

EVANGELISM AND CHURCH GROWTH



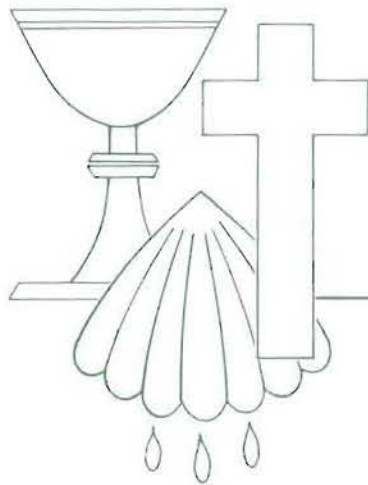
**WITH SPECIAL
REFERENCE
TO THE CHURCH
GROWTH MOVEMENT**

**A Report of the
Commission on Theology and Church Relations
of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod**

September 1987

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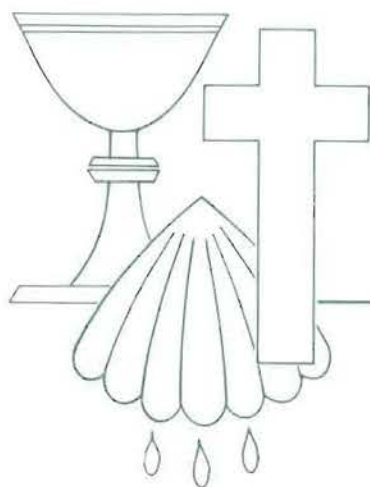
Preface

During the past four decades most Christian denominations have shown an increasing interest in the mission of the church. The ensuing amount of literature defining the mission of the church and suggesting missiological principles and methodologies for carrying out the great commission of our Lord has been considerable.

In recent years the Church Growth Movement in particular has attracted the attention of Christian denominations throughout the world. As the members of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod have become involved in various aspects of this movement, questions have been raised regarding the compatibility of Church Growth principles with Lutheran confessional doctrine. The Commission on Theology and Church Relations has prepared this study in response to requests for guidance in this area.

The purpose of the study is (1) to present the Scriptural principles of evangelism; (2) to set forth the basic missiological principles of Church Growth as these are taught by some leaders at the Fuller School of World Missions in Pasadena, California; (3) to evaluate these Church Growth principles on the basis of Lutheran doctrine; and, (4) to offer recommendations regarding the use of Church Growth principles by the members of the Synod.

In developing missiological principles writers in the Church Growth Movement have introduced an extensive list of terms, most of them new. To assist the reader unacquainted with Church Growth terminology, the Commission has included a glossary at the end of this report.



Introduction

From the beginning years of its history to the present The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod has been characterized by a strong commitment to mission outreach. The founders of the Synod were instrumental in shaping an early awareness of needs and opportunities for proclaiming the love of God in Christ to the scattered immigrants who entered America in the mid 19th century. Under God's blessing and through the determined efforts of its first pastors and congregations, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod grew to be one of the largest Protestant church bodies in America by the first decades of this century. In addition to this early thrust, the Synod sought to carry the Gospel to Native Americans in various parts of the Middle West.

By the middle of this century the Synod's concern for the work of evangelism moved it to establish in 1953 a special evangelism department within the Board for Missions in North and South America. The new department's first major thrust in evangelism was the Preaching-Teaching-Reaching missions, which resulted in adult accessions reaching an all-time peak of 35,000 members annually. Lay evangelism workshops were begun in the 1960s, followed by similar workshops for pastors and teachers. More recently, the Board for Mission Services reported to the 1986 convention of the synod that "in the 80s, the emphasis has been on a Lutheran visitation training program, *Dialog Evangelism*, to train callers and the *Witness Workshop* style to train all members to witness in their daily lives. In addition, there has been a new

interest in evaluation, research, backdoor losses, and the principles of church growth."¹

In spite of these efforts, however, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, like numerous other church bodies, has been experiencing a serious decline in membership growth and an increase in "back-door losses" over the past 15 years. The Board for Evangelism Services reported to the 1986 convention that over the last decade and a half "the total 'defections' . . . have remained at the average of 50,000 communicant members each year. These members are removed from the rosters of congregations because they moved and did not transfer, were excommunicated, joined a church of a different denomination, or just dropped out of the church. Studies by the Parish Services Department indicate that only 58% of the infants we baptize are ever confirmed." This means the loss of 25,000 to 30,000 children annually.²

Gains in membership have also been declining. After reaching a peak of 35,000 adults gained annually by Baptism and confirmation, the total dropped to an average of 26,000 during the 70s, and in 1984 stood at 29,575. About 25% of the congregations of the synod do not gain a single adult from the outside each year, and another 12% gain only one. In 1984 the Synod gained one adult from the outside for every 70 communicant members.³

The reasons for this decline in membership are varied and complex (e.g., the lack of adequate assimilation, the high mobility of people, low priority of evangelism among pastors and lay people). No doubt also contributing to this trend are more general factors such as the increasing loss of confessional and denominational loyalty, unbiblical forms of ecumenism, universalism in modern theology, the increase of social and political activism, uncertainty regarding the meaning of evangelism, or simply an indifference toward the lost.⁴

To assist the congregations of the Synod as they face the challenges of our modern world and as they use the opportunities God gives them to make disciples of the lost, the 1975 convention of the Synod affirmed the Lutheran understanding of evangelism to be "sharing the Gospel with those who do not yet confess 'Jesus Christ

¹1986 *Convention Workbook*, p. 1.

²*Ibid.*

³*Ibid.*

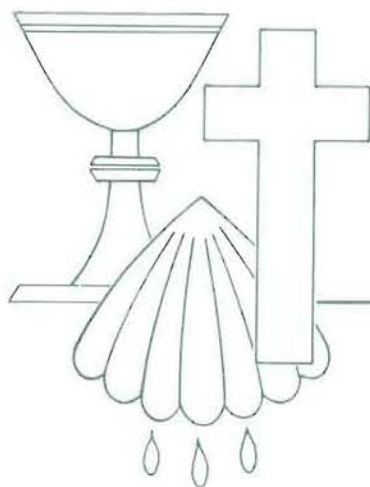
⁴Cf. Resolution 1-02A "To Affirm a Lutheran Understanding of Evangelism," 1975 *Convention Proceedings*, pp. 79-80.

is Lord,' to the end that they, too, may enjoy with us all the benefits of our Lord Jesus Christ." The convention further resolved that a study of the Lutheran understanding of evangelism be continued and that evangelism materials produced by non-Lutheran sources be examined and evaluated.⁵

As a result of these developments the Commission on Theology and Church Relations in 1975 initiated a study of the theology of evangelism with special reference to the doctrine of conversion. Two years later the Commission received an additional request from the English District "to examine the theological presuppositions of the Fuller Church Growth program." Acting on these requests, the Commission on Theology and Church Relations has expanded this report to include both assignments. The purpose of this study is not to evaluate the mass of Church Growth materials appearing on the market at the present time. Nor is it the intention of the Commission to evaluate materials written by Lutherans.

The purpose of this document is to provide, first of all, a summary statement of the Biblical and confessional presuppositions—from a positive and negative point of view—which have formed the basis of the Synod's evangelism and mission programs. This section is not intended to be an evaluation of Church Growth principles. Secondly, the Commission intends to present an examination of the fundamental missiological principles of Church Growth as these are set forth in the writings of Donald McGavran and other writers who have been involved in Church Growth at the Fuller School of World Missions in Pasadena, California. Finally, the document concludes with a series of statements and guidelines for a discerning evaluation and use of Church Growth principles.

⁵*Ibid.*



The Mission of Church: Theological Presuppositions

1. The mission of the church is to make disciples of all nations.

According to the Scriptures the Christian church has one objective in all of its mission efforts—to make disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. A disciple in the early Christian church was simply a Christian (Acts 11:26; 16:1; 18:27). Apart from its technical usage in the Gospels chiefly to refer to the twelve apostles, the term “disciple” in the New Testament occurs predominantly as a reference to believers in Christ.⁶ This term is not used to distinguish between new converts and followers of Jesus who may have been more mature in the faith or who had come to be known as more responsible members of the Christian community.

The means by which the church is to accomplish its purpose is also clearly stated in the Bible. The task of making disciples is to be done by baptizing and by teaching (Matt. 28:19-20). Luke describes the content of the message to be taught when he states: “This is what is written . . . repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem” (Luke 24:46-47). The preaching of repentance and the forgiveness of sins suggests the use of both Law and Gospel in making disciples, since it is only by the Law that sins are recognized and confessed and it is the Gospel alone that works conversion.

⁶This is especially true in the book of Acts (6:1,2,7; 9:1,10,19,26, 38; 11:26,29; 13:52; 14:20,22,28; 15:10; 16:1; 18:23,27; 19:1,9,30; 20:1, 30; 21:4,16). Cf. Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1967), 4:441 and 449.

But the church's responsibility does not end when disciples have been gathered into the church. It has the commission also to "teach all things which Christ has commanded." The present participle *didaskontes* in Matt. 28:20 implies that "Christian instruction is to be a continuous process . . . with a view to enabling disciples to walk worthily of their vocation."⁷ A disciple is described in the Scriptures as one who is committed to the Savior, is willing to take up the cross and follow Him (Luke 14:26-27), continues in Christ's Word (John 8:31-32), bears much fruit (John 15:8), loves fellow human beings, and thus gives evidence of discipleship. (John 13:35)

The church has the responsibility, therefore, to lead and nurture its members in their life of discipleship by teaching them the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27), including especially such central doctrines as Law and Gospel, justification and sanctification, Christology and soteriology, Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Moreover, since Christians are not renewed completely but are still burdened with a sinful nature, the church has the responsibility not only to incite and motivate its members to take seriously the Lord's commission to confess His name before those who have not heard the Good News, but it also has the task to admonish, exhort, and even prod the lax and indifferent.⁸

In recent times some within the Christian community have argued that the church's mission must be expanded to include social and political aims. That is, instead of concentrating its attention on making disciples of all nations through the proclamation of the Gospel, the church should become involved in the social, economic, and political struggles of the underprivileged and oppressed in their efforts to seek justice and equal rights. This view must be rejected as contrary to the central Biblical mandate. To be sure, the Lord has given His church also the task of ministering to the temporal needs of people. But the church's mission efforts must always be to proclaim the Gospel which alone can make lost sinners wise unto salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

2. The mission of the church presupposes that the Bible is God's inspired and inerrant Word.

Since the time of the Reformation, Lutherans have believed

⁷W. Robertson Nicoli, ed., *The Expositor's Greek Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, n.d.), 1:340.

⁸FC SD VI, 9-12.

and confessed that the sacred Scriptures of both the Old and the New Testaments are the only source and norm of doctrine. They are the divinely inspired and inerrant Word of God. Therefore, they are authoritative and absolutely trustworthy in all matters of faith and life as well as history.⁹ They are the normative source for the Gospel which is the power of God for salvation to every one who believes. (Rom. 1:16)

As Lutherans seek to evaluate contemporary approaches to carrying out the mission of the church, they must carefully search out what view a given methodology takes regarding Holy Scripture. Any and all attempts to subject the Scriptures to the relativistic principles of the historical-critical method of interpretation, which allows science, philosophy, human history, and culture to sit in judgment over the clear testimony of the Bible, must be rejected. To question the authority of the Bible in this way necessarily also threatens the Gospel which it proclaims. This is ultimately the crucial question: Does the methodology of Bible study employed recognize the Gospel and the sacraments, *as these are revealed in the Bible*, to be the means of grace which convey to the believer the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation? The answer to this question has a direct bearing on one's understanding of the church's God-given mission.

3. The mission of the church presupposes the total depravity of the entire human race.

Scripture clearly states that all human beings are spiritually blind, dead, and enemies of God. This condition was brought about by the fall of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden.¹⁰ The fall has brought with it the total depravity of the whole human race, showing itself in sinful desires, words, and deeds.¹¹ Even the human will is in bondage to sin.¹²

Human reason considers the doctrine of the total depravity of the human race to be an offense to the dignity of man and contrary to natural instincts which suggest that one can appease the wrath of God and earn salvation by good deeds. Salvation by works has so dominated human thinking that even the Christian church has

⁹FC SD Rule and Norm, 3,9; VII, 45; cf. Ap. XII, 66.

¹⁰Gen. 3:1-9; 6:5; 8:21; Matt. 16:17; Rom. 3:12; 5:12,18-19; 8:7; 1 Cor. 2:14; Eph. 2:1; FC SD I,6,9,17; Ap II,5,35; SA III, i, 1.

¹¹F C SD I, 5.

¹²FC SD II,7,12,24,26.

had to contend with work righteousness in one form or another since its beginning.

The Lutheran church rejects as being contrary to the clear teaching of Scripture all forms of work righteousness which

- a. assume that there can be cooperation with the Holy Spirit in spiritual matters on the part of the unconverted;
- b. hold that the unconverted, by their own power and will, can make a decision for Christ;
- c. equate saving faith with obedience to the Lordship of Christ, thereby confusing justification and sanctification; and
- d. deny in any way that conversion is totally the work of the Holy Spirit by water and the Word, thereby negating *sola gratia*.

In their approach to an unbeliever, Lutherans must follow a method which seeks to bring that person to a clear understanding of the fact that all are by nature under the condemnation of the Law because of sin. And since no human being by nature can do or even will anything good and right in the sight of God, all are subject to eternal punishment. When the unconverted individual has been brought to that realization by means of the Law, then the Holy Spirit opens the heart to the proclamation of the Gospel, creates the desire for Christ, and brings the penitent sinner to faith.

4. The mission of the church presupposes God's eternal plan of salvation through faith in Christ.

The story of the fall of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden is neither a myth nor an allegory. It is the divinely inspired account of an actual historical occurrence which resulted in the fact that all humanity came under the condemning wrath of God.¹³ The redemption of the world, therefore, required a Savior who was both God and a human being. It was necessary for Him to be a true man in order that He might take humanity's place under the Law. He had to be God in order that His every act would have infinite value.¹⁴ In eternity God Himself provided the solution for the world's lost condition by planning to send His only begotten Son to be the world's Savior. While remaining God, in full possession of His divine nature, Jesus assumed human nature, being conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. Christ's work of

¹³Rom. 5:12-19; 2 Cor. 11:3; 1 Tim. 2:14; SA III, i, 1; viii, 5; LC II, 28; FC SD I, 9.

¹⁴FC SD VIII, 40, 44, 82f.; Ep VIII, 8.

redemption consisted in this that as a true human being He voluntarily placed Himself under the law of God in order that He might fulfill it in the stead of the human race. He then suffered and died, facing for the whole world the wrath of God, as the Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all (Rom. 8:3).¹⁵ Any claim that it is immoral to hold that the merits of Christ are now imputed to sinners must be regarded as a repudiation of the clear teachings of Scripture.¹⁶

As a result of Christ's perfect life and His sacrificial death on the cross, God has reconciled the world to Himself, "not counting men's sin against them" (2 Cor. 5:19). God's wrath has been appeased. His justice has been satisfied. Sin has been atoned for. All mankind has been redeemed. The church now has the privilege and the responsibility to offer this invitation to all the world: "Be reconciled to God." (2 Cor. 5:20)

The Lutheran church believes and confesses that salvation is solely by grace, for the sake of Christ, through faith. We must, therefore, reject any view of the mission of the church which

- a. denies such basic doctrines of Scripture as the deity of Christ, His true humanity, His birth of the virgin Mary, His all-sufficient atonement, His vicarious satisfaction, His resurrection and ascension into heaven, His return for judgment;
- b. holds that a person can be saved without believing in Christ;
- c. assumes that the task of evangelism has been completed when a community has been given the opportunity to observe the lifestyle of Christians as they support the hopes and efforts of those who seek justice and equal opportunities in life;
- d. confuses saving faith with a knowledge of the historical facts in the life of Jesus.

5. The mission of the church presupposes that the church has been instituted by God.

God brought the church into existence when He created Adam and Eve in His own image and established a blissful relationship with them in the garden of Eden (Gen. 1:26-31). When that relationship was destroyed by Adam and Eve who willingly sinned, it was God who took steps to restore that relationship with the entire

¹⁵Is. 53:4-6; Ps. 69:4-5.; Matt. 20:28; Rom. 8:32; Gal. 3:13; 1 Tim. 2:6; 1 Pet. 1:18-19; 2:24.

¹⁶Rom. 5:19; Matt. 3:15; Rom. 10:4; FC SD III, 15.

world by sending His Son to live a perfect life in the sinner's stead and to die on the cross. Having ascended into heaven, Christ now rules as "head over everything for the church, which is his body" (Eph. 1:22-23; cf. 5:23-24). As the Lord who has redeemed us, He now enables us to live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him. In short, the ascended Lord and Savior is the One who through the Holy Spirit now builds, protects, and preserves His church.¹⁷

What the Scriptures say about the Lordship of Christ has important implications for the mission of the church. The church fails to understand its mission if it thinks of itself chiefly as a human organization rather than as the body of Christ.

Lutherans, therefore, reject

- a. any view which holds that the church must allow the world to write its agenda. While the church must be sensitive to such things as the culture of the people among whom it works, their sociological background, and psychological needs, it must never lose sight of the fact that Christ, the Lord of the church, has given it His agenda, namely, to make disciples of all nations by means of the proclamation of the Gospel;
- b. any view which calls on the church to adjust its message in such a way as to dilute the demands of the Law and distort the promises of the Gospel; and
- c. any view which sees the Lordship of Christ chiefly in terms of the sovereignty of God and excludes or deemphasizes the fact that the ascended Lord is the Savior who has redeemed us and now preserves us in the faith.

6. The mission of the church presupposes that conversion is solely the work of the Holy Spirit.

As it carries out its important mission, the church must recognize that conversion is more than a cosmetic change in one's lifestyle. It is more than a feeling of guilt or even disgust at one's sin, followed by a pious resolve to reform one's life. It is more than an emotional religious experience aroused within the sinner who is brought face to face with the wrath of God and the eternal consequences of transgressing the divine law. It is more than subscription to certain doctrines and truths of Holy Scripture.

Scripture describes conversion as a radical change in one's relation to God, a change so fundamental that the convert is called

¹⁷Ps. 46; Matt. 16:18; John 10:27-28.

"a new creation" (2 Cor. 5:17). Conversion is described as deliverance from the power of darkness and transference to the kingdom of Christ, a change in status from children of wrath to children of God who live under His grace.¹⁸ In Acts 11:21 and 15:7 conversion is equated with coming to faith in Christ.

The Lutheran church has always found it important to emphasize that conversion, in the strictest sense of the word, occurs instantaneously. There is no middle state between conversion and non-conversion. While the preparation for conversion may extend over a longer period of time, conversion itself takes place the moment when the Holy Spirit kindles a spark of faith in the heart of the sinner or awakens in a person a desire for the grace of God in Christ.¹⁹ Terms such as regeneration, vivification, illumination, and repentance are synonyms of conversion rather than steps in a process which finally results in conversion.

It should also be remembered that Scripture at times uses the term conversion in a wider sense to designate the daily contrition and repentance which continues throughout the life of the believer (Matt. 18:3). But a sharp distinction is maintained between the initial conversion when a person becomes a Christian and the daily repentance of a child of God. (Cf. Rom. 6:1-14; 1 Pet. 2:25)

The Biblical doctrine of conversion has important implications for evangelism. First, when dealing with an unconverted person the witness must know that such an individual cannot in any way cooperate in conversion. It is folly, therefore, to think that the unconverted can decide on their own to become Christians. The unconverted have neither the desire nor the spiritual strength to make such a decision.

Second, since the purpose of evangelism is the salvation of sinners, Christian witnesses must to the best of their ability become aware of the spiritual condition of those to whom they are speaking. One cannot assume that a person is "open to the Gospel" just because of a good reputation in the community, obedience to the laws of the land, or a willingness to associate with church

¹⁸Col. 1:12-13; Eph. 2:3; Gal. 3:26; Rom. 6:14; 1 Pet. 2:10; John 1:12. Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1951), 2:454.

¹⁹Pieper, 2:461. C.F.W. Walther expressed it thus: "Whoever teaches that one may be converted and still not entirely converted contradicts Holy Scripture, which says that a man is entirely in one of two states, the state of death or the state of life. One who is not in grace is under wrath; one who is not on the way to heaven is on the way to hell; one who is not a saved person is a condemned person. Here there is no twilight, no middle state between light and darkness." Quoted by Pieper, 2:461, note 11.

members. The witness must not therefore be afraid to speak of sin and its eternal consequences when dealing with a person who appears to be unconcerned about sin and feels no need of a Savior.

Third, the witness must not press people to reach a specific level of contrition before offering the comfort of the Gospel. Such a synergistic-pietistic practice may cause the witness to treat a weak Christian, just new in the faith, as one who is not yet converted, and thus bring about unnecessary distress and even despair. A faith which is weak is still a saving faith.²⁰

Finally, a witness should not press for a commitment from someone who is not a Christian. It is important, therefore, that the witness have a correct understanding of the nature of faith. Scripture describes faith in the following manner: (1) Saving faith is *essentially* the reliance of the heart on the promises of grace set forth in the Gospel. It is the hand of the alarmed sinner appropriating to oneself the forgiveness of sins won by Christ on the cross. (2) The faith which justifies, state the Lutheran Confessions, is "no mere historical knowledge." "To avoid the impression that it is merely knowledge," they continue, "we add that to have faith means to want and to accept the promised offer of forgiveness of sins and justification."²¹

That faith involves the will has important implications for the mission of the church. As noted above, saving faith is no mere historical knowledge. Nor is it the bare ability to repeat the truths set forth in Scripture. Rather, it is desiring and appropriating to oneself the forgiveness of sins offered and communicated by the Gospel.

This is not to suggest, however, that the unconverted person has an inner ability to desire Christ, to seek Him, to "open the door" to Him, or even to cease resisting the Holy Spirit's invitation. Nor does it suggest that faith can be defined as a commitment to obey and serve the Lord. While Lutherans believe that the commitment to dedicate one's life to the Savior will certainly follow faith, commitment is not a part of the essence of faith itself. It is instead a result or fruit of faith which belongs in the sphere of sanctification rather than justification.

It is precisely in the area of conversion that the Lutheran method of witnessing will differ from the method employed by

²⁰FC SD II, 14. Pieper, 2: 461.

²¹Ap IV, 48.

many of those who view conversion *as a process* through which God moves the sinner from the state of spiritual death to life in Christ. According to this latter view, the process begins with regeneration, when God by the direct and immediate operation of the Holy Spirit 1) awakens from spiritual death, 2) implants new spiritual life in the sinner, and 3) gives a new life that moves in a Godward direction. In this first step a person is passive. But in the following two steps the individual is expected to be active, that is, in indicating a willingness to repent and in making the decision of faith.

Since the Scriptures teach that conversion occurs solely by the grace of God and at that moment when the Holy Spirit through the means of grace kindles faith in the heart of the sinner, Lutherans reject the view

- a. that regeneration, vivification, and illumination may be viewed as different stages along the way to conversion;
- b. that a person not yet converted can nevertheless be spiritually alive;
- c. that unconverted persons can decide on their own to believe in Jesus Christ and to receive the gift of eternal life;
- d. that a person remains unconverted until reaching a predetermined level of contrition;
- e. that the forgiveness of sins may be proclaimed in such a way that unconverted and impenitent sinners are given the impression that they have the forgiveness of sins even though they do not believe in Christ;
- f. that faith may be defined as a commitment to Christ (thus confusing justification and sanctification); and
- g. that converts may be considered Christians only after they have publicly declared that they have made a decision for Christ.

7. The mission of the church presupposes the necessity and centrality of the means of grace (Word and sacrament).

The Lutheran church emphasizes the necessity of the means of grace. The Smalcald Articles make the emphatic statement: "We should and must constantly maintain that God will not deal with us except through his external Word and sacrament. Whatever is attributed to the Spirit apart from such Word and sacrament is of the devil."²²

²²SA III, viii, 10.

The Lutheran church has also emphasized that the means of grace not only hold before the sinner the prospect of forgiveness, but they actually proclaim and confer the grace of God in Christ. The Gospel assures us that whenever and wherever this message of reconciliation is read or heard or is in any way communicated, the Holy Spirit is actively seeking to create faith in human hearts and to communicate to them the forgiveness of sins. The Gospel is more than a dead hand holding out to the sinner the grace of God. It is a creative message containing God's almighty power, working to change the will of the sinner and to turn the person to God in repentance and faith. The Lutheran church believes and confesses that this Gospel is the main thrust of the entire Scripture. Everything in Scripture serves this theme.

This basic principle has important implications for the church as it carries out its mission. When Christians understand the centrality of the Gospel, they will know that the Law was never intended to show sinners the way to salvation. Rather, the purpose of the Law is to bring the human race to a knowledge of its sinfulness and lost condition so that it will recognize its need of a Savior and repent. The Christian witness will also realize that the Gospel was never intended to confront the penitent sinner with commands or threats or even calls for obedience. Its purpose is instead to give God's grace and forgiveness.

The Lutheran church, therefore, rejects any tendency to confuse Law and Gospel

- a. by attempting to build the church with means other than the Word and sacraments, e.g., social gospel, legalism in its popular forms, universalism, miracles of healing, direct revelations through visions and dreams or direct prophecy;
- b. by assuming that methodologies and strategies in themselves can build the kingdom of God;
- c. by weakening either the demands of the Law or the promises of the Gospel in order to make them more acceptable to modern world culture;
- d. by telling the penitent sinner that one must engage in the act of prayer, asking God to give faith, before one can have the assurance of forgiveness;
- e. by giving the impression that one must feel God's forgiveness before one can be sure of salvation;
- f. by using the Law to motivate Christians to become active in the mission of the church;

- g. by holding that the winsomeness and the personality of the witness in some way contributes to the efficaciousness of the Gospel and the sacraments;
- h. by assuming that the spiritual gifts and talents of the witness in some way contribute to the efficaciousness of the means of grace;
- i. by giving the impression that Christian service is not really necessary in the life of the child of God;
- j. by assuming that Christians need not be exhorted and encouraged to be active in the work of the Lord; and
- k. by implying that there are different levels of believers, thus falsely distinguishing between ordinary Christians and Spirit-filled Christians.

8. The mission of the church presupposes a distinction between the priesthood of believers and the office of the pastor.

In the Old Testament the priests were a special class set apart from the people to serve as mediators. Their task was to appear before God in the peoples' behalf, to intercede for them, and to make sacrifices for their sins. The New Testament teaches, however, that as a result of Jesus Christ's high priestly work all Christians are priests.²³ All believers have direct access to the throne of God because of the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. In obedience to God, they have the privilege and responsibility to "offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."²⁴ Among the sacrifices which Christians are urged to bring are such services in the church as proclaiming the Gospel, teaching, exhorting, giving, showing leadership, performing acts of mercy.²⁵

To the entire church, God's "royal priesthood," Christ has given the office or power of the keys,²⁶ that is, the power to preach the Gospel, to forgive and retain sins, and to administer and distribute the sacraments.²⁷ This means that as priests all Christians have the responsibility to participate in the work of the church.

That all Christians are priests does not mean, however, that

²³C. F. W. Walther, *Church and Ministry*, trans. J. T. Mueller (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1987), p. 268. Cf. Pieper, 3: 441.

²⁴1 Pet. 2:5; cf. Eph. 2:18; Rom. 12:1-8.

²⁵Rom. 12:1-8.

²⁶Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope, 24 and 67; C. F. W. Walther, *Church and Ministry*, Theses IV and VII, pp. 198 and 268. Cf. Pieper, 3:439.

²⁷AC XXVIII, 5.

all Christians are pastors. God in His wisdom has instituted the office of the public ministry for the public administration of the priestly rights and privileges which all believers possess.²⁸ That is, God has established the pastoral office "to exercise the rights of the spiritual priesthood in public office in the name of the congregation."²⁹ The Scriptures call the incumbents of the office of the public ministry by such names as pastor, teacher, evangelist, overseer (bishop), and elder, terms which themselves describe the important functions which the holders of the office of the public ministry perform in behalf of the congregation (that is, publicly).³⁰ The task of preaching and administering the sacraments cannot be carried out by the congregation as a body, lest confusion, disorder, and strife result.

While pastors have the authority to administer the office of the keys publicly, it should be remembered that they do so in behalf of the congregation(s) they serve by virtue of the "call" which they have received from God through the congregation(s). No one is to assume this authority, by himself, without a regular call.³¹ It should also be emphasized here that the act of calling a pastor does not relieve the congregation of its responsibility to participate in the mission of the church. Christians must guard against the misconception present among some which sees the pastor as taking care of the spiritual needs of the congregation, while the lay men and women concern themselves exclusively with the church's temporal affairs.³²

The Lutheran church, recognizing that both the priesthood of believers and the one who holds the pastoral office have important functions to fulfill in carrying out the mission of the church,³³ rejects all tendencies to confuse them by failing

- a. to recognize that the pastoral office has been instituted by God for the special purpose of publicly preaching the Word, administering the sacraments, and remitting and retaining sins;
- b. to recognize the importance of training pastors for this special office;
- c. to recognize that lay men and women are spiritual priests who

²⁸Acts 20:28; 1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:11-12; AC V.

²⁹Walther, *Church and Ministry*, Thesis VII, p. 268.

³⁰Eph. 4:11; 1 Tim. 3:1.

³¹AC XIV.

³²Matt. 28:19-20; Acts 1:8; Col. 3:16; 1 Thess. 5:11-15; Heb. 10:24-25.

³³Pieper, 3: 441f.

have an important role to play in the spiritual life and mission of the church; and

- d. to recognize that the distinctive task of the pastoral office is not that of organizing other people to do the "real ministry" but is that of serving them faithfully with the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the holy sacraments.

9. The mission of the church presupposes that God gives Christians the grace to serve Him in their various callings.

At the time of their conversion and Baptism, God in His grace endows Christians with the gift of His Holy Spirit so that they know Jesus as their Lord and Savior, trust in Him, and receive the forgiveness of sins. With the Holy Spirit dwelling in them, they have the assurance of everlasting life. In Christ they are "marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit" (Eph. 1:13; cf. Gal. 4:6-7; 2 Cor. 5:4-5; Rom. 8:26,38-39). Depending on the power of the Holy Spirit, Christians are enabled to produce the fruits of the Spirit, showing love to their neighbors, compassion toward those who are in need of their help, patience with others in their weaknesses, and peace even toward those who may despise and reject them. (Gal. 5:22-23)

As His children Christians have the promise that God through His Holy Spirit will work in them both the will and the ability to be His instruments in bringing the message of salvation to a dying world (Phil. 2:13). To that end He gives Christians gifts of grace, skills and aptitudes which enable them to perform this important service. Among the gifts which God gives His church is the ability to witness for Christ, to teach in a manner that communicates the Gospel, to exhort and encourage the weak, to show mercy to the needy, to demonstrate generosity, and to love others. (Rom. 12:3-8)

It is important that Christians not only recognize the gifts and graces which God has given them, but that they use these gifts as faithful stewards (1 Pet. 4:10), since God will require an accounting of them. (Luke 16:2)

In his commentary on 1 Pet. 4:10 Luther remarks:

The Gospel wants everyone to be the other person's servant and, in addition, to see that he remains in the gift which he has received, which God has given him, that is, in the position to which he has been called. God does not want a master to serve his

servant, the maid to be a lady, a prince to serve the beggar. For He does not want to destroy the government. But the apostle means that one person should serve the other person spiritually from the heart. . . .

God did not give us all equal grace. Therefore everyone should pay attention to his qualifications, to the kind of gift given to him. When he is aware of this, he should use his gift in the service of his neighbor. . . . God has poured out varied gifts among his people. They should be directed to only one end, namely, that one person should serve the other person with them, especially those who are in authority, whether with preaching or with another office.³⁴

In view of the absence of a promise from God, however, the church today cannot rightly expect God to give Christians all of the gifts of the Holy Spirit mentioned in the book of Acts and in other books of the New Testament. In fact, the apostle's point in 1 Corinthians 12,³⁵ as well as in Romans 12, is that the dispersment of diverse gifts remains solely a divine prerogative and choice, according to God's wise purposes. Thus, in apostolic times miracles were performed by the apostles and other leaders in the church in order to meet specific needs. In Acts 8:4-7 they are described as signs *sēmeia*, which accompanied the preaching of Philip as he proclaimed Christ. St. Paul calls the "signs, wonders, and miracles" which accompanied his preaching "the things that mark an apostle" (2 Cor. 12:12). According to Acts 10:46 and Acts 11:18-19, "speaking in tongues" apparently was a sign given by the Holy Spirit to indicate that the Gospel was intended also for the Gentiles. In any case, these passages cannot be interpreted to mean that the absence of any particular gift in the Christian's life today must be viewed as evidence of a person's lack of faith or of failure to reach an advanced level of sanctification. It is enough to accept in faith and thanksgiving that the Holy Spirit, when and where He pleases, supplies His people individually and corporately with His varied gifts in all their fullness and richness. (Is. 11:2)

³⁴Luther's Works, American Edition, 30:124-25.

³⁵It should be noted here with reference to St. Paul's discussion in 1 Corinthians 12 that most modern English translations understand the Greek term *pneumatikoi* in 1 Cor. 12:1 to be a reference to "spiritual gifts." The Revised Standard Version, however, includes a footnote at this point to indicate that "spiritual persons" is also a possibility (the Greek allows either translation). If this is what Paul had in mind, the reference is to Christians who were enriched by the Holy Spirit in a special way, having been given extraordinary gifts, sanctified talents, offices, abilities, and services for the purpose of building up the body of Christ and manifesting the unity of the Spirit in a congregation representing different nationalities and levels of society.

The Lutheran Confessions do not address specifically the special gifts which the Holy Spirit gave to the congregation at Corinth (1 Cor. 12:4-11). However, they assist us in making a crucial distinction when considering the question of special endowments of the Holy Spirit. They clearly state that in matters of salvation "we should and must constantly maintain that God will not deal with us except through his external Word and sacrament."³⁶ They go on to emphasize strongly that men of God such as Moses, the prophets, and John the Baptist who received gifts from the Holy Spirit, received them only after God had given them a previous word of promise. Thus, the gifts from the Holy Spirit must be clearly distinguished from the means of grace.³⁷

In view of the above considerations, it is therefore contrary to the Scriptures and dangerous to the salvation of people

- a. to teach "that the so-called 'gifts of the Spirit' are external signs by which we can assure ourselves that we have faith, are living in God's grace, or have the Spirit of God"³⁸
- b. to teach "that God promises every Christian such gifts as speaking in tongues, healing, discerning of spirits, and prophecy, and that God has given such a promise as a part of the 'full' or 'complete' Gospel";³⁹
- c. to teach "that God gives guidance and leadership to the church today through visions and dreams or direct prophecy."⁴⁰

10. The mission of the church presupposes that God motivates His people to perform the church's mission, not by the pressures and threats of the Law, but by the promises of the Gospel.

If a congregation is to serve the Lord with gladness, both Law and Gospel are needed. However, each must be applied in keeping with its God-given purpose and function. Members need to be reminded of their indifference and frequent failure to take God's will seriously and of their need of forgiveness. The Law is also needed to show all Christians what their responsibilities are to Christ and the lost world.

³⁶SA III, viii, 10.

³⁷SA II, viii, 11-13.

³⁸Resolution 3-10A "To Clarify the Synod's Position Regarding Charismatic Teaching," 1977 Convention Proceedings, pp. 131-32. Cf. *The Lutheran Church and the Charismatic Movement*. A report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1977, p. 7.

³⁹*Ibid.*

⁴⁰*Ibid.*

But only the Gospel can move the child of God to serve willingly and effectively. It alone assures us that our past failures have been forgiven, and it reminds us of the Savior's continued presence in grace with His church until the end of time. The Gospel guarantees the future of the church since the church belongs to God. Through the Gospel He not only builds the church. He also preserves and protects it. And, He has given the church the task to proclaim the Gospel, endowing it with gifts of grace. These are the promises which move the Christian witness to engage in the task of evangelism. Bible study, therefore, becomes a prerequisite in any program of evangelism, for the Gospel which the Scriptures reveal constitutes both the *message* of the church and the *means* by which it is moved to carry out its mission.

But if the Gospel is both the message and the motivation, does the congregation really need strategies? In recent years as interest in mission outreach has intensified, congregations have developed methods and elaborate strategies for evangelism. This development has given rise to the concern that, as more attention is focused on methods and strategies, less emphasis might possibly be placed on the Gospel and the sacraments as the only means by which the Holy Spirit builds His church.

In response to this concern it must be remembered first of all that, while the Lutheran church has never regarded strategies as means of grace, it has found them to be useful in carrying out its mission program. In themselves, strategies must not be thought of as contrary to the Scriptures.

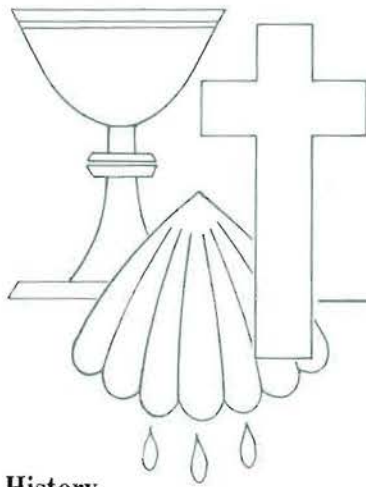
The Lutheran church has always maintained that specific strategies for missions are neither commanded nor forbidden in Scripture. The church is at liberty, therefore, to determine how it will organize its mission program. However, congregations should be advised to follow a few basic principles in this regard:

- a. Strategies do not in themselves build the church. But they can serve the Gospel to the extent that they help the congregation organize itself so that more members will participate in its evangelism program, more unconverted persons will be reached with the Gospel, and a more intensive follow-up procedure will be put into effect.
- b. The congregation should determine what course of action is best suited to its own particular needs. Its decision for or against a strategy must not be allowed to cause dissension or disrupt the unity of God's people.

- c. The congregation must avoid legalism in carrying out its decision to employ a particular method. The Formula of Concord states: "Adiaphora which in their nature and essence are and remain in themselves free . . . are not subject either to a command or a prohibition. . . . We also reject and condemn as wrongful the procedure whereby such commandments are imposed by force on the community of God as necessary."⁴¹ The Lutheran theologian Johann Gerhard advises: "The true church does not insist that non-essential things must be done or not done *because the Church has so decided*, but rather that all things may be done decently and in order, so that good order may prevail and offense be avoided. As long as this is the case, the Church does not burden a man's conscience nor cause him to have scruples nor force anything upon him."⁴²
- d. The congregation must also avoid antinomianism (the view that Christians are free of all moral law) as it determines its strategies for carrying out its mission. It must carefully scrutinize and evaluate the proposed course of action in order to make sure that it does not, in fact, undermine or contradict the theological principles to which it has subscribed. Methods and strategies are never entirely neutral.

⁴¹FC SD X, 14,27.

⁴²Quoted in John Fritz, *Pastoral Theology*, reprint edition in Concordia Heritage Series (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1932), p. 318.



The Church Growth Movement: A Brief History and Basic Missiological Principles

History

The Church Growth Movement has been called "the most influential development of the 1970s" on the American religious scene. Whether one agrees with this assessment or not, it is a movement which cannot be ignored. In less than a decade and a half its influence has been felt in many Christian denominations. It has had an impact also on many clergy in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod because it is regarded by many pastors and congregations as an effective attempt to find a solution to a serious problem in their midst—a lack of enthusiasm for evangelism and a lack of skill in inspiring God's people to take the great commission seriously.

Church Growth leaders usually credit Donald A. McGavran with having founded the movement, although they acknowledge also the contributions made by others such as C. Peter Wagner, Alan R. Tippett, George Hunter, Winfield Arn, and Vergil Gerber. McGavran was a third generation missionary in India for more than thirty years, serving under the sponsorship of the United Christian Missionary Society (Disciples of Christ). While in India he was deeply troubled by the apparent lack of success which many missionaries, in spite of their faithful efforts, experienced. He asked: "What *does* make churches grow? More importantly, what makes many churches *stop* growing? How is it possible for Christians to come out of ripe harvest fields empty handed?"

After returning to the United States, he became a professor

at the College of Missions in Indianapolis. It was there in 1957 that McGavran conceived a plan to found the Institute of Church Growth. The Institute was established in 1960 and began operating the following year on the campus of Northwest Christian College in Eugene, Oregon. In 1965 the Institute was moved to the campus of Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California, where McGavran was the founding dean of the Fuller Seminary School of World Missions. The time for the move seemed to be ripe since a new interest in missions was spreading through the country, sparked in part by the Berlin Congress on World Evangelism held in 1966 and the International Congress of World Evangelism convened at Lausanne in 1974.

As interest in Church Growth increased, representatives from a variety of denominations enrolled at the Fuller School of World Missions. They then returned home to adapt these principles to the theological stance of their particular denomination. As a result, Church Growth materials today present are presented to the Christian world in many different forms, depending on the theological presuppositions of their authors.

Church Growth is a technical term chosen by McGavran to describe the mission of the church as he came to understand it after many years on the mission field. In contrast to the more liberal definition which in recent years had equated evangelism with social programs, McGavran sought to center evangelism in Christ as God and Savior. By choosing the term Church Growth he wanted also to emphasize the fact that the mission of the church included not only the proclamation of the Gospel but also *persuading* the lost to make a decision for Christ and working to get them to become responsible members of the body of Christ.

The goal and objective of Church Growth is the salvation of the lost. McGavran is interested not only in searching for the lost but also in finding them and restoring them to the fold. He asks the basic question: "How can we most effectively reach the lost in the many cultures of this earth and integrate them into the work of the church?" To attain these objectives, McGavran and other Church Growth leaders have developed a number of missiological principles according to which the movement operates.

Missiological Principles

The expression "Church Growth principle" has been defined as "a worldwide truth which, when properly applied, along with other

principles, contributes significantly to the growth of the church."⁴³ Church Growth theorists distinguish carefully between a principle and a method. While principles are accepted by most Church Growth advocates and become axiomatic, methods and strategies vary with circumstances in a local community or church.

The objective of this section is to present a number of the more basic and generally accepted Church Growth principles, and to do so as objectively as possible.⁴⁴

1. Church Growth principles are rooted in Scripture.

Donald McGavran and Win Arn state: "Scripture is the major source of Church Growth thinking. The New Testament is a series of Church Growth documents. The Gospels, the Book of Acts, and the Epistles were written by missionaries for missionaries. They were written by Church Growth people to Church Growth people to help the church grow."⁴⁵

Church Growth subscribes to principles such as the following: the Bible is the church's final authority; people outside of Christ are lost; the heavenly Father wants all to be saved; Christ is the only way of salvation; obedience to the leadings of the Holy Spirit is a major factor in the growth of the church; praying specifically for the conversion of the lost is a major factor in the growth of the church; and, the church is the body of Christ through which God has chosen to disciple all nations.⁴⁶

While the Bible is the chief source of missiological principles, Church Growth practitioners also use other sources of knowledge in the service of the Gospel—geography, anthropology, sociology, psychology and many other fields. Church Growth believes that God in His providence has given also these to the church for its use. If they are used "in line with biblical principles," and if God blesses their use, they may become helpful tools in the church's efforts to disciple all nations, cultures, races and people.⁴⁷

⁴³Donald A. McGavran and Winfield C. Arn, *Ten Steps for Church Growth* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), p. 127.

⁴⁴In January 1987 six representatives from the CTCR and the seminary faculties, together with CTCR staff, met with seven evangelical theologians from Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California, to discuss the topic of Church Growth. A preliminary draft of this report was shared with the Fuller Seminary representatives and served as the basis of discussion for a portion of the meeting. This discussion assisted the Commission in its efforts to present the views of Church Growth leaders at Fuller fairly and accurately.

⁴⁵McGavran and Arn, *Ten Steps*, p. 24.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 24-31.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, p.26.

2. Churches grow when they are faithful stewards of the Gospel.

This is a key theological principle of the Church Growth Movement. Scripture states: "Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful" (1 Cor. 4:2). In New Testament times faithful stewards were those who used all their resources in order to produce results. Faithfulness consisted in setting goals and accomplishing them.

Church Growth maintains that in keeping with this principle faithfulness to the great commission includes not only sowing the seed of the Gospel but also reaping the harvest, not only searching for the lost in all nations, races, and peoples but also finding them, adding them to the fold, and nurturing them.⁴⁸

Church Growth is critical of the attitude which says: "The church's one task is to proclaim the Gospel. It need not concern itself with results and numbers. They are strictly in the hands of God. He will gather into the fold whom He wills."⁴⁹

McGavran defines the mission of the church as "an enterprise devoted to proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ, and to persuading men to become His disciples and dependable members of His Church."⁵⁰ Evangelism is "to proclaim Jesus Christ as God and Savior, to persuade people to become his disciples and responsible members of his church."⁵¹

In both of these definitions faithfulness to the great commission includes both proclamation and persuasion. In reply to the question, "Isn't it God's business to persuade?" McGavran and Arn reply: "There is a good biblical basis for assuming that God frequently persuades through us. If we sit quietly in our corner and refuse to persuade, we are actually being disobedient to the Holy Spirit. . . . Without persuasion, without intending for people to become disciples of Jesus Christ, evangelism is a thin, anemic substitute for the real thing. Persuasion is an essential part of effective evangelism."⁵²

3. Finding the lost is the church's primary mission.

⁴⁸Donald A. McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980 Revised edition), pp. 26-40.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 30-32.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, p. 26.

⁵¹McGavran and Arn, *Ten Steps*, p. 51.

⁵²*Ibid.*, p. 54.

Church Growth maintains that "God expects his church to do many good things, but these must be arranged in order of priorities."⁵³ This implies among other things that the church must distinguish between its primary objective, which is to make disciples of all nations, and the means by which this goal is reached.

Sacred acts such as worship on Sundays, studying God's Word, social action, Christian fellowship, nurturing in Christian living, and even verbal witnessing, important and God-pleasing as these are, must not become ends in themselves. According to Church Growth advocates, these activities are not the church's primary objective. Even the preaching of the Gospel, the administration of the sacraments, and Bible study are not the ultimate goals of the church. The church's ultimate mission is to bring lost children back to the Father's house.⁵⁴

Church Growth also distinguishes sharply between discipling and perfecting or nurturing. According to C. Peter Wagner, discipling takes place when the church goes, baptizes, and teaches the prospect to be obedient to Jesus as Lord and Savior. He rejects the opinion that discipling includes training the convert in Christian living. He also cautions against "loading the initial proclamation of the Gospel with too much ethical content lest you give the impression that salvation is by works."⁵⁵ Law is important in one's approach to the unbeliever, but the person being approached with the Gospel should be asked to repent only of those sins of which the Holy Spirit has already convicted that person.

4. The church has a vital role in God's plan for discipling the nations.

Is building the church man's work or God's? In replying to this question, McGavran and Arn quote the apostle Paul who wrote: "I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow" (1 Cor. 3:6). They then add: "When a church grows, God has given the increase. Yet man has planted, watered, and nurtured. God has given these tasks into men's hands; they are man's responsibility."⁵⁶

⁵³*Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁵⁴*How to Identify, Reach, and Win New People*, A Professional Education Workshop for Pastors, Executives, and Church Leaders, sponsored by The Institute for American Church Growth, pp. 18-20.

⁵⁵C. Peter Wagner, *The Growing Church* (Pasadena, CA.: Fuller Evangelistic Association, 1976), Cassette #3, Side 1.

⁵⁶McGavran and Arn, *Ten Steps*, p. 33.

A distinctive feature of Church Growth is that it places great emphasis on human responsibility so that the lost are to be found and returned to the Father's house. Leaders of the movement are very critical of pastors and congregations who are indifferent toward the lost, unimpressed by Biblical and theological arguments for Church Growth, and have learned to rationalize their lethargy by glorying in littleness.⁵⁷ C. Peter Wagner says that there are two indispensable axioms of church growth: 1) The pastor must want the church to grow and be willing to pay the price since it is hard work pastoring a growing church. 2) The people must want the church to grow and be willing to pay the price. He then adds: "I know of no growing church that is not led by a pastor to whom God has given a vision for growth, and for whom that vision is contagious. It might seem that every pastor would automatically want his church to grow, but such is not the case."⁵⁸

Church Growth urges pastors to mobilize the laity and to motivate them to become active in the mission of the church. "The church is the Body of Christ, and the responsible member is a part of that Body. . . . A responsible member would be acutely aware of the unchurched and unsaved, those who live without knowing Jesus Christ or his power, joy, forgiveness and love."⁵⁹

Church Growth leaders insist that "Church Growth is not optional; it is commanded by God."⁶⁰

5. God equips His church for mission by giving its members spiritual gifts.

According to Church Growth practitioners, spiritual gifts play a very significant role in the mission of the church: 1) They underscore the important fact that the Holy Spirit is active in building the church since He is the Giver of spiritual gifts. 2) They emphasize human responsibility in carrying out the great commission of our Lord. 3) They highlight the important fact that Christians do not witness for Christ on their own initiative and by their own strength, but they are enabled by the Holy Spirit who equips them with spiritual gifts. 4) They clearly imply that Church Growth is a task in which all members of the church can and should participate.⁶¹

⁵⁷C. Peter Wagner, *Your Church Can Grow* (Ventura, CA.: Regal Books, 1981), p. 47.

⁵⁸*How to Identify, Reach, and Win New People*, p. 27. See also Wagner, *Your Church Can Grow*, p. 55.

⁵⁹McGavran and Arn, *Ten Steps*, pp. 51.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, p. 49.

⁶¹See Delos Miles, *Church Growth, A Mighty River* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman Press, 1981), p. 129.

C. Peter Wagner has been called "the most articulate spokesman for the use of spiritual gifts in evangelism."⁶² According to Wagner, activating and mobilizing lay people for Church Growth became feasible in the late 1960s with a general awakening throughout American churches to the Biblical teaching on spiritual gifts.⁶³

In view of the fact that Christians often find it difficult to recognize the gifts which the Holy Spirit has given them, Wagner suggests five ways for discovering one's gifts: 1) explore the possibilities; 2) experiment with as many as possible; 3) examine your feelings; 4) evaluate your effectiveness; and 5) expect confirmation from the body.⁶⁴

6. The church has the responsibility to discern the spiritual health of its members.

Church Growth leaders speak of a high view of the church. It is the body of Christ, the bride of Christ, made up of true Christians who not only believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior but who are expected to mature and become responsible members of the Christian community. The church is a necessary part of God's plan for the salvation and discipling of men and nations.⁶⁵

Furthermore, the church is a visible entity made up of countable people. There is nothing particularly spiritual in not counting them. In fact, as discerning Christians our business is to know everything possible about the body. The church needs to be described accurately, even scientifically, for this aids Christians in becoming good stewards of the grace of God and effective communicators of the Gospel of Christ.⁶⁶ It needs to measure "the different rates of growth, describing the different parts of the Body, and discovering why one part of the Body is growing better than another."⁶⁷ "When a church sees itself accurately and realizes its growth potential, the Body grows."⁶⁸

7. Church Growth sees the mission fields ripe for the harvest.

Church Growth advocates have conducted research in numerous foreign countries as well as in America and have come to the

⁶²*Ibid.*, p. 128.

⁶³Wagner, *Your Church Can Grow*, pp. 69f.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, 74.

⁶⁵McGavran and Arn, *Ten Steps*, p. 30.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 61f.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*, p. 67.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*, p. 64.

conclusion that the fields are white for the harvest. They have found missions particularly successful in Africa, Korea, Indonesia, and South America. They feel that even in America many people are ready and waiting to be won for Christ.

McGavran and Arn have written: "Today we stand on the edge of the greatest expansion of the church the world has ever seen. To those reared on large doses of pessimism, hearing every Sunday about the post-Christian era or the indifference of people to Christ, this stance may seem unduly optimistic. Yet the facts clearly indicate that the church is expanding greatly and will continue to do so."⁶⁹

They base their optimism on promises such as Matt. 16:18 where Jesus says, "I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it." They confidently assert: "God is not going to be defeated! Jesus Christ is not powerless! The arm of the Lord is not weak! God is the Father Almighty! The church of Jesus Christ has abundant resources and excellencies. It is now evidencing strengths and goodness and kindness such as no other organization even dreams about."⁷⁰

McGavran urges Christians not to assume that slow growth is necessarily good growth or that rapid growth should be regarded as more or less suspicious and disreputable.⁷¹

8. Church Growth emphasizes the importance of the church knowing the community in which it lives and works.

Church Growth leaders contend that America is not the melting pot that it is often thought to be in which different races, cultures, and classes readily blend together to form a unity with common goals, interests, customs, and even language. Instead, a community in today's world is a "mosaic of many different kinds of people."⁷²

These different groups of people in a given geographical area have been called "homogeneous units" in Church Growth literature. They are groups with some common characteristic or bond which ties them together. It may be culture, race, language, or even political ideals. That common bond may at times also cause them to be "people conscious," that is, make them think of themselves

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*

⁷¹McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth*, pp. 166-75.

⁷²*How to Identify, Reach, and Win New People*, Module 3, p. 3.

as a separate entity with the result that they classify themselves as "we" and all others as "they." Thus they become isolated from others in the community.⁷³

Church Growth advocates have concluded from their research that men and women in these homogeneous units usually prefer to become Christians without crossing racial, linguistic, or class barriers.⁷⁴ When there are marked differences of color, stature, income, cleanliness, and education present, people understand the Gospel better when it is presented by their own kind of people. They prefer to join churches whose members look, talk, and act like they do.⁷⁵

Church Growth practitioners suggest that as the church seeks to present the Gospel to these culturally different groups it should recognize the need for establishing a different kind of church in each homogeneous unit so that each group will be able to worship God in its own way and in accord with its unique culture. It is felt that the more each group develops its own indigenous kind of worship the more open it will become to the Gospel.⁷⁶

Church Growth literature indicates that the homogeneous unit principle remains one of the most controversial elements of the Church Growth Movement, but it is generally recognized that this principle is still one of the most useful and valuable contributions of Church Growth to world evangelism.

9. The church can and should measure the receptivity of those whom it hopes to evangelize.

According to this principle, a church which plans to evangelize a given area or community should begin by taking the following two steps: 1) seek out a homogeneous unit where people are bound together by some common bond and then endeavor to understand their unique characteristics; and 2) plot them on what has come to be known as the Resistance-Receptivity Axis. This is a chart which visualizes those who have been found to be more receptive to the Gospel as opposed to those people who give evidence of showing some resistance.⁷⁷

Church Growth theorists suggest that the more receptive pros-

⁷³McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth*, pp. 243-44.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, p. 198.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*

⁷⁶Wagner, *The Growing Church*, Cassette #4, Handout #14.

⁷⁷*Ibid.*, Cassette #6.

pects will usually be 1) visitors to your church, 2) new arrivals in the community, 3) new arrivals who respond to the church's invitation, 4) those who have felt needs which the church can meet, and 5) friends of new converts. Among the less receptive and even more resistant will usually be 1) those who have maintained no contact with the church over a period of time, 2) long term residents of the community, 3) new arrivals in the community who apparently are indifferent to the church, 4) people with no felt need which the church can meet, and 5) more distant relatives and mere acquaintances of new converts.⁷⁸

The School of World Missions at Fuller suggests that the church should spend most of its time and labor among those who appear to be the most receptive, but it should not neglect those who resist. "Sudden ripenings, far from being unusual, are common," says McGavran.⁷⁹ C. Peter Wagner claims that the Resistance-Receptivity Axis has become one of Church Growth's most useful tools.⁸⁰

10. Church Growth emphasizes the importance of wise planning.

Church Growth advocates contend that the Scriptures themselves teach the necessity of wise planning. The book of Proverbs describes a wise man as one who looks ahead (14:8). When he makes a decision, he does so on the basis of facts (18:13). When faced with a problem, he seeks the counsel of others (15:22). He depends on God to help him (16:9). He acknowledges that while human beings make plans, it is God who determines the final outcome (16:1). Only the fool refuses to give up plans when they do not work (13:19). Finally, the intelligent man is open to new ideas. (18:15)

Wise planning, according to Church Growth practitioners, is not only Biblical, but it is also essential if the church is to carry out the great commission as God intended. Good planning requires that one know the facts. This implies analyzing the existing situation in a congregation, setting up goals and objectives, developing a strategy which will outline what a congregation should do to meet its goal, and finally, evaluating the results to determine whether the church is "moving ahead."

Peter Wagner encourages congregations to be very pragmatic.

⁷⁸*Ibid.*, Handout #21.

⁷⁹McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth*, p. 247.

⁸⁰Wagner, *The Growing Church*, p. 29.

Strategies must be developed that will be compatible with the local situation and that will work. When a strategy or method is not effective, it should be abandoned and a new one developed.

11. Pastors and congregations should develop Church Growth eyes.

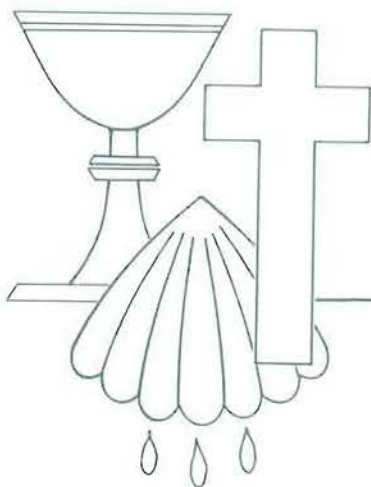
The term "Church Growth eyes" has been defined as "a characteristic of Christians who have achieved an ability to see the possibilities for growth and to apply appropriate strategies to gain maximum results for Christ and His Church."⁸¹

According to Church Growth advocates, if a person has Church Growth eyes, he will 1) see the world from God's perspective, knowing that God loves the world and wants His lost children "brought back to the Father's house." He will 2) see the hand of God working in the world. He will recognize that the Gospel is succeeding. The church is growing. There is reason for optimism. He will 3) take seriously the responsibility which God has placed on the church "to make disciples of all nations." He will 4) recognize that some mission fields are more fruitful than others and will ask: "Why is the Holy Spirit blessing one and not the other? Is part of the problem laxity, indifference, or even failure on the part of the pastor and the congregation to communicate the Gospel clearly?" Finally, he will 5) see the need for developing effective strategies for Church Growth.⁸²

These are some of the more important missiological principles that have been suggested by Church Growth practitioners. However, it should be remembered, they point out, that new principles are constantly being discovered as churches spread the Gospel in new ways and find that God is blessing their efforts.

⁸¹McGavran and Arn, *Ten Steps*, p. 127.

⁸²Wagner, *The Growing Church*, Cassette #1.



An Evaluation With Recommendations

Church Growth principles have been described as universal truths. That is, they are in a general way acceptable to all Christians. Examination of these missiological principles reveals that some of them are indeed Biblical principles which have been used in Christian churches, including The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, for many years. Others are new and have their origin in sociology, anthropology, and psychology, but they too have been found to be useful, also by numerous congregations in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. Still other principles have caused some concern in Lutheran circles chiefly because they are perceived as coming into conflict with Scriptural teaching, especially with the doctrine of the means of grace.

As we attempt to evaluate Church Growth principles, two important questions need to be kept in mind: Do these missiological principles reflect a theology which is non-Scriptural to the point that their application in Lutheran congregations is unacceptable? Or, can they be modified so that they are consistent with Lutheran theological presuppositions, providing new missiological techniques acceptable to Lutheran pastors and congregations as they strive to carry out the great commission?

Lutherans are concerned not only that missiological principles themselves be in accord with Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions. They must also be *used and applied* to human needs in a manner that is consistent with the clear teachings of the Bible. We therefore offer the following statements as a way of assisting pas-

tors, teachers, and congregations for a discerning evaluation and use of Church Growth principles.

1. Missiological principles must be applied in a way that correctly distinguishes between Law and Gospel.

- a. Church Growth advocates use Law and Gospel, but they often do so in a manner not in keeping with Biblical understanding. Lutheran theology interprets the mission of the church chiefly from the viewpoint of the atoning and justifying work of Jesus Christ on the cross (Luther's "Theology of the Cross"). Many Church Growth leaders, however, tend to view it primarily from the viewpoint of the concept of the kingdom of God and obedience to the Lordship of Christ.⁸³ This means for them that, since Christ is the Lord of the church, Christians carry out the mission of the church principally because of Christ's *command*. The Scriptures indeed compel us to take the great commission seriously, but they also teach that Christians are motivated to witness for Christ not by the Law but by the Gospel. The Law is necessary because it shows us what God's will is. But the Holy Spirit, working through the Gospel of the crucified and risen Christ, is the One who gives Christians the desire and the ability to carry out Christ's command.

If Lutherans use Church Growth materials, they should be aware of the dangers of falling into a legalism which depends on external pressures and threats to move Christians to be faithful stewards of the Gospel.

- b. The Lutheran Church confesses the Biblical doctrine of the total depravity of the entire human race. This implies that unconverted persons become receptive to the Gospel only after they have been brought to a realization of their lost condition by means of the Law, and the Holy Spirit works faith in them by the proclamation of the Gospel.

⁸³Note, for example, that C. P. Wagner in his book *Church Growth and the Whole Gospel* (New York: Harper and Row, 1981) regards the kingdom of God as the controlling theme of the Scriptures according to which the church must understand its missionary mandate. To be sure, the Kingdom of God is Christocentric in nature for Wagner, but this means chiefly that "Personal submission to the king, Jesus Christ, is the chief characteristic of the kingdom of God" (p. 5). Thus, the first two theological assumptions basic to Church Growth are "The Glory of God as the Chief End of Humans" and "The Lordship of Jesus Christ" (referring not to His salvation, but our obedience). None of the five theological assumptions makes reference to Christ's redemptive work on the cross. See Hermann Saase, *We Confess Jesus Christ*, trans. Norman Nagel (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1984), pp. 36-54.

Church Growth materials commonly suggest that a congregation may find it helpful to conduct "soil-testing" research to discover which communities are most receptive to the Gospel and thus offer greatest potential. Some claim that it is not uncommon to discover that whole families become receptive in times of crisis such as the death of a loved one, the birth of a child, a divorce, a period of illness, or loss of employment. As we have noted above, Church Growth theorists have developed what has come to be known as the Resistance-Receptivity Axis, which is intended to reveal where individual prospects are on a scale indicating the degree of their openness to the Gospel.

Is such "soil-testing" research in accord with Scripture? While we may recognize that some individuals appear to be more interested in church membership than others, there is no Scriptural warrant for the claim that it is possible by systematic research to list on a graduated scale the degree to which a person may be open to the Gospel. Moreover, this becomes no more than a subjective judgment on the part of the pastor and the congregation, since it is impossible to evaluate with certainty the spiritual condition of another human being (1 Cor. 2:11). In general, it is superficial and misleading to purport to diagnose the "health" of the church independently of the divinely given means of grace, on the basis of externals such as degrees of activism, efficiency, or apparent success or failure.

Admittedly, the Holy Spirit does at times use events in the life of unconverted people to prepare them for the Gospel. However, such crises are applications of the Law. As such they may break down the resistance of the unconverted in the sense that they cause that person to become aware of the fact that he or she has sinned against God, deserves His wrath and punishment, and asks, "What must I do to be saved?" But in the strict sense, the individual stops resisting and becomes receptive to the Gospel only at the time of conversion.

- c. As the Lutheran Church seeks to carry out the great commission in keeping with confessional doctrine, its approach will be noticeably theocentric. It is God who is working in the world through the means of grace for the salvation of the lost. *He* is the One who converts. While He has chosen to work conversion through human instruments, and while their role is very important, they are still secondary.

Although pointing to God's role in missions, Church Growth

materials tend to become quite anthropocentric, focusing attention on the church's use of sociological techniques to communicate the Gospel effectively and "return the lost to the Father's house." Church Growth asks: "Is the church today using every legitimate modern technique which God has made available in an effort to meet its mission challenge?" Strong emphasis is placed on the church's role in God's plan of salvation.

While recognizing that the use of modern techniques is not in itself contrary to the Scriptures, how does the pastor encourage the congregation to carry out its responsibilities without compromising the Biblical principle of "grace alone"? He will do so by properly applying Law and Gospel. In order to do this, he may ask by way of evaluation: "What are the needs of the congregation? Have the members of the congregation, in spite of their hard work, become frustrated because they see no growth in numbers?" If that is the situation, the congregation needs the assurance that God is the One who gives the increase. It needs encouragement to be faithful in carrying out the task which He has given it.

If, however, the congregation is lax, indifferent, and content with being small, the pastor has the responsibility to apply the Law, reminding it of God's command: "You are my witnesses; make disciples of all nations." The pastor must also ask himself: "Does the congregation have its priorities straight? Am I offering it the leadership that I should? Am I interested in finding the lost in the community and does the Gospel predominate in my teaching as the means by which the congregation is inspired for greater service to Christ? Am I spending sufficient time in the preparation of sermons so that they communicate the Gospel clearly?" (Cf. Ap XV, 42)

2. Missiological principles must be applied in a way that reflects the proper relationship between justification and sanctification.

Consistent with Lutheran theology, many Church Growth advocates regard justification and sanctification as important doctrines to be taught and applied as the church carries out its mission. However, they frequently differ from the Lutheran position in the way they relate these two doctrines to each other. Lutherans believe and teach that justification by faith is the central doctrine of

the Christian faith, the doctrine on which the church stands or falls and therefore by which the church is built and preserved. The desire to seek the lost and witness for Christ are necessary fruits of justification and evidences of saving faith.

While the School of World Missions at Fuller Seminary certainly recognizes the necessity of justification, most of the materials which it produces make sanctification the point of departure. This emphasis on sanctification becomes evident, for example, when a "disciple" is defined as one who has accepted Jesus as Savior *and Lord* and has been incorporated into the body of Christ as a responsible member. Accordingly, a distinction is made between one who makes a decision for Christ and one who is a disciple. McGavran and Arn write: "A decision is often the first step. However, we deceive ourselves if we believe that a person who has made a decision for Christ . . . has truly become a disciple A decision suggests a brief moment of time; a *disciple* suggests a life long task."⁸⁴

Lutherans agree that far too many who confess their faith (for instance, at the time of confirmation) do not continue in that confession. They concur that a disciple of Jesus should grow in faith and in all good works. And the church certainly has the responsibility to nurture and care for the new convert until the person is incorporated into the life of the local congregation and becomes a "responsible member of the body of Christ." But to distinguish between the ordinary believer and a disciple of Christ is to mix justification and sanctification, thus causing a weak Christian to become uncertain of salvation. According to the Scriptures a believer *is* a disciple and enjoys all the blessings of justification the moment he or she comes to faith. The most essential element in discipleship is faith. Moreover, when the believer confesses that "Jesus is my Lord" this simply means, as Luther wrote, that Jesus is our Redeemer "who has brought us back from the devil to God, from death to life, from sin to righteousness, and now keeps us safe there."⁸⁵ The confession that "Jesus is Lord" does not denote an advanced level of sanctification.

3. Missiological principles must distinguish between mission methods and the means of grace.

⁸⁴McGavran and Arn, *Ten Steps*, pp. 52-53.

⁸⁵LC II, 31.

Lutherans believe and teach that the Gospel, Holy Baptism, and Lord's Supper (as well as Holy Absolution), are the only means of grace which God has given to His church.

As means of grace they not only offer penitent sinners forgiveness. They are *efficacious* instruments or means through which the Holy Spirit brings sinners to faith, sanctifies and preserves them in the faith and thus builds the church.

While the School of World Missions at Fuller Seminary holds to many of the doctrines of the Reformation and regards Baptism and the Lord's Supper very highly, it does not regard them as means of grace. Rather, they are merely "ordinances" which are performed by the church because of Christ's command. The sacraments, therefore, play little or no significant role in the mission outreach of this school. This may account in part for the fact that methods, strategies, organization, research, and goals are the central concern in the process of growth in the church. The impression is thereby given that mission methods have been substituted for the means of grace and have themselves become the instruments through which God builds His church.

If Lutherans use Church Growth materials, they must realize that the means of grace and mission methods serve different functions and purposes. Only the means of grace truly build the church. Organization is clearly not a means of grace and therefore does not itself build the church or cause it to grow. To be sure, there is a sense in which it can serve the Gospel. A study of the social, psychological, and cultural needs of the unconverted can assist a congregation in better understanding how to approach them. Such a study can reveal, for example, their prejudices or biases toward the church and its message and the reasons behind these attitudes. As the congregation formulates goals and develops strategies it will need to take these factors into account. In summary, a well-organized mission program is compatible with the Lutheran doctrine of the means of grace, provided the pastor emphasizes that it is the Holy Spirit who builds the church through these means.

The fact that many Church Growth advocates do not regard the sacraments as means of grace has its effect also on the worship services that are conducted. They recommend that a congregation use hymns and structure its services in a way that will conform to current cultural patterns. While Lutherans grant that God has not prescribed a specific order of worship, they recognize that the orders of worship which are used in the Lutheran church have been

designed to accent the objectivity of the Gospel proclaimed in the Word and communicated in the sacraments, not the subjectivity of the hearers or their emotional response. The "divine service" is primarily God's service to us, not our service to Him. Consistent use of subjective hymns and emotional orders of worship cannot but undermine that accent. The pastor will be sensitive to the needs of unchurched visitors, but he will be just as concerned with the spiritual growth of those who are already members. This means neither slavish, ritualistic adherence at all costs to traditional orders of service, nor arbitrary substitution of "crowd-pleasers." Precise worship forms are adiaphora (neither commanded nor prohibited) indeed, but careless appeal to this principle may fall into the pitfall of acting as though worship forms can be entirely value-free. (See 10c and d, pp. 25-26.)

A concerted program of both outreach and education will focus on both the "head" and "heart" components of worship. A truly confessional church cannot but highlight the "head" (intellectual, doctrinal) components, but failure to cultivate the "heart" involvement represents a false antithesis to reaching the "whole man." Details will inevitably be somewhat colored by the surrounding culture, but it must not be forgotten that, in a sense, the church (including its cultus or worship) is always *counter-cultural*, too, and that such attitudes must be *cultivated*.

4. Missiological principles must distinguish between the pastoral office and the priesthood of believers.

Since its beginning the Lutheran church has recognized that both the priesthood of believers and the divinely established office of the pastor are clearly revealed in Scripture. This distinction must not be blurred, nor obliterated, for confusion and unnecessary tension in the congregation will result. Lutherans teach that both the laity and the clergy have their special functions to perform in the church regarding the ministry of the Word.

The emphasis which Church Growth has placed on the role of lay persons has been a valuable contribution to the mission outreach of the church. Church Growth has reminded us that the laity also have a significant role to perform in the work of Christ's kingdom. It has stressed the importance of training the members of the church to be more able communicators of the Gospel and witnesses for Christ.

However, as Lutheran congregations use missiological princi-

ples which assume and focus on the role of the laity, they must be cautious lest they lose sight of the Biblical truth that the office of the public ministry is a divine institution.⁸⁶ This office should not be confused with "ministry" in a general sense, which belongs to all Christians. The pastor must, therefore, not become merely an organizer, a manager whose time is spent largely in coordinating the efforts of the congregation as the members witness for Christ. He will certainly be interested in mission outreach and will work diligently to enlist all the members of his congregation(s) in the various aspects of this endeavor. But he will not lose sight of the fact that he has been called to carry out distinctive functions of the pastoral office, that is, to preach the Word, to administer the sacraments, to remit and retain sins. Accordingly, he will be sensitive to the need to preserve a proper balance between reaching out to the lost and nurturing those who are in the church.

5. Missiological principles must distinguish between the gifts of grace which God gives His church today and the special signs and wonders He gave the apostles.

It is important that The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod maintain a clear, Scriptural position regarding spiritual gifts. On the one hand, pastors and congregations should encourage their members to receive with thanksgiving the gifts which God in His grace gives and then to use them to His glory and for the edification of His church. On the other hand, Christians should also acknowledge that God gives spiritual gifts as He wills and in accord with the needs of His church.

According to Church Growth practitioners, spiritual gifts serve a most important purpose in the mission of the church. C. Peter Wagner strongly urges Christians to recognize the gifts which God gives for their use in serving the body of Christ and especially in witnessing to the lost. He suggests five ways in which the believer can discover what specific gifts the Holy Spirit has given him.⁸⁷

⁸⁶The tendency to lose sight of the Scriptural teaching that the office of the public ministry is a divine institution and therefore a divine mandate for the church is evident in some Church Growth literature. For example, C. P. Wagner describes as "exceedingly effective" the evangelism method of a congregation which "believes so much in body life that they refuse to hire pastors for their churches. They believe that the Holy Spirit provides each church with all the gifts needed for healthy church life, and that when members are properly using their gifts, a professional minister is simply excess baggage. The elders and the deacons do the preaching. The only man the church hires is the bookkeeper; the rest of the work is done by the members themselves." *What Are We Missing?* (Carol Stream, Ill.: Creation House, 1973), p. 81.

⁸⁷Wagner, *Your Church Can Grow*, p. 75.

Most Church Growth advocates speak neither for nor against the spiritual gifts claimed by pentecostals, neo-pentecostals, and charismatics. When listing gifts, they usually use these categories: special gifts, speaking gifts, serving gifts, and sign gifts.

As Lutheran pastors and congregations continue to encourage the recognition and use of God's gracious gifts to His church, they must avoid the errors of pentecostalism, neo-pentecostalism, and the charismatic movement. At its 1977 and 1979 conventions The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod cautioned against certain teachings held and taught by some individuals and groups involved in the charismatic movement as "contrary to the Holy Scriptures" and therefore "dangerous to the salvation of men to teach."⁸⁸ Similarly, the Commission on Theology and Church Relations in its 1972 document on "The Charismatic Movement and Lutheran Theology" stated: "It is noteworthy that the Scripture nowhere promises or encourages us to hope that extraordinary charismatic gifts will become the possession of the Christian church throughout the centuries. The pattern set in Scripture may actually indicate the opposite. While the gifts of the Spirit are spoken of throughout the Bible, different gifts were given at different times in history depending on the needs of the Kingdom. The church can be sure that the Spirit will grant it those blessings that it will need to build the church, but it will remember that the Lord may have other gifts in mind for His people than those He granted the Christians in apostolic times."⁸⁹

6. Lutherans using missiological principles must distinguish between faith in the promises of God and triumphalist claims to success through programs.

The Scripture describes the future of the church in terms of Law and Gospel. The Law reminds us that a particular church body or a local congregation may cease to exist because of error in doctrine, laxity and indifference, or even because of economic and sociological conditions.

The Gospel assures Christians that, resting on the sure promises of God, they can proclaim the Word with confidence, hope, and expectation, confident that the church will always remain (Is.

⁸⁸1977 Resolution 3-10A.

⁸⁹*The Charismatic Movement and Lutheran Theology*, A Report of The Commission on Theology and Church Relations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1972, p. 24.

55:11; Matt. 16:18; 28:19-20). Lutheran pastors are accustomed to preaching Law and Gospel according to the needs of the congregation.

The Church Growth Movement appears to view growth primarily, if not exclusively, from a positive, success-oriented perspective. Results *will* accrue if one expects the church to grow, commits oneself to that end, and takes seriously the promise of Christ: "I will build my church, and the powers of hell will not prevail against it." The church is a living organism, united to Christ its head. Its members are a royal priesthood, equipped by the Holy Spirit with gifts of many different kinds for use in carrying out the great Commission. The church must and will grow, internally and externally, if this positive view is embraced!

There are aspects in this approach which may be commended. It encourages, for example, unwavering trust in the promises of God. However, the weakness of such a perspective is that it may lead to a state of euphoria in which triumphalist claims are made which do not adequately take into account that the church is composed of persons who are *simul iustus et peccator* (at the same time saint and sinner) (cf. 1 Cor. 1:27; 2 Cor. 12:9). Some basic questions need to be asked in response to such a tendency: "Is the work of the church really that easy? What conclusions should a congregation or church body draw if, despite the most faithful efforts, no growth appears to take place?"

As they apply Law and Gospel to the needs of God's people, Lutherans must avoid all forms of triumphalism, as well as pessimism concerning the Lord's mission. It must be recognized, first of all, that the task of making disciples of those who do not believe in Jesus Christ will never be easy. Nurturing members of a Christian congregation with the Word and sacraments to a mature faith is a challenging task. Growth is often slow. Pastors and congregational leaders must resist the temptation to manipulate others to bring about effects or results which lie in God's province alone.

On the other hand, though results may not always be dramatic, nor even evident, the faithful pastor still has reason to be confident and optimistic as he proclaims Law and Gospel. God gives the increase, when and where it pleases Him, through the hearing of the Gospel (AC V). The Lord asks only that he be faithful in carrying out the functions of his calling.

7. Lutherans using missiological principles must evaluate the

homogenous unit principle in the light of the efficaciousness of the Gospel.

The homogeneous unit principle is considered by some to be one of the Church Growth Movement's most valuable contributions to evangelism. It holds that the Gospel is most effectively communicated within cultural units, among people who have the same cultural background, and who speak the same language.

Some argue against this principle on the grounds that it appears to be racist or separatistic along cultural lines and therefore contrary to what the Scriptures teach regarding the unity of the body of Christ. Others have found it to be very useful in mission outreach, provided it is not carried to extreme. They have found that Christian relatives, friends, associates, business partners, and neighbors often prove to be valuable instruments in reaching the unconverted.

The homogeneous unit principle can indeed be useful in mission outreach, if it is not raised to the level of an absolute. Uncritical acceptance and use of the homogeneous unit principle may cause the church to lose sight of the important fact that the Gospel is the power of God for salvation, capable of reaching across cultural barriers to convert the lost. The book of Acts demonstrates how a Jew named Paul, under the direction and blessing of the Holy Spirit, could proclaim the Gospel of reconciliation successfully to a Gentile world made up of many different cultures, races, and peoples. In fact, both Jesus and Paul faced their greatest opposition from their own countrymen.

8. Lutherans using missiological principles may find it advisable to use more familiar terminology.

Church Growth has developed an elaborate and extensive terminology which includes words such as "body evangelism," "bridging growth," "harvest principle," "kinship web," "people blindness," and "persuasion evangelism." Are all of these terms useful in Lutheran congregations? Here are a few points to be considered:

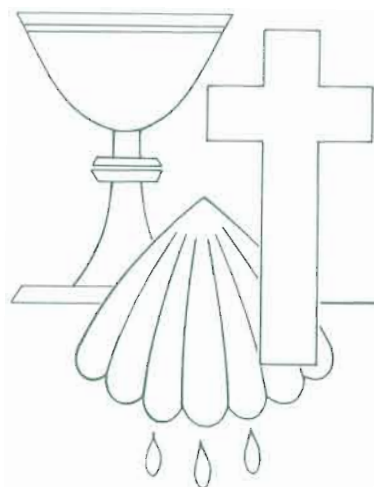
- a. Terminology is useful only to the extent that it is understood and communicates the intended message. Lutheran pastors and congregations interested in using the missiological principles of Church Growth may find it advisable to simplify the language and use terms that are more familiar to the members of the Lutheran tradition.

- b. There is always a risk involved when one church body adopts the terminology developed by another which has a different theological stance. Language can be weighted with denominational bias. Terms may mean different things to different people, depending on their frame of reference. To one person the word "Church Growth" may suggest an evangelism program that is being taught at the School of World Missions at Fuller Seminary. To another person the same word may suggest a broader concept, namely, a program of outreach and nurture with no relation whatever to Fuller. Again, one person may identify the term "spiritual gifts" in a narrower sense with speaking in tongues, prophecy, or miracles of healing. To another person the term may suggest more generally those gifts and skills which God in His grace promises to give His children so that they may serve the body of Christ.

To avoid confusion Lutherans should seek to use terminology which avoids ambiguity. Instead of using the term "Church Growth" Lutherans may prefer the more familiar terms "evangelism" or "missions." Instead of the term "spiritual gifts" some may prefer the more literal translation "gifts of grace."

- c. While Lutherans try to avoid terminology which is weighted with non-Lutheran theology, it is also important that they do not overcompensate. As a case in point, they must not fear certain errant views of spiritual gifts present in the charismatic movement to such an extent that they not only avoid employing different terminology but also reject the view that God gives spiritual gifts of any kind to His church today.⁹⁰

⁹⁰Rom. 12:3-8.



Conclusion

Guidelines for Evaluation

As interest in Church Growth continues, a variety of plans and programs are being offered, many of them written to reflect a particular denominational point of view. Some of these will certainly come to the attention of pastors and congregations in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. How can these be evaluated? From a Lutheran perspective the key question is: "How does the author apply Law and Gospel?" More specifically, the following questions should be asked:

- a. Does the program or technique suggest approaching the unconverted first with the Gospel rather than seeking to discover whether the person has a knowledge of his or her sin and lost condition without Christ?
- b. Does the program or technique present the Gospel in a way that suggests that human beings have the ability within themselves to make a decision for Christ rather than that faith comes through the operation of the Holy Spirit?
- c. Does the program or technique, either directly or indirectly, focus attention on what is taking place within the individual rather than on what took place on the cross of Jesus Christ? Does it tend to regard the presence of certain extraordinary—or even ordinary—gifts of the Spirit as a basis for certainty of forgiveness and salvation? Does it foster the impression that faith is a good work that merits God's favor?

- d. Does this program or technique suggest that there are at least three categories of people—unrepentant sinners, believers or those who have accepted Jesus as Savior but not as Lord, and disciples or those who have accepted Christ as both Lord and Savior?
- e. Does the program or technique give the impression, either directly or indirectly, that spiritual growth is always visible to the human eye and can therefore be measured by statistics and plotted on charts and graphs?
- f. Does this program or technique create the illusion that the acceptance of the Gospel by sinners is attributable to the use of this program or technique?
- g. Does this program or technique lead to the conclusion that the lack of positive results, when this occurs, is attributable solely to the way in which it was implemented?

When questions such as these must be answered in the affirmative, there is a confusion of sanctification with justification and a falling into work-righteousness.

But Lutherans must also guard against the opposite error, the separation of faith and good works which results in apathy, lethargy, and indifference. The following questions must also be asked.

- a. Is the lack of numerical growth in our congregation the result of a failure to prepare carefully and to execute a plan for reaching those people in our community who do not know Christ?
- b. Is a lack of new members attributable, at least in part, to our failure to keep records and to make use of statistics and measuring devices to see weaknesses and discover trends?
- c. Have we made wise use of the resources and insights at our disposal—for example, the social sciences, the arts, etc.—in proclaiming the Gospel and in furthering Christian nurture?
- d. Are we guilty of excusing our apathy and indifference for sharing the Gospel through a kind of “glorification of littleness”?
- e. Do we tend to attribute an absence of numerical growth to faithfulness rather than to laziness and inactivity?
- f. Is a lack of new members attributable, at least in part, to a failure to communicate the Gospel clearly?

When these questions can be answered in the affirmative, then we have separated justification and sanctification and have fallen into the error of cheap grace or indulging sin.

Concluding Word

The church faces the challenges of the future in a "world-come-of-age" in the confidence that God has given it the resources necessary to carry out the mission to which He has called it. When we say "resources," however, we are chiefly mindful of the means of grace, the Gospel and the sacraments. Strictly speaking, the means of grace are the only "resources" through which God calls, gathers, enlightens, sanctifies and keeps the church in the one true faith and therefore through which He builds His church. In this sense the means of grace are not simply one item among many others. They are the most crucial dimension of the church's life and work. Where the means of grace are taken seriously, the whole life of the church will be shaped by them. "The real adornment of the churches," our Lutheran Confessions can therefore state, "is godly, practical, and clear teaching, the godly use of the sacraments, ardent prayer, and the like."⁹¹

Dependent on the promises of God given through the means of grace for growth and on the power of the Holy Spirit who bestows on it His manifold gifts, the church accepts with thanksgiving all methodological insights and wisdom that will enhance and facilitate the proclamation of the Word. In Christian freedom, though with Biblically tested criteria, the church will gladly make use of methods and techniques designed to accomplish this end.

Faithfulness to God's Word requires that Christians accept their God-given tasks willingly and with the confident expectation that the church will continue to grow. The church belongs to God. He has purchased it with the blood of His Son. He preserves and protects it. He guarantees its future. Believing such promises, Christians may therefore mutually encourage one another to "serve the Lord with gladness."

But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the end of eternity.

2 Peter 3:18

⁹¹Ap XXIV, 50f.

Glossary⁹²

Biblical Principles—"truths revealed in Scripture, founded on revelation, and believed as bedrock to the faith."

Church Growth—"an application of Biblical, theological, anthropological, and sociological principles to congregations and denominations and to their communities in an effort to disciple the greatest number of people for Jesus Christ. Believing that 'it is God's will that His Church grow and His lost children be found,' Church Growth endeavors to devise strategies, develop objectives, and apply proven principles of growth to individual congregations, to denominations, and to the worldwide Body of Christ."

Church Growth Conscience—"the conviction that God's will is for the Body of Christ to grow."

Church Growth Eyes—"a characteristic of Christians who have achieved an ability to see the possibilities for growth and to apply appropriate strategies to gain maximum results for Christ and His church."

Church Growth Principle—"a worldwide truth which, when properly applied, along with other principles, contributes significantly to the growth of the church."

Church Growth, Types of:

1. *Internal*—growth of Christians in grace, relationship to God and to one another.
2. *Expansion*—growth of the church by the evangelization of non-Christians within its ministry area.
3. *Extension*—growth of the church by the establishment of daughter churches within the same general homogeneous group and geographical area.

⁹²McGavran and Arn, *Ten Steps*, pp. 127-30. The Commission has here selected some of the key terms and their definitions in McGavran and Arn's book, and in other sources noted in the footnotes following. The inclusion of this material implies neither endorsement nor non-endorsement of the terms or their definitions.

4. *Bridging*—growth of the church by establishing churches in significantly different cultural and geographical areas.”

Church Growth, Ways of Increase:

- “1. *Biological growth*—children of existing members who come into the church.
2. *Transfer growth*—members of one church who unite with another church.
3. *Conversion growth*—the coming into the church of people of the world who are converted by receiving Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.”

Decision—“a personal commitment to receive Jesus Christ as Savior.”

Discerning the Body—“seeing a local church or a denomination as it really is and obtaining and analyzing information about it and its members.”

Discerning the Community—“seeing a church’s ministry area in its sociological, economic, and ethnic composition and obtaining and analyzing information about it.”

Disciple “(noun)—a person who has made a commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, who is learning and practicing His teachings and who maintains a meaningful relationship with His body—the Church—and its mission of spreading the Gospel.”

Disciple “(verb)—to bring a person to faith in Christ and obedient membership in His Church.”

Evangelism, Classifications:

Evangelism Zero (E-0)—winning nominal Christians back to fervent faith.

Evangelism One (E-1)—evangelization of non-Christians in one’s own language and culture.

Evangelism Two (E-2)—evangelization of non-Christians in a similar language and culture.

Evangelism Three (E-3)—evangelization of non-Christians of a radically different language and culture.”

Homogenous Group—“a group of people who all have some characteristic in common and feel that they ‘belong.’ ”

Homogeneous Unit Principle—“the belief that men and women in different homogeneous units or groups prefer to become Christians without crossing racial, linguistic, or class barriers.”⁹³

⁹³McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth*, p. 223.

Mission—"an enterprise devoted to proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ, and to persuading men and women to become His disciples and dependable members of His Church."⁹⁴

Presence Evangelism "(1-P)—the view of evangelism which considers doing good to others as a sufficient goal of evangelism."⁹⁵

Proclamation Evangelism "(2-P)—defines evangelism as simply making the Good News known to others, whether or not conversions result."⁹⁶

Persuasion Evangelism "(3-P)—insists that evangelism must include bringing lost people to a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and into responsible church membership."⁹⁷

Receptivity—"openness to hear, consider, and obey the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Individuals, groups, and societies show varying degrees of receptivity."

Resistance-Receptivity Axis—"a chart which visualizes prospects who have been found to be more receptive to the Gospel as opposed to those people who give evidence of more resistance."⁹⁸

Search Theology—"the church's God-given mission is only to announce the Good News. We sow the seed. God in His good time gives the increase. We search for lost sheep. The finding is not in our hands."⁹⁹

Theology of Harvest—"mere search is not what God wants. God wants His lost children found. He wants the church to gather in the harvest of souls."¹⁰⁰

⁹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 26.

⁹⁵C. Peter Wagner, *The Growing Church*, p. 12.

⁹⁶*Ibid.*

⁹⁷*Ibid.*

⁹⁸*Ibid.*, Cassette #6.

⁹⁹McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth*, pp. 26-40.

¹⁰⁰*Ibid.*

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