-27), rather than suffer cruel oppression, as has usually been the rule throughout human history.

Aliens were to be accepted by Israelites on equal terms as themselves, not to be taken advantage of because of their vulnerable position outside the legal protection that, in every land ancient and modern, has given preferential treatment to a nation's own citizens. Whatever the "national interest" of Israel may be at any given time, they were always to remember that they themselves had once suffered as aliens in Egypt and should therefore treat foreigners in their own land humanely and mercifully (Ex. 22:21; 23:9; Lev. 19:33; Deut. 24:18). As the LORD had rescued them from the foreign country of their oppression, so they were to exhibit His kindness to all foreigners living among them: they were not to govern aliens with different laws, but to apply their own laws to them, too, without partiality (Ex. 12:49; Lev. 24:22; Num. 15:15-16; Deut. 1:16-17; 24:17). Indeed,

¹Most of this article was presented at the Niagara West Circuit, meeting in North Tonawanda, NY, 13 January 2000, and at the Niagara East Circuit, meeting in Virgil, ON, 8 February 2000.

²The latter was emphasized by all four mission executives in Lutheran Church-Canada: Ian Adnams, "Mission and Missions", *The Canadian Lutheran* 14.5 (1999): 6-8.

³I am indebted to Rev. Paul Pollex (St. Thomas, ON) for alerting me to this fact.

Israelites were to treat aliens like fellow Israelites, even to love them as themselves (Lev. 19:34; Deut. 10:19).

Alienation was a negative basis for Israel's understanding of themselves as God's people. They were no longer aliens, as they had been in Egypt, but fully adopted heirs. If an alien bore the same sign as an Israelite, circumcision, he was welcomed by the LORD to celebrate the Passover (Ex. 12:48) and to offer acceptable sacrifices (Num. 15:14; cf. Is. 56:6-7). They were also included when Israel's Covenant was renewed (Jos. 8:33). Such participating aliens may be considered to have been "half-proselytes" (called "fearers of God" in the New Testament, e.g. Acts 10:2), that is, those who believed in the LORD, the God of Israel, and worshipped Him, but had not become full members of Israel's covenant community.

Moses already understood the LORD'S mercy for aliens even before he had received His Law from Him. He set a personal example for accepting non-Israelites when he married the Midianite Zipporah (Ex. 2:16, 21) and later a Cushite woman (Num. 12:1). God did not disapprove of such marriages (see Num. 12:6-8). Thus, Moses' alien wives became full members of the Israelite covenant community through their marriage with an Israelite and through their faith, as Zipporah testified (Ex. 4:25-26).

Besides persuading his brother-in-law Hobab to be Israel's guide in the wilderness (Num. 10:29-32), Moses also allowed "many" non-Israelites to accompany them in the Exodus (Ex. 12:38; Num. 11:4).⁴ These were probably other slaves who lived close to the Israelites in Egypt, but may also have included some Egyptians (see Ex. 9:20). Later, Joshua understood Moses' Book of the Law to have been intended for aliens in Israel as well as for Israelites (Jos. 8:35). Why should Moses have had the assurance that it would not be against the LORD'S will to allow non-Israelites to participate in Israel's Exodus? After all, this could eventually incorporate them into the tribes of Israel and let them share in the occupation of the Promised Land (as did Hobab, Jud. 4:11). His right interpretation of God's will is borne out by the fact that these "fellow travellers" were not rejected by God; He must have accepted them.

As Johann Gerhard pointed out nearly 400 years ago, Gentiles were never completely barred from entering God's Old Testament Church, for the call into His Church is universal, having its beginning already with Adam.⁵ Thus,

⁴These may have included Moses' second wife: C. F. Keil, *The Fourth Book of Moses, Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament*, with F. Delitzsch, trans. J. Martin (repr. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978) 76.

⁵*Loci theologici* (Jena, 1610-22), vol. 5, *De ecclesia* 22 (ed. Eduard Preuß, Berlin, 1867), cited by Werner Klän: "Eine merkliche Bekehrung der meisten Juden sei vor dem Ende der Welt zu erwarten ..." (Johann Gerhard, 1582-1637): Zur Verhältnisbestimmung zwischen Kirche und Synagoge im Horizont der lutherischen Konfessionalisierung", *Lutherische Theologie und Kirche* 24.1/2 (Feb. 2000): 27.

the welcome to non-Israelites is a natural consequence of the Doctrine of God in the Old Testament, as exhibited already in the Pentateuch: The LORD is the Creator and Ruler of all mankind (Gen. 1:26-28; 3:20; 9:18-19; Ex. 19:5; Deut. 7:6; 10:14, 17; 32:8, 39; 33:26-27; cf. Davidic Psalms 8:1; 19:1; 22:28; 24:1-2; 65:6-7). So, the basic concern of God the Creator is for all people, which is why He always provides for everyone (see Job 25:3; Ps. 65:9-13; 145:15-16).

It is just as appropriate that the almighty LORD provides salvation for all people (Gen. 3:15; Ps. 9:11; 22:27; 57:9; 59:13; 65:2, 5, 8; 68:32). Long before Moses' time, Eve, Lamech, and Noah believed in and longed for the LORD'S promise of salvation for all people (see Gen. 4:1; 5:29; cf. 6:9; 9:7-9). God Himself did not choose a believer such as Melchizedek (14:18-20) to be the father of His special people, but rather the idolater Abram (11:26; 12:1-3; Jos. 24:2). Abraham the convert appropriately interceded before the LORD that He spare the sinners of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 18:22-33). It was thus in keeping with the loving concern of the LORD and of earlier believers for all people, that Moses welcomed aliens into Israel, presumably on the condition that they believed in the LORD. If they had not done so, they would not have taken the risk of joining Israel in trying to flee from Egypt, for the LORD was their only hope and protection.

As long as the aliens who accompanied the Israelites married among themselves, they would retain a separate identity outside Israel's covenant community (see Jos. 9:27). Indeed, Israelites were forbidden to intermarry with any of the inhabitant peoples of Canaan (Ex. 34:11, 16; Deut. 7:1-3). But alien women who married Israelites and their children were recognized as fully Israelite (Num. 31:18; Deut. 21:11), and alien men could be adopted into the Israelite community if they became full proselytes. But Edomites and Egyptians could not be accepted until after the third generation, and Ammonite and Moabite men not until after the tenth generation (Deut. 23:3, 7-8; foreign women could be accepted directly by marriage). Thus, in the course of a number of generations, most earlier aliens would have become assimilated into Israel at least by the end of the monarchy.

II. NAOMI: EVANGELISM BY LOVE

Everyone who reads the Book of Ruth is particularly impressed by Ruth's profession of full commitment and loyalty to Naomi (1:16-17).⁶ There is

⁶Much of the material in sections 2 and 3 was researched in preparation for a commentary to be published by Concordia Publishing House, and some has appeared in the article, "Ruth: Convert Confessor", *Mysteria Dei: Essays in Honor of Kurt Marquart*, eds. P. T. McCain and J. R. Stephenson, 2nd ed. (Ft. Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary, 2000) 361-76.

some good reason for frequently taking her words out of context and applying them to marriage partners, for the promises of husband and wife to each other should be nothing less than Ruth's,⁷ except that hers extended beyond death. However, Ruth made her declaration not to her lover or spouse but to her mother-in-law. This is especially noteworthy because in the ancient world no less than today, the relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law is famous for being one of the most strained of all family relationships (see Mt. 10:35; Lk. 12:53).⁸ For a mother, while expecting a daughter with some advice to take care of herself, by contrast naturally continues to harbour deep concerns over the welfare of a son. She may thus find difficulty in entrusting him wholly to his wife, perhaps even subconsciously treating her as a rival. Similarly, a father may easily accept a daughter-in-law, while wishing to continue to protect a daughter and having difficulty trusting a son-in-law.

If Ruth could break forth in such a complete expression of total commitment to Naomi, then something most significant must have preceded this. For why would she declare such a total solidarity with Naomi that included land, family (see Ruth 2:11), people, God, burial, and the after-life (cf. Gen. 5:24; I Sam. 28:14-20; II Sam. 12:23; Job 19:26-27; Ps. 49:15),⁹ all irrevocably confirmed by a solemn oath? This last is the key: More than just a commitment to Naomi, it was first of all a profession of faith in the LORD, the God of Naomi and of Israel (see Ruth 1:6, 8). She had so come to believe and trust in the LORD (see 2:12) that she could no longer imagine life without Him.

Ruth was content to remain in Moab with a family who worshipped the LORD. Therefore, if the only other believer in the LORD in Moab emigrated to Israel, Ruth's only option was to go with her in order to worship the LORD in His land with His people, be buried there, and be assured through Him of everlasting life—this all without a husband or even sufficient means to ensure minimal existence (see 2:2). Thus, Ruth sacrificed the certain care of her father's household or of a potential husband from her own people for the sure uncertainty and lack of protection as an alien without the aid of citizenship, husband or sustenance. Nothing could be more risky than a poor, foreign widow! Since Naomi could offer her nothing substantial, the LORD

⁷Walter R. Roehrs, "Ruth", *Concordia Self-Study Commentary*, with M. H. Franzmann (St. Louis: Concordia, 1979) 182.

⁸Paulus Cassel, "The Book of Ruth", trans. and ed. P. Steenstra (1871), *Commentary on the Holy Scriptures* 2, ed. J. P. Lange (repr. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1960) 18 cites Terence, Juvenal, and a German proverb ("The mother-in-law has forgotten that she was ever a daughter-in-law").

⁹See this writer's "Belief in Life after Death in Genesis", *Lutheran Theological Review* 3.2 (1991): 57-66.

was her only hope. Of course, this fact does not detract from the other side of the coin, that Ruth was also deeply, lovingly committed to Naomi.

How did Ruth come to such a true faith in the LORD? Not by any convenient grace in Moab. It must have been through the witness of Naomi. We may also include Mahlon and Chilion as witnesses (see 1:2-5). For, since the Biblical record reports no word of criticism against them, we may presume that, like Naomi, they were also firm believers in the LORD who practised their faith, e.g. by exhibiting loving concern for their wives (cf. Isaac, Gen. 24:67; 25:21) rather than the harsh oppression commonly experienced by heathen women.¹⁰ But, since Naomi is the only one of the family whose expression of faith is recorded, it was likely she who primarily evangelized Ruth by her love.

Ruth must have learned from her Israelite family that the God of these people who lovingly cared for each other was also a God of love, in contrast to Moab's gods who threatened destruction. Moab's chief god, Chemosh, demanded child sacrifice as the highest offering (see II Kgs 3:27; 23:13).

Naomi was deeply concerned for Orpah and Ruth in Moab in their plight as young widows (Ruth 1:8-13), and later for Ruth in Israel (3:1-4). She was willing to undertake the greatest of sacrifices for them if it were at all humanly possible (1:12). In great sorrow, she made the greatest feasible sacrifice: parting from them forever by trying to send them back to Moab for their own sakes (1:8, 11, 15), thereby depriving herself of their future love and aid and leaving herself to her own fate.¹¹ For Orpah, who is not negatively judged for obeying Naomi's command (1:14), it was humanly sensible to separate from Naomi by returning home where she may find care and a husband (1:8-9).¹² But Ruth's refusal to part and her throwing her lot in with that of her widowed mother-in-law (see 1:18) was indeed extraordinary.¹³

Ruth unequivocally professed her faith in Israel's God. She had been "evangelized" by her Israelite family, especially by Naomi, who exemplified the fact that a believer witnesses her faith in God primarily through her life.¹⁴ Ruth had been convinced that the LORD of Israel is the one true God, because He had inspired Naomi to love her with self-sacrificial love. This God could be trusted for true blessing, including love, protection, care and everlasting life. This God deserved total commitment in this life and forever.

¹⁰"Marriage and family life form the real mirror of religious belief and worship"; Cassel 16. Ancient Israel distinguished itself from Canaanites by faithfulness and love in home and family.

¹¹Cassel 16.

¹²Edward F. Campbell, *Ruth*, Anchor Bible 7 (New York: Doubleday, 1975) 82.

¹³Robert L. Hubbard, *The Book of Ruth*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988) 116.

¹⁴This comment was made by David F. C. Wurster, Niagara West Circuit, 13 Jan. 2000.

Ruth's missionary through love was Naomi. This may be called the "Naomi method" of evangelism.

III. BOAZ: EVANGELISM BY ACCEPTANCE

Boaz is introduced as the paragon of ideal Israelite covenant virtue ("an honourable gentleman," אִישׁ נְבוֹרָה חַיִל, Ruth 2:1). In order to be willing to accept Ruth the Moabitess as a full-fledged Israelite, he needed only to be convinced of her commitment to the LORD. This reputation quickly became known to him as a relative of Naomi's before he first met her (2:11-12). It was then underscored for him through her self-sacrificial devotion to her mother-in-law by gleaning for her provision (2:6-7). But it was later proven without doubt when she appeared to him secretly on the threshing floor to propose marriage (3:1-9).¹⁵ This act was taken advantage of by the storyteller for suspenseful sexual innuendoes,¹⁶ since the situation would naturally lead to such questions by the readers anyway. That Ruth and Boaz refrained from sexual activity, however, is clear to all as the scene unfolds: Boaz did not touch Ruth, but took steps to ensure her honour, and Ruth only remained near him until dawn, when she could return home without danger of attack or suspicion (3:13-15).

This interpretation is also borne out by Boaz's reaction to Ruth's proposal: He correctly understood her "advances" as not erotic but familial. He realized that Ruth had not only proposed marriage to him but had also requested him to act as her redeemer (גֹּאֵל),¹⁷ indeed, to redeem Naomi and their deceased husbands as well (see 4:9-10). The only one of several aspects of redemption (גְּאֻלָּה, see 4:6-7) that could apply in this situation is that of redeeming the family's property, that is, taking responsibility for the inheritance where there was no heir (Lev. 25:23-25). However, by being asked both to marry Ruth and to redeem the inheritance, Boaz knew that this meant trying to father an heir by Ruth, the widow of the deceased heir. This new heir would inherit the "name" and ancestral property of Mahlon (and thus also of Elimelech and Chilion, Ruth 4:5, 10). Marriage and redemption should be the means of solving the dying family's dilemma.

¹⁵This is indicated by her bathing, perfume, fine clothes, and the nature of her request. See Gen. 24:53; Est. 2:12; Ezek. 16:8-13; Hans Wilhelm Hertzberg, *Die Bücher Josua, Richter, Ruth*, Das Alte Testament Deutsch 9 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1959) 261.

¹⁶E.g. "uncover his feet" (lit. "the place of his feet", 3:4, 7; see v. 14) could refer euphemistically to uncovering Boaz's genitals, although here it was meant to awaken him quietly through the cool night air.

¹⁷Hubbard 212-13.

Naomi could not have tried to marry Boaz herself, for she was too old to bear a child in order to provide an heir (1:11-12). So, she sent Ruth to Boaz, but not just as a young widow to seek a husband (3:1-4). For Naomi could have tried to arrange that in direct conversation with Boaz, a known relative (2:20). Besides, Ruth, as an adult foreigner without a male guardian, was free to arrange her own marriage (3:10). However, besides disposing of the property through redemption (4:3-4), Naomi's primary objective was to provide an heir for Elimelech (see 4:5, 10). For this, the closest relative, could not be by-passed (3:12-13).¹⁸ But Naomi discerned that he would not be open to her proposal (see 4:6), so she directed it to the second-closest relative, Boaz (4:4). Besides, Naomi could hardly speak for Ruth, for she was not her daughter but only her daughter-in-law—indeed, a foreigner who was ineligible to provide a legal heir in Israel unless she married an Israelite citizen. Further, it would have been socially impossible for Ruth, a young foreign widow, to approach openly an older married gentleman with a proposal of marriage; she would appear to be a prostitute.

Already middle-aged (see 3:10), Boaz in that society must have been long-since married. The circumstance of marriage and family best explains the situation of the closer relative, as to why he would “ruin” his inheritance under the conditions proposed by Boaz (4:6). That he would not have expected Boaz to take the same risk explains why Boaz's proposal surprised him (4:4-6). Thus, it all makes the best sense if it is presumed that both of them were not only married but also had children. Further, Naomi could not have expected Boaz or the closer relative to fulfil the Levirate obligation since they, though related somehow to Elimelech (2:1), were not her brothers-in-law (Deut. 25:5-6; see Gen. 38:8-26; Ruth 1:11-13; Mt. 22:23-28).¹⁹ We see here the ingenuity and necessity of Naomi's plan and the daring of Ruth to carry it out.

Because the nearer relative at first agreed to redeem Elimelech's inheritance (Ruth 4:4), Boaz's proposal must have taken him completely by surprise (4:5). He could not have said: “**you** acquire (קָנִיתָהּ) the dead man's widow” (e.g. NIV), which emends the Hebrew consonantal text (*ketib*) according to the Masoretic reading (*qere*; also LXX, Syr., EVV). For he must have known the duties of a redeemer and the situation of Naomi and Ruth as well as did Boaz, the elders and townspeople, who fully accepted Boaz's action (4:11-12). Therefore, the correct reading in verse 5 must be that of the Hebrew consonantal text: “the wife of the deceased **I** will have acquired (קָנִיתִי)”²⁰

¹⁸Hubbard 217.

¹⁹See A. A. Anderson, “The Marriage of Ruth”, *Journal of Semitic Studies* 23 (1978): 171-83.

²⁰All quotes from Scripture are the author's own translation unless otherwise indicated.

This was surely an unexpected move on Boaz's part. No one would have expected more from him than his previous statement of willingness to redeem Elimelech's inheritance (4:4), for to marry Ruth in the Levirate sense was not incumbent upon either of the potential redeemers because a *levir* had to be an actual brother of the deceased (Deut. 25:5-6). Whether according to the Law or custom, no one was obligated "to raise up the name of the deceased over his inheritance" (Ruth 4:5, 10). This is why the nearer relative was willing to redeem it. But, even if he redeemed the property, Boaz would still marry Ruth in order to provide an heir to the family that was dying out in Israel.²¹ The nearer relative could have countered by agreeing to marry Ruth himself, but this would have damaged his inheritance. For a child born to him and Ruth would not only inherit Elimelech's property and carry on his name, but also receive a portion of his own inheritance (cf. 4:21; I Chr. 2:3-5).²²

Boaz thus offered to make a singular sacrifice, going beyond the letter of the Law to fulfil its spirit, its proper intention²³ that a family be preserved from extinction (Ruth 4:10). In stark contrast to the spiritual and moral degeneracy of that period (Judges 17-21), he did what was right, not "in his own eyes" (21:25), but in God's eyes. Boaz is thus a prophecy of Christ, for he redeemed Naomi and Ruth without any obligation to do so, as Christ redeemed sinful mankind sacrificially. To love another self-sacrificially is patterned after the love of Christ who sacrificed Himself for us sinners; it is the love that He expects us to give to others (Jn 15:12).

Like Orpah as a foil to Ruth, the closer relative, as a foil to Boaz, was unwilling to make a sacrifice that could be very detrimental to himself. That Boaz was willing to do this could imply that he had more means at his disposal and could more easily accept a further division of his inheritance. However, no amount of the means or property of either of the men is mentioned as of real consequence. What mattered was Boaz's sacrifice, not for the sake of erotic love or acquiring a young wife or another heir for himself, but only to uphold the covenant ideals of Israel by preserving a family with its inheritance that was a pledge from the LORD. This Boaz did on the basis of Naomi's plan and Ruth's action, the final proof to him that she truly trusted completely in the God of Israel. For, rather than seeking an unmarried husband of her own age and liking (Ruth 3:10), she rather sacrificed this to fulfil the covenant obligation of an Israelite woman, namely, to provide an heir to inherit the land the LORD had allotted to her

²¹D. R. G. Beattie, "Kethibh and Qere in Ruth IV 5", *VT* 21 (1971): 490-94; John C. Lawrenz, *Judges, Ruth*, The People's Bible (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1997) 252-54.

²²Theodore and Dorothy Thompson, "Some Legal Problems in the Book of Ruth", *VT* 18 (1968): 98-99.

²³Lawrence 254.

family. For the inherited portion was to remain a witness to every generation of the LORD'S faithfulness to each family and of their faithfulness to Him. This is why it could not simply be sold (as Naboth maintained to king Ahab, I Kgs 21:3), but must remain in the family if at all possible (Num. 27:8-11; 36:7-9).

True covenant loyalty (חֶסֶד)²⁴ to the LORD was the highest priority of Ruth and Naomi, not personal satisfaction. Naomi had correctly appraised Boaz in contrast to the nearer redeemer to share the same priority (see Ruth 2:1, 20-22; 3:18). In recognizing her חֶסֶד Boaz praised Ruth as an "honourable woman" (אִשָּׁה חַיִּיל, 3:11), thus sufficiently virtuous to be worthy of marriage to such an exemplary Israelite as himself (2:1). That was Naomi's hope and goal, Ruth's sacrifice, and Boaz's sacrifice—all for the sake of חֶסֶד to the LORD. And He fully rewarded them by working out His plan of salvation through them, for all three became ancestors not only of King David, but also of Jesus Christ (4:17; Mt. 1:5-17).

In contrast, Orpah and the closer relative both refused to make a self-sacrifice, for they were more concerned about their own personal situation or that of their inheritance than about another person's critical situation or inheritance. By thus failing to love their neighbour as much as themselves (Lev. 19:18), they were not holy to the LORD (19:2), and did not trust in the LORD taking care of them if they would make a sacrifice (Deut. 11:13-15). They therefore loved themselves more than God (6:5), in effect making idols out of themselves (see 5:7-9), and choosing everlasting death because they had selfishly sought to insure a better life in this world (11:16-17; 30:15-20). Likewise, Jesus Christ expects us all who follow Him to sacrifice ourselves for His sake (Mt. 10:37-38; 16:24-25)—which includes making sacrifices for those in need (25:34-40)—or else we forfeit everlasting life for the sake of a better temporal life (10:39; 16:26; 25:41:46).

Boaz was a kind of missionary, not one who specifically "evangelized", but who in practice accepted a candidate wholeheartedly into the people of God (Ruth 2:12; 3:13)—which was ratified by Bethlehem's elders, men, and women (4:11-12, 15). This may be called the "Boaz method" of evangelism.

²⁴חֶסֶד is primarily doing good to someone in need on the basis of covenant responsibility: Gnana Robinson, *Let Us Be Like the Nations, A Commentary on the Books of 1 and 2 Samuel*, International Theological Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993) 191-92; see Katherine D. Sakenfeld, *The Meaning of Heseḏ in the Hebrew Bible: A New Inquiry*, Harvard Semitic Monographs 17 (Missoula: Scholar's Press, 1978); Gordon R. Clark, *The Word Heseḏ in the Hebrew Bible*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement 177 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993).

IV. DAVID: MISSION BY LEADERSHIP

In the Book of Ruth, there is unusual emphasis upon the fact that Ruth was a foreigner. Instead of her introduction as such (1:4) sufficing, this is mentioned explicitly seven more times (1:22; 2:2, 6, 10, 21; 4:5, 10). This is partly necessitated by Ruth as the Moabite widow of Mahlon (4:10) not being eligible to appeal to the nearest relative to redeem the family inheritance by raising up an heir, unless she could marry an Israelite living in Israel where the inheritance could be appropriated, serviced, and passed on. However, it was not necessary to remind the readers seven times that Ruth was an alien in Israel. This is obviously a major theme for the author that goes beyond the demands of the brief story itself.

The author wanted to stress Ruth's background for the sake of David, who appears as the story's anti-climax (4:17, 22).²⁵ For David's claim to the throne of all Israel was disputed by many in the land, primarily because he supplanted the house of Saul (II Sam. 15:5-8; 20:1-2; see I Kgs 12:16-20). Besides, one of David's eight wives was also a foreigner, Maacah, a princess of the Aramean kingdom of Geshur (Absalom was her son, II Sam. 3:3; 15:8).²⁶ But more important is that, instead of putting all defeated Canaanites to death in Israel as commanded by Moses and obeyed by Joshua (Deut. 7:1-5; Jos. 6:21; 10:20, 28-40; 11:11-12), David incorporated the Jebusites into the nation of Israel (II Sam. 5:6-9; see Jos. 15:63; Jud. 1:21). In the minds of many faithful Israelites, this policy must have raised the question: Can David really have been chosen by the LORD if he was too tolerant towards enemies within Israel?²⁷

Did David have good reason for sparing the Jebusites? We note that Ittai, a Philistine Gittite (i.e. from Gath) and a commander in David's army, pledged his loyalty to David in the Name of the LORD, thus indicating his faith in Israel's God (II Sam. 15:21; see 18:2, 5).²⁸ Also, Uriah the Hittite, an inhabitant of Jerusalem and one of David's "mighty men" (11:3, 8; 23:39), professed his faith in the God of the Ark (which David had brought to Jerusalem, 6:12) and his allegiance to the army of Israel (11:11 – how

²⁵Hubbard 41-42.

²⁶Earlier accepted precedents for foreign wives were the Midianite and Cushite wives of Moses (Ex. 2:16, 21; Num. 12:1) and two ancestresses of David: Judah's Canaanite wife (Gen. 38:2-5) and Rahab of Jericho (Jos. 2:1; Mt. 1:3, 5). Bathsheba, however, was an Israelite (II Sam. 11:3; 23:34).

²⁷Hubbard 45; see Kirsten Nielsen, *Ruth: A Commentary*, The Old Testament Library, trans. E. Broadbridge (Louisville; Westminster John Knox, 1997) 27-28.

²⁸Joyce G. Baldwin, *1 and 2 Samuel*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries 8 (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1988) 260; see Robinson 232.

treacherous was David's double sin against him and God!).²⁹ This implies that, in accord with the ancient oriental mindset, the Jebusites were given an amnesty by David to remain in Jerusalem³⁰ because, like Uriah, they had accepted the LORD as their God and His anointed as their king; this included submitting to His Law and being incorporated into His Covenant.

David was not a typical missionary or evangelist in the modern sense. But he was, first, the kind of military and political leader who inspired sacrificial devotion from his soldiers and subjects (see II Sam. 15:15, 19-23; 17:27-29; 18:3; 19:31-40; 21:15-22; 23:8-23). As is often the case, for example even today when a tribe follows their chieftain who converts to Christianity, David's followers were so devoted to him that they accepted his God. Of course, there may have been some selfish concerns involved. But it had become obvious to all that God had bountifully blessed David with great success (see 7:9; 8:6, 14), and this because he was wholly devoted to the LORD, the God of Israel (see I Sam. 17:36-37; 23:2, 10-12; 24:6, 15; 25:32-34; 26:19-24; 30:8; 2 Sam. 2:1; 5:19-25; 7:2, 18-29; 9:1-3; 23:1-7; I Kgs 15:5).³¹

Whenever necessary, David was not above thoroughly defeating his enemies in battle and even massacring many survivors (I Sam. 30:17; II Sam. 8:2, 5, 13; 10:18; 12:29-31), who were, after all, really the enemies of the LORD (I Sam. 30:26). Regarding Jerusalem, however, it was not a defensive war, for David took the initiative to capture the city-state to make it the strategic political and religious capital of Israel. He could rightfully call it his own (II Sam. 5:9), for it belonged to none of the tribes of Israel. Therefore, he would have felt free to treat the inhabitant Jebusites not harshly according to the letter of the LORD'S Law (Deut. 7:1-2), but rather mercifully on the conditions that they accept the rule of the king of Israel and the worship of the God of Israel.

David may thus be defended, first, as one who, in having a foreign wife, may be compared to Moses, Judah, and Boaz. Secondly, he did not simply incorporate heathen foreigners into Israel, but rather welcomed aliens who professed their loyalty to Israel's king and their faith in Israel's God, i.e. who committed themselves to Israel's Covenant with the LORD. We may even recognize here the "David method" of evangelism. Prime examples of converts were Ittai and Uriah, comparable to Ruth. She, for the author of the Book of Ruth, is the model *par excellence* of an alien convert who not only

²⁹Also, Obed-edom the Gittite must have been a worshipper of the LORD for David to have left the Ark in his house for safe-keeping (II Sam. 6:11-12), as well as his "friend", Hushai the adviser, a Phoenician from Arke (15:32-37), and the Ammonites Zelek, one of David's "mighty men" (23:37), and Shobi, who brought him provisions during his flight from Absalom (17:27-29; see Cassel, 5-6).

³⁰Robinson 174-75.

³¹Walter R. Roehrs, *Survey of Covenant History* (St. Louis; Concordia, 1989) 135-36.

professed her faith in the LORD but also made a tremendous double sacrifice to worship Him in His land with His people and to enter into a marriage in order to uphold the spirit of his Covenant and Law.

V. CONCLUSION: ANCIENT EVANGELIST MODELS FOR TODAY

Most new members of our congregations do not come in through such efforts as portrayed in the Book of Acts or in evangelism manuals. Experience shows that they mainly come through personal invitations by relatives and friends (as Andrew invited his brother Peter, and Philip his friend Nathanael, Jn 1:41-48).

Naomi is the prime example of someone who inspired a close relative to convert to Israel's true religion by conviction. The Holy Spirit created saving faith in Ruth after she had experienced Naomi's self-sacrificial love to her. Naomi "won" her over, not by direct witness or convincing arguments, but simply by living her faith as a sincere believer in the one true God.³² The LORD proved to be the only hope and support for Naomi in all her adversity, as well as the living source for her loyalty, love, and generosity. By living lovingly, she proved to Ruth that her God enabled her to do so, and that He must be the one God to trust in for fulfilment in this life and in the life beyond death.³³

Boaz, a man of convinced covenant loyalty and faith in the LORD, is one who could recognize such virtues in others. "Even in Israel" had he not found such faith and loyalty as in Ruth the foreigner (cf. Lk. 7:9; 17:18). To lead someone to faith in the Saviour God, as Naomi did Ruth, is only the beginning. The newcomer may yet be lost if she is not accepted by the community of faith. Boaz was willing to put his perfect reputation on the line by welcoming Ruth the foreign refugee, and this so fully that it was at great sacrifice to himself. The corollary to evangelism is welcoming visitors and new converts and members wholeheartedly. A new family member—whether a child or in-law—changes the make-up of the family and thus the lives of all other members. So, too, new members of a congregation alter its make-up and change the lives of the others. It is incumbent upon us to accept new members fully, precisely because it entails sacrifice on our part, for this is the Christian lifestyle, patterned after that of Christ (see Acts 10).

David's leadership position in Israel was immense. But most of us have positions that entail at least some responsibility and leadership toward others, even if only in our families. David's example of welcoming many foreigners to worship his God admonishes first of all our pastors and

³²Cf. the remarks by Konstantin Hahn and Donald R. Schiemann (Adnams 7, 8).

³³Naomi thus practised what is called today "friendship evangelism".

congregational leaders, and then also all members, to welcome the aliens in our country. Some of them, like Rahab and Ruth, enter our congregations through marriage as well as by profession of faith. Others, like Ittai and Uriah, are impressed by how our God blesses us, especially when we exhibit unquestioned loyalty to Him and His love to them (see II Sam. 9:3).

In the Book of Ruth, God speaks to no one directly or indirectly, nor does any clergyman such as prophet or priest appear. The only activity attributed to God concerns the creation of life in crops (1:6) and conception (4:13). All other activity—although often implied as really God’s action in His people—is done by ordinary lay believers. So, God works out His will among us as we do His will in loyalty to Him and in love to others—and as we employ the “Naomi, Boaz, and David methods” of evangelism.

It was not easy for the Israelites under Moses or David to accept aliens into their covenant community. It is also not easy for us today to do likewise, even though we have the much greater revelation of the Saviour Jesus Christ. But, as the LORD commanded Israel to welcome and love the aliens among them, we can do no less than to welcome and love all aliens who visit our services and to accept sacrificially all who profess faith in Christ as our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. The future of the Church of Christ is with people of all backgrounds, cultures and races.

The Great Commission (Mt. 28:18-20) may be fulfilled not only in foreign countries but also in our own nation. This is one aspect of the realization of the Kingdom of God that is spiritual, “in your midst” (Lk. 17:21, NASB),³⁴ the gracious rule of Christ who is both with us (*Immanu-El*, Is. 7:14)³⁵ and the King for all peoples (Dan. 7:14). This is how the curse of the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11:7-9) is being reversed, and how the blessing of Pentecost (Acts 2:5-11) is being realized among us today.

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³⁴Arthur A. Just, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia, 1997) 662.

³⁵See this writer’s “‘Immanuel’ as Basic Motif of Biblical Theology”, *Lutheran Theological Review* 1.2:5-16.

**SERMON:
LOST AND FOUND (ST LUKE 15)¹**

Thomas M. Winger

Our text is the Gospel reading from Luke 15, the parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin, but I also wish to include the parable of the Prodigal son that follows immediately after. I think we should hear all three parables together, because that's how Luke wants us to hear them.

When I was a student preacher—and now it seems so long ago—my supervisor once criticised me for trying to fit everything we'd studied about a text into just **one** sermon. It's a hard lesson for youth to swallow: that there will, in fact, be another chance to preach the text. But there are texts which simply will not be confined, which gush with Gospel, whose depths could never be plumbed if we were to sit here from dawn to dusk in continuous conversation. These three parables of Luke 15 are such texts. Indeed, the parable that is usually called "The Prodigal Son" has been called "The Gospel within the Gospel". Unlike John 3:16, which condenses the Gospel into one terse sentence, our Lord in this parable spins a tale of infinite complexity, whose every detail seethes with wisdom about sin and repentance, God and His grace, the Church and the sacraments, and on and on. Even the common title "The Prodigal Son" can't contain it all. For there is another son, the elder son, the unrepentant one, of whom the parable might truly be said to speak. And then there's the father. In the early '50s in post-war Germany, a preacher named Helmut Thielicke drew 4000 people twice a week into St Michael's Church in Hamburg to hear his dynamic proclamation based on Jesus' parables. In his most famous sermon he turned this parable on its head, titling it "The Waiting Father"—reminding us that the most important part of the tale is the graciousness of God. Truly this is a text whose riches can never be exhausted.

If, then, we wished to hear just **one** thing from these three parables today, we'd do well to listen to how St Luke introduces the chapter of our Gospel which contains these lovely gems:

Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to [Jesus] to hear Him. And both the Pharisees and the scribes began murmuring, saying, "He [habitually] welcomes sinners and eats with them!" (Lk. 15:1-2)

¹Preached on the 17th Sunday after Pentecost 2001 to Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Tottenham, England.

And in response, Jesus tells them our three parables. In other words, the parables have something to do with **Pharisees**—those perpetual villains who dog Jesus’ every step. To the average Jew, the Pharisees were the height of religious virtue. They were in every way the opposite of “tax collectors and sinners”—the sort of people Jesus hung around with. As far as the religion of Israel was concerned, they were “insiders”, with all the privileges of membership in that exclusive club. They were anything but “lost”. And so in Jesus’ parables, they’re the 99 sheep who don’t wander, the nine coins that remain in the safe box, the elder son who stays home with his father. But that hardly sounds like a criticism. So what is it about the Pharisees that was so Pharisaical?

Well, let’s move to the end of the first parable, where Jesus ends the story of the lost sheep by saying to the Pharisees: “I say to you that there will be such joy in heaven over one sinner repenting, rather than over ninety-nine ‘righteous’ who have no need of repentance” (Lk. 15:7).² Now, I don’t think Jesus meant this as a compliment! For I don’t believe there’s any such thing as righteous people who need no repentance. But the Pharisees thought that’s what they were. And it led them to despise people that they considered “unrighteous”, “sinners” who deserved no place in God’s kingdom. It brought them no joy to see Jesus cavorting with such people. But Jesus turns the tables on them. They’re unable to rejoice over the salvation of one lost sinner because they themselves are unable to repent. And so, though they’re insiders, they find themselves strangely excluded. The Messiah has come, the Kingdom has come, lost children of God are being brought into God’s house—but they can’t rejoice. Like the elder son in the parable, they’re bitter and jealous. Although they’ve stayed within God’s house, so to speak, within the religion of Israel, they’ve been excluded from the great feast because they see no need for themselves to repent.

And that’s what this parable is partly about: **repentance**. The danger that we on the inside always face is that we begin to think we’ve earned our place in this family. We’ve done our part. We’ve made our way in. God’s given us our due. Repentance is something those people outside have to do. So thinks the elder son. He’s shocked by his father’s actions towards his wayward little brother. He thinks **he** deserves the feast. “Look how many years I’ve been slaving for you and I never disobeyed your command” (15:29). And so, even while staying at home he ends up more lost than his prodigal brother—lost in his own self-righteousness and self-made sainthood. He sees this man not as a father who loves and who gives, but as a master who commands and rewards. And how easily the younger son, too, falls into this trap. When he

²My translation. The standard reading, “**more** joy in heaven over one sinner who repents **than** over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance” (RSV), is dubious and distorts the meaning significantly.

comes to his senses in that foreign land, he begins to calculate how he might **work** his way back into his father's favour.

I shall get up and go to my father and say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you, I'm no longer worthy to be called your son; make me one of your wage-earning servants" (15:18-19).

And so he has a plan. But it's little different from the elder son's self-righteousness. And in the end, when his father brushes aside all pretence of dignity and runs out to greet him, throwing his arms around his long-lost son, the prodigal's last vestige of self-worth melts away in the face of overwhelming love; and he repents, he truly repents. He gives up any hope of making amends and simply casts himself on his father's mercy, hoping beyond hope that his father's love will cover all his debts. For in the end **true** repentance can't come from the fear of God alone, but is moved by faith's confidence that this is a Father who will forgive.

And so there's true reconciliation. The distance between father and son created by years of rebellion, wasteful living, and heartless selfishness is erased in a moment. The Father has gone out to meet his wayward son in a matchless picture of the **incarnation**—just as God came down in the flesh to seek and to save His lost children, rather than waiting arrogantly for them to find their way back to Him. And with a kiss of peace He grants His forgiveness. A kiss in the ancient world could only happen between two people who held no grudge against each other. With a holy kiss the father embraces his lost child and says, "Peace be with you" (cf. Jn 20:19). And then he calls for clothing and jewellery fit for the son of a wealthy man. With a splendid robe he covers over the tattered linen remains which barely covered his son's withered body. For this son whom he supposed to be dead is, in fact, alive; this son who'd hurt him so badly that he might as well have been dead is now back home. And what more splendid picture of Holy **Baptism** could be held before our eyes. We who were lost were found; we who were rebellious and disobedient were shown mercy by our gracious Father and washed clean of our sins. Through this Baptism we truly died to our old lives and were made alive again. And our Father clothed us with the perfect beauty of Jesus' righteousness.

In all three parables, when that which was lost is found, the whole community is gathered together to rejoice—for the lost sheep, the lost coin, the lost son are not only reconciled to their owners or father, but also to the community. The prodigal son's father went so far as to slaughter a prized fatted calf and invited the whole town to a feast of reconciliation. Surely we can all see the Christian meaning of this event. For a victim has also been slain for us: Christ, the Lamb of God. And Christ's sacrifice, likewise, not only reconciles us to our Father, but it also heals what divides us one from another. We who are baptized, kissed one by one with God's peace, clothed with Christ's robe, are brought into Christ's **Supper**. That feast goes on here

today. The Blood of Christ which cleanses us from all sin will be poured out at this altar for us. It's the wine of gladness, which we receive together in celebration of our redemption. It's a brief bright foretaste of the eternal banquet of heaven. Daily and weekly we return to the Lord through repentance and faith—for, unlike the Pharisees, we do not think ourselves as beyond all need of repentance. Each and every week, the Father's graciousness calls us through repentance into His feast. We sit at table with our God—even more, He embraces us, joins Himself to us by giving His very Body and Blood into our mouths. And oh what joy there is in heaven and on earth over our being found! Amen

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