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LUTHERANS IN MEXICO

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## FOREWARD

Although Lutherans in Mexico make up only around .015% of the population, the importance of their story should be obvious. We have our Lord's command to preach his good news to the outermost ends of the earth, and just across the border there are 60,000,000 (1975 est.) people who have very limited opportunities to hear it preached faithfully. Added to the great need and potential in Mexico, Hispanics are predicted to become the largest ethnic majority in the U.S. by late 1985.

Lutherans in Mexico are also of interest in more general terms. The story of Lutheran mission work there shows the concerns and efforts of mission work everywhere: the battle with government regulations and limitations, the challenges of a new language and culture, the working relationship between expatriate and national. With a knowledge of their story our prayers for them can have faces and names--rejoicing in their successes and pleading for help in their struggles. And as a branch of the church militant, the concerns of our Mexican brothers mirror our concerns. How do we maintain a loving confessional Lutheranism, showing love and loyalty for God's Word as well as love and concern for the universal body of Christ? How do we serve all men in every need and maintain our primary purpose of salvation for his soul?

For the Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod the story of our brothers across the border is of special interest. The translation of "WELS" into Spanish is a bit difficult. The most common translation for "well" is pozo, which can also mean "deep hole" or "pit." Unfortunately, this latter sense has been reflected on occasion in the attitude that the support we're giving to Mexico hasn't paid off very well. Fortunately this "rat hole" view has not prevailed.

It is this writer's added hope that this survey of Lutheranism in Mexico will provide a better background to assess our work there by offering some information on the potential and problems of mission work in Mexico. Also, it is hoped that by looking at the successes and struggles we may see that our work there is not a pozo but a manantial; truly a source of opportunity to serve, a spring with which we share the Water of life.

## LUTHERANS IN MEXICO

### I. Institutions and Revolutions: The Mexican Background

The ruling party in Mexico for the past half-century has been the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). The apparent contradiction in the terms of this title has actually been attempted in practice as this country, torn apart by over 100 years of bloody revolutions, has sought peace by institutionalizing the revolutionary spirit. These two contradictions--the conservative, authoritarian institution and the vibrant, restless revolution--coexist under the same political banner. If this is hard for us to comprehend, it underscores the need to look at the history of religion in Mexico in order to better understand the situation in which Latin Lutheranism finds itself. The forms of Christianity south of the border also shows this institutional revolutionary contrast. One of the worst blunders a missionary to Mexico could make would be to assess Mexican Lutheranism on the basis of his own background.

A Lutheran from the U.S. finds many forms of Mexican Christianity unfamiliar--hardly a surprise. But the same would probably be true of most of his Catholic countrymen, in spite of their common attachment to Rome. If the Reformation had little effect on Mexican Christians until the 20th Century, neither did the Counter-Reformation and its checks on some of the Roman abuses. Yet the social implications of Vatican II have been embraced here enthusiastically. Through the window

thrown open in the early 1960's, the Vatican now feels a chilling wind blowing in from Latin America--liberation theology.

The Catholic Church in Mexico from the beginning has been a revolutionary institution, conservative and authoritarian but incorporating and accommodating the opposition. On the heels of the conquistadores came the Franciscans who brought Rome to the indians in garb they could recognize.

The friars built a Christian church above the ruins of every pyramid, placed a saint's statue where each minor god had stood, a statue of the Virgin in place of each goddess, and adapted their religion to the Aztec rites: even Communion was recognized by the Aztecs, as symbolic sacrifice such as they already celebrated.<sup>1</sup>

Eugene Nida calls the result "Christo-paganism," a complex mixture of faith and superstition.<sup>2</sup> Even today the pagan-rooted beliefs and practices can be seen in the pre-occupation with death, devil figures in church processions and roadside shrines for the restless spirits of auto accident victims.

In the political arena, however, the Mexican Catholic Church has been more institutional and often opposed to revolution. And its relationship with the government is important to our purposes since we must also work under the church/state situation that has developed from over a century

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<sup>1</sup> Victor Alba, History of Mexico (New York: American Heritage Publishing Co., Inc., 1973), p.41.

<sup>2</sup> Eugene Nida, Understanding Latin Americans (South Pasadena, Calif.: William Carey Library, 1974), pp. 106-124.

of conflict. The highly privileged status Rome enjoyed under Spanish colonial rule was also guaranteed by the new constitution of 1823 as the official religion of independent Mexico. The Catholic Church was given a third of the new tricolor flag (the white bar symbolizes purity of religion) and retained control of a vast majority of the property and other forms of wealth. The control of the church continued unchallenged until the liberal revolution and the new constitution of 1857 tried to curtail her power by ordering a divestment of property not devoted to religious functions, prohibiting her civil immunity, establishing secular education, and especially in declaring religious freedom. These terms were mostly ignored, as the church regained control during Maximilian's brief reign and retained it through Diaz's dictatorship (1876-1911). Yet it was during this period that American protestant missionaries began activity south of the border.

After another revolution the new, and current, constitution of 1917 was more strongly anticlerical. Even church buildings became state property, no religious schools were permitted and all expatriate clergy were forbidden. Again these measures went unenforced, but fearing that someday they would be, the Roman Church publically protested in 1926. President Calles answered this challenge with strict enforcement, and a bloody three-year rebellion was ignited between the government and Catholic guerilla bands called cristeros.

The church/state relationship has been relatively calm since then, the Catholic Church content with the return of some of her privileges (in practice if not officially) and the government apparently satisfied in knowing the legal restraints are still there should it choose to use them. American Protestants are often puzzled by this arrangement under which they also work. What does Romans 13:1-7 say about civil laws which are merely handy and apparently not binding? The Wisconsin Synod has kept its missionaries in residence across the border in El Paso, yet current statistics show 5,648 foreign missionaries and personnel at work in Mexico.<sup>3</sup>

The attitudes toward religion in Mexico resulting from Rome's privileges and conflict with the government also pose other problems for the American protestant. There is a strong religiously-conservative group which views the Catholic institution with great affection and great loyalty. It sees their church as an integral part of their heritage, Indian as well as Spanish.<sup>4</sup> Also, it's common to hear conservatives remark that Mexico was much more economically prosperous and politically stable when the Catholic Church was the strongest. Opposition to the church is often seen as an attack on the

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<sup>3</sup> David B. Barrett, World Christian Encyclopedia (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 491.

<sup>4</sup> 55.1% of the population is mestizo, of Indian and Spanish descent, and 29% is pure-blooded Indian. Barrett, op. cit. P. 491.

well-being and heart of the country. In contrast, many among the liberals and the young see Catholicism as an imperialistic oppressor, an attitude that sometimes is transferred to foreign-based protestant churches. This is reflected in the fact that traditional denominations account for only 22% of Mexican protestant churches while pentecostal groups largely indigenous make up 64%.<sup>5</sup>

With the history of institutions and revolutions in Mexico, Protestantism has encountered many difficulties. And some have wondered why even be so concerned about evangelizing a country that is so heavily Christian already. The World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh in 1910 specifically excluded Latin America from its consideration for this reason. In its defense it should be noted that the needs of the many other fields almost entirely untouched by the Gospel were more pressing. Yet in spite of the 96.2% of Mexicans professing Catholicism in 1970, there were undoubtedly great needs for spiritual care here also. Only one in four Catholics meet the minimum requirement of church attendance.<sup>6</sup> How much genuine faith was present faced with the still-common Cristo-paganism? Also, questions arise about the extent of actual spiritual care. Grossmann remarks that even in 1960 there was only one

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<sup>5</sup> W. Read, V. Monterroso and H. Johnson, Latin American Church Growth (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Ferdmans Pub. Co., 1969), pp. 164-166.

<sup>6</sup> Barrett, op. at pp. 487, 490.



priest for every 4,500 Catholics, and he tended a parish averaging 235 square miles.<sup>7</sup> Given the dependence upon clergy in the Roman Church, this statistic is especially a problem. Eventually the great needs were recognized, and at the International Missionary Council in Ghana (1958), Latin America was described as one most promising Protestant mission field in the world. And many had answered the call by then.

## II. Opportunity and Unity: Lutheran Beginnings in Mexico

By the mid 1930's the stabilizing political situation and the calmer church/state relationship gave Protestant missionaries better prospects for work in Mexico. Although religious freedom had been officially declared in 1857 and some foreign missionaries came to Mexico shortly after, the Catholic Church was still very much in control until the 1920's. And her opposition to Protestantism was sometimes violent, to the point of inciting a mob to kill an American Congregational minister and his Mexican assistant in Guadalajara in 1872.<sup>8</sup> But the attitudes were changing. An example can be seen in the descriptions of Martin Luther in school textbooks. While this writer was in Mexico he had the opportunity of comparing a turn-of-the-century history text with one currently being

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<sup>7</sup> R. Grossmann, "Latin America: The Intellectual and Spiritual Background," Lutheran World, Vol VIII: No. 4 (Dec. 1961), p.227.

<sup>8</sup> John Thiessen, A Survey of World Missions (Chicago: Moody Press, 1961) p. 359.

used. The former described Luther in the anathema sit manner, mentioning that he was a sick and incorrigible rebel from his youth and that his father was forced to move to Eisleben because he had murdered someone in Moehra. The new edition, however, praised Luther as a revolutionary who stood up against the well-known abuses of Rome.<sup>9</sup>

The Missouri Synod recognized the opportunity the changing attitudes and practices presented and at their convention in 1938 resolved to enter work in Mexico.<sup>10</sup> They would be the first Lutherans to begin a Spanish Mission south of the border, yet they weren't the first Lutherans there.

Already by 1861 a group of German-speaking Lutherans had joined together, but was served only intermittently for years. In spite of being formally organized under the auspices of the Evangelical Church of the Old Prussian Church in 1904, the congregation had no resident pastor from 1908 to 1927.<sup>11</sup> Finally, in 1927, it reorganized under Rev. C. Frieling of the LCMS.<sup>12</sup> This group has remained German-speaking and has expanded its activity with outposts in the widely scattered areas of Puebla, Monterrey, Guadalajara, Torreon, Chihuahua and

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<sup>9</sup> It should be noted that the earlier text was published when the Catholic Church controlled the schools while the latter came from secular sources.

<sup>10</sup> Proceedings of the 37th Regular Convention of the Ev. Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio and other States, 1938, p. 190-191.

<sup>11</sup> Lutheran World, Vol. 24: No. 2-3 (1977) p. 317.

<sup>12</sup> Lutheran Witness, Vol. 44:195-196.

Tapachula. Since 1956 it has been a member of the Lutheran World Federation and is also assisted by the foreign office of the Evangelical Church in Germany in acquiring pastors. Currently 4,000 members are being served by three resident pastors and an assistant.<sup>13</sup>

Other foreign language Lutheran activity should also be mentioned here. In 1954 work among Scandinavians began in Mexico City. With assistance from the LWF and the Church of Sweden providing a pastor, the congregation officially organized in 1957 and now numbers 1,500. The Scandinavians share facilities with the English-speaking Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd, which is a 1963 merger of an LCMS congregation (organized in 1948) and an ALC one (1959). These two American bodies also cooperated in establishing an English-speaking congregation in Guadalajara in 1968.<sup>14</sup>

These groups seem to have had little or no effect on their native Mexican neighbors as their efforts have been limited to serving immigrants and visitors of their own heritage. Also, when looking at current Lutheran statistic totals for Mexico, one must remember that of the 9,100 members,<sup>15</sup> nearly 6,000 are not truly Latin.

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<sup>13</sup> Lutheran World, loc. cit.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., pp. 317-318. See also Lutheran Mission Directory, 1980, (Geneva: Department of Church Cooperation, LWF), pp. 184-185.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 316.

The opportunity for a genuine Mexican Lutheran mission came from the Mexicans themselves. Two native-born Mexicans came in contact with the Missouri Synod while serving as pastors in the Methodist Church in Texas. One, Felix Segovia, became convinced of the Lutheran teachings by studying a copy of Walther's Law and Gospel<sup>16</sup>, was instructed and received into fellowship. Segovia and the other, Cezar Lazos, went on for training in the LCMS and re-entered Mexico as missionaries. Lazos arrived in Mexico City in 1940 and established the San Pablo congregation. Segovia began in Monterrey in 1941 and organized the congregation of Santa Cruz. Five more congregations were established, and the Concordia Conference of Mexico was organized in 1947. A seminary also opened in Monterrey in 1947 but was closed in 1959 for a lack of national students.

In the 1940's, three other Lutheran mission endeavors also began in Mexico. The Latin American Lutheran Mission, an independent "faith mission," was started by Myrtle Nordin Huerto in 1942. The group was interested primarily in training Mexican naturals as evangelists and building an indigenous church.<sup>17</sup> After some early success and several relocations due to changing government regulations, the LALM is now based

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<sup>16</sup> Lutheran Witness, Vol. 58, No. 4, p. 58.

<sup>17</sup> Andrew Burgess, Lutheran World Missions (Minneapolis: Augsburg Pub. House, 1954), pp. 222-224.

in Laredo, Texas and supports the Ev. Lutheran Church of Mexico, which is centered in Saltillo and lists a membership of 3,000.<sup>18</sup>

The World Mission Prayer League began work in northwest Mexico in 1944 with two women missionaries. This group, whose home base is in Minneapolis, was founded without any synodical ties or support and is open to "anyone willing to pledge prayer fellowship provided they were members in good standing in some Lutheran Church." Their guidelines also state that "the mission would stand squarely upon the historic confessions of the Lutheran Church."<sup>19</sup> Along with organizing their own congregations and serving among the Nauhatl Indians, they have assisted the ALC mission effort (see below) by transferring to that body several congregations in the 1950's. The WMPL has experienced problems both with keeping expatriates in the country and with declining membership. Recently they have joined with the Association of Free Lutherans to form the Lutheran Apostolic Alliance of Mexico, headquartered in Mazatlan, with 250 current members.<sup>20</sup>

The Mexican mission work of the LCA began in 1947 with one man, and it would center around him for over two decades. This

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<sup>18</sup> Lutheran Mission Directory, 1980, p. 182.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., pp. 233-237.

<sup>20</sup> Lutheran World, Vol. 24, Nos. 2-3 (1977), p. 317. See also Lutheran Mission Directory-1980, p. 182 and The Lutheran Church in Mexico, an uncataloged essay by R.A. Eggert, 1981.

gifted individual would also play a key role in another Lutheran body's mission work in Mexico. For both these reasons his story will be treated in greater length.<sup>21</sup>

David Orea Luna was the professor of literature and church history at the Seminary of the Church of the Nazarene in Mexico City when, in the early 1940's, complaints were brought against a Lutheran pastor, Cezar Lazos. Lazos was accused of corrupting several of the Nazarene Seminary students with Lutheran doctrines, so the faculty sent Orea Luna to deal with him. The plan backfired. Since Orea Luna also came to agree that the Lutheran teachings were biblical, the Nazarene officials sent him to Monterrey to separate him from Lazos. But the questions still were burning, and Orea Luna found the answers he needed from another Lutheran pastor in San Antonio, Texas. He entered the Bible College at San Jan, Texas (ALC) and was confirmed. As he wrote to a colleague, "I found the truth and understood that the Lutheran Church was the only church which was teaching the evangelical doctrine with purity."<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> The sources for the following information are the memorial issue dedicated to Orea Luna of El Amanecer II, Nos. 25-26 (Marzo y April, 1972) and Eggert's essay, which includes his personal recollections as Friendly Counselor to Mexico and also draws from class notes taken by one of Orea Luna's students.

<sup>22</sup> "Semblanza Biografica," El Amanecer II, Nos. 25-26, p. 8.

A short time later Orea Luna entered the Lutheran Seminary in Columbus, Ohio, and after ordination was sent to Mexico City in 1947 under the auspices of the ALC. He gathered a congregation and, in addition, used his literary gifts to further spread the gospel in establishing the magazine El Amanecer (The Dawning) in 1949. With ALC sponsorship the work spread, and in 1957 nine congregations and preaching stations formed an independent body called the Mexican Lutheran Church (ILM), electing Orea Luna as president. From the beginning he had been instructing pastoral students, and around 1957 he helped establish the Augsburg Theological Seminary in Mexico City. He attended the 1957 LWF Assembly in Minneapolis and became part of the committee to produce a Lutheran Hymnal in Spanish called Culto Cristiano.

One can't help but stand in awe and praise God when looking at the energy and talents of David Orea Luna. The many gifts God pumped into him Orea Luna used for the good and gain of his church. Not only was he a pioneering missionary, able teacher and administrator but also a poet, playwright and hymn writer. In addition he translated many Lutheran writings and confessional statements into Spanish. But undoubtedly the most important gift God gave him was a great love and loyalty for His Word. It was this great love that led him searching to the Lutheran church, that led him to bring this church back to Mexico, and finally it would be his loyalty to the Word that would lead him to break from the church he had helped to establish.

In the period of twenty years since Lutheran Mission work had begun in earnest in Mexico, the opportunities were taken and were bearing fruit. But it didn't come easy. The Lutheran missionaries were bringing a unique gospel message to a people entrenched in centuries of Roman legalistic heritage and often disillusioned by the ritual and authoritarianism. There always is the problem that dissidents will look for a different church more out of rebellion than out of conviction for the truth. The widespread poverty could at the same time alienate the people from the affluent American church or give it a materialistic attraction. Government regulations prohibited any religious group from holding services, advertising or giving public invitations before obtaining a church building--a catch 22 in mission work. Also, the expatriate missionaries continually worked under the threat (and sometimes execution) of the foreign clergy expulsion law.

Even the native Mexican pastors found the going rough in their own country. Cezar Lazos' experience offers a telling example. Before beginning his work in Mexico, he served in Houston where he established a Hispanic congregation. During the 28 months he was there he confirmed 50 adults, organized a Sunday School with an average attendance of 105 and a Christian day school with an enrollment of 42 children. Yet, after he arrived in Mexico City, the sheaves didn't come in so easily. Lazos writes:

In the beginning my work in Mexico City was very hard and trying. Many a time I thought after a day's work that it was in vain to try to establish our church in Mexico. But after much earnest prayer I began to



feel ashamed of my weakness, and I asked God to give me more faith and courage to face the difficulties and not to be afraid to give up my life, if need be, for the sake of our Savior.<sup>23</sup>

During the early years of mission activity in a new country and culture, there usually is a period when the new church bodies struggle to find their identity and define their objectives. With the extreme pressures, doctrinal and social as well as practical, there always is a strong temptation to spend a little orthodoxy to buy a little expediency, all for the good of the greater cause. And the parent groups back home can complicate the matter even more with their purse strings and allegiances. If this sounds familiar, it's because the pioneering Lutherans in the United States struggled with the same questions time and time again. They were difficult questions for Mexican Lutherans also, and the same troubling road was chosen by many--unionism.

In 1960, five Lutheran groups met in Mexico City to discuss a plan to join their pastoral training efforts into one theological center. The proposal seems to have originated in the ALC, which approved it at convention in 1960.<sup>24</sup> It was also soon approved in committee by the LCMS, which had closed its seminary in Monterrey in 1959.<sup>25</sup> The new Augsburg Center

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<sup>23</sup> C. Lazos, "A Call From Mexico City," Lutheran Witness, Vol. LIX, No. 24 (Nov. 26, 1940), p. 411-412.

<sup>24</sup> Official Minutes of the 1960 Convention of the American Lutheran Church, pp. 135-136.

<sup>25</sup> Reports and Memorials of the 45th Regular Convention of the LCMS (1962), p. 110.

for Theological Studies opened in 1965 for the pastor training of the Mexican Lutheran Church (ALC), the Caribbean Mission District of the LCMS (which included the Concordia Conference of Mexico), the German Ev. Lutheran Church in Mexico, the Scandanavian Congregation in Mexico (LWF), the World Mission Prayer League and the Colombia Synod (ALC). The faculty included professors from most of the bodies involved plus Rolf Lahusen from the Center of Ecumenical Studies of Mexico. This Augsburg Center became part of the Mexico City Theological Community, a group project including the seminaries of the Episcopal, Baptist, Methodist, Disciples of Christ and Congregational Churches. Along with sharing buildings and library, they also offered the opportunity to take courses in any of the related institutions.<sup>26</sup>

This Augsburg Center venture shows a new trend in Lutheran mission work in Mexico during the early 1960's, a trend that also had its roots in the changing attitudes of the parent groups in the United States. Strong doctrinal stands were giving way to increasing cooperation and offers of fellowship. During this time Dr. Lueking of the LCMS remarks:

Once the scholastic confessional tradition had served its functional purpose of rendering consciences clean and rallying financial support, its usefulness ended. For the exigencies of the work abroad called

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<sup>26</sup> R.F. Gussick, "Growing Latin American Lutheran Cooperation Since World War II," Lutheran World, Vol. XV, No. 4, 1968, p. 313. See also El Amanecer II, No. 1 (Marzo 1970) p. 14.

for a concentration upon the fundamentals of the evangelical understanding of Christianity.<sup>27</sup>

This new view became the official policy in the LCMS at its 1965 convention with the adoption of a series of mission resolutions which came to be known as the "Mission Affirmations." These resolutions were a result of the "Mission Self-Study and Survey" carried out by Martin L. Kretzmann and included a call to repentance of "our individual and corporate self-centeredness," urging greater cooperation with other Christian church bodies. The individual sister churches overseas were given the authority to determine the extent of such cooperation. Also, stronger efforts in social concerns were greatly encouraged.<sup>28</sup> (See Appendix 1 for a fuller treatment of these resolutions.)

These Mission Affirmations stirred up a long controversy, and the LCMS constituents in the U.S. lodged official protests and calls for clarification of the disputed points. But the guidelines remain standing although many perceived moderates in the missions board were removed during the 1970's. In Mexico the opportunity given by the new policy was taken for greater unionistic efforts and social activism. In 1968 the LCMS-supported congregations formed the Lutheran Synod of

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<sup>27</sup> F. D. Lueking, Mission in the Making (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964), p. 227. See also his discussion of the "turning point" of LCMS mission strategy and practice, pp. 302-307.

<sup>28</sup> Proceedings of the 46th Regular Convention of the LCMS, 1965, pp. 79-81 and Convention Workbook (of the same) pp. 113-140.

Mexico and eliminated from its constitution an article on doctrinal standards in order to allow close relations with other Lutheran bodies in Mexico.<sup>29</sup> And especially in connection with the Augsburg Center there would be a crisis over the ecumenical and social activities of Mexican Lutheranism, a crisis that meant opportunity for a new confessionalism.

### III. Renunciation and Invitation: The WELS Crosses the Border.

The opportunities for mission work among Latin Americans had not gone unnoticed by the WELS. In 1948 Venus Winter became its first Latin American missionary. After exploratory services in Phoenix, he settled in Tucson where he established a Spanish congregation, began radio broadcasts and eventually started a Christian day school. Until his retirement in 1981, Winter remained in Tucson faithfully serving the people and also giving invaluable advice and help to the Synod's other Spanish efforts.

Tucson would be the only Spanish mission for another 15 years, yet the vast potential in Central and South America demanded more effort. A committee from the Board for World Missions studied the possibilities for a new mission, and after a trip into Mexico reported in 1960:

Your committee is convinced that we should not begin mission in Mexico at this time. We feel we should

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<sup>29</sup> J. H. Kane, A Global View of Christian Missions (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1971), p. 485.

stay on this side of the border and investigate the heavily populated Spanish areas which exist in such cities as Phoenix and El Paso in our Southwest.<sup>30</sup>

So the Board looked for a different avenue into the Latin work which would be more accessible and less difficult. After another survey in 1963, Puerto Rico was chosen as the Spanish stepping stone. Also, in 1966 Ernest Zimdars was sent to El Paso, Texas, where it was hoped a foothold could be made in the large Mexican City of Jaurez just across the Rio Grande.<sup>31</sup>

Before this could happen the opportunity came from an unexpected source. Again, the Mexicans themselves opened the door. David Orea Luna from the beginning in 1960 had opposed the planned merger of the Augsburg Seminary in Mexico City. He feared and continually warned against the liberal theology and ecumenicism that such a venture would bring. Orea Luna had attended the LWF Assembly in Helsinki in 1963 and came away convinced that "the majority of Lutheran bodies had fallen into rationalism and great deviations from the Lutheran doctrine."<sup>32</sup> The tendencies in the ILM, of which he was still president, also disturbed him.. So in late 1964 Orea Luna wrote to President O. J. Naumann and requested information about the WELS' confessional position. Materials were sent,

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<sup>30</sup> Report to the Nine Districts, May 1960, p. 10.

<sup>31</sup> "New Openings for the Gospel," The Northwestern Lutheran, March 1, 1970, p. 74.

<sup>32</sup> "Semblanza Biografica," El Amanecer II, Marzo y Abril 1972, p. 9.

and Luna recognized the faithfulness to Scripture in the WELS' doctrine and practice. But for three more years he would battle to save the church he had helped to establish.

The problem centered around the Augsburg Seminary. Under the presidency of Robert Hoferkamp (LCMS), some of the faculty were teaching false doctrines. Orea Luna charged:

Some professors had departed from the truth of the gospel and from confessional Lutheranism. They were denying fundamental doctrines such as: verbal inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible, the virgin birth of Christ, the vicarious atonement of Christ, the bodily resurrection of Christ, the immortality of the soul, the existence of the devil and hell and the reality of sin.<sup>33</sup>

There were also instances of public altar fellowship by the faculty with other sects, including Roman Catholics. Along with the false doctrines and unionism, the faculty was actively encouraging social revolution in the classrooms. Orea Luna presented a well-documented protest to the Seminary's administration which showed more time was spent studying Marxist doctrines than the Lutheran Confessions.<sup>34</sup>

The writings of Marx and "The Diary of Che Guevara" appear to have been popular textbooks among the students also. A majority of the student body was from Columbia, Guatemala, El Salvador and Panama, and according to one Mexican pastor, some admitted to having been imprisoned in their own countries for taking part in subversive movements against the government.

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<sup>33</sup> D. Orea Luna and D. Chichia Gonzalez, "Aclaracion Historica." El Amanecer II, No. 1, Marzo 1970, p. 13.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

The same pastor reports an incident during an evangelism class at the Seminary in which the students threatened to walk out on strike unless the assignments were suspended in order to have another hour of Marxism.<sup>35</sup>

The administration of Augsburg Seminary did not act on Orea Luna's protests, so he took his case personally to the ALC in the United States. Apparently on his trip to Nebraska and Minnesota he found no friends of confessionalism there, for he returned to Mexico and, on July 17, 1967, proposed to the ILM that they separate themselves from the Augsburg Seminary and also from the ALC. The declaration of separation was signed by, in addition to Orea Luna (the president), the secretary, treasurer and vice-president, seven other pastors and two laymen. However, shortly afterwards all but two (Luna and the then treasurer, Pastor D. Chichia) withdrew their signatures. When Orea Luna tried to convince them again of the need for doctrinal and confessional integrity, the secretary of the ILM replied, "Mr. Luna, our children are not going to eat with pure doctrine."<sup>36</sup> This must have been especially painful for Orea Luna since he had confirmed and instructed most of these men.

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<sup>35</sup> Carlos Avendano "Por que Renuncie al Sinodo Luterano de Mexico," El Amanecer II, No. 4 Junio 1970, pp. 6-8.

<sup>36</sup> "Semblanza Biografica," El Amanecer II, Nos. 25 & 26, (Marzo y Abril, 1972), p. 9. See also "Aclaracion Historica," El Amanecer II, No. 1, (Marzo 1970), pp. 13-14, where Luna and Chichia state that the pastors received an increase in salary for retracting and remaining with the ALC and Augsburg Seminary.

Orea Luna again contacted President Naumann in November of 1967, requesting more information and, if possible, an interview to clear up some points of doctrine which were not entirely understood by him. At the regular convention of the ILM in early December, he and Chichia presented their withdrawal from the body "out of love for the truth and for confessional Lutheranism."<sup>37</sup>

The proposed interview was held from March 18 to 21 of the next year with a committee appointed by Pastor Frey, president of the Arizona-California District of the WELS. The outcome was favorable, and the two Mexican pastors, severing all ties with the ILM, formally applied for membership in the WELS. After a successful colloquy was held at Tucson on May 1, 1968, Orea Luna and Chichia were received into membership in the AZ-CA District. These two pastors were enthusiastic about their new church and the WELS responded in kind.

The situation of this new Lutheran mission was precarious, however. Aside from the usual difficulties, Orea Luna and Chichia lost their church buildings and housing as a result of their withdrawal from the ILM, a crippling loss in view of government regulations on public worship and evangelism. The WELS was facing another large deficit in the operating budget that year, but funds came in an extraordinary manner. As

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<sup>37</sup> "Aclaracion Historica," El Amanecer II, Marzo 1970, p. 14.



E. Hoenecke, Executive Secretary of the Board for World Missions, reported:

When the news of the successful colloquy was announced to the Synodical Council at its May meeting, a spontaneous offering was gathered as a token of thanksgiving to God whose Word does not return void. Enough was gathered in that spontaneous offering to support the little mission for almost two months!<sup>38</sup>

Other extra-budgetary gifts began to come in, and a corporation was created to represent WELS interests and to transact its business in Mexico. Soon a house was bought for Orea Luna and a church site acquired. Although only one congregational worship could be conducted for over a year, sixty people from Orea Luna's congregation in Mexico City stayed with him and another thirty in Guadalajara (served by Chichia). The 40th Biennial Convention of the WELS in 1969 authorized and funded the Mexican Mission as a part of the Latin American Mission Board.<sup>39</sup> The new mission was on its way.

The year 1970 was a banner year. The new chapel in Mexico City was completed and dedicated in July. "The Message of Salvation," began to air over a radio network in eight principal cities around the country in August and the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Church of Mexico (IELC) was formally organized in November with Orea Luna as president.

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<sup>38</sup> "The Lord Calls Us Into Mexico," The Northwestern Lutheran, June 9, 1968, p. 187.

<sup>39</sup> Proceedings . . . WELS, 1969, p. 139-40. See also Reports and Memorials, 1969, pp. 73-74.

Always the gifted writer and teacher, Orea Luna resumed publication of the magazine, El Amanecer, after a hiatus of three years and formed the Martin Luther Theological Institute where he was instructing two students for the ministry in his home.

Manpower increased when a pastor from Puebla, Carlos Avendano, withdrew from the Lutheran Synod of Mexico (LCMS), was received into membership by colloquy and began serving the members of his congregation who had come with him. The next year the congregation built their own chapel in Puebla. Also Felipe Luna Garcia was sent to serve in Juarez, under the supervision of Pastor Zimdars in El Paso.<sup>40</sup>

To handle this growing work, Ruppert Eggert was called in 1971 from Puerto Rico to be the Friendly Counselor to Mexico. Because of government regulation he would reside in El Paso and serve the Mexican Mission from there. Eggert was also called to be the director of the Latin American Seminary which was planned for El Paso. The need for this seminary soon became unfortunately urgent.

On March 7, 1972, the Lord suddenly called home his faithful servant David Orea Luna. The temptation is strong to here present a fitting eulogy for this faithful and dedicated man, but the aforementioned list of God's accomplishments

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<sup>40</sup> The information for this section and following is drawn from R. Eggert's essay and the reports of the Executive Committee for Latin American Missions, as found in the respective Reports and Memorials of the WELS, 1968-1983.

through him serves better. The loss of Orea Luna to the Mexican mission work, however, could not be so easily covered. Added to this loss was Pastor Avendano's resignation from the ministry for personal reasons, also in 1972.

Two of Orea Luna's students transferred to El Paso and were instructed under Eggert and Zimdars. As vicars they also served the vacancy at Juarez created by moving Garcia to Mexico City. Another student, Jose Lorenzo Perez, resumed Avendano's position in Puebla. Under God's grace the work continued: in 1973 a new chapel was dedicated in Juarez and a new mission was started in Saltillo under Vicar Daniel Perez from the Seminary in El Paso. Two new developments soon caused more difficulties and another shuffling of personnel. Pastor Zimdars left El Paso to accept a call to the new venture in Colombia, but the vacancy was eventually filled by David Haeuser. Pastor Luna Garcia, in Mexico City, was suspended because of neglect of duty and unchristian conduct, which had caused a loss of members in the congregation. Pastor Chichia transferred to Mexico City and D. Perez filled his empty spot in Guadalajara, forcing the closing of the mission in Saltillo.

Despite the losses and moves, God's Word was being spread, and evidence was seen of its promised effectiveness. The chapel in Guadalajara was dedicated in 1975 after many delays and tangles. The three Mexican vicars, J. Perez, V. Guillen (in Juarez) and D. Perez, were examined and ordained. Two more students enrolled at the Seminary, and Pastor Gary Pieper came

to El Paso as Missionary to Mexico to lighten Eggert's duties. To replace Orea Luna's magazine, Pastor Martens in Puerto Rico began to edit El Mensajero Luterano (The Lutheran Messenger), which is distributed to all the Latin American fields. By 1977 a new chapel-seminary building was completed in El Paso, several parsonages purchased in the various Mexican cities, and land was acquired for a second chapel in the Juarez area.

The recent years have seen a welcomed period of relative stability and opportunity for development. The discouragements still continued as religious broadcasting was banned in Mexico in 1980 and one of the Seminary students, Juan Rubio from El Salvadore, joined the LCMS. Josue Saucedo, however, completed his studies and vicarship and was ordained in 1979. He is presently serving in Guadalajara. Since his departure from the Seminary, there haven't been any students at El Paso.

Long vacancies in the expatriate staff at El Paso has been a problem, but the team is complete now. Eggert left for Tucson to replace the pioneer and patron Venus Winters, who retired in 1981. Pastor Paul Hartman from Puerto Rico arrived to assume the position of Friendly Counselor to Mexico and pastor to the San Juan congregation in El Paso. Larry Schlomer brought his experience as Theological Director in Columbia to head the Seminary in El Paso and assist at San Juan. Though there are no students at present, a comprehensive plan has been developed and implemented for the continued theological study of the Mexican pastors. Plans are also being made to make

El Paso the seminary for the national students from all the Latin American fields. There are several good prospects who are currently being trained with Bible Institute courses in their own countries. Also, Pastor Mark Goeglein arrived in El Paso from Columbia in 1984 to coordinate the mass media and literature programs for all of the fields.

A fitting end to this survey of the IELC and WELS mission work in Mexico is the Santa Cruz congregation in Monterrey. The beginnings of the IELC under Orea Luna and its determined struggle for the sound teaching and practice of confessional Lutheranism are paralleled with the story of Santa Cruz. Begun by Felix Segonia in 1941, this large congregation later withdrew from the LCMS affiliate and for three years struggled on without a pastor, except for the ministrations of the retired and aged Segovia. It approached the WELS and applied for membership with the IELC. After a long series of examinations of their own positions and interviews with representatives of the IELC and WELS missionaries, Santa Cruz joined the IELC on April 1, 1984 and called D. Perez of Guadalajara as its pastor. As reported in El Mensajero Luterano:

The first of April was not only a union between a congregation and a synod, but also a celebration of fellowship in the same faith and hope.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> El Mensajero Luterano, Vol. 1X, No. 4 (Sept.-Oct., 1984), p. 6.

Mexico is a land of dominating institutions and restless revolutions, a land of great and urgent opportunity but with countless threats to its purity and purpose. The WELS with faith and hope has crossed the border into Mexico under God's grace and direction. With the same faith and hope in our Lord, our Mexican brothers are working with us to proclaim the gospel. May love and loyalty for God's Word encourage us in this great work.

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NUESTRO TRABAJO CON NUESTROS HERMANOS MEXICANOS:

"UNA CELEBRACION DE CAMPANERISMO EN LA MISMA  
FE Y ESPERANZA."

APPENDIX 1

The following are portions of the resolutions which comprise the "Mission Affirmation" found in the Proceedings of the 46th Regular Convention of the LCMS (1965), pp. 79-81.

Resolved; That we repent of our individual and corporate self-centeredness and disobedience, whenever it has caused us to regard our local congregations or our Synod as ends in themselves and moved us to give self-preservation priority over God's mission. (Res. 1-01A).

Resolved; That we recognize that our sister mission churches in other lands have been placed by God into other circumstances and are subservient not to us but to the Lord.

Resolved; That we affirm that by virtue of our unity with other Christians in the body of Christ, we should work together when it will edify Christ's body and advance his mission, refusing cooperation, however, on such occasions when it would deny God's Word. (Res. 1-01C)

[From Convention Workbook Report on this point: "We will then be ready at all times to listen to those who differ from us and will be ready to establish relationships which will make this possible, so that all who have been called by God through faith in Christ will help one another." p.120]

Resolved; . . . We deplore the desecration of Christianity by the multiplication of sects as though the Gospel were a religion of human design instead of God's outreach after men in the giving of Himself. (Res. 1-01F)

Resolved; That Christians be encouraged as they attempt, under the judgment and forgiveness of God to discover and further His good purposes in every area of life, to extend justice, social acceptance, and a full-share in God's bounty to all people who are discriminated against and oppressed by reason of race, class, creed, or other unwarranted distinctions. (Res. 1-01D)

[From the Convention Workbook: "When the church understands itself to be Christ's mission to the whole man, it will again realize the true nature of activities like social welfare, medical work, uplift through education, and all efforts which help man to realize his potentialities to serve God and man as a full human being. All of these activities are as much the concern of the church as Christ's mission to the whole man as the salvation of man's soul." p. 118]

## Appendix 2

### Update on Other Lutheran Work in Mexico

#### Augsburg Seminary:

Enrollment in 1968 was 20 students, with the first two being graduated in 1969. Four additional national pastors were graduated in 1971. By 1973 enrollment was at 13, but an extension program was serving 150 Lutheran students in six centers throughout Latin America. The Seminary was closed in July of 1981 by its board of control because of a lack of students. The participating churches and missions have since then had to assume the responsibility of training their own workers.

(Convention Workbooks of LCMS and "A Small Mission With a Large Mission," The Lutheran Witness, July 1981, p. 16.)

#### Mexican Lutheran Church (ILM):

Membership is 1,500 with 12 congregations and 12 pastors, centered around the metropolitan area of Mexico City and the west-central state of Jalisco. The younger pastors have been trained at the Augsburg Seminary. The ALC continues to subsidize with a planned annual reduction.

(Lutheran World, Vol. 24, Nos. 2-3, 1977, p. 316; Lutheran Mission Directory, 1980.)

#### Lutheran Synod of Mexico (LCMS):

From a peak of 1753 members and 17 congregations and stations in 1974, this body reported for 1980 1215 members in 11 congregations with eight pastors and two lay-pastors. These figures include the large Santa Cruz congregations in Monterrey, which has since withdrawn and joined the IELC. With the closing of the Augsburg Seminary and the advancing age of most of its pastors, a severe worker shortage is on the horizon.

(Convention Workbooks of the LCMS, see also "A Small Mission With a Large Mission," The Lutheran Witness, July 1981, pp. 14-16.)



Appendix 3

Statistics for the Confessional Evangelical  
Lutheran Church of Mexico (IELC)

<u>Year</u>	<u>Baptized Members</u>	<u>Communicant Members</u>	<u>Major Events</u>
1969	157	61	--Mexico officially adopted as Mission Field
1970	280	58	--New Chapel in Mexico City, 2 new pastors --IELC Formed-- <u>Amanecer</u> resumes publication
1971	288	73	--Chapel built in Puebla --Eggert to El Paso as Seminary Director and Friendly Counselor
1972	263	78	--Orea Luna dies --Seminary opens in El Paso --Avendano resigns
1973	407	69	--Mission opened in Saltillo --Chapel built in Juarez
1974	388	48	--Luna Garcia suspended --Chichia moves to Mexico City--Saltillo closed
1975	399	54	--Chapel built in Guadalajara --Ordination of J. Perez, V. Guillen and D. Perez
1976	357	66	--Mensajero Luterano begins publication
1977	457	68	--Seminary/Chapel building completed in El Paso
1978	373	63	
1979	266	68	--J. Saucedo ordained, to Guadalajara

## Appendix 3--2

<u>Year</u>	<u>Baptized Members</u>	<u>Communicant Members</u>	<u>Major Events</u>
1980	320	74	--Religious broadcasting banned in Mexico
1981	350	75	
1982	338	71	--Eggert to Tucson --Hartman to El Paso as Friendly Counselor
1983	286	92	--Schlomer to El Paso as Seminary Director
1984			--Goeglein to El Paso as Mass Media Director --Santa Cruz in Monterrey joins IELC

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