

A Preface to Lutheran Missiology

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Is there such a thing as a Lutheran missiology? Yes, just as there is a distinct Lutheran theology. This includes a proper distinction between Law and Gospel; a celebration of the priesthood of all believers, as well as an appreciation for called and ordained workers; belief that there really is forgiveness given through the Sacraments; that God really does still speak to human beings in an authoritative way through His Word in Holy Scripture. we could go on.

Several years ago I was asked by the Board for Mission Services (BFMS) of The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod to set out certain theological distinctives which would describe mission work from a Lutheran point of view. The missiological outline he developed has served the BFMS well. *Missio Apostolica* believes that more would benefit from reading it. Several times over the last five years questions have been raised about the theology of a particular action taken by the BFMS. In response, each time I have been able to share this missiology—which has guided the board in its initiatives.

Is there such a thing as a Lutheran missiology? Yes, this paper is an excellent example.

1. Introduction

This preface to LCMS World Mission's strategy statement provides an introduction to the theological framework and assumptions that guide World Mission's activity. What follows is a concise summary of how the church's mission takes shape in the context of commitment to the Scriptures and Lutheran Confessions.

2. *God loves the world and His will is that all should be saved*

The core of the Gospel message is summarized in John. 3:16: "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." Again, 1 Timothy 2:4: "He [God] wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth." All human beings by nature are lost since the sin of Adam (Ro 5:15-17). The forgiveness of sins, life and salvation can only be found by grace through faith in Jesus Christ (Ac 4: 12).

3. *Mission belongs to God*

From the beginning, God promised that He would take action to save His people (Ge 3:15). He sent His people into the world to be a blessing to others (Ge 12:1-3). Throughout the centuries He called people to Himself through the prophets, and finally He sent His Son as His full and final revelation (Heb 1:1-2). In the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus, human beings are set free from sin once and for all (Jn 1:29; Ro 5:17-19; 6:4; 1 Co 15:20-22; Heb 9:26-28).

After His resurrection, Jesus said to His disciples, "'Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.' And with that he breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not

forgive them, they are not forgiven” (Jn 20:21-23). On other occasions before His ascension, the Lord made it clear to His followers that His message was to be proclaimed throughout the world, starting from the place where they were (Lk 24:46-49; Ac 1:7-8; Mt 28:19-20). Missionaries carry out the will of the Lord by seeking the lost through the faithful proclamation of God’s Word and the administration of the sacraments.

4. *The whole people of God sent into the world*

In the broadest sense, all Christians are missionaries. As priests before God, they carry the responsibility to “declare the praises of him who called [them] out of darkness into his wonderful light” (1 Pe 2:9). All believers are instructed, “Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us” (1 Pe 2:12). In many cases, evangelistic mission work is accomplished by people who simply seize an opportunity and spontaneously share the Word of the Lord, even in the midst of adversity (Ac 8:1-4).

5. *Called missionaries*

In a narrower sense, the Spirit, using the church as the means for identifying and sending people, sends specific people to accomplish specific tasks in missionary service (Ac 8:28-31). Acting in partnership with the congregations of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, the Board for Mission Services, guided by the Holy Spirit, calls or appoints and sends people into this service.

The central task of the mission of the church is proclamation of the Gospel through Word and Sacrament, the good news of the forgiveness of sins for Jesus’ sake. To accomplish this task, the church calls into service as missionary pastors men who carry out the same charge given to St. Paul in the first Christian century: “I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen of me and what I will show you.... I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me” (Ac 26:16-18). Through their clear preaching of the Gospel (Ro 10:13-15) and right administration of the sacraments (1 Pe 3:21-22; 1 Co 11:23-26), the Lord adds to his church such as are being saved (Ac 2:47).

In addition, LCMS World Mission calls, commissions, and sends selected men and women to share the Gospel through words and deeds of loving service which complement the oral proclamation of the Gospel. These people carry out their service to the Lord by assisting the hungry, thirsty, sick, naked, lonely, those in prison, and so forth (Mt 25:34-40), service to the whole man that Jesus identifies as a sign of the coming of the kingdom of God (Mt 11:2-6). Such people are properly referred to as missionaries because they share the Gospel by deed and word, each according to his or her calling (1 Co 12:4).

LCMS World Mission also calls, commissions, and sends out people in support roles so that those who are called as evangelistic missionaries are not distracted from their work in order to fulfill the record-keeping or accounting standards of the United States or foreign governments, for example. Likewise, teachers and others are occasionally sent to take care of the needs of missionary children. Such people are properly called

missionaries because God uses their service to free others to be more deeply involved in the direct proclamation of the Gospel and frequently because of their own personal witness to the Gospel in word and deed.

6. Pastoral missionary service

As the Lutheran Confessions make clear, God has given the office of the ministry, “that is, provided the Gospel and 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.” (Augsburg Confession, Article V). The Lutheran Confessions know of no other tools that God has given to His church by which the Holy Spirit can create and preserve people in the saving faith.

All pastors are to be concerned not only about those who are already believers and members of congregations, but also those who do not have faith in the Gospel (Ro 10:14-15).

Some pastors, however, are called to carry the Gospel to people who would not hear it unless someone crosses a barrier of language and/or culture to reach them. This is the sense in which the term “missionary” is commonly used in the modern world. Even after such initial contact has taken place, the church may send additional missionaries to strengthen existing congregations or communities of believers, to carry out further evangelistic work in new places or to train people for leadership roles in the church including the preparation of some men for ministry. A missionary is not necessarily called into foreign service, for mission work is done wherever boundaries must be crossed to proclaim the Gospel (Ac 1:8).

In order for a missionary pastor to carry out his responsibilities wisely and well, it may be necessary for him to learn another language, to learn how to communicate clearly using unfamiliar cultural forms (1 Co 9:21-22), and so forth. What is said and done is controlled by the need to provide the Gospel and sacraments in ways that the Spirit may use to change the hearts and minds of people so that they may share in the forgiveness of sins.

7. Beginning the missionary task

All who are sent as missionaries work in the confidence that the Lord who sent them on His mission will also provide them with opportunities to communicate the Gospel. Medical missionaries, for example, are well aware that the alleviation of human suffering frequently provides the opportunity to talk about the forgiveness of sins (Ac 3:16, 19-20; Mt 9:2-7). Missionary pastors may have the opportunity to preach, to publicly proclaim the Gospel (Ac 13:15). In other situations, evangelistic work may begin with discussions in places where people meet and even in the marketplace (Ac 17:17). In mission history, mission work has begun with hymns and prayers in city jails (Ac 16:25) or in similar surroundings. Whatever the circumstances, missionaries live in the hope and expectation that what they say and do will cause people to talk and ask questions, to seek to know the Word of the Lord more fully, and to become a part of the community of believers (Ac 2:37; 13:42-44; 17:11). They live in the hope that the people among whom they work will respond to the Gospel in the same way as the woman of Samaria, who immediately shared the message she had received with the people around her (Jn 4:28-30).

8. *Baptism, the Church and Lord's Supper*

In obedience to Christ's command and trusting in His promises, Lutheran missionaries emphasize Baptism in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and instruction in the Biblical faith (Mt 28: 19-20). On the one hand, when working with adults, instruction normally precedes Baptism (Ac 8:30-38; Ac 16:13-15), and on the other, infants are incorporated into the kingdom of God first through Baptism (Mt 19:14; Ac 16:15, 31). Baptism, water connected with the Word of God, is "a gracious water of life and a washing of regeneration in the Holy Spirit (Luther's Small Catechism, The Sacrament of Holy Baptism, Tit 3:5-8). New believers are baptized into Christ (Ro 6:1-5) and are incorporated into the church, His body (1 Co 12:12ff).

The church is not a sociological phenomenon, made up of those who have come to faith and then chosen to call themselves members. Rather, God creates His new community, the church, through the proclamation of the Word and the administration of the Sacraments (1 Pe 2:9-10). In the church He daily and richly forgives the sins of all believers (Luther's Small Catechism, Third Article).

Participation in the body of Christ normally leads to participation in the life of the church, "the assembly of all believers among whom the Gospel is preached in its purity and the holy sacraments are administered according to the Gospel" (Augsburg Confession, Article VII). In this sense it can be said that Lutheran mission work leads to Lutheran churches, even while recognizing that in some parts of the world non-Christian and even anti-Christian forces may make the public exercise of the faith virtually impossible.

At the same time, missionaries are well aware that not all who call themselves Christians are, in fact, a part of the people of God (Mt 23:28; Augsburg Confession, Article VIII). Missionary pastors are acutely aware of their responsibility to guard the flock that has been entrusted into their care against those who would destroy it through false teaching (Ac 20:28-31).

9. *Worship*

Within the church the Gospel is preached and the sacraments administered for the forgiveness of sins. The central message is the preaching of the cross (1 Co 2:1-2), the message that Christ died for our sins (1 Co 15:3), that through Him all people have been reconciled to God (Col 1:21-22) and now, justified by His grace, those who have faith in Christ live in the hope of eternal life (Tit 3:4-7). This is the message which "prepare[s] 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" (Eph 4:12-13).

Since the beginning, Lutherans have recognized that, "...it is sufficient for the unity of the Christian church that the Gospel be preached in conformity with a pure understanding of it and that the Sacraments be administered in accordance with the divine Word. It is not necessary for the true unity of the Christian church that ceremonies instituted by men, should be uniformly observed in all places" (Augsburg Confession, Article VII. Cf. Formula of Concord, Epitome, Article X). The Lutheran church does not maintain that there is one form of worship that must be used throughout the world, but it

has always been concerned that its total worship life confesses the faith of the Creeds in accord with the universal church, and that the worship-liturgical life of the church is done decently and in order.

As St. Paul makes clear (1 Co 14), however, not all forms of worship communicate the Christian faith equally well. It is not enough that a proposed worship style is in accord with the language and culture of the emerging Lutheran community. "We should not consider as matters of indifference, and we should avoid as forbidden by God, ceremonies which are basically contrary to the Word of God, even though they go under the name and guise of external *adiaphora* and are given a different color from their true one.... We further believe, teach and confess that the community of God in every place and at every time has the right, authority, and power to change, to reduce, or to increase ceremonies according to its circumstances, as long as it does so without frivolity and offense but in an orderly and appropriate way, as at any time may seem to be most profitable, beneficial, and salutary for good order, Christian discipline, evangelical decorum, and the edification of the church" (Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Article X: 5, 9). Lutheran missionaries are concerned that above everything else, the worship life of the congregation clearly communicates God's law and God's love and forgiveness in Jesus Christ, both to those who are already a part of the church and to those who are coming into contact with the Christian church for the first time.

10. Church and ministry

The Scriptures make clear that all believers are priests before God (1 Pe 2:9). As such, all Christians are able to come before the Father, offering their sacrifice of worship and praise for the sake of Jesus Christ (Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article XXIV). St. Peter further describes all believers as "a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God," and also describes the purpose for which God has created this special relationship: "that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Pe 2:9). All Christians have the joyful privilege and responsibility of showing their thankfulness to God for His salvation by sharing the Gospel with those around them.

At the same time, individual Christians are called into the new community of the people of God (Gal 3:26-29; Col 3:11-12; 1 Pe 2:10). In this community they have the privilege of praying for each other, for those who serve, and for all people (Col 4:2-4; Eph 6:18-20). They urge each other on to greater service to the Lord, testing everything and holding on to the good (1 Th 5), restoring those who have fallen (Mt 18:15-17; Jas 5:19-20), etc. They live life under the cross. They consider themselves blessed to share in the Lord's suffering and are committed to sharing the sufferings of brothers and sisters in the faith as well as paying the price of bearing witness to the Christian faith (Ro 8:17; 2 Co 1:3-5; Php 1:29-30; 1 Th 3:2-4; 1 Pe 1:6-7).

As the people of God live and work together, it begins to become apparent that God has given special gifts to some men and women, gifts that allow them to be of special service to the people of God. At the beginning, they may offer hospitality, or teach, or take care of people with special needs, or some similar service (Ac 6:1-6; Ro 12:6-8, 12-21; 1 Ti 5:3, 9-10). As the church sees an individual exercise his gifts and observes his

spiritual maturity (1 Ti 3:1-13), it may entrust additional responsibilities to him, and eventually the church may call him into the divinely-instituted office of public ministry. It is one of the missionary's primary responsibilities as a pastor to prepare all the members of the congregation for their works of service, each according to the calling God has given (Eph 4:11-13), and to prepare some men, selected by the church, for entrance into the public ministry.

Lutheran missionaries are well aware of the impossibility of separating pastor and congregation. On the one hand, the church is "the mother that begets and bears every Christian through the Word of God" (Large Catechism, The Third Article, 42). The church is given the responsibility to preach the Gospel, to rightly administer the sacraments, to forgive and retain sins. On the other hand, the Lord uses the church to select men as candidates for ministry, to provide means of training and examining such men, to call them, and to confer on them the power which God has given to the congregation (Ac 13:1-3; Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article XIII: 7-13). The call of God mediated through the congregation is indispensable to the carrying out of the office of public ministry (Augsburg Confession, Article XIV). Following the custom of the ancient church, missionaries of The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod use the rite of ordination as a human ceremony that publicly confirms the call (Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope, 63-70).

In the practice of St. Paul, pastoral functions appear to have been handed over very quickly (Ac 14:21-23), on the one hand. On the other hand, Paul advises Timothy not to be hasty in the laying on of hands (1 Ti 5:22). Within the parameters set by these two emphases, Lutheran missionaries work with the emerging church to provide called and ordained Lutheran ministry. Of those who are called into ministry, "The Gospel requires of those who preside over the churches that they preach the Gospel, remit sins, administer the sacraments, and, in addition, exercise jurisdiction, that is, excommunicate those who are guilty of notorious crimes and absolve those who repent" (Treatise, 60).

The method of training for ministry is tailored to the needs of those who are being prepared for the pastoral office as well as the needs of the congregations they will serve. Over the centuries methods have ranged from the apprenticeship models used by Jesus and His disciples and Paul and his companions (2 Ti 2:2) to the highly academic, professional school models favored today.

The church has "the right of calling, electing, and ordaining ministers" (Treatise, 67). As Lutheran churches have done since the beginning, it is the right and privilege of Lutheran churches to set standards for admission to pastoral ministry. Lutheran missionaries are expected to help new believers in this process on the basis of their own commitment to and experience of the doctrine and practice of the Lutheran church. They share their insight into the teaching of the Lord regarding leadership in the church (Mt 23:8-12; Lk 9:46-48; Lk 22:24-26) and Biblical standards for those who hold the pastoral office (1 Ti 3:1-13; Tit 1:5-9; 1 Pe 5:1-4). They emphasize the importance of commitment to the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions (Tit 1:9).

11. Conclusion

LCMS World Mission is acutely aware that, ultimately, the success of its work does not depend on the skill of its missionaries, on the cleverness of its plans, but on the blessing of the Lord. He has promised His Spirit (Jn 14:16-20) and promises to go with His people as they make disciples throughout the world (Mt 28:19-20).

In the prayers of the church, Lutheran congregations include this prayer for missionary work.

Almighty God, since You have called Your church to witness that in Christ You have reconciled us to Yourself, grant that by Your Holy Spirit we may proclaim the good news of Your salvation that all who hear it may receive the gift of salvation; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

May this work of the Lord be done among us and through us as well!



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