

# CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY

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"The Log in Your Own Eye"

PAUL G. BRETSCHER

Lutheran Conditions for Communion in  
Holy Things

ROBERT W. JENSON

Homiletics

Book Review



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# Editorial ✠

## “Structure and Mission”

On Friday, Sept. 22, Dr. Martin Luther Kretzmann was notified by the Board for Missions of The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod that his services would not be required after Dec. 20, 1972. This action came as a personal shock to Dr. Kretzmann and to us, although it was not entirely unexpected. We are concerned for Dr. Kretzmann and are happy to hear that the Commission on Mission and Ministry in the Church has been authorized by the Board of Directors to engage Dr. Kretzmann as full-time executive secretary when his term with the Board for Missions ends. But we are also concerned about what his dismissal may mean for the Synod's understanding of the nature of God's mission and of the proper relationship between institutional and mission functions.

During his 30-year tenure in India Dr. Kretzmann saw that the Synod's execution of its mission was often hampered by too heavy a concern for institutional structures and practices and for the preservation of pure doctrine, as defined in the tradition of the Synod. The Biblical directives concerning God's mission were misunderstood and misapplied. Institution was often emphasized over mission.

He combated this skewing of priorities on the field with great vigor and with a large measure of support and help from fellow missionaries of the Synod. But he did not escape opposition and criticism, both there and at home. Then in 1963 the Board of Directors of the LCMS authorized a mission self-study and survey and invited Dr. Kretzmann to serve as study director. Some in the Synod understood that institutional concerns at home also obscured our understanding of the mission of the church. After 2 years of study Dr. Kretzmann produced a careful analysis of Biblical, theological, and historical materials that were then capsuled into six Mission Affirmations.

In crisp, clear language the affirmations spelled out the Biblical understanding of mission:

“The church is God's mission.”

“The church is Christ's mission to the whole world.”

“The church is Christ's mission to the church.”

“The church is Christ's mission to the whole society.”

“The church is Christ's mission to the whole man.”

“The whole church is Christ's mission.”

These Affirmations and the study materials were presented by the Board of Directors to the delegate Synod at Detroit in July 1965 and were enthusiastically and overwhelmingly adopted. At the same convention a unified Board for Missions was created to coordinate and facilitate a better execution of the mission. At the same time the Commission on Mission and Ministry in the Church was established to aid the boards and agencies of the Synod to work in conformity with the Mission Affirmations. Without

becoming overly dramatic we can say that a new era was dawning, and Dr. Kretzmann was one of the chief architects. He was employed by the Board of Directors to speed the implementation of the Affirmations, and then was employed by the new Board for Missions beginning in 1966.

While these Affirmations seek to accomplish many things, one thing they do with special force is to concentrate on an issue which is again before the LCMS, namely that of the proper relationship between institution and mission. Some seem to stress synodical identity over mission, while others may do the opposite. The Mission Affirmations say that neither eventuality is possible when the Biblical understanding of mission is kept in the center of our thinking. But today there is strong pressure in the Synod to put institutional identity and a certain kind of institutional perpetuation above mission concerns. For example, it is argued that since unity depends on truth, the defense of truth according to one traditional understanding of it is a concern that is prior to and more important than the pursuit of mission and unity.

Dr. Kretzmann was a quiet reformer, but now the movement that he was involved in inaugurating may have received a setback in his unexplained dismissal. Surely one can surmise that some of the votes cast against him were prompted by basic disagreement with his theological convictions. Thus his name is added to that of distinguished leaders of the Synod who have been dismissed from key posts in which they wielded great theological influence. Can we hope that the Board for Missions may reconsider its action and thus allay our fears concerning the future of the Affirmations?

We are informed that efforts will be made at the New Orleans convention to adopt new statements on the mission of the church. We hope that if such documents are prepared they will build on the excellent principles contained in the Mission Affirmations, expanding and clarifying them where necessary but in no way seeking to limit or emasculate them. We believe that any attempt to reverse the thrust of the Affirmations and to lead the Synod into some far corner of the world's pasture will be quickly rejected by the majority of delegates. We believe that in communities all across the nation, as well as in foreign lands, the correctness and the wisdom of the Mission Affirmations have been repeatedly proved in the daily experience of hundreds and thousands of Lutheran people. The lay people we know are committed to mission, unity, and to synodical preservation, and they know that they can pursue these goals without sacrificing the purity of the Gospel proclamation — indeed, that only by pursuing these goals do they demonstrate why the Gospel needs to be pure in the first place.

HERBERT T. MAYER