Pietism and the Church Growth Movement in a Confessional Lutheran Perspective

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The Church Growth Movement itself, as far as I have seen, makes no self-conscious reference to historical pietism. But my biases against historical pietism paled in comparison to my reaction to my encounter with church growth materials. The very titles triggered all the alarm bells that warn of a theology of glory. As I surveyed the shelf of church growth materials in the library, the following titles leaped out at me: *I Believe in Church Growth, Body Building Exercises for the Local Church, Our Kind of People,* "How to Build High Morale in Your Church," "How to Find a Pastor Who Fits Your Church...," "How to Find Receptive People," "How to Light a Fire under Your Church Members Without Getting Burned."[1] It seems that faith no longer comes by hearing but by organizing. I admit that there may be a bit of professional jealousy coloring my reaction. It is not that I have never been tempted to sell my inheritance for a snappy book title; it is just that I lack imagination.

But as I began reading about the Church Growth Movement, it became increasingly apparent that there was more to my reaction than professional jealousy. Although there are indications now that church growth theorists may be concerned for developing biblical warrants for their program, the movement itself is notorious for its self-consciously sociological, pragmatic, and a-theological approach to ecclesiology and mission. Donald McGavran, the pioneer of the Church Growth Movement, protests this evaluation. But his very protest sharpens the question of whether ecclesiology is simply correct sociology plus the doctrine of one's choice. In his revised edition of *Understanding Church Growth,* McGavran wrote: "As you set forth church growth theory and theology for your congregations and your denomination use your own creedal statements, your own system. . .Do not attack church growth as theologically inadequate. Make it adequate according to the doctrines emphasized by your branch of the Church. The test as to whether you have done this or not is whether your congregations are stimulated to vibrant grateful growth such as the New Testament churches exemplified."[2] In short, if one's churches grow, one's doctrine cannot be all bad!

We are all familiar with the evaluation of Americans as peculiarly prone to promises of success through techniques. Thus, it is not surprising that the Church Growth Movement has been one of the most influential recent movements in American churches. Luther's remark that we are all born Pelagians had proleptic significance for America.

The popularity of the Church Growth Movement is also not surprising when we stop to consider that the necessity of choice— what Berger calls "the heretical imperative"—is characteristic of modern culture and its religion. Numerous critics have pointed out how our cafeteria culture promotes the dissolution of confessional differences and the development of pragmatic and utilitarian values with respect to religion in order to increase, as it were, shares in the ecclesiastical marketplace.[3] But as James Scherer succinctly points out: "Pragmatism represents a betrayal of the norm of *sola scriptura.* The entire basis, methodology, and goal of mission today must be rethought in faithfulness to the Scriptures, and in light of the current situation."[4]

What is surprising, at least to me, is the account of how popular the Church Growth Movement is among confessional Lutherans. Glenn Huebel, a Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod pastor, in a recent article in the *Concordia Theological Quarterly* wrote: "The [Missouri] Synod has enthusiastically embraced church growth principles. Great numbers of our pastors have been trained at Fuller Theological Seminary in California. Many districts, including my own, are emphasizing and integrating church growth principles. Lyle Schaller has rated the Church Growth Movement as the most influential development of the 1970's. It is becoming a tidal wave in our synod at the present time."[5]

Thus, in this context it may be helpful to consider the Church Growth Movement in the light of a prior renewal movement such as pietism. We may gain some perspective by detaching ourselves from immediate causes. Historical awareness of the context of pietism may provide clues to the appeal, orientation, potential impact, and theological profile of the Church Growth Movement. It seems to me that pietism and the Church Growth Movement are similar in suggesting that Word and Sacrament are *not* sufficient for the church. Each in its own way piously desires something more, some additional mark by which the church may

be "really" evident among us. From this orientation there arise a number of issues which are problematic to Lutheran theology. It is very tempting to attempt to ring all the changes on a theological critique of renewal movements from the perspective of Luther's theology: justification by grace alone through faith alone, sin as being curved in upon the self, faith as confidence in God which comes by hearing, the Christian and the Christian church as simultaneously righteous and sinner, the theology of the cross and the dialectic of Law and Gospel as lived hermeneutics, life between the now and not yet of the kingdom of God, etc. Obviously such an approach would take far more space than is possible here. Thus, I have narrowed my approach to a consideration of the church; but all these other themes are presupposed.

Pietism

Each of the renewal movements we are considering means many things to many people. The understanding of pietism depends upon which "pietist" orientation is perceived as the paradigm for renewal of the church. Those who look to pietists such as Christian Hoburg (1606-1675) and Gottfried Arnold (1666-1714) will find a radical mystical spiritualism which to confessional Lutherans appears as *Schwaermerei*.[6] On the other hand, a focus on the acknowledged "Father of Pietism," Philipp Spener (1635-1705), has prompted some interpreters of pietism to claim that he really contributed nothing new theologically but only summarized the theology of Lutheran orthodoxy.[7] There is not time to review the various interpretations of pietism between these two poles, so I will only refer to F. Ernest Stoeffler's statement that pietism is "one of the least understood movements in the history of Christianity."[8]

Understood or not, however, there is a clear consensus among scholars of pietism that it was "the most significant religious. . .reform movement of Continental Protestantism since the Reformation [and that it] was a movement for the renewal of the church, theology, and piety from the experiential vitality of the Holy Spirit."[9] What is common to pietism throughout its various expressions in Halle, Wuerttemberg, Switzerland, Herrnhut, and elsewhere is the complaint that the church is spiritually impoverished in every respect.[10] Since from the

perspective of early pietism, clergy, parishioners, and polemical confessional theology all lacked the Spirit, t!... urging and expectation of a new, richer, experiential work of the Holy Spirit was common.[11]

What was the context for this loss of congregational and spiritual vitality? The intra- and extra-Lutheran polemical struggles of the late sixteenth century are well known. The orthodox concern for the purification of doctrine was expressed in lengthy discourses not infrequently characterized by dogmatic rigidity and polemical attacks on Lutheran, Catholic, and Calvinist opponents. The theological absolutism of orthodoxy fit in well with the developing political absolutism of the seventeenth century. Church life suffered not only from this dogmatic orientation, but also from the fact that the clergy were perceived as being out of touch with the common life and as serving a government-maintained church. The printed sermons of the time suggest, according to Jaroslav Pelikan, that "the type of preaching to which the people were being exposed was unproductive of religious, spiritual, or ethical power."[12] The orthodox church of Spener's time clearly tied religious, spiritual, and ethical power to the office of the ministry and the institutional church. This fact is graphically illustrated by the title page of the dogmatics text by Spener's orthodox teacher, Johann Conrad Dannhauer. The title page of Dannhauer's *Hodosophia Christiana* (Strasbourg, 1649) depicts an altar upon which is a crucifix, paten, chalice, candlestick, and Bible; behind the altar is a clerically robed Lutheran pastor with the great keys of binding and loosing in hand; before the altar a Christian kneels in submissive mien, uncertain as to whether to direct his gaze to the pastor or to God the Father who looks down from the clouds above. In order to participate in the helping grace of the Holy Spirit, the Christian is entirely dependent upon the pastor and the ecclesial means of grace administered by the pastor.[13] Consequently, there was a decline in and even a corruption of pastoral care. "The cure of souls was much neglected and largely confined to a limited amount of visitation and the rather mechanical practice of private confession. . .for which a fee (*Beichtpfennig*) was paid to the pastor. . .Critics revived a saying of Sarcerius [1501-1559]: 'The binding key is quite rusted away while the loosing key is in full operation.' "[14]

It is in reaction to this situation that the pietists developed their well-known slogans of "life versus doctrine," "Holy Spirit versus the office of the ministry," and "reality versus the appearance of godliness." The latter slogan indicates the shift of pietism's attention from the doctrine of justification to regeneration. The edification of the individual and the increase of the community was now related not to doctrine but to personal growth in spirituality. The mark of the church became the reciprocal love of its members rather than Word and Sacrament. This point meant that reflection on the church focused on its history and structure and located its deficits in its members rather than in their relationship to their Head. "That the church is the body of *Christ* disappears behind the fact that it is a *body* suffering from disease. Its earthly life condition is taken to be more important than its heavenly nourishment, the Word and sacraments."[15] A consequence of this focus on the praxis of piety was an extensive de-dogmatization and confessional indifference. The earlier quotation from McGavran seems to echo this pietist orientation.

But the intellectual, dogmatic system of orthodoxy was not the sole context for the rise of pietism. The historical-social context was also important. This context was one of physical, moral, and religious crises caused in large part by the horrors of the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648). Mercenary armies tramped back and forth across the German territories, living off the land of friend and foe alike and wreaking destruction. Cities were plundered, the countryside ravaged, and populations decimated by warfare, plague, and starvation. This destruction and confusion not only wrecked the economy but also adversely affected religion and culture. Churches and schools had been burned, many of those still standing were leaderless, and care of the sick and poor was practically nonexistent. In the light of this religious and spiritual disintegration it is not surprising that orthodox debates were of little interest to the people.[16]

Spener's critique of the church, in brief, was not that it lacked the Word or pure doctrine, but rather that it lacked the Spirit and life; the church suffered from a lack of the Holy Spirit, a poverty of the Spirit, indeed, a loss of the Spirit.[17] Spener's remedies and some of their consequences are well-known. The

small groups (the *collegia pietatis*) for the cultivation of holiness brought in their train tendencies toward otherworldliness, Donatism, legalism, and divisiveness (the *ecclesiolae in ecclesia*). These tendencies will surface in later renewal movements such as the charismatic renewal. But what is of interest here in terms of analogous expressions in the Church Growth Movement is the pietist understanding of the church. The irony is that in the attempt to expand the Augsburg Confession's definition of the church, these movements constrict the church even more. When Word and Sacrament are no longer sufficient marks of the church, then the church is reduced to the like-minded, the like-experienced, the like-classed. The intent of the *ecclesiola in ecclesia* was to provide more room for the activity of the Holy Spirit but it led to a problematic "spiritual priesthood" consisting not of all baptized Christians but of those who had experienced the anointing of the Holy Spirit.

Pietist ecclesiology foreshadowed another problem for renewal movements as well—a chiliastically flavored eschatology. "The awakening of chiliastic expectations is one of the most pregnant marks of early pietism in Frankfurt."[18] The immediate context of pietism was already characterized by a strong eschatological tension related to the terrors of the Thirty Years' War. As few other times in church history, there was a widespread expectation of the near end of the world. But Spener's hope was not for the end of all times, but rather the hope for a better time. As he stated in the *Pia Desideria*: "If we consult the Holy Scriptures we can have no doubt that God promised His church here on earth a better state than this." For Spener, this "better state" is linked to the conversion of the Jews and the fall of the Roman papacy;[19] for church growth advocates this "better state" is linked to what McGavran calls "the harvest of peoples."

The ecclesiologies of both pietism and the Church Growth Movement displace the tension-filled dynamic of *simul justus et peccator* and the theology of the cross by the motifs of progress and perfection. For pietism this alteration is pointedly illustrated by the title of an influential chiliastic writing of the time: "Assertion of the Thousand Year Reign or of the Prosperity of the Church of Christ on Earth."[20] Around the turn of the year 1674-1675 the goal of the Frankfurter pietists was announced as

not only the withdrawal from the depraved *Volkskirche* to a circle of pious friends, but to make alive once again the form of the primitive Christian church in the midst of the outwardly corrupted church. This desire is closely related to the expectation that the fulfillment of the divine promises and the beginning of a better time for the church are no longer far off. "The orientation to the ideal of primitive Christianity of the chiliastic hope, as is so often the case in the history of the church, also belong together in their roots in Frankfurter pietism."[21]

Thus Spener's new perspective which detached pietism from orthodoxy and raised the *Pia Desideria* to the programmatic writing of a new epoch in Lutheranism was twofold. It was the concept of the gathering of the pious into particular assemblies patterned after the primitive Christian community and the concept of a promised glorious kingdom of Christ on earth to the pious.[22] This orientation will continue in the Church Growth Movement, albeit with variations on the theme.

The Church Growth Movement

The broad context for the rise of the Church Growth Movement hardly needs to be spelled out. Analogously to the context for pietism, contemporary Western culture is experiencing the pervasive deterioration, if not breakdown, of the external supports for belief systems and social structures. Government, church, and family all seem incapable of resolving or ameliorating alienation, poverty, war, injustice, economic failure, and social dislocation. Our time is marked by enormous insecurity of every type; fears of the future; breakdown of traditional values; plurality of competing worldviews, norms, and definitions of reality; loss of power by nations as well as individuals; individual isolation and dehumanization. Traditional mainline churches are declining in membership, but conservative churches are growing. While the declining churches continue to agonize over the "why" and "whether" questions of mission and evangelism, the growing conservative churches focus on the "how" of mission and evangelism.[23] Recently the Lutheran missiologist, James Scherer, wrote: "Reticence, hesitation, and loss of nerve, especially in ecumenical circles, characterize the attitude of many Christians toward mission near the end of the 20th century."[24] According to McGavran:

This was the case in Christian missions overseas in the mid-twentieth century. Tremendous resources were spent in mission work, often for very little growth of the church. Where growth was impossible, this outcome was understandable, but sometimes little growth was unnecessary. Christians, pastors, and missionaries were coming out of the ripe fields empty-handed. During the decades following World War II, little or no growth also marked most denominations in the United States. Some biological and transfer growth did occur but conversion growth was spotty and slight. Whole denominations became static or actually declined. Pastors in America, like their brothers overseas, often led congregations which remained at about the same number of members for years, or even lost a few hundred.[25]

It was this situation which prompted Donald McGavran, a former missionary with over thirty years of experience in India and now Dean Emeritus of the School of World Mission at Fuller Seminary, to begin urging a rethinking of missions. He claimed that the lack of growth in missions was the consequence of a mission theology which posited slow growth and was preoccupied with social rather than evangelical issues. Beginning in the fifties, McGavran argued that the fields were ripe for harvest but that missionaries and pastors were blinded by false presuppositions. ''He challenged the 'seed-sowing' concept of missions, that 'the objective and measurable growth of churches must neither be expected nor counted as a measure of effectiveness.' He argued for a narrow definition of mission, emphasizing the goal of church planting, in place of one which 'attempts to take in everything that the church and the Christian faith ought to do.' For McGavran 'the whole gospel for all mankind means little, unless it is preceded by stupendous church-planting. There can be little hope of sustained signs of the Kingdom in the world without the influence of a sufficient number of sons and daughters of the Kingdom. . . What the fantastically mounting population of this world needs is fantastically multiplying churches. . .''[26] One commentator goes so far as to say that, on the basis of a narrow evangelical hermeneutic and theology, the Church Growth Movement ''deduces that everywhere and in all circumstances the numerical increase of the church is the one goal for which

everything else may be sacrificed.''[27]

This quotation would, of course, send Luther, were he alive, into a rage. The kingdom of God does *not* depend upon attaining a critical mass of church members, nor even a critical mass of Christians. We do not need to turn to Luther's vigorous and extensive attacks on the *Schwaermer* of his day to document this truth. We need only recall his simple explanation of the second petition of the Lord's prayer: "To be sure, the kingdom of God comes of itself, without our prayer, but we pray in this petition that it may also come to us."[28] Certainly Luther was concerned for the growth of the church as well as its reform. His writings attest to this fact, especially his works on the liturgy. But Luther never identified the visible church with the kingdom of God nor did he place his hope on an increase of church members, for even Christians are and remain sinners. Neither pietism nor the Church Growth Movement has any sense of the motifs of the dialectic of Law and Gospel and the Christian as *simul justus et peccator.* And when Luther lamented that there are too few Christians in the world, he did not then suggest that the Word and Sacrament are insufficient for the church.

McGavran's concern not only to multiply the churches but also to multiply the numbers of Christians within them is expressed in his principles of church growth, which in recent years have been applied to established congregations as well as mission fields. These principles are straightforward. First of all, as I already mentioned, the primary orientation of the Church Growth Movement is sociological rather than theological. The social sciences such as sociology and anthropology provide diagnostic tools for the analysis of the church and for suggesting directions to maximize church growth. "The numerical approach," McGavran wrote in 1980, "is essential to understanding church growth. The church is made up of countable people and there is nothing particularly spiritual in not counting them. Men use the numerical approach in all worthwhile human endeavors. Industry, commerce, finance, research, government, invention, and a thousand other lines of enterprise derive great profit and much of their stability in development from continual measurement. Without it they would feel helpless and blindfolded."[29]

The sociological utility of this numerical approach was perceived by McGavran during his mission work in India when he and others recognized that group "conversions" alleviated the isolation of individuals whose joining the church pulled them out of their social context.[30] This orientation is what is behind the people-movement type of church growth. "A people movement results from the joint decision of a number of individuals— whether five or five hundred—all from the same people, which enables them to become Christians without social dislocation, while remaining in full contact with their non-Christian relatives, thus enabling other groups of that people, across the years, after suitable instruction, to come to similar decisions and form Christian churches made up exclusively of members of that people."[31]

A people-movement approach to church growth utilizes what is one of the most frequently criticized aspects of the Church Growth Movement, the homogeneous unit principle. Simply stated, the homogeneous unit principle is that "men like to become Christians without crossing racial, linguistic, or class barriers."[32] McGavran's point is this: "It takes no great acumen to see that, when marked differences of color, stature, income, cleanliness, and education are present, men understand the Gospel better when expounded by their own kind of people. They prefer to join churches whose members look, talk, and act like themselves."[33] In capsule form this statement collapses the prophetic and reconciling power of the Gospel into a baptism of the world as it is.

Some Lutheran Reflections on Pietism and the Church Growth Movement

The first thing that is clear is that the Church Growth Movement is a growth industry. In recent decades more than a hundred titles have appeared on the principles of church growth. On the basis of my very limited acquaintance with this literature I venture the following initial observations. Only a very few books raise critical theological questions of the movement. As far as I am aware, there seem to be few if any Lutheran contributions to this literature. Certainly it is clear that Lutheran publishing houses are not among the five major publishers of church growth materials: Lutterworth Press, Eerdmans, Zondervan, Moody

Press, and the William Carey Library.[34] But although the names of these publishers indicate the primarily Reformed orientation of the theorists of the movement, its popularity is by no means limited to Reformed and evangelical churches. In fact, this self-consciously transdenominational and transconfessional orientation is a characteristic which the Church Growth Movement shares with historical pietism.

Historical pietism transcended ecclesial and confessional barriers because finally *the* criterion for the church was not doctrinal but experimental. The Church Growth Movement also transcends ecclesial and confessional barriers by emphasizing experience as the criterion for the church. But the difference from historical pietism is that the experience to which the Church Growth Movement points is not the experience of the Holy Spirit but the experience of increasing numbers of people in the church. In good Lutheran dialectical fashion we may say both yes and no to this approach.

First the "yes"—in terms of a Lutheran theological perspective, the Church Growth Movement's utilization of sociological method may be seen in terms of the civil use of the law, that is, reason. McGavran is right when he says that there is nothing particularly spiritual in not counting church members. In fact, every pastor, evangelist, and Christian should be as sensitive as possible to not only the mechanics of church organization and direction but also the cultural, linguistic, and ethnic variables of the congregation and the larger community. To paraphrase McGavran, it is not particularly spiritual to ignore non-doctrinal factors in ministry.[35] It hardly needs to be said that the Gospel ought not be conveyed in a manner that creates false stumbling blocks to its acceptance.

The Church Growth Movement can remind us that it is poor discipleship to denigrate the skills and responsibilities requisite to overseeing the work of the church. Too many Lutherans have lost sight of the fact that we have a remarkable tradition of church organization rooted in our very origins. Luther himself was involved from the earliest stages of the Reformation in the development of church orders for Wittenberg, Leisnig, and Goettingen. And certainly we cannot forget that Luther's own pastor, Bugenhagen, is renowned for his organizing churches

throughout the length and breadth of the land. Our tradition took very, very seriously the organization and growth of the evangelical churches. Furthermore, as James Kittelson reminds us in a recent article, Luther not only self-consciously assumed the role of pastor and bishop, but knew that even church bureaucracy was spiritual when joined by the Word of God.[36]

However, while the Lutheran tradition affirms reason, wisdom, and human sensitivity in service to the Word and Sacrament, these are not interchangeable. As Luther once remarked in his own inimitable style, when reason becomes a means to the kingdom of God, it becomes "the devil's whore." In less colorful terms, various critics of the Church Growth Movement have questioned whether methodologies for increasing church membership may be so easily presented as theologically neutral. In terms of the Lutheran tradition, adiaphora are not always adiaphora. This is clearly the case when it is posited that the correct use of sociological methods will result in the growth of the church, which is then proclaimed as the will of God. McGavran asserts that God requires church growth. McGavran further asserts that, "where there is no faithfulness in proclaiming Christ, there is no growth."[37] Another leader in the Church Growth Movement asserts that "... the evangelical church that grows in membership is providing an irresistible demonstration of the will of God being accomplished in its midst. Indeed, church growth is a test of the faithfulness of the people of God to the ministry to which he has called them."[38]

These assertions are clearly a theology of glory which identifies the visible church with the kingdom of God. Like every theology of glory this approach provides ample opportunity for either presumption or despair. If our churches grow, we simply assume we are faithfully proclaiming Christ; if they do not grow, we assume we are not faithfully proclaiming Christ. Obviously St. Paul in his sermon in the Areopagus falls into the latter category! This insidiously Pelagian and Donatist ecclesiology puts the burden of proof for the Gospel upon the pastor and the congregation. As one advocate of church growth puts it, "Church growth does not just happen; it must be made to happen."[39] This is a kind of ecclesial Kantianism; that is, the church ought to grow; therefore it can. In short, it seems to me that the Church Growth Movement is subtly adding a third mark to the church

by implying that Word and Sacrament are insufficient marks of
the church without numerical growth. This tendency also appears
to me to be but a modern variation of the age-old alterations
of the marks of the church, with statistics taking the place of
such marks as perfection, discipline, and church government.

It also seems to me that the Church Growth Movement has
various parallels to the ecclesiology of historical pietism although
I would not grant it the theological depth of pietism. Like pietism,
the Church Growth Movement assumes it can model itself on
the early church and collapses eschatology into the conviction
that this is a "better time" for the church. As pietism hoped to
convert the world through the conversion of individuals, the
Church Growth Movement foresees "christianizing" culture
through conversion of the masses. In its crass forms, church
growth is a culture religion.

The fundamental principle of the Church Growth Movement
which has received the most criticism is the homogeneous unit
principle. Here we have the *ecclesiolae in ecclesia* orientation with
a vengeance not known in historical pietism. For Spener and his
colleagues an unintended consequence of the *collegia pietatis* was
the tendency to create ecclesial in-groups of the like-experienced.
For the Church Growth Movement the creation of like-minded,
like-colored, like-speaking in-groups is an intentional means to
further the institutional church. This approach has serious
repercussions on the Gospel itself as well as on social ethics.

The good news of reconciliation in Christ is side-stepped by
proposing churches be homogeneous units, for then the church
becomes a reflection of its culture. A church of this sort does
not offend anyone or anything but rather sanctifies the status
quo. The homogeneous unit principle also is false to the historical
development of the church.[40] Now there is no doubt that the
Lutheran churches in this country have a long history of
homogeneity, and in some places Lutherans may still think that
a mixed marriage is between a Swede and a Norwegian. But at
least today the struggle for inclusiveness has begun; and we have
not raised ethnicity to a theological principle over against the New
Testament. McGavran and others in the Church Growth
Movement have more recently become sensitive to the charge of
racism directed against the homogeneous unit principle. But

popular materials of the movement, such as filmstrips, portray black folks going into black churches and white folks going into white churches. Commentators from South Africa clearly see the homogeneous unit principle as a support of apartheid. Regardless of what one thinks of the Lutheran World Federation's *status confessionis* position, it is difficult to argue away the fact that human actions can be a denial of the Gospel. There is no doubt that humankind craves community, but there should also be no doubt among Lutherans that not all community is authentic to the Gospel. In recent history, talk about "our kind of people" is most frequently associated with the Nazis, the Ku Klux Klan, and upholders of apartheid. Our understanding of sin as being curved in upon ourselves also reveals the demonic potentiality of communities.

This brings me to a final point, and that is that the Church Growth Movement is a bedfellow, if not an advocate, of culture religion. Ironically the movement has protested against the World Council of Churches and others for adopting the world's agenda. McGavran has criticized the WCC for its attention to "organized good deeds and social action [which] takes the attention of many younger churches off the propagation of the Gospel."[41] Yet the advocacy of sociological methods for church growth mirrors the world's agenda by positing that the church is a "business" like any other. Eddie Gibbs, who is basically favorable to the Church Growth Movement, has written: "The failure of church growth thinking, at least in its early formulations, to differentiate between church and kingdom has led to a great deal of misunderstanding and criticism. It has resulted in Christian mission being caricatured as denominational aggrandisement, or a plea for survival for western-based churches and their related mission agencies. Church growth thinking. . .has consequently given the impression that mission is simply making more and more people to become like ourselves."[42] René Padilla makes much the same point when he writes: "Because of its failure to take biblical theology seriously, it [the Church Growth Movement] has become a missiology tailor-made for churches and institutions whose main function in society is to reinforce the status quo. What can this missiology say to a church in an American suburb, where the bourgeois is comfortable but remains enslaved to the materialism of a consumer society and blind to the needs of the poor? What can

it say in situations of tribal, caste, or class conflict? Of course, it can say that 'men like to become Christians without crossing racial, linguistic and class barriers.' But what does that have to do with the Gospel concerning Jesus Christ, who came to reconcile us 'to God *in one body* through the cross'?"[43]

Article VII of the Augsburg Confession is elegant in its simple definition of the church as "the assembly of all believers among whom the Gospel is preached in its purity and the holy sacraments are administered according to the Gospel. For it is sufficient (*satis est*) for the true unity of the Christian church that the Gospel be preached in conformity with a pure understanding of it and that the sacraments be administered in accordance with the divine Word."[44] Luther can liken the church to a "mouth house,"[45] because faith comes by hearing the Word. The point is that the unity and marks of the church are not the like-mindedness—the homogeneity—of the community but the proclamation of the Gospel of the unconditional promise of God embodied in Word and Sacrament. "The human structures of the church, of course, exhibit the same life as the church's members—a life under the cross which is simultaneously sinner and righteous. Thus the church, like its members, also lives by the continuous encounter with the Word of God, which is why it needs constant reform. This is another way of saying that the church is not specified by the character of its members but rather by the character of the assembly—the preaching of the gospel. This is the basis upon which the church stands or falls."[46] The church is recognized not by its holiness of life—*contra* the pietists—nor by its numbers—*contra* the Church Growth Movement—but by the "possession of the holy Word of God." For as Luther stated in *On the Councils and the Church* in 1539, "Now, wherever you hear or see this Word preached, believed, professed, and lived, do not doubt that the true *ecclesia sancta catholica,* 'a Christian holy people,' must be there, even though their number is small. . .And even if there were no other sign than this alone, it would still suffice to prove that a Christian, holy people must exist there, for God's word cannot be without God's people and, conversely, God's people cannot be without God's word."[47]

ENDNOTES

1. Eddie Gibbs, *I Believe in Church Growth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981); *Body Building Exercises for the Local Church* (London: Falcon, 1979); C. Peter Wagner, *Our Kind of People* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1979); The essays are found in Win Arn, ed., *The Pastor's Church Growth Handbook* I, II (Pasadena: Church Growth Press, 1979, 1982). These volumes are subtitled thus: "America's leading authorities on church growth share the keys to building a dynamic church."

2. Donald A. McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth,* Revised Edition (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), p. 8.

3. See for example, Peter Berger, *The Heretical Imperative: Contemporary Possibilities of Religious Affirmation* (Garden City: Anchor Press, 1979), and Jens Glebe-Moeller, *A Political Dogmatic* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987).

4. James A. Scherer, *That the Gospel May Be Sincerely Preached Throughout the World. A Lutheran Perspective on Mission and Evangelism in the Twentieth Century* (Geneva: LWF Report 11-12, 1982), p. 181.

5. Glenn Huebel, "The Church Growth Movement: A Word of Caution," *Concordia Theological Quarterly,* 50 (1986), pp. 165-181, 178.

6. Hoburg quite starkly stated that justification is a fiction whereas rebirth is a reality, and Arnold in his famous innovation of church history (*Unparteiische Kirchen- und Ketzerhistorie vom Anfang des Neuen Testaments bis auf das Jahr Christi 1688*) excoriated the orthodox and elevated traditional heretics as models of true faith. Cf. Martin Schmidt, *Wiedergeburt und Neuer Mensch: Gesammelte Studien zur Geschichte des Pietismus* (Witten: Luther Verlag, 1969) as well as his other writings for an interpretation of pietism in terms of the motifs of mystical spiritualism and rebirth.

7. Cf., for example, Kurt Aland, *A History of Christianity, II: From the Reformation to the Present,* trans. James L. Schaaf (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), pp. 238ff.; 260-261.

8. F. Ernest Stoeffler, *The Rise of Evangelical Pietism* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1971), p. 1. For a survey of Pietist research see Martin Schmidt, "Epochen der Pietismusforschung," in Berg and Dooren, eds., *Pietismus und Reveil* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1978), pp. 22-79.

9. Johannes Wallmann, "Geisterfahrung und Kirche im fruehen Pietismus," in Trutz Rendtorff, ed., *Charisma und Institution* (Gutersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1985), pp. 132-144, 132. Similarly, Aland, op. cit., p. 234, writes: "Pietism is undoubtedly the most significant

movement which has happened within Protestantism since the Reformation."

10. Part One of Spener's famous *Pia Desideria* (1675) reviews what he perceives to be the corrupt conditions in the church with sections on the defects in civil authorities, clergy, and the people. Cf. Theodore G. Tappert, ed., *Pia Desideria* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964).

11. Wallmann, loc. cit.

12. Jaroslav Pelikan, *From Luther to Kierkegaard: A Study in the History of Theology* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1963), p. 80.

13. Wallmann, op. cit., pp. 136-137.

14. John T. McNeill, *A History of the Cure of Souls* (New York, 1951), p. 182.

15. Carter Lindberg, *The Third Reformation? Charismatic Movements and the Lutheran Tradition* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1983), p. 169.

16. Tappert's introduction to his edition of the *Pia Desideria*, op. cit., provides a useful overview of this context.

17. Wallmann, op. cit., p. 134.

18. Johannes Wallmann, *Philipp Jakob Spener und die Anfaenge des Pietismus* (Tuebingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1986), p. 325.

19. Tappert, op. cit., pp. 76ff.

20. Pierre Serrurier, *Assertion du Règne de Mille Ans ou de la Prospérité de l'Eglise de Christ en la Terre* (Amsterdam, 1657). The influence of Serrurier and his work upon Spener and his colleagues is discussed by Wallmann, *Spener,* op. cit., pp. 349ff.

21. Wallmann, *Spener,* op. cit., p. 353.

22. Wallmann, *Spener,* op. cit., p. 354.

23. For an overview of the crisis of church and mission among contemporary Lutheran churches, see chapter 2 in Scherer, op. cit.

24. Ibid., p. 37.

25. McGavran, op. cit., p. vi.

26. Gibbs, op. cit., p. 19. For a discussion of McGavran's heritage (Christian Church-Disciples of Christ), theology, and methodology, cf. Arthur Glasser, "An Introduction to the Church Growth Perspectives of Donald Anderson McGavran," in Harvie M. Conn, ed., *Theological Perspectives on Church Growth* (Nutley, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1977), pp. 21-42.

27. Charles R. Tabor, "Contextualization," in Wilbert R. Shenck, ed., *Exploring Church Growth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), pp. 117-131, 119.

28. "The Small Catechism," in Theodore Tappert, ed., *The Book of Concord* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959), p. 346.

29. McGavran, op. cit., p. 93.

30. Christian Kreyszer (1877-1961), a German Lutheran missionary and author serving the Neuendettelsau mission society, may have been influential on McGavran. Kreyszer's experience was that individual conversion methods were impracticable in communities structured along collectivist lines.

31. McGavran, op. cit., p. 335.

32. Ibid., p. 223.

33. Ibid., p. 227.

34. Cf. George W. Peters, *A Theology of Church Growth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), p. 263. The Church Growth Book Club (Pasadena, California) publishes bimonthly lists of books on church growth and related subjects in the *Church Growth Bulletin.*

35. The significance of non-doctrinal factors in local ecumenical relationships is discussed in a recent study by the LWF-related Institute for Ecumenical Research, Strasbourg. Cf. André Birmilé, ed., *Local Ecumenism: How Church Unity Is Seen and Practised by Congregations* (Geneva: WCC, 1984). To insist, however, that "the great obstacles to conversion are social not theological" is an attack on doctrine not limited to Lutheran theology. This McGavran quotation is cited in Harvie Conn, "Looking for a Method: Backgrounds and Suggestions," in Wilbert R. Schenck, ed., *Exploring Church Growth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), pp. 79-94, 79.

36. James M. Kittelson, "Luther, the Church Bureaucrat," *Concordia Journal,* 13 (1987), pp. 294-306.

37. McGavran, op. cit., p. 5; cf. also p. 7: "Church growth is basically a theological stance. God requires it."

38. Arthur F. Glaser, op. cit., pp. 21-42, 31.

39. George W. Peters, op. cit., p. 133.

40. Cf. Frederick W. Norris, "Strategy for Mission in the New Testament," in Wilbert R. Schenck, ed., op. cit., pp. 260-276.

41. McGavran, op. cit., p. x. Cf. also the numerous criticisms of the WCC in Donald McGavran, ed., *Church Growth Bulletin,* Second Consolidated Volume (Pasadena, California: William Carey Library, 1977).

42. Eddie Gibbs, op. cit., p. 52.

43. René Padilla, "The Unity of the Church and the Homogeneous Unit Principle," in Schenck, op. cit., pp. 285-303, 301.

44. *The Book of Concord,* p. 32.

45. *WA* 10: 1:2, p. 48.

46. Lindberg, op. cit., p. 51, with documentation.
47. *LW* 41, p. 150.

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