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Wholeness — Oneness

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Perhaps we have "a thing" going in our church. In a memorable convention in Detroit four years ago our church acted in a most distinctive way. Aside from several bold administrative decisions, such as recognizing the autonomy of developing national churches overseas and creating a unified Board for Missions, our church collectively penned and proclaimed the total mission of the church in six brief resolutions and then summarized them in six concise but meaningful statements. We called them the Affirmations on God's Mission.

"The thing" we seem to have going began to develop soon after the Detroit convention. People and pastors began to say that it was a convention devoted to mission. We adopted the Mission Affirmations! Praise God! But not too many repeated the six concise statements. Fewer still studied the resolutions. Still fewer took a look at the Scriptural reference study. Still fewer made them the object of serious personal study. The "thing" is that the phrase or title "Mission Affirmations" caught on and was used by many, but relatively few have caught their full significance. The result is that the message they bring has not entered the bloodstream of the church.

Perhaps it does take time to make them an integral part of that inner motivation which shapes the life and activity of both congregation and church body. Given the

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truth of that thought, then all who are in one way or another leaders of the church must consciously, deliberately keep the affirmations before our minds, lay them on our hearts, and call them to the attention of God's people often. Perhaps it does take longer for seed to take root in some soil. But planting and nurturing are a constant necessity.

That's the purpose of this article. We want to add to the growing storehouse of material available to help the people of God absorb the full significance of those decisive resolutions passed at Detroit. Some brief comments on each of the six affirmations will follow and then some thoughts on the ultimate purpose of God's mission.

I

"The Church Is God's Mission!" That's a daring challenge and a bold claim. It ought to be repeated often. For in this day of emphasis on planning, the church has become goal-conscious and method-conscious. The Founder of the church, its Author and Head, demands a hearing in such goal-setting meetings.

It is so easy and natural (or vice versa) for members of a congregation to give first, and sometimes even only, consideration to the physical and spiritual well-being of the congregation, forgetting its reach toward others. Self-preservation results! Soon the thought of mission erodes and a church exists for itself as just another institution. Because the human factor is so strong, we need the constant reminder

that God has fixed the goals. He has provided the means. He has called us to His task. He has challenged our response. He has sent us to fulfill His mission.

"The Church Is Christ's Mission to the *Whole* World!" No doubt this affirmation is the most readily and most widely acceptable. "Go into all the world" has been the theme of countless mission festivals and mission sermons.

Perhaps because preachers have said it and congregations have heard it, so many get a feeling that it is really happening. In fact, we know so little about the people of our world. Increasing populations, especially in areas least able to sustain the increase, developing spirits of freedom which show themselves in a supernaturalism, growing differences between "the have and the have not" nations, and the sometimes revolutionary implications of the third world — all combine to make it a complicated world.

A church with missionaries in less than 20 percent of the countries of the world (and for lack of resource and personnel much of this activity is only "surface-scratching") can hardly think of itself as being in mission to the whole world. "How can our witness to the world be extended or expanded?" That is a legitimate question for discussion anywhere in the church.

"The Church Is Christ's Mission to the Church!" Obviously a look at the world in which we live reveals that ours is not the only Christian church. To be Christ's mission to the whole world would seem to demand by the very nature or substance of the command a relationship of some kind to all of the other existing Christian churches.

Isolation or separation are not the means

by which the church may be Christ's mission to the church. Nor is it achieved when comity agreements are hammered out between Lutherans or between Christian denominations. Recognizing the existence of differences, it becomes the responsibility of the churches to get acquainted with one another's theology. Simple meetings on an inter-Lutheran or interdenominational basis are not enough, nor is it sufficient to speak at such meetings; it is of paramount importance to listen and to think in such conclaves. Only by dint of hard work and by crucial negotiations can areas be identified in which work may be done jointly. Strengthening and encouraging one another may enable the church to be Christ's mission to the church and help it ultimately in its responsibility to the whole world.

"The Church Is Christ's Mission to the *Whole* Society!" As The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod responds to this affirmation, we show our inexperience. We have been willing to admit our responsibility to be in mission to people in the various levels of society.

Apparently, however, it is difficult for us to reach across the boundaries within our society to persons of other races, cultures, backgrounds, or economic levels. Much less do we think of ourselves as being in mission to the very structures of society. God has established the various orders of society for man's good. To be His Son's disciples and to live in His world demands of us a deep concern for the total welfare of all in a community. It is not an easy assignment, but the work of God in our world is never really easy or simple. An awareness of life as it must be lived by some, an alertness to possible ways and

means of improving such life, and a love for our fellowman, whatever his origins, are basic to fulfilling Christ's mission to the whole society.

"The Church Is Christ's Mission to the Whole Man!" For too long we have been content to speak of man's spiritual and physical needs as though they were unrelated, as though man could be divided. Man's wholeness and his oneness have been set by the Creator Himself. Take any part away, and the man ceases to exist. The church must so think of man, be concerned about his total welfare, and thus speak and live and serve. Even as did Jesus Christ! While we make studies of Jesus' life and death and resurrection, the full meaning and import of that life cannot be fully described in any one part of it. He and His life were a unit, a total speaking and living the kingdom of God.

"The *Whole* Church is Christ's Mission." All of us are in together. Equally responsible for fulfilling our task! There are tasks to be done individually or corporately in a congregation, or together in a church body, and there are also those which can and must be done on an interchurch basis. The *tie* that binds the church into one reaches out for one another in order that they may constantly reach out to all of God's people.

II

Six affirmations were adopted. Each one is worthy of careful and separate study, but it must always be remembered that not one individually but all six together constitute the mission of God and the church. One word used four times in the affirmations may keep us aware of that. Christ's mission to the *whole* world, to the *whole*

society, and to the *whole* man on the part of the *whole* church!

As used in that sentence, the word "whole" means entire or complete. But the dictionary suggests that the first and primary meaning of "whole" includes the concept of healing, or wholeness, of soundness. In this sense the word means "sound and healthy, or restored to soundness and health." Understood in this fashion, the use of the word in the affirmations may be regarded as a subtle reminder of the total mission: to bring soundness to a world fractured by evil; to bring healing to a people sick with the virus of sin; to restore a fellowship between God and man which had been shattered by man's rebellious spirit; to bring a new fullness, a new completeness, a new wholeness; to offer in word and deed a healing and a redemption in Christ to the entire world, to all of society, and to the total man. Such wholeness through such healing must be the constant goal of the church, as it is of her Lord.

Healing and wholeness are basic concepts of the Scripture. The evangel of the Old Testament contains the words: "By whose stripes we are healed." That thought is echoed by Peter in the New Testament: "He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By His wounds you have been healed." Any number of words have been used to convey the fruits of Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection. Each one of them has its own shade of meaning and adds a new dimension to the divine mystery. In this day of broken relationships, of fracturing and segmenting, of disruption and separation, it may be well

to emphasize the word "healing" to describe the work of our Lord Jesus Christ.

When man shattered the fellowship which God had built into his creation, his entire life and the entire life of the human race was affected. His outlook, his emotions, his personality, his thought process, all were affected, or perhaps more descriptively, infected. Truly fractured, broken, bruised! An illness, a disease, a virus had taken control. Man, willing to destroy his relationship to God, would not hesitate to fracture, to bruise, to infect the relationships with his fellowman. Some of the fragmentation of the human relationship in this light betrays its evil character.

The wonder of Christ's work, the patient endurance of God's own Son, the willingness to suffer all the results of all of the wounds of such brokenness, though He did not create them, is cause to think of our Lord as the Great Physician. Not simply because He provides a physical healing from a particular sickness, but because He heals the whole man by His suffering and death and resurrection. It is a thought which deserves further concentration and exploration by every pastor in his study, by discussions at pastoral gatherings, and by enlightening sermons from the pulpits. Such emphasis could polish another facet of our Lord's redemption and deepen our appreciation of the work of Christ and the mission which confronts the church in today's world.

If boundaries, separations, ghettos, gaps, fragmentation, isolation are characteristic of our age, what finer role for the church in following through on its mission than to proclaim and live healing and wholeness in and through Christ. As it is proclaimed and lived, as the message is heard and

believed, as mankind lives in its new relationship to God and mends its relationship to fellowman, there will grow out of this new wholeness a oneness. The progression is undeniable and unmistakable. Christ prayed for it. Paul revealed unity and oneness as part of God's eternal plan.

III

It is surely in place for a Christian, a Christian congregation, or a Christian church body to set as a conscious and deliberate goal to be committed to the healing and unity of the human race in, with, and through the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Wholeness and oneness are challenging goals.

Let no one minimize the difficulty of pursuing these goals, nor reduce their scope. Think of the difficulty and the tremendous price paid to achieve the redemption, the ingredients of healing the broken relationship between God and man. Only one side of that relationship was infected, and on the other side was the perfect Lord! To proclaim that healing in the most effective, "hearable and understandable" way requires a knowledge of the healing process in Christ and of the human illness.

Then to live that healing process, to desire and work for the healing between people, can be doubly difficult. For both sides of this broken relationship are and can remain hostile. Even the Christian so involved can still slip under the pressure of his own sinful self. How are the wounds and fractures between people healed? How are unities developed and wholeness fostered? One answer alone — only as God's people, engaged in this mission of God and

motivated by His love, speak and live the life of healing in Christ.

The difficulty of achieving oneness among Christians, let alone the problem of accomplishing it among Lutherans, casts its own shadow of doubt over the possibility and the willingness of Christians and the churches to proclaim and live the ministry of healing in the world.

A great deal of attention, time, and effort is being used to foster ecumenicity on a variety of levels. Much of it is evidently worthwhile, especially when the goal of the effort is related to the thought of Christ's prayer "that the world may know that Thou hast sent Me and hast loved them even as Thou hast loved Me." A ministry of healing within the church is a necessity for the sake of the committed and for the sake of our stance and attitude toward the world.

But it must be mentioned that we have reached the point of saying "both and" again. Occasionally ecumenical dialogs consume such an inordinate amount of time that the far deeper divisions within the human family receive less attention from the church than they deserve. Healing and unity *in Christ* are His goals for all mankind. Building the bridges or filling the chasms or breaking down the walls or crossing the boundaries, in whatever way one chooses to express it, must be high on the church's agenda. But the principles and purposes are set by Christ Himself. It is His mission.

How difficult the Christian's role is may be apparent from two examples, both pressing issues today. The black man, especially in the United States, has moved progressively along the pathway of self-identification. To continue this emphasis

on his own dignity, he speaks of black history, black culture, black contributions to the development of our world. So overriding can this emphasis become that some see separation as the best goal and that Christ may be designated the "white man's" God.

While it may be necessary for the sake of dignity for all in the family of man to give emphasis to individual cultures, histories, and ancestries, yet the ultimate goal must be the healing of the breaches through Christ, who is the Savior of all, and the unity of all in Him by whom and for whom all were created. To be aware of the needs of man and the goals of Christ's mission, to stand at the point of friction, and to understand and communicate describes the church's quandry, responsibility, and opportunity.

A second example centers in the renewed emphasis on the integrity and self-determination of each nation. A new kind of national emphasis is being made everywhere. Nations demand their place in the sun, their right to be involved in the decision process of the family of nations. Part of this process is the development of national churches. It may become more and more difficult to work in other lands as missionaries in the traditional sense, and it may become more difficult at times to respect the integrity of national churches (especially if they are subsidized and some of their decisions may not be wholly acceptable to the church here in the United States).

The need of national independence must be recognized, and the responsibility of a developing national church must be accepted as part of our thinking. But the division cannot become divisive. At this

point the church must be willing to stand and communicate its healing message in Christ and do all, even suffer, to hold out the goal of fellowship and oneness in Christ and partnership in His mission. How difficult!

The world is full of tensions caused by so many divisive factors. In this kind of world it may be especially meaningful for understanding the mission to view Christ

as the Great Physician, to think of His sacrifice as providing the ultimate ingredient and base for healing, to see the mission as the mending of the shattered relationship between man and his God and man and his fellowman, and to see the role of the church as being God's mission to bring wholeness and oneness into a fragmented world.

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