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SHAPING CONFESSIONAL LUTHERANISM FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY: THE IMPACT OF THE LUTHERAN REFORMATION ON MISSION, WORSHIP, AND WORLDVIEW

Keynote Address to the Sixth World Seminaries Conference, Wittenberg, Germany, October 10–13, 2016

by Werner Klän

1. Introductory Remarks

ACCORDING TO HERMANN SASSE, the Lutheran church is “the confessional church par excellence.” And indeed, the confessional habit is significant for the profile of Lutheran faith, worship, theology, church, mission, and worldview, and thus an unmistakable mark of Lutheran identity.

The Lutheran church, however, is characterized as being “confessional” in a special manner. This is due to the fact that confession, in the Lutheran use of the term, is meant as a responsible reaction to God’s faith-creating action through his word, expressing not only a person’s private convictions on religious matters, but formulating an agreement on the foundational features of Christian faith, revealing the accordance of a person’s belief with the doctrine of the church universal. Inevitably, from the Lutheran point of view, the doctrine of the church has to be proved by the Scriptures. Confession as a personal action, as well as a statement on behalf of the church, responds to the scriptural witness, and is determined by and based on the basic testimony of God’s word. The doctrinal documents, for their part, define and regulate the teaching and preaching and the life of the church by normative standards derived from the Scriptures and applied to the necessities and needs of the church; this holds true for mission, worship, and worldview. Though this application occurs at certain times and places in history, it is intended to confess the truth of faith valid for all times. Believers of all times and ages take part in the confessional obligation of all Christians.

The implications global changes have for our identity as Lutherans in our missionary task, in our worship, and in our worldview, however, must be taken into consideration within our own ranks. Nevertheless, it has to be remembered that the roots and requirements of the

Confessional Lutheranism, the historic faith found in the Holy Scriptures, translates the truths of God’s Word in order to communicate to different cultures and settings. Education in the truth of the Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions shapes the church’s mission, worship, and worldview as she encounters a changing world.

Lutheran church are basically ecumenical. The Preface to the Augsburg Confession and Articles I and VII, Luther’s explanation of the Third Article of the Creed, the first part of the Smalcald Articles, and the Binding Summary of the Formula of Concord, just to name a few of the relevant basic texts, are a fundamental witness to this. In the first half of the nineteenth century, the church fathers were aware of this truly ecumenical responsibility. In this sense it was quite logical for Wilhelm Löhe to describe the Lutheran church as the “reconciling center of the confessions.” This is where we stand.

2. Mission

2.1 Luther: The Preeminence of the Missionary Witness

Luther and the Lutheran church have been accused of not having been missionary-minded. It has been shown, however, and can be demonstrated that such a perception is simply wrong. It is true, certainly, that Luther, his followers, and successors did not organize mission practices as they originated in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.¹ But for the Wittenberg reformer, “the missionary expansion, which occurred in biblical times, is neither past nor complete”; therefore, “all people without exception are in need” of the proclamation “of the biblical message of Law and Gospel.”² For historical and geographical reasons, the Lutheran territories in the first decades of and centuries after the age of the Reformation had no immediate access to harbours and for this reason could not establish overseas missions.³ Nonetheless, as Detlev

¹ Volker Stolle, *The Church Comes from All Nations* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2003), 11.

² Stolle, *All Nations*, 13.

³ See Albert B. Collver, “Loeche: Mission Societies, The Church in Motion, and Mission Dei,” in *Wilhelm Löhe und Bildung: Wilhelm*

Schulz has pointed out, “the Reformation must be seen as a missionary movement.”⁴ This analysis is based on the perception that according to the Lutheran Reformation, the word of God is dynamic in itself. That is why “God’s mission takes place within the life of the Church, and yet it also extends beyond the Church to those still held in unbelief.”⁵ In the first place, this missionary activity takes place through preaching, teaching, and administering the means of grace; these are “the most original and appropriate form of mission.”⁶

In line with this assessment is the observation that according to Luther, mission “is bound to the Cross.”⁷ The reformer’s vision is not a “Christian world.” It has always been seductive to Christians—and to church leaders in particular—to see the church as a culturally, politically, morally influential, and even ecclesiastical predominant factor or institution in this world. That tempting dream, which in some realms of Christianity still lingers on, belongs most intimately to the imperial ideology and ecclesiastical enthusiasm of the Constantinian era. Many times, the church presented itself as something of a subculture in the surrounding environment⁸ in which it was often enough indeed tempted to support the ruling culture instead of standing up to it critically, when it openly went against God’s will. In this way, it has a self-critical element of its own.⁹

In an astounding manner, Luther was “remarkably sensitive” in terms of “customs and culture.” And up to our time and day, mission always takes place “in a given context.”¹⁰ Therefore the gospel should be preached in the language of the target group it was addressed to and “it should be brought to each nation in its own language. But it should not be proclaimed in a dead language.”¹¹ It can

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be easily demonstrated that “every culture in which God gives his gifts has developed its own ways for speaking of reality.”¹² For Lutherans, it is noteworthy that they “have both affirmed the created goodness of their cultures, and at the same time, served as sharp critics of what their cultures do in opposition to God’s will”; thus missionaries in the course of the past centuries have often found themselves in conflict with “traditional cultural values, but have also attempted to affirm and enrich those values.”¹³

That this highly complex work of translating is necessary across limits of time, space, and culture, is no mystery.¹⁴ For North America and Europe, challenges for the Christian witness may be identified as the following: pluralism; secularization, especially withdrawal from religion; and individualism with clear tendencies to narcissism.¹⁵ In addition, the phenomenon of estrangement and the feelings of meaninglessness and powerlessness might be seen,¹⁶ and last but not least, all this in the face of the reality of death.¹⁷ But the very structure

of the relationship between God and his people, as it may be discovered in Luther and in the Lutheran Confessions, continues to be fruitful for application of the biblical message into other contexts.¹⁸ In any case, translation has been the core task of any missionary attempt, and Luther’s translation of the Bible into German was a major contribution to this challenge.

In Luther’s time, Germany was indeed a mission field, as on the ground of the rediscovery of the biblical gospel, the entire country had to be evangelized anew. In the nineteenth century, the most striking definition for the reality of missions is in Wilhelm Löhe’s statement in his *Three Books About the Church* that “the work of Missions is nothing else than the One Church of God in motion,

Loeche und Christian Formation, ed. Dietrich Blauffuß and Jacob Corzine (Nürnberg: Verein für bayerische Kirchengeschichte/Neuendettelsau: Freimund-Verlag, 2016), 172.

⁴ Klaus Detlev Schulz, *Mission from the Cross: The Lutheran Theology of Mission* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009), 47.

⁵ Schulz, *Mission from the Cross*, 50.

⁶ Schulz, *Mission from the Cross*, 53.

⁷ Stolle, *All Nations*, 105.

⁸ Stolle, *All Nations*, 7.

⁹ Stolle, *All Nations*, 10.

¹⁰ Schulz, *Mission from the Cross*, 301.

¹¹ Hermann Sasse, “Ecclesia Migrans,” chap. 12 in *Hermann Sasse*:

Letters to Lutheran Pastors: Volume I, 1948–1951, ed. Matthew Harrison (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2013), 215.

¹² Robert Kolb, “The American Mind Meets the Mind of Christ,” in *The American Mind Meets the Mind of Christ*, ed. Robert Kolb (St. Louis: Concordia Seminary Press, 2010), 8.

¹³ Kolb, “American Mind,” 10.

¹⁴ Kolb, “American Mind,” 6–12.

¹⁵ Robert Kolb, *Speaking the Gospel Today* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1995), 11, 32, 182.

¹⁶ Kolb, *Speaking the Gospel Today*, 86–92.

¹⁷ Kolb, *Speaking the Gospel Today*, 94–96.

¹⁸ Kolb, “American Mind,” 10.

the actualization of the One universal Catholic Church.”¹⁹ Along these lines, but even before Löhe published his booklet, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Prussia, also known as the “Old Lutherans,” in their first general convention of 1841, after ten years of persecution, adopted a remarkable resolution on mission, claiming that, “Mission is a concern of the Church as such.” Missionary activities should not be left to societies, groups of individuals, not even to single congregations, or districts, but ought to be regarded as a core task of the church itself, and therefore steered by the church. This principle has found its clearest expression in the slogan embraced and promulgated by the Bleckmar Mission (now Lutherische Kirchenmission/ Mission of Lutheran Churches): “The Lutheran Church does Lutheran Mission Work.”²⁰ This motto was later on developed into the phrase: “Lutheran Mission Work Results in a Lutheran Church.”

It has been noted that the structure of the Augsburg Confession of 1530 “reflects salvation history,”²¹ and thus provides the theological framework in which God’s mission and the mission of the church have their place, carried out particularly by the office of the ministry, but nonetheless by any Christian witnessing to the gospel, as mission is to be understood “as a fundamental life expression of the church,”²² and “missionary opportunities present themselves ... even in the immediate vicinity.”²³ On the basis “of the Reformation’s doctrine of justification,” it is nearly self-evident that the gospel message is “unconditionally necessary for all people without exception.”²⁴ In the twenty-first century, the Lutheran Confessions may still be seen as “a perfect document to use as the voice of a faith community.”²⁵ In addition, it has to be observed that

There can be no doubt that, as long as we are churches bound to Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions and intend to remain so, we will be aware that effectiveness is not ours but the Holy Spirit’s, through God’s word and the sacraments.

the credibility of the church’s missionary efforts has to be proven by the harmony of doctrine and life.

It seems to me that Germany, as the home country of the Reformation, and the continent of Europe in general, nowadays “represent prime mission fields.”²⁶ These days, it is far more likely that, at least in Europe, Christianity, or rather the church, will take a shape similar to the one it had throughout the first three centuries: being a minority, despised, mocked, marginalized, suspected, neglected, displaced, persecuted, and even killed. At least in the northern parts of the world, “pastors and congregations as they reach out to communities saturated with the ideas and assumptions inherent in pluralism and mix-and-match religion” face a rather complicated situation.²⁷

This we have to realize in due soberness. I do not see the Lord promising his church it will be a culturally, politically, morally influential or even predominant factor or institution in this world: on the contrary, he tells his “little flock” not to be “afraid” (Luke 12:32).

Luther’s view of mission is characterized by such soberness; it takes setbacks and opposition into account. This fact, however, by no means impedes the mission of the church from being

confessional; quite the opposite.²⁸ Mission and church, and in particular the Lutheran church as the church of “pure doctrine,” are most closely related to one another.²⁹

2.2. Mission—The Islamic Challenge

With regard to Islam, Lutherans should be very much aware of the fact that it was Luther who staunchly opposed any attempt to crusade against the Turks, then the representatives of Islam, although he regarded it legitimate that the emperor and the princes of the Holy Roman Empire of the German nation defend the empire and their territories against the aggression of the Ottoman troops in the late twenties and thirties of the sixteenth century,

¹⁹ Wilhelm Löhe, *Three Books about the Church*, trans. James L. Schaaf (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969), 174.

²⁰ Friedrich Wilhelm Hopf, ed., *Lutherische Kirche treibt lutherische Mission* (Hermannsburg: Bleckmarer Mission, 1967).

²¹ Schulz, *Mission from the Cross*, 62–63.

²² Stolle, *All Nations*, 75.

²³ Stolle, *All Nations*, 41.

²⁴ Stolle, *All Nations*, 104.

²⁵ Schulz, *Mission from the Cross*, 60–61.

²⁶ Schulz, *Mission from the Cross*, 58.

²⁷ Paul W. Robinson, “Pluralism and Mix-and Match Religion,” in *The American Mind Meets the Mind of Christ*, ed. Robert Kolb (St. Louis: Concordia Seminary Press, 2010), 75.

²⁸ Schulz, *Mission from the Cross*, 300–301.

²⁹ Stolle, *All Nations*, 106; Collver, “Loeche,” 182.

and that in this case, the population was obligated to support this armed conflict as defensive warfare. That is why it is understood that intelligence and police observe terrorist groups and people arousing suspicion of being sympathetic with those attempts, and of course take legal measures against them.

On the other hand, Lutherans ought to remember that Islam, according to the Augsburg Confession, is judged to be an anti-Trinitarian heresy rejected in the first article, and according to the Large Catechism, a contradiction to the Christian creed, and thus, Muslims are in line with “heathen, [Turks,] Jews, or false Christians and hypocrites” (LC II, 66), which I regard as a noteworthy sequence and enumeration as it states that all these people are “outside this Christian people.” Yet the Christians living under Muslim rule should bear witness to their faith by displaying obedience to the worldly powers (as everywhere) and bear witness to their Christian convictions personally.

It has to be regretted that Christian churches in Germany and Europe have done almost nothing to develop missionary strategies to Muslims. The mainstream churches in Germany, for example, prefer to pursue a strategy of dialogue, and by trying to do so, face the very same difficulties civil authorities are confronted with. In 2002, the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church (SELK) council published a manual on living together with Muslims. In this document, the doctrinal differences between Christian faith and Islam are denoted unambiguously. Missionary witness over against Muslims is seen as a consequence to Christian faith and love. As a rule, the minimizing of the fundamental differences between Islam and Christian faith is refused clearly: “It is inappropriate to abandon the option of witnessing the total truth of the Gospel just for the sake of dialogue.”³⁰ Any arbitrary pluralism is rejected. Religious freedom, however, ought to be granted also to Muslims.

At the same time, pastors and congregations of the SELK are encouraged to engage theologically with the issue of Islam, and to face the challenge of testifying to the crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ as the Savior of all humankind. Since the 1990s, missionaries in the cities of Leipzig and Berlin have been reaching out to Muslim migrants, mostly from Iran, who form a considerable and still rapidly growing group within the Lutheran

congregations celebrating their services in Farsi. This can only be seen as a miracle in our eyes.

2.3. Challenges

Living in a post-Christian environment, like in Europe, it will be most necessary for the mission of the Lutheran church to cling faithfully to its biblical and confessional roots, to dedicate itself to the task of translating and transferring the biblical Lutheran heritage into a language understood by contemporary people, supported by authentic ways of living and working together. At least this is the historical experience of the SELK: God can use small circles of true believers and employ minor groups of deliberate Christians witnessing faithfully to the gospel as blessed bases for his mission.

There is, of course, a real difference between a respectably large confessional Lutheran church in a Christian western country with freedom of thought and a minority church in a post-Christian context, such as Europe or in a country with completely different religious orientation such as Japan, India, or China. It also makes a difference whether other Christian denominations and confessions have had a dominant role for many years or even centuries, like the Roman Catholic Church in South America, or in Italy, Spain, and Portugal.

If it holds true that Christianity is in the process of moving from the northwestern hemisphere to the South and the Southeast, there is first and foremost one task that lies ahead of us. Having inherited the orthodox doctrine of the early church from northern Africa, from theologians and bishops like Athanasius, Cyprian, and Augustine, first in Europe, where this heritage was historically received throughout the Middle Ages and gratefully embraced by the Lutheran Reformation, and was handed on to the adherents of Lutheran theology and the Lutherans emigrating to the Americas, to Australia and to Africa, we are undoubtedly obligated to pass on to the emerging southern churches what once was granted to us. Moreover, the changes in the kind of Christianity that is emerging, especially in what is labeled the “global south,” cannot be neglected. In the era of globalization, the northern churches will have to listen very carefully to what the emerging churches in the South have to say on Christian identity and authenticity, not least in the area of Christian conduct and ethics.

³⁰ “Wegweisung für evangelisch-lutherische Christen für das Zusammenleben mit Muslimen in Deutschland,” 6, www.selk.de/download/Islam.pdf.

3. Worship

3.1 God's Salutary Self-Communication

The reform of the medieval mass Martin Luther carried out in various attempts from 1523 (Formula Missae et Communionis) to 1526 (Deutsche Messe und Ordnung Gottesdiensts), was guided by the rediscovery of the gospel, and thus by applying justification by grace as a principle to the restoration of the inherited liturgy.³¹ In his famous definition of what happens in the divine service, Luther claimed that “our dear Lord may speak to us through his holy Word and we respond to him in prayer and praise.”³² That is to say that for the Wittenberg reformer “the liturgy was the means by which God's Word came to God's people, thus the people needed to hear this life-giving Word read and preached.”³³

The salutary self-communication of God has as its purpose the trustful reception of this self-communication, just as such a reception is only made possible through the one who promises and imparts his salvation.³⁴ In the setting of the Lutheran Reformation, the divine promises and their God-worked reception in faith are understood as corresponding dimensions that are in correlation to one another.³⁵ Thereby it is faith, which is the process of reception that depends on the promise and affirms it, that accepts what the self-communication of God says and works.³⁶ In the perception of the word of forgiveness, this forgiveness is accepted:³⁷ we should “only take and receive from him [God]” (LC VI, 18). Therefore forgiveness is the epitome of the gospel. And thus, not only the word, but also the sacraments as modes of application of the gospel function as means of God's self-communication.³⁸ That is why the wording of the words of institution in their literal sense was so immovably fixed for Luther that he could not back down in this regard whenever the real presence

³¹ Arthur A. Just, Jr., *Heaven on Earth: The Gifts of Christ in the Divine Service* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2008), 248–70.

³² Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress and St. Louis: Concordia, 1955–1986), 51: 333.

³³ Just, *Heaven on Earth*, 250.

³⁴ See *Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche*, 10th ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1986), Ap XIII, 19–20, 295. Hereafter referred to as *BSLK*.

³⁵ “*Quare [i.e. Paul] inter se correlative comparat et connectit promissionem et fidem*” (Ap IV, 50, *BSLK*, 170).

³⁶ “*Promissio non potest accipi nisi fide. Est autem fides proprie dicta, quae assentitur pro missioni; de hac fide loquitur scriptura*” (Ap IV, 112, *BSLK*, 183).

³⁷ See Ap IV, 116.

³⁸ Just, *Heaven on Earth*, 250.

of the body and blood of Christ in the celebration of this testament of Christ was called into question (LC V, 8–14, Kolb-Wengert, 467–68).³⁹

Luther places the gospel in precisely these forms of application—proclamation, Holy Baptism, the Lord's Supper and confession as the “third sacrament” (LC IV, 74)—at the centre of an encompassing Christian understanding of worship (SA III, IV). In the catechisms, he provides the Christian community with an introduction to a life guided by God.⁴⁰ He thereby points out that Holy Baptism is God's salutary self-communication, which brings to us “victory over death and the devil, forgiveness of sin, God's grace, the entire Christ, and the Holy Spirit with his gifts” (LC IV, 41, Kolb-Wengert, 461), just as the sacrament of the altar, which he views as “this great a treasure, which is daily administered and distributed among Christians,” provides the new human being with constant fortification in his battle against Satan, death, and sin (LC V, 39, Kolb-Wengert, 470–71), and just as the Lord's Prayer invokes God's irrefutable willingness for mercy in just such a battle, a battle that becomes inevitable for a Christian precisely by partaking in God's self-giving and self-revelation; a Christian who, in the battle of the gospel for the gospel, takes on his enemies (LC III, 65–67; 80–81).

Melanchthon uses an extended definition of sacrament, in contrast to the definition of the early Reformation taken from Augustine and used by Luther in 1520. This definition includes certain rites within the divine service that go back to the mandates of God and are connected to a promise of grace. In this respect Melanchthon counts Holy Baptism, the Lord's Supper, and Absolution as the “sacrament of repentance,” the sacraments in their narrower, New Testament sense.⁴¹ A characteristic of these New Testament “signs”⁴² is their being witnesses of grace and the forgiveness of sins.⁴³

God's institution of these rites and his salutary self-communication performed through them are the constitutive parts of this definition of the sacrament.

³⁹ Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000). Hereafter referred to as Kolb-Wengert.

⁴⁰ See Werner Klän, “Anleitung zu einem Gott-gelenkten Leben. Die innere Systematik der Katechismen Luthers,” *LuThK* 29 (2005): 18–35.

⁴¹ See Ap XIII, 3–4.

⁴² “*Signa novi testamenti*” (Ap XIII, 14, *BSLK*, 294).

⁴³ “Sign and witness . . . of divine Will against us, to waken faith and strengthen faith in us” (Ap XIII, 1, *BSLK*, 68); “*testimonia gratiae et remissionis peccatorum*” (Ap XIII, 14, *BSLK*, 294).

Melanchthon thereby retains the idea of signification and word-centeredness that characterize the Augustinian definition of sacrament.⁴⁴ In this he follows the identification of the sacrament as a visible word so that its uniqueness lies in the illustration of that which the word already states. The semantic content, the efficacy of the word, and the carrying out of the divine service are thereby identical. Only the mode of perception differs.⁴⁵

This definition of the sacrament has an openness that allows even ordination or the laying on of hands to be called a sacrament,⁴⁶ as well as prayer, the giving of alms, and the affliction of the believer.⁴⁷ For Melanchthon, however, an actual numeration of these sacraments is irrelevant as long as those acts are retained that mediate grace and have the ordinance and promise of God.⁴⁸ As such, the sacraments certainly aim at faith. The character of promise, which is the salutary self-communication and self-giving of God, is constitutive. Also the relation to faith, which is the reception in believers of such a self-communication and self-giving worked by the Holy Spirit, is foundational.⁴⁹

This gospel-centred and worship-oriented approach is received by the following generations in the Lutheran churches across Germany and beyond. Thus it is and remains undisputed that the Bible and hymnal, in the way that they have become determinants for piety and worship during the Lutheran Reformation, have, “during the subsequent period, defined Christian culture as a whole, and across all confessional boundaries at that”; this may be exemplified for example by the names of Paul Gerhardt and Johann Sebastian Bach.⁵⁰

Furthermore it can be stated that Luther took a mediating position between “Abolitionists and Traditionalists,”

and his followers and heirs ought to “carefully consider the great tradition to provide continuity with those who have used the historic liturgy for more than fifteen hundred years, attempting to reflect the principle of ‘the living heritage and something new.’”⁵¹ It cannot be ignored, though, that Luther’s reform of the mass, compared to the traditional liturgy of the Middle Ages, was severe and one of the most revolutionary inroads into the inherited structure of the service. This is to say at the same time that “liturgical renewal has always been with the Lutheran Church since the Reformation.”⁵²

3.2 Questions on Liturgy and Culture

One crucial question to be asked is about the relationship between worship, or liturgy, and culture. If and because it is true that the divine service is the center of any congregational life, moreover the center of the church’s life indeed, then the conclusion seems likely that “the goal of good liturgy is always the transforming of culture by the Gospels of Jesus Christ.” But having said this, it has to be admitted that “the cultural context of the liturgy” can never be ignored.⁵³

It seems as though a debate is going on—and necessarily so—about how and to which degree the translation of the biblical message may make use of traditional forms, expressions, or customs in a given target culture. It might be said that in missions, acculturation, enculturation or contextual accommodation were not needed; rather the true preaching of the pure Gospel and proper administration of unadulterated Sacraments of our Lord Jesus Christ. I am afraid that this view is similar to a spurious alternative. In contrast to this proposition, bishop emeritus David Tswaedi from South Africa draws our attention to the fact that “culture is dynamic,” and from there concludes that “the hallmarks of Lutheranism are not Germanic, Nordic or American trappings but the bible based teaching of the church and using the Lutheran confessions as the hermeneutical tool.” On this basis, “African Lutheran pastors would have to grasp the basis of the Lutheran teaching if they would be confident enough to translate them into their specific situations themselves.”⁵⁴ The question at stake is: Do we really have the “fear of not

⁴⁴ See Ap XIII, 5.

⁴⁵ “*Idem effectus est verbi et ritus*”; “*ritus ... est quasi pectura verbi, idem significans, quod verbum. Quare idem est utrusque effectus*” (Ap XIII, 5, BSLK, 292–93).

⁴⁶ Ap XIII, 9–11.

⁴⁷ Ap XIII, 16–17. Luther’s later discussions on the seven Heiltümern (salutary/curative treasures or medicaments) of the Christian church found their prelude in these thoughts of Melanchthon. Luther lists under these Heiltümer: the word of God, baptism, Eucharist, the appointment of preachers, prayer and, lastly, the *Anfechtung* of the believer and the persecution of the Christian. See also *Luthers Werke*, Weimarer Ausgabe [Weimar Edition or WA] 50, 624–49, the word *heilthum* in WA 50, 629, 13; *passim*.

⁴⁸ Ap XIII, 17.

⁴⁹ “*Haec fides est ... opus spiritus sancti*” (Ap IV, 115, BSLK, 183).

⁵⁰ Christoph Wolff, “Musik aus dem Geist der Reformation: Bibel und Gesangbuch in der Musik Johann Sebastian Bachs,” in *Spurenlese: Kulturelle Wirkungen der Reformation*, 350n 5.

⁵¹ Just, *Heaven on Earth*, 260–62.

⁵² Just, *Heaven on Earth*, 263.

⁵³ Just, *Heaven on Earth*, 264.

⁵⁴ David Tswaedi, “Martin Luther—One Confession—Multicultural: An African Perspective” (lecture, Lutherische Theologische Hochschule, symposium on “Luther—Uni-confessional—Multicultural,” Oberursel, Germany, November 2015).

being able to garb the message in an African culture without changing the message”?⁵⁵

4. Worldview

4.1 World Pictures

In the first place, we have to realize that the church, according to the New Testament record, lives “in the world, yet not of the world (JOHN 17:13–16.)”⁵⁶ This is what constitutes the uniqueness of its existence. And for this reason, a “national church ideology” cannot be an option for the church, nor for confessional Lutheran churches specifically.⁵⁷ In a sort of prophetic manner, Hermann Sasse maintained as early as 1950 that “in our day as the shadows of night fall ever deeper upon modern Western man and his culture,” the experience of the church will be that on the one hand, it participates in the decline around it, but otherwise where the divine service is held, Christian congregations will rise again.⁵⁸

Before, I mentioned the doctrine of the “two kingdoms,” or two realms, to be crucial to the Lutheran worldview. Luther’s distinction between these two ways of God’s governance gives way to discerning between penultimate realities, values, and goals on the one hand, and on the other hand, the ultimate destiny of human existence. One might tend to blame Luther and the Lutheran Confessions for having initiated, instigated, and theologially legitimized the decline of what used to be “Christian Europe” to secularization,⁵⁹ which would be as foolish as to cast Luther and the Lutheran churches as the ideological forefathers of Hitler and the Nazi party. On the contrary, the Lutheran distinction of the two realms exonerates the church, namely by restricting its tasks to the proclamation of law and gospel, from ruling and regulating the affairs of state and society. Given this fundamental distinction, this does not at all mean that the law of God does not apply to mundane matters, and thus

the application of God’s universal will has no place in the proclamation of the church; quite the opposite. The “political use of the law” has to be an integral part of the church’s message. We will return to this point later on.

For the Reformation and post-Reformation times, it is interesting to see that the reformers and the early orthodox teachers of the Lutheran church did not have much of a problem with the new cosmological discoveries.⁶⁰ The new scientific world picture left the early orthodox fathers, for the most part, at least, “often relatively untouched.”⁶¹ It can be demonstrated in any case, as Werner Elert has done, that it was Luther’s christological and sacramental theology that laid the foundations, theologically speaking, to overcoming the inherited worldview linked to Aristotle and Ptolemy: “Heaven, as God’s place, is not a place in a spatial sense.”⁶² Elert claimed that “the new world picture” was “the triumph of an exact knowledge of nature—a knowledge that is free from all theological and ecclesiastical prejudices,” and from this point of view he concludes, “The church, which derives its mission from the Gospel and knows that the proclamation of the Gospel exhausts this mission, has no interest in the various world pictures.”⁶³

In the background to positions like these, Elert sees Luther’s concept of God’s omnipresence and omnipotence: “God is *in* the things.”⁶⁴ Such a view is mirrored in the position taken by Tycho Brahe, according to whom “God is everywhere and nowhere.”⁶⁵ And the Erlangen “Lutheranissimus” is deeply convinced that (many of) Luther’s heirs also followed him in asserting that “God’s presence ... is always operative.”⁶⁶ The most decisive point, according to Elert, is “that all creation remains God’s creation” including “man’s feeling of belonging in a direct manner to God’s creation.”⁶⁷

Of course, one cannot deny that among the early orthodox theologians of the Lutheran church, there are those to be found who opposed the new astronomical

⁵⁵ The narrative of the two powerful horsemen, one from the North, one from the South, Naaman and the Ethiopian eunuch, could be used as another point in this. One, though hearing the message from the prophet, compared the stream he was instructed to wash in with the wide rivers back home. The other, having gotten the explanation from an evangelist, was ahead of the teacher when seeing the water. He didn’t wish to be baptized in Jerusalem, but in roadside stagnant waters (Tswaedi, “African Perspective”).

⁵⁶ Sasse, “Ecclesia Migrans,” 203.

⁵⁷ Sasse, “Ecclesia Migrans,” 209; “So we must have the courage to say farewell to that false view which identifies church and nation,” (Sasse, “Ecclesia Migrans,” 211).

⁵⁸ Sasse, “Ecclesia Migrans,” 213.

⁵⁹ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge/London: Harvard University Press, 2007).

⁶⁰ Robert D. Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism, Volume II: God and His Creation* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1972), 222–58.

⁶¹ Preus, *Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, 225.

⁶² Werner Elert, *The Structure of Lutheranism*, trans. Walter A. Hansen (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1962), 415; Preus, *Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, 226–27.

⁶³ Elert, *The Structure of Lutheranism*, 423.

⁶⁴ Elert, *The Structure of Lutheranism*, 440.

⁶⁵ Elert, *The Structure of Lutheranism*, 441.

⁶⁶ Elert, *The Structure of Lutheranism*, 442.

⁶⁷ Elert, *The Structure of Lutheranism*, 458–59.

discoveries.⁶⁸ This antipathy occurs only from the middle of the seventeenth century, as we find it for example in Abraham Calov. Prior to that date, “the new world picture developed by Copernicus, Brahe, and Kepler was almost never discussed in Lutheran dogmatics.”⁶⁹ Robert Preus has rightly judged that “Calov failed to see that the statements on Scripture which assigned a stationary position to the earth were not statements concerning astronomy or a world picture, but statements expressing God’s benevolence or wisdom or providence.”⁷⁰ Others to the contrary took the position that “it was not the intention of Scripture to present a final system of cosmology,”⁷¹ or even refused “to favor any world picture as being Scriptural.”⁷²

From such observations, Preus concludes that in the “mature thoughts of orthodox Lutheranism ... it was not the purpose of Scripture to present a world picture, but only to proclaim God as Creator and absolute Lord of all things.”⁷³ While stating a “relative indifference and ignorance of the new scientific world pictures” among “the great majority of the Lutheran theologians on the one side,” Preus posits “that the classical Lutheran theology ... is remarkably independent of any philosophical ontology and transcends completely any empirical or scientific world picture.”⁷⁴ Like Elert, Preus traces this back to the Lutheran Christology and its view on Christ’s exaltation and session at the right hand of God.⁷⁵ To prove this assumption, Preus quotes from Nikolaus Selnecker, one of the authors of the Formula of Concord, and his exposition of Acts 3:21, that “heaven is not the place that encloses Him (sc. Christ), but is enclosed by Him.” And there is not “the slightest metaphysical or physical connotation” to this proposition.⁷⁶ Rather we would have to adopt the conviction that “the Lutheran concepts of heaven and hell illustrate the transcendence of Lutheran theology over all world pictures.”⁷⁷

It has to be noted, however, that the more “science” in certain realms and to a certain degree presents itself

as a “metaphysical research programme,” the less it is about “explanation” but functions as a “paradigm” that “creates faith.”⁷⁸ That is to say, we will have to look at scientific results in a thoroughly critical manner so that we do not fall for ideological concepts instead of observations—and interpretations—of facts. To regard the world as God’s creation implies, from a Christian point of view, the awareness of “one’s responsibilities to the rest of the creation”; this “fundamental point” sets us apart—or on principle ought to do so—from all ideas of individualism if it is understood only “as the insistence on my rights”⁷⁹ that characterizes much of the “modern, postmodern, and post-colonial” western European and northern American mindset.⁸⁰ And the question has to be asked “whether appeals to self-giving and selflessness actually work in the North American context,” a question that applies as well to Europe and many other contexts that have been influenced by western philosophies and ideologies.⁸¹

4.2 The Church in the World

In the Lutheran Confessions,⁸² the church is defined, according to its Magna Charta in Article VII of the Augsburg Confession, as the “assembly of saints,” commissioned to “purely preach and teach the Gospel and to rightly administer the sacraments,” and this church does not strive for a totalitarian domination of the world: “For the Gospel teaches an internal, eternal reality and righteousness of the heart, not an external, temporal one,” but “does not overthrow secular government, public order, and marriage” (AC XVI, 4–5, Kolb-Wengert, 48–50). Right from the outset, the Lutherans claimed that they did “not understand the church to be an external government of certain nations”; rather the true Christians were regarded as “people scattered throughout the entire world who agree on the gospel and have the same Christ, the same Holy Spirit, and the same sacraments” (Ap VII, VIII, 10, Kolb-Wengert, 175).

We as Lutherans have to be interested, particularly

⁶⁸ Elert, *The Structure of Lutheranism*, 430–31; See Preus, *Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, 227–29.

⁶⁹ Preus, *Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, 229.

⁷⁰ Preus, *Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, 227.

⁷¹ Preus, *Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, 230.

⁷² Preus, *Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, 231.

⁷³ Preus, *Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, 234.

⁷⁴ Preus, *Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, 237.

⁷⁵ Preus, *Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, 239.

⁷⁶ Preus, *Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, 239.

⁷⁷ Preus, *Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, 241.

⁷⁸ Joel Okamoto, “Science, Technology, and the American Mind,” in *The American Mind Meets the Mind of Christ*, ed. Robert Kolb (St. Louis: Concordia Seminary Press, 2010), 105.

⁷⁹ Joel Biermann, “Individualism as the Insistence on My Rights,” in *The American Mind Meets the Mind of Christ*, ed. Robert Kolb (St. Louis: Concordia Seminary Press, 2010), 44.

⁸⁰ Leopoldo A. Sánchez M., “Individualism, Indulgence, and the Mind of Christ: Making Room for the Neighbor and the Father,” in *The American Mind Meets the Mind of Christ*, ed. Robert Kolb (St. Louis: Concordia Seminary Press, 2010), 57.

⁸¹ Sánchez, “Individualism,” 60.

⁸² Schulz, *Mission from the Cross*, 59–67.

in these times, in the freedom of faith. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the right to exist as an organization separate from the Roman church was granted to the Lutheran church in the Holy Roman Empire of the German nation by the Augsburg Religious Peace (1555) and, after the Thirty Years' War, by the Peace of Westphalia (1648). But this was achieved only at the cost of "a great sacrifice: by the authority of the regional monarch over the church."⁸³ "At no time did Luther's great principle of the separation of the secular and spiritual powers prevail in the Lutheran Churches and states of Europe."⁸⁴ It took three more centuries after the Reformation until the fathers and mothers of the confessional Lutheran churches in the nineteenth century were able to disengage from the state-church system as inherited from the late Reformation times. In contrast to the unionist concepts promulgated by the state, they wanted to manifest Lutheran identity in the ecclesiastical dimension by establishing that, as the expression of full church fellowship, fellowship in public worship, particularly at the communion table, has as its unconditional prerequisite a consensus in faith, doctrines, and confession.

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

For here, as anywhere in religious matters according to the reformers' understanding, the distinction of the two kingdoms, or realms, applies: "For secular authority deals with matters altogether different from the gospel" (AC XXVIII, 11, Kolb-Wengert, 92). Therefore, also the

(episcopal) office "to judge doctrine and reject doctrine that is contrary to the gospel" is administered "not with human power but with God's Word alone" (AC XXVIII, 22, Kolb-Wengert, 94). It has to be maintained, however, that this doctrine "is misunderstood and abused wherever it is interpreted and applied as being a 'license for Christians to relinquish matters of the state.'"⁸⁵

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

The renunciation of God's will consequently manifests itself in many ways, the most crass of which is evident in the fact that man suffers under the delusion that he is lord of himself—or even the whole world—while in reality his toil and effort only revolve around himself. This is really the most devastating of all human delusions,⁸⁶ which characterizes the outlook of modern western man since the Enlightenment, and represents, from a biblical-theological standpoint, a false notion of autonomy, or rather, a false concept of freedom closely bound up with this notion of autonomy. At the core of this struggle for what he believes to be freedom is man's delusion of being able to invigorate and master his own life—without God.

Christians and the church, claimed by their Lord, have nothing to sugarcoat, nothing to gloss over, and nothing to conceal concerning the predicament of men and our contemporary society. They will boldly carry out their task, irrespective of power, richness, or influence of men. They will not cower before the powerful, and not buckle before those in charge of the state, society, or economy. I say this because the history of the church is also a history of failure in light of this responsibility. The history of alliances between throne and altar, Christianity and power,

⁸³ Hermann Sasse, "Cuius Regio, Eius Religio: On the Four Hundredth Anniversary of the Augsburg Religious Peace," in *Hermann Sasse: Letters to Lutheran Pastors: Volume II, 1951–1965*, ed. Matthew Harrison (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2014), 376.

⁸⁴ Hermann Sasse, "Concerning the Freedom of the Church," in *Hermann Sasse: Letters to Lutheran Pastors: Volume I, 1948–1951*, ed. Matthew Harrison (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2013), 109.

⁸⁵ Friedrich Wilhelm Hopf, "Lutheran Co-responsibility for Christian Witness in Southern Africa" (lecture, Mission Conference of Lauenburg, Ratzeburg, Germany), 28–29.

⁸⁶ Eberhard Jüngel, *Das Evangelium von der Rechtfertigung des Gottlosen als Zentrum des christlichen Glaubens* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998, 1999), 75, 93, 108–9, 111.

church and dictator, demonstrates these failures all too clearly. If the church desires to do justice to its mission, it will not give in to majority trends and mainstream public and popular opinion.

The church will today, as always, warn, and where necessary, even accuse. It speaks to situations where the validity of divine standards is being foundationally or practically challenged, but always with the goal of calling men back into the fellowship and freedom which God preserves and offers in himself. This task was once labelled “the application of the Word of God to our time and day.” The church has to proclaim that God, who is visible in Jesus Christ, took it upon himself to repair the broken fellowship between him and humankind, in order to free the totality of humankind and each individual human being out of the injurious bonds in which we are ensnared, out of the dominion of the ruinous powers, around and in us, from the self-inflicted lot of threatening destruction. Until the Last Day, this obligation will never come to an end.

5. Conclusion

In our time and day, and on the global level, and in all these areas, like mission, worship, and worldview, the witness of the Lutheran Reformation, which is tied to the Holy Scriptures as the original proclamation of the gospel, must be promulgated untiringly and without fear. That is why with gratitude I realize that we share a multitude of points of view amongst our partner churches throughout the International Lutheran Council (ILC) concerning the tasks that lie ahead for the confessional Lutheran churches in postmodern and, in some parts of the world (like Europe, as it seems to me), even post-Christian times.

The ILC ought to be an appropriate counterbalance to an increasingly non-confessional Lutheranism, and could provide a well-founded, profiled corrective to theological and church-political developments and objectives that diminish, abandon, or by trend annihilate the theological heritage and the confessional stance of the Lutheran church as it is circumscribed and defined in the Lutheran Confessions. Hopefully it could be a credible partner in dialogue with other churches and confessions, or movements and factions within major church bodies, that equally adhere to what might be defined as “historic faith.”

One of the areas of highest importance, as far as I can see, is the area of theological education. It might be said that the formation of future pastors in many a part of the

globe is and will be the appropriate way of missionary outreach in our time. And theology, Lutheran theology in particular, “is not meant to be an abstract, intellectual exercise but is deeply spiritual in that it is grounded in worship and accompanied by prayer and meditation with the expectation that affliction (Luther’s *Anfechtung*) will beset those who engage deeply with the Word.”⁸⁷ Most certainly, it is all still a matter of prayers and patience, being convinced that the Lord will show us what he has in store for us, the seminaries, and the confessional Lutheran churches. There seems to be an urgent need for coordinating the educational efforts in the seminaries all over the world, but this is, and will be, hard work, too, to find and develop opportunities in order to improve the confessional Lutheran academic scenario.

There can be no doubt that, as long as we are churches bound to Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions and intend to remain so, we will be aware that effectiveness is not ours but the Holy Spirit’s, through God’s word and the sacraments. It is and will be him who creates, preserves, and strengthens faith and brings people from all races, cultures, social groups, societies, and nations to salvation. For we are convinced of and dedicated to the fact that the “church which we believe in, and which we confess in our Confessions, is not a sect with the Concordia as its club statue, but the *Una Sancta*, in which we live.”⁸⁸

Thank you for your attention.

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⁸⁷ Jeffrey Silcock, “Martin Luther—One Confession—Multicultural: Australian Perspectives” (lecture, Lutherische Theologische Hochschule, symposium on “Luther—Uni-confessional—Multicultural,” Oberursel, Germany, November 2015). Oswald Bayer has made a special contribution to the understanding of the rule by arguing that the key term in the formula is *tentatio* and that the *oratio* and *meditatio* have to be seen within that context. This is because, he would say, our praying as well as our meditating on Scripture can never be divorced from spiritual attack (*tentatio*) where Satan causes us to doubt that our prayers will be heard or that we can rely on the certainty of God’s promise. For a full explanation of the rule, see Oswald Bayer, *Theology the Lutheran Way*, ed. and trans. Jeffrey G. Silcock and Mark C. Mattes, Lutheran Quarterly Books (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 33–65. See also John Kleinig, “Oratio, Meditatio, Tentatio: What Makes a Theologian?” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 66, no. 3 (2002): 255–67.

⁸⁸ Hermann Sasse, “Geleitwort des Verfasser,” in *In Statu Confessionis*, ed. Friedrich Wilhelm Hopf (Berlin-Hamburg: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1966), 1: 10.