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The Church's Mission and Evangelistic Task A Distinctively Lutheran Theology of Mission¹

“Who am I? Why am I here?”² It is not easy to be a Lutheran. At times we seem to have no identity of our own. While Roman Catholics see us as just another type of Protestantism, Protestants look at us as watered down Romanists. As Lutherans, we have a unique theological system with an identity all our own. When we forget this basic premise, we always get ourselves into theological trouble. When we fail to keep God's theological tensions in balance, we not only lose our identity, we fall into error. Perhaps nowhere is this more true than with regard to the topic that is before us today. What is the mission of the Church? Does “mission” have a separate and unique theology of its own? Does being a “Confessional Lutheran” mean you are by definition “anti-mission?” Does having a “heart for mission” mean that there are some traditional Lutheran practices that must be jettisoned? Is it really possible in this day and age to keep the message straight and get the message out? Has it ever been? May God grant us His blessing and guide us into His Truth.

The Theology of Mission

Where should we begin? The faddish temptation is to begin our discussion of mission with a mission statement. But which statement should we use; synod, district, circuit, congregation, growing congregation, traditional congregation, high priced consultant? The now sainted Dr. Kurt Marquart gives us helpful advice:

It has become popular in the wake of the Church Growth movement, to compose “mission statements” for congregations and church-bodies. This can be a good exercise if it digs down to first principles. The danger lies in soaking up uncritically the torrents of “biblical” sounding verbiage pouring forth from sectarian circles and saturated with an alien, non-sacramental and therefore unevangelical theology. Lutheran congregations and synods

¹ This paper is a condensed version of a major presentation given in October, 2007, at the Fall Pastors' Conference of the Montana District, LCMS under the title, “Missions in the LCMS, Theology, History, and Today.” I am grateful to all who helped sharpen its focus and clarify my words, especially the brother pastors of the Montana District and Dr. C. Matthew Phillips of Concordia University, Seward, Nebraska.

² These words were made famous/infamous by Vice Admiral James Bond Stockdale during the Vice Presidential debate on October 13, 1992.

must learn again to treasure the Book of Concord as their best and most authentic “mission statement,” and to implement its doctrinal and sacramental substance full-strength in the actual shaping of their church-life.³

Being true to our Lutheran identity, we must dig down to our first principles. We believe, teach, and confess that The Holy Scriptures are the inspired, inerrant, infallible Word of God and the only source and norm for our theology and practice. We also believe, teach, and confess that the Lutheran Confessions are a proper exhibition of that Word.⁴ Let us then turn to our “best and most authentic ‘mission statement.’” I submit that the first six articles of the Augsburg Confession make the perfect framework for our discussion.

All true theology, by definition of the word itself, begins with God. Who is the One, True God?

[I. Concerning God]

In the first place, it is with one accord taught and held, following the decree of the Council of Nicea, that there is one divine essence which is named God and truly is God. But there are three persons in the same one essence, equally powerful, equally eternal: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. All three are one divine essence, eternal, undivided, unending, of immeasurable power, wisdom, and goodness, the creator and preserver of all visible and invisible things. What is understood by the word “person” is not a part nor a quality in another but that which exists by itself, as the Fathers once used the word concerning this issue.

Rejected, therefore, are all the heresies that are opposed to this article, such as the Manichaeans, who posited two gods, one good and one evil; the Valentinians, the Arians, the Eunomians, the Mohammedans, and all others like them; also the Samosatrenians, old and new, who hold that there is only one person and create a deceitful sophistry about the other two, the Word and the Holy Spirit, by saying that the two need not be two distinct persons since “Word” means an external word or voice and the “Holy Spirit” is a created motion in all creatures.⁵

God is perfect, holy and Triune; what about us? How do we stand in relation to Him? Next comes the doctrine of man.

³ Kurt E. Marquart, *The Church and Her Fellowship, Ministry, and Governance*, Confessional Lutheran Dogmatics, Volume IX. (The Luther Academy: St. Louis, 1990), p. 185.

⁴ Lutheran Service Book Agenda, Ordination Vows, 165-166.

⁵ *Book of Concord*, Kolb/Wengert, 36.

[II. Concerning Original Sin]

Furthermore, it is taught among us that since the fall of Adam, all human beings who are born in the natural way are conceived and born in sin. This means that from birth they are full of evil lust and inclination and cannot by nature possess true fear of God and true faith in God. Moreover, this same innate disease and original sin is truly sin and condemns to God's eternal wrath all who are not in turn born anew through baptism and the Holy Spirit.

Rejected, then, are the Pelagians and others who do not regard original sin as sin in order to make human nature righteous through natural powers, thus insulting the suffering and merit of Christ.⁶

Houston, we have a problem! God is holy and we are not. Cut off from God and doomed as His enemy, we have no power to save ourselves, no ability to restore this broken relationship. We need help.

[III. Concerning the Son of God]

Likewise, it is taught that God the Son became a human being, born of the pure Virgin Mary, and that the two natures, the divine and the human, are so inseparably united in one person that there is one Christ. He is true God and true human being who truly "was born, suffered, was crucified, died, and was buried" in order both to be a sacrifice not only for original sin but also for all other sins and to conciliate God's wrath. Moreover, the same Christ "descended into hell, truly rose from the dead on the third day, ascended into heaven, is sitting at the right hand of God" in order to rule and reign forever over all creatures, so that through the Holy Spirit he may make holy, purify, strengthen, and comfort all who believe in him, also distribute to them life and various gifts and benefits, and shield and protect them against the devil and sin. Finally, the same Lord Christ "will come" in full view of all "to judge the living and the dead . . .," according to the Apostles' Creed. Rejected are all heresies that are opposed to this article.⁷

So Jesus is the Christ, true God and true man, sent by the Father as a sacrifice for sin. What, exactly, does that mean for me, a poor, miserable sinner?

[IV. Concerning Justification]

Furthermore, it is taught that we cannot obtain forgiveness of sin and righteousness before God through our merit, work, or satisfactions, but that we receive forgiveness of sin and become righteous before God out of grace for

⁶ Kolb/Wengert, 36,38.

⁷ Kolb/Wengert, 38.

Christ's sake through faith when we believe that Christ has 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 in his sight, as St. Paul says in Romans 3[:21–26*] and 4[:5*].⁸

Forgiveness of sin and eternal life as a gift of God through the person and work of Jesus the Christ; awesome! How do I get it, since I am powerless to save myself?

[V. Concerning the Office of Preaching]⁹

To obtain such faith God instituted the office of preaching, giving the gospel and the sacraments. Through these, as through means, he gives the Holy Spirit who produces faith, where and when he wills, in those who hear the gospel. It teaches that we have a gracious God, not through our merit but through Christ's merit, when we so believe.

Condemned are the Anabaptists and others who teach that we obtain the Holy Spirit without the external word of the gospel through our own preparation, thoughts, and works.¹⁰

Christ is gift, forgiveness is gift, eternal life is gift, and even faith is gift; how can I ever thank you Lord, for all Your benefits to me?

[VI. Concerning the New Obedience]

It is also taught that such faith should yield good fruit and good works and that a person must do such good works as God has commanded for God's sake but not place trust in them as if thereby to earn grace before God. For we receive forgiveness of sin and righteousness through faith in Christ, as Christ himself says [Luke 17:10*]: "When you have done all [things] . . . , say, 'We are worthless slaves.'" "The Fathers also teach the same thing. For Ambrose says: "It is determined by God that whoever believes in Christ shall be saved and have forgiveness of sins, not through works but through faith alone, without merit."¹¹

⁸ Kolb/Wengert, 38, 40.

⁹ AC IV and AC V are meant to be read together; salvation achieved and salvation delivered. For an excellent treatment of the 19th century theological shift in the interpretation of the Augustana which led to "actual departures" from this traditional understanding see, Norman Nagel, "Externum Verbum: Testing Augustana V on the Doctrine of the Holy Ministry." *Logia* 6:3, p.27ff. See also Gerhard O. Forde, *Justification by Faith-A Matter of Death and Life*, (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), especially chapter 5.

¹⁰ Kolb/Wengert, 40.

¹¹ Kolb/Wengert, 40.

There you have it, the framework for our discussion of the theology of mission. The word *mission* seems conspicuously absent. Certainly it must be in one of the twenty two articles to follow, right? Wrong. *Somewhere* in the Book of Concord? No. How then can The Lutheran Confessions serve as our “mission statement” when the word mission doesn’t even occur? Either confessional Lutherans really don’t have a theology of mission, or we need to rethink “mission” in biblical and confessional language.

We are face to face here with the so-called “mission of the church.” The church has only one divinely-assigned task: to build herself up in faith and love, embracing more and more of fallen humanity, to the praise and glory of God, by and for the transmission of forgiveness, life, and salvation through the holy Gospel and sacraments of Christ (Mt. 28:19-20; Jn. 15:1-17; Eph. 2:19-22; 4:1-16; I Pet. 2:1-12; I Jn. 1:1-4; 5:1-13).¹²

Luther teaches us, that where there is forgiveness of sins, there is life and salvation.¹³ The mission of the church is the forgiveness of sins.¹⁴ In other words, the very reason for our existence as church is the forgiveness of sins. The material principle of Lutheranism, the thing that matters most, is justification.¹⁵ We are justified, that is, declared righteous, by grace alone, through faith alone, on account of the person and work of Jesus Christ alone, as revealed to us in Scripture alone; to God alone be the glory! Justification is not only the chief doctrine in Lutheranism, it is the heart and soul of every other doctrine as well. To speak of “mission” apart from justification is to deny the material principle of Scripture. To have a theology of mission that does not have at its center the doctrine of justification is to cease to be Lutheran. Hear how Luther wrote about this subject:

Here is the first and chief article:

That Jesus Christ, our God and Lord, “was handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification” (Rom. 4[:25*]); and he alone is “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1[:29*]); and “the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Isa. 53[:6*]); furthermore, “All have sinned,” and “they are now justified without merit by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus . . . by his blood” (Rom. 3[:23–25*]).

Now because this must be believed and may not be obtained or grasped otherwise with any work, law, or merit, it is clear and certain that this faith

¹² Marquart, p. 185.

¹³ Small Catechism, Sacrament of the Altar, Kolb/Wengert, 362.

¹⁴ Werner Elert, *The Christian Faith An Outline of Lutheran Dogmatics*, translated by Martin Bertram and Walter Bouman (St. Louis: CPH, 1974) 280.

¹⁵ See *Theses On Justification*, CTCR Report, May, 1983.

alone justifies us, as St. Paul says in Romans 3[:28*, 26*]: “For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law”; and also, “that God alone is righteous and justifies the one who has faith in Jesus.”

Nothing in this article can be conceded or given up, even if heaven and earth or whatever is transitory passed away. As St. Peter says in Acts 4[:12*]: “There is no other name . . . given among mortals by which we must be saved.” “And by his bruises we are healed” (Isa. 53[:5*]).

On this article stands all that we teach and practice against the pope, the devil, and the world. Therefore we must be quite certain and have no doubt about it. Otherwise everything is lost, and the pope and the devil and whatever opposes us will gain victory and be proved right.¹⁶

This is the chief article of our faith; and if you either do away with it, as the Jews do, or corrupt it, as the papists do, the church cannot exist. Nor can God keep His glory, which consists in this, that He is compassionate and wants to forgive sins and to save for the sake of His Son.¹⁷

For if the doctrine of justification is lost, the whole of Christian doctrine is lost. And those in the world who do not teach it are either Jews or Turks or papists or sectarians. For between these two kinds of righteousness, the active righteousness of the Law and the passive righteousness of Christ, there is no middle ground. Therefore he who has strayed away from this Christian righteousness will necessarily relapse into the active righteousness; that is, when he has lost Christ, he must fall into a trust in his own works.¹⁸

As I often warn, therefore, the doctrine of justification must be learned diligently. For in it are included all the other doctrines of our faith; and if it is sound, all the others are sound as well. Therefore when we teach that men are justified through Christ and that Christ is the Victor over sin, death, and the eternal curse, we are testifying at the same time that He is God by nature.¹⁹

Therefore all depends on this article about Christ, and he who has this article has everything. In order to be able to abide by it, the Christians must be engaged in the most strenuous warfare and must fight constantly. Therefore Christ and the apostles have good reason to insist on it everywhere. Al-

¹⁶ Smalcald Articles, II, II, 1-5. Kolb/Wengert 301.

¹⁷ LW 4:60.

¹⁸ LW 26:9.

¹⁹ LW 26:283.

though the other doctrines are also based on Scripture—for example, Christ’s birth from a pure virgin—it does not stress them as much as it does this one. When St. Paul champions this doctrine of Christ’s birth, he does not even call the mother by name; nor does he mention the honor of the virgin; he states simply (Gal. 4:4) “born of woman.” But when he informs us that we receive grace and salvation, not by works and the Law but only through this Mediator, Christ, then he speaks exhaustively.²⁰

Other doctrines have also been attacked, but not one has caused so much bloodshed and produced so many martyrs as this one. For this began at once in the case of the first two brothers, Cain and Abel, when the one had to die at the hand of the other because of this same question. And it will continue as long as the world exists. Where this doctrine is proclaimed, there the devil is mad and insane, and the world is aflame with anger and raging.²¹

Justification itself contains a paradox. We generally speak of objective justification (Christ has won forgiveness for all sin for all time) and subjective justification (forgiveness is received by faith). “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” {John 3:16} Again, this paradox must be kept in tension.²² Whenever we emphasize one at the expense of the other, we find ourselves in theological hot water. An over emphasis on objective justification can lead to mission apathy or even universalism. An over emphasis on subjective justification can lead to a denial of the divinely instituted office of the ministry, sacerdotalism, or works righteousness.²³

Many have attempted to state a concise and precise “theology of mission.”²⁴ There are required classes on the subject at our seminaries.²⁵ Rarely a day goes by when something in the mailbox doesn’t promise to help explain or expand “the mission;”²⁶ this is truly the beast of

²⁰ LW 24:319.

²¹ LW 24:319.

²² See Ken Schurb, *Does the Lutheran Confessions’ Emphasis on Subjective Justification Mitigate Their Teaching of Objective Justification?* (Ft. Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, no date).

²³ See note 18.

²⁴ Required LCMS seminary reading includes Darrell L. Gruder, ed., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998); Georg Vicedom, *The Mission of God* (St. Louis: CPH, 1965); Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret An Introduction to the Theology of Mission* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978, 1995); Robert J. Scudieri, *The Apostolic Church* (Lutheran Society for Missiology, 1995); James A. Scherer, *Gospel, Church, & Kingdom* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1987); Craig L. Nesson, *Beyond Maintenance to Mission* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999).

²⁵ P160, Theology of Missions, at Concordia in St. Louis.

²⁶ The original day of this paper, in my mailbox was Martin Sinderman, “Expanding Your Mission with Marketing and Branding,” *Worship Facilities* (Sept/Oct 2007) 53-56.

relativism at its finest. You might think that God's Word is somehow absent or not clear on the subject.

21 But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. 22 This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. 25 God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished— 26 he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus. **Romans 3:21-26**

5 However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness. 16 Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. 17 As it is written: "I have made you a father of many nations." He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed—the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were. 18 Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, "So shall your offspring be." 19 Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah's womb was also dead. 20 Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, 21 being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. 22 This is why "it was credited to him as righteousness." 23 The words "it was credited to him" were written not for him alone, 24 but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. 25 He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification. **Romans 4:5,16-25**

18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: 19 that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. 20 We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. 21 God made

him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. **2 Corinthians 5:18-21**

29 The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! **John 1:29**

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. **Romans 1:16**

Luther was fond of speaking of this justification paradox as salvation achieved and salvation distributed.

So that our readers may the better perceive our teaching I shall clearly and broadly describe it. We treat of the forgiveness of sins in two ways. First, how it is achieved and won. Second, how it is distributed and given to us. Christ has achieved it on the cross, it is true. But he has not distributed or given it on the cross. He has not won it in the supper or sacrament. There he has distributed and given it through the Word, as also in the gospel, where it is preached. He has won it once for all on the cross. But the distribution takes place continuously, before and after, from the beginning to the end of the world. For inasmuch as he had determined once to achieve it, it made no difference to him whether he distributed it before or after, through his Word, as can easily be proved from Scripture. But now there is neither need nor time to do so.

If now I seek the forgiveness of sins, I do not run to the cross, for I will not find it given there. Nor must I hold to the suffering of Christ, as Dr. Karlstadt trifles, in knowledge or remembrance, for I will not find it there either. But I will find in the sacrament or gospel the word which distributes, presents, offers, and gives to me that forgiveness which was won on the cross. Therefore, Luther has rightly taught that whoever has a bad conscience from his sins should go to the sacrament and obtain comfort, not because of the bread and wine, not because of the body and blood of Christ, but because of the word which in the sacrament offers, presents, and gives the body and blood of Christ, given and shed for me. Is that not clear enough?²⁷

Luther, without using the word mission, makes clear the mission of God. The Father sends His Son to be the Savior of the world. Through His perfect life, obedient death, glorious resurrection and ascension, Christ Jesus wins salvation for all mankind. This salvation is freely distributed by God’s divine means. Christ delivers the benefits of His crucifixion and resurrection in the preached Word, at the baptismal font, in the bread and

²⁷ LW 40:213-214.

chalice, and in the spoken Word of forgiveness, in other words, the Gospel in all its glorious forms. God's mission is the gift of His Son for the life of the world. God fulfills this mission through the means of grace. God's means of grace, Word and sacrament, which grow and sustain the church. But what about the method? Isn't that important?

If there is to be such a thing as a Lutheran "paradigm" for the church's mission, its all-decisive, determining elements will have to be the pure preaching of the Gospel (orthodoxy!) And the right administration of the sacraments (infant baptism, bodily presence!)- and therefore also properly qualified incumbents of the divinely ordained Gospel ministry to do this. All stress is on God's gracious channels of salvation, on His own provisions for the delivery of the deliverance in His Son- to the exclusion of all man-made substitutes, like synergism, moralism, unionism, antinomianism, revivalism, anti-sacramentalism, subjectivism, millennialism, pentecostalism, and the like. Administrative, ceremonial, and other such details are significant only as they either implement and express, or else hinder and obstruct, the divine arrangements for the life and growth of the church (Augsburg Confession VII, compare Formula of Concord X).²⁸

The pure and holy Word of God, taught, believed and lived. This Word bespeaks us righteous.²⁹ This Word strengthens us and keeps us steadfast in Christ until we are transferred to the kingdom of glory. This Word gives us a new identity, in Christ.³⁰ This Word moves us out into the world, where we live and move and have our being. The familiar post-Communion Collect says it this way, "... we implore You that of Your mercy You would strengthen us through the same in faith toward You and in fervent love toward one another..." This is the response of faith we call good works (AC VI). Having been called to faith, God now calls us to love our neighbor. In this area, most of what we would call mission work or evangelism takes place, in our vocation,³¹ in the freedom of the Gospel.

Although the Christian is thus free from all works, he ought in this liberty to empty himself, take upon himself the form of a servant, be made in the likeness of men, be found in human form, and to serve, help, and in every way deal with his neighbor as he sees that God through Christ has dealt and still deals with him. This he should do freely, having regard for nothing but divine approval.

²⁸ Kurt Marquart, "Church Growth" As Mission Paradigm; A Lutheran Assessment, A Luther Academy Monograph, Houston: Our Savior Lutheran Church, 1994, p. 13.

²⁹ "Thy Strong Word," LSB 578 verse 3.

³⁰ See essay by Herbert C. Mueller Jr., *Our True Identity*, Southern Illinois District.

³¹ See Gene Edward Veith, Jr., *God At Work* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2002).

He ought to think: “Although I am an unworthy and condemned man, my God has given me in Christ all the riches of righteousness and salvation without any merit on my part, out of pure, free mercy, so that from now on I need nothing except faith which believes that this is true. Why should I not therefore freely, joyfully, with all my heart, and with an eager will do all things which I know are pleasing and acceptable to such a Father who has overwhelmed me with his inestimable riches? I will therefore give myself as a Christ to my neighbor, just as Christ offered himself to me; I will do nothing in this life except what I see is necessary, profitable, and salutary to my neighbor, since through faith I have an abundance of all good things in Christ.”³²

For the Christian, salvation is the presupposition of life in this world. Because you are righteous before God for Christ’s sake by faith alone, you do good works (Ephesians 2:10). You do good not for the life to come or to climb some spiritual ladder to God,³³ but for your neighbor, in love, and under your vocation(s). “Because you are justified in Christ *sola fide* you are content to be the person the Lord made you to be: Human! A Creature! Man (Male)! Woman (Female!) Husband! Wife! Father! Mother! Where He put you (The Created World!).”³⁴

The Apostle Peter says that God has “called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9). In so doing, He has given you the status, the high and holy status, as a member of a chosen generation, a priest in His royal priesthood, a citizen in His holy nation of the elect. This calling is the calling to faith itself. On the basis of God’s redeeming work in Christ, the Apostle Paul implores the Ephesians “to walk worthy of the calling to which you were called” (Ephesians 4:1). Luther sums up this relationship, identity and status before God in his explanation to the third article of the Creed.

The Third Article: On Being Made Holy

I believe in the Holy Spirit, one holy Christian church, the community of the saints, forgiveness of sins, resurrection of the flesh, and eternal life. Amen.

What is this? Answer:

I believe that by my own understanding or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ my LORD or come to him, but instead the Holy Spirit has called me through the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, made me holy and kept me in the true faith, just as he calls, gathers, enlightens, and makes holy the

³² LW 31:366-367.

³³ Or to humanly fulfill any part of the Law, including the “Great Commission.”

³⁴ Brent W. Kuhlman, *Vocation: Rejoicing in Being Human/Abandoning Ambitio Divinitatis/Descending to Serve the Neighbor*, paper presented at the Spring Wyoming District Pastors’ Conference, 2007, p. 6.

whole Christian church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one common, true faith. Daily in this Christian church the Holy Spirit abundantly forgives all sins—mine and those of all believers. On the Last Day the Holy Spirit will raise me and all the dead and will give to me and all believers in Christ eternal life. This is most certainly true.³⁵

This calling is a twofold calling (another paradox). It is a calling both to faith (Third Article) and to a life of love that flows from faith (Ten commandments and Table of Duties). The Christian is at the same time both saint and sinner. The existence of the Old Adam is focused and curved in on self, in bold contrast to the life of the new man in Christ. The Old Adam cannot be reformed. He cannot discover his “purpose,” clean up his act, or become “missional.” He cannot be coaxed or bribed or encouraged. The Old Adam must die. “For 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” (Galatians 2:20). When was Paul crucified? In his baptism!³⁶

Paul’s thought continues in Romans 12:1 where he exhorts Christians to present their bodies as living sacrifices to God. Even modern ears know that a sacrifice, by definition, is dead. This living sacrifice is the Christian who has literally died to sin and been raised to new life in Christ. This new life (AC VI) is the life of the holy and royal priesthood, the spiritual sacrifices noted by Peter in 1 Peter 2:5. They embrace all that the believer does in faith toward Christ and love toward neighbor. These sacrifices add

³⁵ Kolb/Wengert, 355-356.

³⁶ *I* What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? *2* By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? *3* Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? *4* We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. *5* If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. *6* For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin— *7* because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. *8* Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. *9* For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. *10* The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. *11* In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. *12* Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. *13* Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. *14* For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace. **Romans 6:1-14**

nothing to the once and for all sacrifice of Jesus. Rather, they express love and care for the neighbor in need. God doesn't need our good works or mission effort; our neighbor does! Apology XXIV states it this way:

Now the rest are eucharistic sacrifices, which are called "sacrifices of praise," namely, the preaching of the gospel, faith, prayer, thanksgiving, confession, the afflictions of the saints, and indeed, all the good works of the saints. These sacrifices are not satisfactions for those who offer them, nor can they be applied to others so as to merit the forgiveness of sins or reconciliation for others *ex opere operato*. They are performed by those who are already reconciled.

These are the sacrifices of the New Testament, as Peter teaches [1 Peter 2:5*], "a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices." Spiritual sacrifices, however, are contrasted not only with animal sacrifices but also with human works offered *ex opere operato*, because "spiritual" refers to the work of the Holy Spirit within us. Paul teaches the same thing in Romans 12[1*]: "[P]resent your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship." "Spiritual worship" refers to worship where God is recognized and is grasped by the mind, as happens when it fears and trusts God. Therefore, it is contrasted not only to Levitical worship, in which animals were slain, but with any worship in which people imagine that they are offering God a work *ex opere operato*. The Epistle to the Hebrews, chapter 13[15*], teaches the same thing, "Through him, then, let us continually offer a sacrifice of praise to God," and it adds an interpretation, "that is, the fruit of lips that confess his name." He commands us to offer praises, that is, prayer, thanksgiving, confession, and the like. These avail not *ex opere operato* but on account of faith. This is stressed by the phrase, "through him let us offer," that is, by faith in Christ.³⁷

The fruit of lips that confess His name, in joyous response to the life giving and life changing Gospel of Jesus Christ; there is our theology of mission!

It is precisely within our vocation that we confess with our lips and bear fruit as spiritual sacrifices. It is also within our vocation that we sin when our confession is less than faithful and our sacrifices man made. That is why, in our vocations, we need to have the Old Adam put to death. The struggles we face and the crosses we bear in our vocation drive us to where God promises to be, the divine service.³⁸ Here God kills the Old Man and freely serves the forgiveness of sins in all its glorious splendor. Here the Lord raises up the new man to live before God in righteousness and purity. Like Peter we may want

³⁷ Kolb/Wengert, 262-263.

³⁸ John Pless, *Ceremonies For Seekers: Catechesis as a Fundamental Criterion for Worship in the Lutheran Confessions*, <http://www.ctsfw.edu/academics/faculty/pless/catechesis.htm>

to stay on the mountain top, but God flings us out into the world to serve. The Old Adam dies as we live a life of sacrificial love for our neighbor. The Old Adam is daily drowned and put to death with all its sin, selfishness, and evil desires. God's means of grace are in action, pastor and people working together.

Here is where we properly look at the end of the Gospel of Matthew.

16 Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. *17* When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. *18* Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. *19* Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, *20* and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." **Matthew 28:16-20**

Most Lutherans are familiar with these words in two ways. We memorize at least a portion of them in our catechetical instruction regarding Holy Baptism. They are spoken at the baptism of every child and adult in our corporate worship service. They are God's "Word's of Institution" for Holy Baptism. In other words, they are God's Word's of institution for the royal priesthood. What is not as commonly known and understood, is another prominent way that these words are used in Scripture and put into practice in the Lutheran Church. At every ordination, when the pastor authorized to perform the rite calls the people to hear what Holy Scripture says concerning the institution of the Office of the Holy Ministry, the first words spoken are these words from Matthew's Gospel,³⁹ commonly called today, "The Great Commission." These words are also God's Word's of institution for the Office of the Holy Ministry. This exemplifies the relationship between pastor and royal priesthood.

The pastor serves the royal priesthood by rightly preaching God's Word and rightly administering His sacraments. The royal priesthood, in turn serves his or her neighbor just as Christ has served us (1 John 4:7-12).⁴⁰ This service is not only in the congregation where the royal priesthood prays for and supports the pastor, but also and especially outside the congregation in the world where God has placed His people in their wide variety of vocations (Isaiah 66). Here the royal priesthood passes on the Gospel that it has received in the divine service. Thankfully they confess Christ and give the reason for the hope that is within them (1 Peter 3:15). It is within the various stations of life that God's

³⁹ LSB Agenda p. 162; LW Agenda p. 208-9; service of installation for a pastor already ordained uses the same formula.

⁴⁰ I am deeply indebted to the excellent treatment of this subject by John T. Pless, *Reflections on the Life of the Royal Priesthood: Vocation and Evangelism*, in *Shepherd the Church: Essays in Pastoral Theology Honoring Bishop Roger D. Pittelko*, edited by Frederic Baue (Fort Wayne: CTS Press) 271-286.

priests speak the Word of God to others, speak to God on behalf of others in prayer, and offer themselves as living sacrifices on behalf of their neighbor.

So, how do you know if this is being done? Look around. Ask yourself some very basic questions regarding mission and ministry. Is the Gospel being faithfully proclaimed? Are baptisms being performed according to Christ's institution? Is absolution being pronounced as Christ has gifted it to His church? Is the Lord's Supper being administered according to the command and promise of Jesus?⁴¹ Remember, "Thy strong Word bespeaks us righteous." God's mission is the gift of His Son for the life of the world; the Church carries out that mission through the means of grace. God's means of grace, Word and sacrament, grow and sustain the church. That is the way it has always been. That is the way it will always be, to the very end of the age. Thus saith the Lord!

14 But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him. 15 For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. 16 To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life. And who is equal to such a task? 17 Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, like men sent from God.

4 Such confidence as this is ours through Christ before God. 5 Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. 6 He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

7 Now if the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, fading though it was, 8 will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious? 9 If the ministry that condemns men is glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness! 10 For what was glorious has no glory now in comparison with the surpassing glory. 11 And if what was fading away came with glory, how much greater is the glory of that which lasts! **2 Corinthians 2:14-17; 3:4-11**

Appendix

So much more could be said and many mission projects highlighted, but time today will not allow it. There are amazing stories that need to be learned, studied, and told in our churches

⁴¹ Sadly, some have labeled these efforts as "maintenance" as opposed to a "mission."

today.⁴² The story of our mission work in China is alone worthy of several volumes.⁴³ Have you heard of our relief efforts and mission work in Germany following World War II?⁴⁴ What about LCMS mission work in Cuba, Japan, New Guinea, and Hong Kong? The Synod establishing itself in Mexico (1922), Alaska (1926), Africa (1936) and Hawaii (1945)? The touching story of how U.S. Airmen befriended a Korean young man with a study scholarship in 1948, who would turn out to be the father of the Lutheran Church in Korea?⁴⁵ The list is virtually endless. Included in these stories are many doctrinal controversies, personality conflicts, and even political ambitions; such is the way of sinful man.

More recently we may remember mission and outreach programs like “Into All the World,” “Each One Reach One,” “Preaching-Teaching-Reaching,” “Bringing Christ to the Nations,” “Dialogue Evangelism,” “Tell the Good News about Jesus,” and “Ablaze!” While there may be many different approaches to mission work at home and abroad, one thing must remain constant; our conviction that Christ is the only mediator between God and man, that Holy Scripture is true, and that the Lutheran Confessions are a proper exhibition of that one Truth. Each new idea, program and emphasis must be carefully examined in light of who we are as Confessional Lutherans; in light of what we believe, teach and confess. Our history bears this out time and again.

It is a good and God-pleasing thing to periodically examine our mission and outreach methods,⁴⁶ as long as we remember that doctrine and practice are intrinsically connected.⁴⁷ We have many wonderful resources in our church body to help and encourage us in this venture. The Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) issued a Report on Evangelism and Church Growth in 1987 and A Theological Statement of Mission in 1991; both are worthy of continued study. The Church Growth Study Committee’s 2001 Report, “For the Sake of Christ’s Commission” is especially good in its look at both theology and culture. More and more primary sources are becoming available for our study and edification in this area as well.⁴⁸

Lutherans from the very beginning of their arrival in America have turned to their confessional writings in order to define their identity, organize, and unite themselves in a religiously pluralistic society. More than any other denomination in America, their Confessions have played a decisive role in shaping their mission

⁴² See Christopher Drews, *Mission-Stories* (St. Louis: CPH, 1931) for just one of many excellent resources.

⁴³ For a small taste of the China Mission see Baepler, 233-235.

⁴⁴ John W. Benken, *This I Recall* (St. Louis: CPH, 1964) 87-117.

⁴⁵ Won Yong Ji, *A History of Lutheranism in Korea*, Concordia Monograph Series Number 1 (St. Louis: Concordia Seminary, 1988).

⁴⁶ One example is Richard C. Caemmerer, *The Church in the World*, (St. Louis: CPH, 1949).

⁴⁷ The main point throughout *Fire and the Staff*.

⁴⁸ Volker Stolle, *The Church Comes From All Nations: Luther Texts on Mission*, trans. By Klaus Detlev Schulz and Daniel Thies (St. Louis: CPH, 2003); Ingemar Oberg, *Luther and World Mission*, trans. By Dean Apel (St. Louis: CPH, 2007). CPH has started a major project to bring the writings of Gerhard to the English speaking world and has also begun a project to add twenty volumes to the current American Edition of Luther’s Works.

and ministry, the theology and practice, of various Lutheran bodies... Lutherans who approach the Confessions from their biblical character would not stress the need to obtain simply an agreement in doctrine, but to arrive at an agreement on the *pure* doctrine of Scripture. Such a position would further lead the church to strive not for a formal acceptance, but a practical reception of the doctrines set forth in the Book of Concord. In other words, the church must preach and teach that doctrine to those sitting in the pews on Sunday.⁴⁹

The Lutheran Church has always been considered a missionary church. In 1523, Luther penned this hymn, based on Psalm 67, considered the first missionary hymn of Protestantism.⁵⁰

1 Would that the Lord would grant us grace
With blessings rich provide us
And with clear shining let his face
To life eternal light us
That we his gracious work may know
And what is his good pleasure
And also to the heathen show
Christ's riches without measure
And unto God convert them.

2 Now let the heathen thank and praise
The Lord with gladsome voices;
Let all the world for joy upraise
A song with mighty noises,
Because thou art earth's judge, O Lord,
And sin no more prevaieth;
Thy word it is both bed and board,
And for all folk avaieth
In the right path to keep them.

3 O let the people praise thy worth,
In all good works increasing;
The land shall plenteous fruit bring forth,
Thy word is rich in blessing.
May we be blest by Father, Son,
Blest also by the Holy Ghost
To whom by all be honor done,
Whom all the world shall fear the most.
Thus heartily say: Amen.

It is interesting to reflect upon the theological content of this hymn. Luther desired it as a sending hymn or closing hymn in the service. You can almost pick out each of the first six articles of the

⁴⁹ Charles P. Arand, *Testing The Boundaries; Windows to Lutheran Identity* (St. Louis: CPH, 1995), 13,17.

⁵⁰ LW 53:232-4.

Augsburg Confession. God's grace is ever present, Christ and His Word provide the power and forgiveness; the people hear, believe, and respond with good works. God's mission is the gift of His Son for the life of the world; that mission is carried on today in the means of grace. God's means of grace, Word and sacrament, grow and sustain the church. That is the way it has always been. That is the way it will always be, to the very end of the age.

Please permit me to offer some solutions to the issues I have raised. First, we must take a good, honest look in the mirror and repent. Repent of our doctrinal indifference, repent of our lack of trust in the power of the Gospel, repent of our obsession with the theology of glory at the expense of the cross. Repent of our Law motivation to get more people to be "in mission." Law motivation packaged cleverly is still Law motivation; it must stop. We must also repent of our obsession with numbers.

"Our Lord has always shown a remarkable predilection for small numbers and little flocks. Instead of organizing vast evangelistic campaigns He has, in the terms of modern missiology, wasted His time by seeking the individual, leaving the ninety-nine in the desert for the one lost sheep. We modern Christians seem sometimes to think and act as if He said: 'Where two or three millions are gathered in my name . . . ' " If I may be allowed to say a critical word of the Interview, I must say that what I missed in it is the spirit of repentance.

"I mention this as an example of the seriousness with which the Church at all times has to fight error and heresy. In this respect there cannot be any latitude in the Church. The old Missouri Synod--and I hope in this respect it will never change in spite of all legitimate theological growth--has been for all churches in America the great example of a church that cares for purity of doctrine. In spite of all mistakes and shortcomings, it has shown to other churches that the Gospel of the saving grace of God in Christ, the proclamation of the love of God is inseparably linked up when the old evil foe tries to destroy it. But this fight must begin in ourselves with the daily prayer that God may keep us in His Word. We ourselves cannot do that."

"We all should not be afraid to admit the failures of our church and to take our share in the judgment of God in patience and faith, in the faith in Him who is the Savior of all men and also the Savior of His body. This should determine our view of the history of the Church and its theology. . . .⁵¹

I would also encourage us to see our mission and outreach efforts in light of Augsburg Confession VI; good works flowing from justification. To aid in this area I would suggest an emphasis on the paradox of passive and active righteousness,⁵² a return to the Reformation

⁵¹ Private letter by Hermann Sasse to: Dr. Oliver R. Harms, Dr. Roland P. Wiederaenders, Dr. Theodore F. Nickel, Dr. Alfred O. Fuerbringer, Dr. J.A.O. Preus, Dr. Martin H. Franzmann, Dr. Herbert J.A. Bouman, The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, June 24, 1964 (Held in the Archives of Concordia Historical Institute).

⁵² Klemmit I. Preus, *The Fire and the Staff* (St. Louis: CPH, 2004), 72-77.

teaching of vocation, and a review of the freedom we have in Christ.⁵³ We must also strive to get our doctrine and practice of election right, and that, or any other problem for that matter, will not happen until we align or realign our doctrine and practice of justification as our material principle. Walther has much to say on this topic. “Why is it that this conviction has to a large extent disappeared even within the Evangelical Lutheran Church?”⁵⁴ Answering his own question he states, “Because most of the teachers in it have themselves lost this treasure.” Walther goes on, cautioning against a spirit that “considers purity of doctrine unimportant,” and “enthusiastic stimulation of feelings through all sorts of new regulations that downplay the means of grace instituted by God.”⁵⁵

Finally, Walther addresses both preachers and hearers, suggesting several measures that should be taken to awaken the lost consciousness of justification. To pastors he gives one word: Study! Study the Word of God and especially the Epistles of Paul. Study the Confessions. Study Luther. The fruit of this study will be, “that they, pastors, evidence all faithfulness in this improved knowledge thus acquired by God’s grace, untiringly promote the pure doctrine of justification as the basic and chief doctrine, inculcate it in their hearers, and conform all their sermons, catechism instruction, private teaching, admonitions, reprimands, consolations, counseling, in short, their total care of souls and congregational leadership to the pure doctrine of justification as the root, the central point, and the crown of all doctrine.”⁵⁶

“With respect to the hearers, however, it will be essential above all that they be directed to this pure pasture of the sweet Gospel, which alone makes one willing and glad to do good works. They should especially be introduced to Luther’s writings, have awakened within them the joy of reading the same, be helped to understand them, be shown the essential difference between them and all other human devotional books without exception, and be made aware of the proper use of the treasures of clear perception and of deep Christian experience contained in them.”⁵⁷ Walther goes on to say that if this were to actually happen, the pure doctrine of justification would soon return and, “with the return thereof, by the repossession of this most precious treasure of doctrine, the blessing would be renewed that the age of the Reformation, comparable only to that of the apostles, so richly enjoyed.”⁵⁸

I would humbly submit that Walther, 148 years ago, in his urgent plea to the Lutheran church, was calling us to be **ablaze** with the doctrine of justification, “For practically 30 years Luther himself stood in spirit at the stake, a death he would have suffered with joy and rejoicing; however, it was not God’s will that he should teach by his death, but in and by his life. Now, as he won the battle against his enemies solely because the doctrine of justification ruled his heart, and constantly thought in harmony with it, so also our Synod can be victorious against the sects

⁵³ Luther, *Freedom of a Christian*, LW 31:329-377.

⁵⁴ C.F.W. Walther, *Justification*, essay delivered at the Fifth Western District Convention, Addison, IL, beginning on May 5, 1859. (Essays For The Church, Volume I, CPH 1992) 30-63.

⁵⁵ Walther, *Justification*, 54.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Walther, *Justification*, 55

⁵⁸ Ibid.

all other enemies only if a fire, lit by a correct understanding of the doctrine of justification, begins to blaze up in us as it burned in our beloved Luther.”⁵⁹

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⁵⁹ Walther, *Justification*, 56