

A photograph of four men in clerical attire standing outdoors. The man on the far left is wearing a dark pinstripe suit, a light blue shirt, and a green patterned tie. The man next to him is wearing a dark suit and glasses. The man in the center is wearing a dark suit and glasses. The man on the far right is wearing a dark suit and glasses. They are all looking towards the right. The background is a blurred green landscape.

# For the Life of the World

## Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne

November 2008, Volume Twelve, Number Four



### **The Gospel, Lutheran Missions, and the Paradox of the Far East**

By Rev. Dr. Daniel N. Harmelink

### **The Struggle of Lutheran Identity in Africa**

By Rev. Dr. Timothy C. J. Quill

### **Faith through God's Mercy**

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# The Struggle of Lutheran Identity in Africa

By Rev. Dr. Timothy C. J. Quill

**The Lutheran Church has precious theological traditions and confessions to mine from when communicating the Gospel in Africa. Lutherans should remember that the theology of the cross is the solid foundation for understanding the Gospel.**

It is a joy to spend time with pastors, missionaries, and professors from around the world who share a common passion for Lutheran theology and Lutheran missions. For the past eight years, Concordia Theological Seminary (CTS) has organized theological conferences in Lithuania, Latvia, and Germany that brought together participants from the former Soviet Union, Europe, and Scandinavia.

On August 19–22, CTS jointly organized its first theological conference with Lutheran Theological Seminary in Pretoria, South Africa. Forty-six bishops, pastors, professors, and missionaries from South Africa, Botswana, Madagascar, Mozambique, Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda, Ghana, Germany, and the United States came together for four days to grapple with the issues related to the theme “The Struggle of Lutheran Identity in Africa: What Is African Lutheranism?”

Influences from liberal European theology, American Evangelicalism, Pentecostalism, and indigenous movements pose a serious challenge to the “emerging” Lutheran churches that are struggling to establish authentic Lutheranism in Africa. The purpose of the conference was to strengthen the understanding of confessional Lutheran doctrine and practice in Africa.

Most of the interaction between the African Lutheran churches takes place on



the level of its leaders, bishops, presidents, and seminary professors. The International Lutheran Council regularly organizes such meetings, which play an important role in fostering church relations among Lutherans. What was different about the South African conference is that it provided an opportunity for church leaders, theologians, and professors to meet with parish pastors and missionaries to learn, study, converse, and reflect on issues facing Lutherans in Africa in both a formal and informal collegial setting.

Many speakers emphasized the need for quality theological education. Rev. Radikobo Ntsimane compared the formation of Lutheran pastors in universities versus denominational seminaries. Ntsimane argues that Africans must be given the best education possible and this includes taking advantage of state universities. Nevertheless, “While the universities are flexible in preparing pastors or theologians to deal with current and contextual issues, they cannot be trusted to prepare Lutheran pastors, let alone confessional Lutheran pastors. They were simply not designed for that.”

Dr. Wilhelm Weber made the same point in his presentation on “Training Pastors in Africa Using the *Book of Concord*.” Weber explained, “Lutherans have played a significant role wherever theology was taken seriously. Lutherans in Africa are no exception. They take theology seriously. They want their pastors, teachers, and bishops to be well trained and equipped to be competent as confessional theologians. For Lutheran missions to establish genuine Lutheran churches on this continent that are Lutheran in name only, it will require advanced theological study programs. This goal requires a lot of profound research, intensive contextual studies, and the ongoing discourse of confessionally sound Lutheran theology as promoted by seminaries. This is not a short-term or quick-fix issue, but rather necessitates a long-term commitment by the Lutheran Church in Africa and globally.” Weber argues for the use of the *Book of Concord* in the training of pastors at African seminaries. Only then will “The Lutheran Church continue to be vibrant

and sustainable. Theological expertise is not just a luxury but a necessity if the church is to survive and prosper in Africa.”

Another development affecting Lutherans in Africa is the emergence of new independent churches. Prof. Sibongiseni E. Sithole delivered a paper titled, “African Independent Churches (AIC): Is Their Success a Fruit of the Gospel? Are They a Model for Us Lutherans?” Key features of these churches include an emphasis on the Holy Spirit, healing and emotional worship that includes African ingredients such as dancing, clapping hands, beating drums, and the like. Sithole observed, “It creates emotionalism as a sign of the manifestation of the power of the Holy Spirit.” The content or theological meaning of the music is not a priority for many AICs. “What matters is that music should make the worship service lively as an expression of feeling the presence of the Holy Spirit. Part of the reason for the growth of AICs may be that they have succeeded where western founded churches often failed—to provide a contextualized Christianity in Africa.” Sithole, however, urged the participants to contextualize the Gospel in a Lutheran way. “The Lutheran Church has precious theological traditions and confessions to mine from when communicating the Gospel in Africa. Lutherans should remember that the theology of the cross is the solid foundation for understanding the Gospel rather than the theology of glory. The Mandinka proverb says, ‘A bird is in the air but its mind is on the ground.’ This means that wherever you are, it is important to remember where you come from. We should remember that as Lutherans we share no common ground with AICs in regard to doctrinal matters or understanding of the Gospel. What Lutherans do in ministry should be centered on the Scriptures and Confessions. These should dictate the Lutheran mission strategies in Africa rather than adopting AICs methods. The Lutheran Church in Africa should bear in mind that praxis is not neutral.”

Dr. Timothy Quill addressed similar issues of contextualization in his presentation on “The Lutheran Liturgy and Culture.” He asked the participants,

“What should Lutheran worship look like in Africa?” “What the liturgy looks like in different African Lutheran Churches should and will be decided by the Africans themselves. This requires African scholars, pastors, evangelists, and musicians who are thoroughly trained in liturgical theology, history, and practice. Such training is also critical in order that Lutherans in Africa are able to recognize theological influences from the West which are inconsistent with and detrimental to faith and practice. Africans will also benefit from a study of the liturgical development in the early church beginning with its biblical, Jewish, and apostolic roots. The study should also include worship in the early church—north, east, and south of the Mediterranean and then include the liturgical contributions of the sixteenth century Reformation liturgical reforms, nineteenth century confessional Lutheran liturgical restoration, and the contributions to the Lutheran liturgy and hymnody in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The task of liturgical inculturation must be undertaken carefully and thoughtfully. It must not be done in a vacuum disconnected from the church catholic. Local African and American churches that ignore the theological struggles and contributions of

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the Christian Church over the past two thousand years do so at their own peril and impoverishment.”

Quill noted, “The decision expressed in the Augsburg Confession, Art. 24, to retain the historic liturgy along with its ceremony and vestments and conducted with even greater devotion and the greatest reverence was made for theological reasons. Lutheran missions and evangelism lead to Lutheran churches. Lutheran churches are liturgical churches for theological reasons. Doctrine and practice cannot be separated. Lutheran practice reflects, teaches, confesses, and lives out Lutheran doctrine. This was true at Augsburg in the sixteenth century and it remains true today in Kenya, Ethiopia, Tanzania, South Africa, Madagascar, Nigeria, Togo, and Ghana.”


Dr. Klaus Detlev Schulz of Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne addressed the “Catholicity and Locality of the Gospel.” He concluded, “The debate between the universal catholic aspects of the Gospel and their accommodation into a locality will remain an ongoing one. However, that dialogue may not be the end itself. It must move beyond the question of contextualization and accommodation and affirm the spiritual or divine reality of the Gospel and the sacraments. Catholicity points to God’s work beyond the whimsical manipulation or rejections

of the Gospel by us humans. In other words, as we debate the complex relationship of communicating the Gospel, we may not lose sight that the divine author behind it all is God Himself. God breaks into this world and seeks out man in his rebellious state and changes what He confronts. The hermeneutical concept that affirms this process is that of transformation. All churches in their localities must seek out the goal to transform their members and newcomers. As transformation was brought into the lives of those confronted by Christ, so too it continues with the preaching of the Gospel today. The catholic Gospel calls all people to repentance, faith, and Baptism. Just as no people, no nations, can escape the effects of a globalized economy, so also the unbelieving world and communities cannot escape these universal realities of the Gospel.”

Dr. Anssi Simojoki began his presentation on “The Lutheran Confessions and Missions” with the observation, “There are tens of millions of Lutherans in the world. Bearing this honourable name of ‘Lutheran’ should also require that we clearly know what it means to be Lutheran, a Lutheran church, a Lutheran Christian, a Lutheran pastor, a Lutheran missionary. German Lutheranism, which was theologically oriented in the period between the two great wars, was silenced for a long time after World War II. American Lutherans coming from the victorious side of the war were more interested in so-called practical than theological questions. In the absence of uncompromised theological reflection, alien ideas and concepts easily conquer our minds with the help of bestselling slogans. Ecumenical missiology, which dominates the World Council of Churches, many traditional main-line churches, and also the Lutheran World Federation, has become a junkyard of missiological slogans: Kingdom of God, shalom-principle, liberation, and so forth. Many Lutherans have responded to this phenomenon by attempting to incorporate as many Lutheran principles as possible into the ecumenical missiological sausage. As we all should know, sausage is a delicacy, which is made of various

leftovers of slaughtered animals, ground, spiced, and then compressed into a bit of intestine or plastic. The Bible does not speak in slogans or watch words. Genuine Lutheranism is a well-integrated doctrinal, theological, and practical totality. All true biblical theology is Christology. Therefore, Lutheran scriptural mission work is nothing less than opening through the Word of God the mysteries of Christology as believed, taught, and confessed in the ecumenical Creeds and the Lutheran Confessions for all in the area of our mission efforts.”

Other engaging presentations included “Church Cooperation, Fellowship, Partnership, and Unity and Augsburg Confession VII,” by Bishop David Tswaedi; “Spiritual and Traditional Beliefs in the Malagasy Lutheran Church Indigenous Lutheran Movement,” by Dr. Joseph Randrianasolo; “The Missiological Impact of the Mpiandry Movement upon Theological Education in the Malagasy Lutheran Church” by Rev. Robert Bennett; “Distance Theological Education Models: Are They Viable: If So, How Will They Work?” by Dr. Paul Mueller.

A refrain heard throughout the conference was the great need and desire among the Africans for serious theological training. Seminaries are seen as crucial to the mission and life of the church. For the past thirteen years, President Dean Wenthe has provided CTS with a missionary focus that is solidly biblically and theologically grounded. It is a beautiful thing to see our professors engaged all over the globe with fellow Lutheran colleagues. They return to Fort Wayne intellectually, theologically, and spiritually invigorated to carry on with their work among our students and in our Synod. 

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