

For the

LIFE of the WORLD

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To be a chaplain means to know the joys and sorrows, the pleasures and suffering, the courage and fears of warriors. If they are deployed to a forward position, he is deployed with them. If they face imminent attack, he faces it with them. If their lives are in danger, his life is in danger. To a chaplain who truly serves Christ, there is no being "in the rear with the gear." Where his people are, there he must be. Why? Christ must be there with them.

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Featuring the Rev. Brian Hamer, Pastor at Christ the King Lutheran Church, Riverview, Fla.

Cover Photo: Rev Pavel Zayakin (with deacon's stole) conducting the Lutheran liturgy on St. John the Baptist Day in a cemetery in the village of Verkhni Suetuk, East Siberia. Assisting is Seminarian Alexey Vinogradov (black robe) who attends Lutheran Theological Seminary in Novosibirsk.



LUTHERAN MISSIONARY EDUCATION:

Some Thoughts on Integrating Our Tradition.

Rev. Dr. Detlev Schulz

No student who enters the seminary is ever regarded a lone individual. As a believer, he does not stand in solitude and shut off with his faith like a single tree in an open field struggling to withstand strong, blowing winds. He has not been entrusted with a faith “all alone” like the pioneers of faith—Abraham, Paul, or Luther. It is also unlikely that he possesses their faith heroism. He needs help and support. This is offered to him in a community where his faith is nurtured, strengthened, and guided. It is to the student an encouraging thought to be able to raise the banner of his faith together with “the cloud of witnesses” and have written on it the confession of his church.

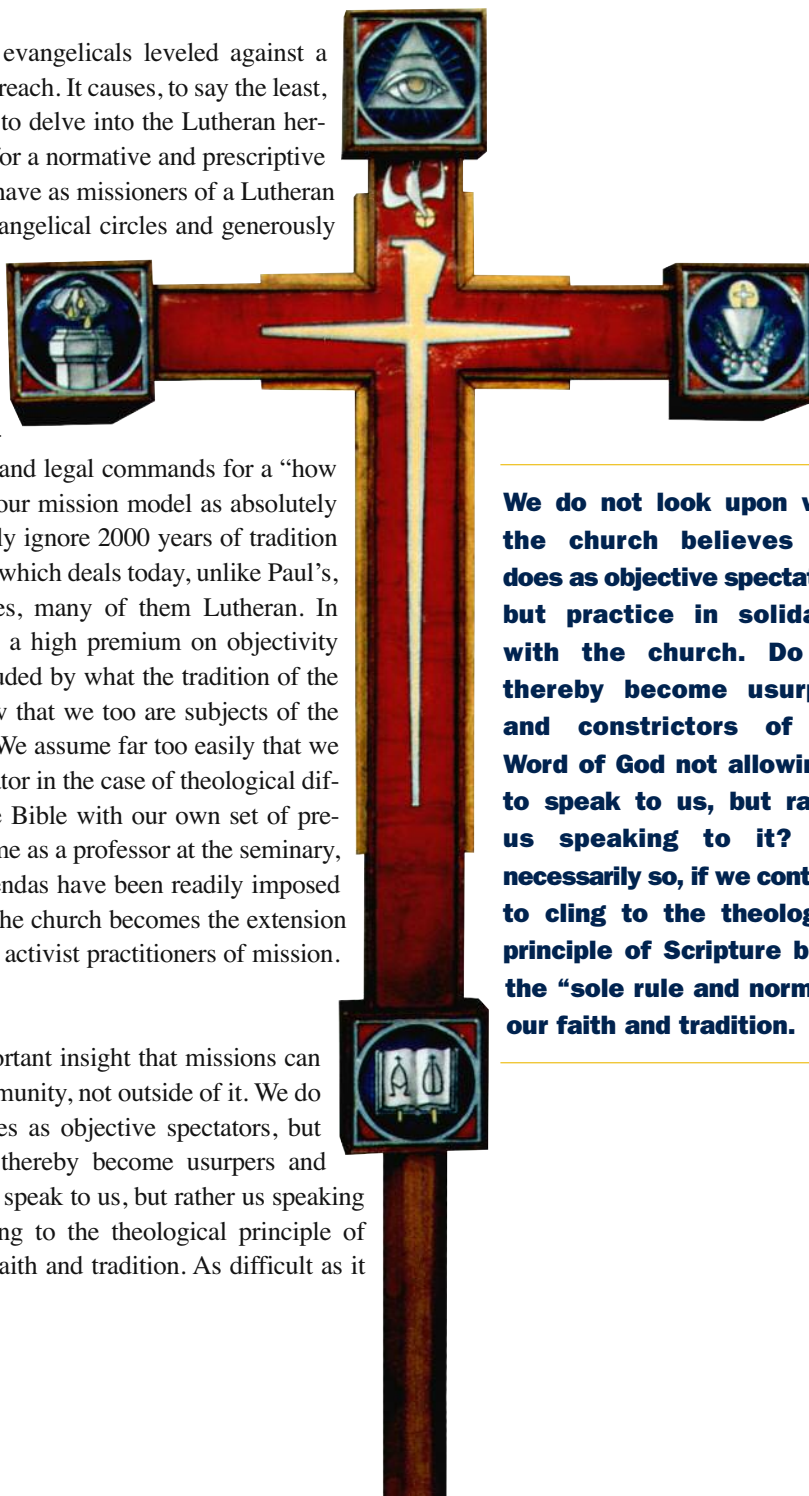
Stating the Problem: Scripture - Church Tradition - and Missional Context

The above raises a sensitive issue which is, unfortunately, no longer just a given and, therefore, worthy of clarification. Teaching missions at Concordia Theological Seminary is no easy task because the student is not only instructed in the Bible and the missional context but also in our church tradition. Clearly, what our church believes and confesses is placed as a link between Scriptures and the mission setting to which the student will eventually be called. The downside of juxtaposing the tradition of the church is, as one is often told, the apparent loss of the normativity of Scripture for the missional context. Tradition interprets Scripture. It authorizes and structures mission according to what it finds as the mission agenda in Scripture. Church tradition mediates and filters what Scripture says, and thereby Scripture loses much of its dynamic and direct impact on the missional context.

This is indeed a popular argument amongst evangelicals leveled against a particular denominational approach to mission outreach. It causes, to say the least, no small headache for a missiologist who braves to delve into the Lutheran heritage such as the Confessions and integrate them for a normative and prescriptive missiology of today. But what alternatives do we have as missionaries of a Lutheran church? We could join in with these prevalent evangelical circles and generously leap over the tradition of the church into today's context. We could treat Scripture as a mission handbook containing a collection of conspicuous texts such as Matthew 28:19-20 and Acts 14:21-25, which we pluck out and transfer in a proof, text-like fashion into the present missional context, and in doing so, have them serve as models and legal commands for a "how to" in doing mission. Thereby, we could declare our mission model as absolutely normative for mission today. We could deliberately ignore 2000 years of tradition and mission history, as well as a changed context, which deals today, unlike Paul's, with a worldwide network of Christian churches, many of them Lutheran. In graciously leaping tradition, we could also place a high premium on objectivity because our understanding is not impaired or clouded by what the tradition of the church teaches. Little, however, do we then know that we too are subjects of the valid yet disturbing invective of postmodernism. We assume far too easily that we can employ the Bible as a kind of objective arbitrator in the case of theological differences, not realizing that all of us approach the Bible with our own set of pre-conceived ideas about what it says. In my short time as a professor at the seminary, I have discovered that far too often particular agendas have been readily imposed onto Scripture with the result that the mission of the church becomes the extension not of the Lutheran church, but of a select club of activist practitioners of mission.

The Solution?!

We are unarguably dealing here with the important insight that missions can only be done within the faith of the Lutheran community, not outside of it. We do not look upon what the church believes and does as objective spectators, but practice in solidarity with the church. Do we thereby become usurpers and constrictors of the Word of God not allowing it to speak to us, but rather us speaking to it? Not necessarily so, if we continue to cling to the theological principle of Scripture being the "sole rule and norm" of our faith and tradition. As difficult as it



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seems, one missiologist's call remains pertinent that "the church must in every generation be ready to bring its tradition afresh under the light of the Word of God." We are exploring the nature and content of the church's mission and then inquire whether this ecclesiastical practice reflects the Word of God. This implies that we are more looking upon what the mission of the church ought to be like rather than what it is. In this way, reminiscing the value of the Lutheran Confessions and seeking their assistance for missions, we perceive them to be nothing than a call to the Word of God, which they interpret and from which they receive all its authority. In so doing, the Confession's value comes to the fore reminding us of the true content of Scripture and where the theological accents in Scripture themselves are placed. A deliberate act of avoiding the Confessions surmounts to nothing other than buying into the tragedy of all those movements of enthusiasts (*Schwaermertum*) who without a clear statement of their confession could not discern between the true and false interpretation of Scripture.



Our tradition helps us to get away from finding a few proof-texts or isolated nuggets in the Bible to buttress our missional agendas. Rather we seek to establish the entirety and richness of the Scriptural evidence both thematically and textually. We hold with Luther that our great faith heroes of the Old Testament bore witness to their faith within their alien surrounding.

Discovering the Rich Biblical Missional Potential Through the Confessions

What value exactly do we find for our mission from the community of faith in and around the Confessions? Besides regarding them as a call to Scripture they also give us important themes as they are contained in the Word of God: The triune God, the centrality of Christ, the righteousness bestowed to us through faith in Christ, the Word of God and the Sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion as God's instruments and their administration through the office of the church, and finally, the communion of believers which approach the second coming of Christ, but which in the interim period rejoices in the right administration of the Sacraments and the pure preaching of His Word. We are reminded of mission as being a gift of God and not just a work of man. God freely bestows His gift of salvation through His Word. Being a mission in the spirit of the Reformation, we triumph over the discovery of the Gospel. As the power of God, we attribute to it everything and not to ourselves (Romans 1:17). It is a comforting thought in this age of extreme activism to think with Luther and with Paul that "all over the world this Gospel is bearing fruit and growing" (Colossians 1:6).

A return to the Reformation is indeed a call for us in missions to approach Scripture not only as a handbook of disjointed mission texts, but indeed as the invaluable theological source of mission themes permeating and going beyond all its conspicuous texts on missions. Applying them will, admittedly, make the church's mission not only Scriptural but also Lutheran. In this way, as Hermann Sasse once observed, "a return to the Confessions, if one takes them seriously, is no repristination, no romantic attempt to resuscitate a past which is long considered dead" but a reaffirmation of one's own missionary identity.

Our tradition helps us to get away from finding a few proof-texts or isolated nuggets in the Bible to buttress our missional agendas. Rather we seek to establish the entirety and richness of the Scriptural evidence both thematically and textually. We hold with Luther that our great faith heroes of the Old Testament bore witness to their faith within their alien surrounding. We see in the commission of John 20:21 not the glorious and exulted Christ, but one who has His wounds openly displayed (verse 20) and touched (verse 27). We are doing missions under Christ crucified and reminding ourselves of His wounds. Then we, too, are able to come to better terms with setbacks, downfalls, and disappointments in our mission. All in all, in our mission we want to know none other than Christ crucified. In Scripture we see the church struggling as the first missionary outreaches were made. But through the guidance of the Triune God, the church triumphs and becomes the hallmark of salvation in the history of mankind. Moreover, in our pursuit of seeking a Scriptural and Lutheran character of missions, we are willing to place missiology within the disciplines of theology; much in contrast, one might add, to contemporary approaches which make cultural anthropology missiology's standing room.

The 19th Century Lutheran Community of Faith: Mission - Church - Confession

As much as the Reformation reminds us to look at missions as a gift of God directed towards us, we also become bearers of this gift to others. What can we learn from history for the operation of our mission? The mid-nineteenth century was a time of great formation for Lutheran missions under personalities such as Wilhelm Loehe, Friedrich Brunn, and Ludwig Harms. Through their continual theological encouragement and support with innumerable pastors, the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS) was born. Mission was for the first time done by Evangelical-Lutheran churches, rather than some nondescript evangelical church or an undefined society working under the banner of the kingdom of God alone. Here Lutherans became once more conscious of their distinctive confessional identity within the union of Christian churches. In this movement, the Lutheran Confessions were once more eagerly appropriated as historic testimonies to Biblical truth. Hallmarks of this community became confessional purity and exclusive church fellowship, the celebration of the Baptism and the Lord's Supper, as well as the discovery of the missionary nature of the office of the church. The missionary support through preachers and pastors from Europe had imprinted upon the LCMS the strategy of reaching out through Word and Sacrament, of upholding the Confessions and integrating them into the missionary message and service, as well as seeing the validity of the ordained ministry in missions. "We must bring them the office with its Word and Sacrament," the young missionary candidates were told when going to the United States and other countries.

Missionary Formation of Every Student.

The years at the seminary are for every student formative in Scripture and our Lutheran tradition. They must be charged with Paul's words to Timothy to continue in the things they have learned and "preach the Word! . . . convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine"(II Timothy 4:2, 3). This is particularly true as the students are facing a changing missional context. A noticeable shift has taken place in the last decades. Through the increasing secularization of our society and the influx of immigrants, the United States has become a mission continent. All congregations find themselves in an immediate mission setting. Due to the rise in affluence, congregations and laity wish to be actively placed in the loop of missions at home and overseas as well. Our students, it seems, will not be asked to serve as professional ministers geared towards upkeep, but as missionary pastors commissioned by their members towards outreach. Our Biblical and confessional foundation hopes to prepare them for such a ministry. Sadly though, with the increased mobilization of laity for missions on short-term mission projects, the recruitment at the seminary for ordained servants of the Word on the mission field has dropped substantially; a significant shift, indeed, from the age of the Reformation and the 19th century paradigm of Lutheran mission outreach.

Responding to Incoming Calls from Macedonia

We must again fervently embrace mission principles from Scripture and our past tradition, the Confessions. There is a sense of urgency in this, particularly in view of the incoming Macedonian calls (Acts 16:9-10) from Lutheran churches worldwide seeking guidance and assistance in mapping out their Lutheran identity against the all-embracing "unity in diversity" principle of the Lutheran World Federation. A large representation of international students is also seeking Lutheran formation on our campus. We are indeed blessed in a time of immense mission opportunities far and near. Teaching missions at the seminary as proposed above will hopefully make a modest contribution towards the promotion of worldwide Lutheranism.

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