

# The Centrality Of The Means Of Grace In Confessional Lutheran Mission Work

## ( How God Offers His Salvation To Sinners)

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We who are gathered here in this world mission setting will want to be, indeed need to be continuously reminded of the truths which Professor Lawrenz proclaimed on the basis of Matthew 11:25-30 on that May morning in 1975 when he preached for that year's Seminary graduation using the theme, *How God Offers His Salvation To Sinners*. They are basic truths which summarize God's mission. It is in His mission, God's redemptive activity, that missions, the activity of God's people, the church, has its source. God's mission is central to missions and unless that is kept clearly in mind there will be confusion as to the means of missions. The church will fail to be true to God's mission and the means He Himself has ordained for carrying out His mission.

Since the truths expounded by Professor Lawrenz are central to the topic before us and since this essay is to be the keynote for these sessions, it will be well worthwhile for us to turn back the clock, take time, and listen to those words for our encouragement and direction.

At that time Jesus said, 'I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth for hiding these things from wise and intelligent people and revealing them to little children. Yes, Father, I praise You for wanting it to be that way. My Father put everything in My hands. Only the Father knows the Son. And only the Son—and anyone to whom the Son wants to reveal Him—knows the Father. Come to me, all you who are working hard and carrying a heavy burden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble-minded; then you will find rest for your souls—for My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.' (Matthew 11:25-30, *God's Word to the Nations*.)

Let our text remind you, *How God Offers His Salvation To Sinners*: Only as a pure gift; only as a pure gift through His Son; yet as a wonderful gift to all.

When Jesus here speaks of the things that the Father has hidden from the wise and the prudent and revealed unto babes, He means the truths of the Gospel, the great truths of our salvation, the truths which the seventy had been sent out to proclaim. Only as a pure gift does God offer His salvation to sinners. This brings it about that His great saving truths will remain hidden from the wise and prudent. The worldly-wise like to form their own ideas about themselves, about life and its purpose, about the hereafter, about God, their relation to God, and about the things that are pleasing in God's sight. Thus when God's Word, His message of salvation as a pure gift, is brought to them, many are not willing to discard everything that they have done, everything that they have thought out for themselves, and simply to accept salvation just as God offers it in His Word, wholly as a gift of His grace. They are not willing to give all glory to the heavenly Father, the Lord of heaven and earth, for their salvation. Some glory, at least, they want to keep for themselves. Yet this will not do. This is blind ingratitude toward God's unfathomable love seeking our salvation. It is arrogant irreverence toward the gracious wisdom of the Lord of heaven and earth. It is presumptuous pride for sinful man to seek salvation on his own terms. God offers salvation as a pure gift. Hence, it will in judgment remain hidden to the worldly-wise and prudent.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Lawrenz, Carl, "How God Offers His Salvation To Sinners," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol. 72, Number 3, (July 1975), p. 188

Nothing could have been better or more merciful than the manner in which the heavenly Father has been pleased to offer salvation to us. We sinners could not possibly bring anything to God toward our salvation. A salvation still depending partly upon us and our deeds would be no salvation at all. It could not give us peace; it could not inspire us with hope; it could not strengthen us to a godly life.

Our text goes on to remind us that it is through Jesus, His incarnate Son, and through Him alone, that God offers His free gift of salvation to us sinners.<sup>2</sup>

If we sinners likewise by faith are to know the Father in His saving thoughts toward us, the Son must reveal Him to us. He does that through the prophetic and apostolic Word, the Holy Scriptures, God's inspired and inerrant Word. What is there prophesied of Jesus, our divine Savior, what is unfolded concerning His saving life and death, what the evangelists and apostles, and Jesus Himself in His own words, there set forth concerning His wonderful person and work, lets us fully know the heavenly Father's saving thoughts toward us. This gospel message in the Scriptures is the power of God for our salvation, working faith and sustaining it. All Scripture stands in the service of this Gospel message. Apart from the Holy Scripture there can be no knowledge of the salvation which God offers to us as His free gift. Every departure from Scripture, every corruption, every alteration, every compromise of it endangers the gospel message of our salvation.<sup>3</sup>

Our text closes with the reminder that God offers His free and full salvation, revealed in the Scripture, as a wonderful gift to all.

Jesus says, 'Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.'

What a gracious invitation to all who are laboring under the burden of sin and guilt, and under vain human efforts for ridding themselves of this burden! What a gracious invitation to all who are heavy laden by all the evil consequences of sin for time and eternity! To all who will come to Him in faith, Jesus promises rest for their souls. This promise He is able to redeem through the forgiveness of sins which He has purchased with His own blood. Christ's gospel invitation itself awakens the faith which enables us to come to Him and to rejoice in His pardon, and with it to have rest for our souls. It is rest through the assurance of being at peace with God and of being dear children in His sight. It is rest through the assurance that our lives are under the guidance and protection of His fatherly love, that we have the right to approach Him in prayer and the promise, that our prayers are heard. It is rest in the certainty that we are heirs of heaven, and that in due time we will enter upon the full enjoyment of eternal joy and glories.<sup>4</sup>

What else is the gospel ministry in essence than the continuance of the Savior's gracious invitation and promise? Those who minister with the gospel in Word and Sacrament are Christ's ambassadors. As Christ's spokesmen they continue His gracious invitation: 'Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.' That is the ministry to which you have been called, dear graduates. May the Lord keep you faithful and blessed in this service.<sup>5</sup>

Professor Lawrenz closes with a very fitting, "Amen." That is where we will start. Amen! The gospel in Word and Sacraments is the means through which "God offers His salvation as a pure gift; only as a pure gift through His Son; yet as a wonderful gift of His Son to all." Thus, it is indeed not only very fitting but also very timely that we should consider together, *The Centrality of the Means of Grace in Confessional Lutheran Mission Work*.

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.190.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.191.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p.192.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p.193.

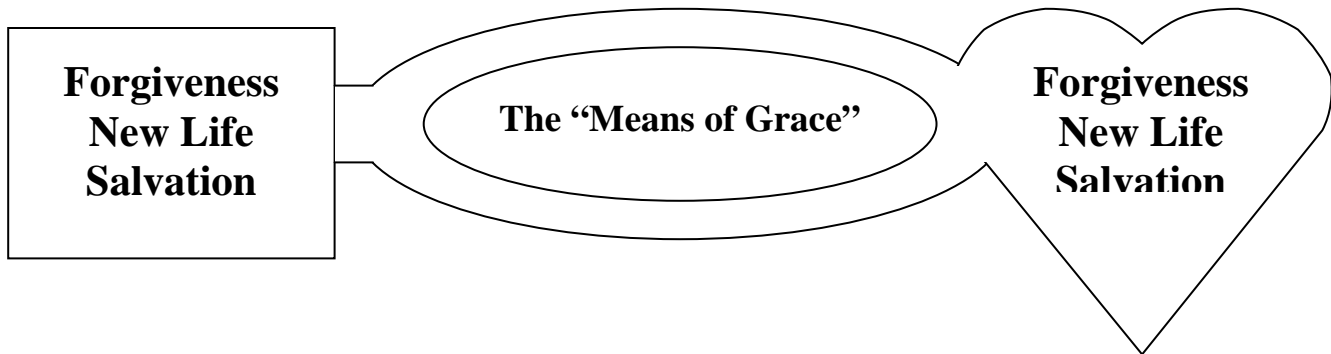
In the history of the Christian church, indeed, from time to time also in the Lutheran church this centrality has been forgotten or denied outright. But from Scripture it is clear that God makes use of certain eternal, visible means which He Himself has ordained in order to offer and yes, convey to mankind “His salvation as a pure gift prepared by His Son for all.” It is through these means that God has promised that the Holy Spirit will work and preserve faith.

That is the clear teaching of the Scriptures and the Confessions. The Smalcald Articles state, “in those things which concern the spoken, outward Word we must firmly hold that God grants His Spirit or grace to no one except through or with the preceding outward Word” (Smalcald Articles Part III, Art. VIII, 3). The Augsburg Confession states, “They (our churches) condemn the Anabaptists and others who think that the Holy Ghost comes to men without the external word through their own preparations and works.” (A.C. Art. V, 2).

Mueller’s *Christian Dogmatics* quotes the Latin definition of the means of grace:

Our dogmaticians define the means of grace as ‘*media externa a Deo ordinata, quibus Deus gratiam a Christo acquisitam hominibus offert et fidem ad gratiam accipiendam necessariam in hominibus efficit et conservat.*’ As divinely ordained means of grace they acknowledge, on the basis of Scripture, only the Word (the Gospel) and the Sacraments, Baptism and the Lord’s Supper, the latter two as the visible Word (*verbum visibile*).<sup>6</sup>

To refresh our memory these means have a twofold function or power. The Holy Spirit through these means offers the grace of God and the righteousness of Jesus to those who hear and/or read the Word. Also through the means of grace the Holy Spirit actually works to create, strengthen and preserve faith in the pure gift of forgiveness by Christ Jesus so that hearts are turned and converted. Mueller writes, “For this reason we rightly call the means of grace *media communicationis remissionis peccatorum sive iustificationis ex parte Dei.*”<sup>7</sup>



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The Gospel is a means of grace not only because it offers forgiveness but also because the Gospel actually delivers forgiveness and absolves the sinner. As stated before, the Gospel is a means of grace, whether heard in spoken message or read with the eye or received by the touch as in the reading of Braille.

Since our Lord has also connected the gracious Gospel promise to Baptism and the Lord’s Supper, these too are effective and true means of grace. The Scripture clearly states in the well known passage in Acts 2:38 that Baptism is “for forgiveness of sins” (*eis aphasin hamartiwn*). Also in Acts 22:16 we learn that Baptism is

<sup>6</sup> Mueller, J.T., *Christian Dogmatics*, Concordia Pub. House, St. Louis, Mo., 1955, p.441.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 442.

“the washing away of sins” (*apolousai hamartias*). Ephesians 5:26 and I Corinthians 6:11 as well as other passages could be added.

According to Luke 22:19,20 and Matthew 26:26-29 our Savior Himself offers the forgiveness of sins in the new covenant which is the Lord’s Supper. In fact, the Lord gives His very own body and blood as an unmistakable proof and seal of His gracious promise.

Because these two means, Baptism and the Lord’s Supper, can be perceived by the eye, “they are called the ‘visible Word’ (*Verbum visibile*) or Sacraments.” The Apology explains,

These rites have God’s command and the promise of grace, which is peculiar to the New Testament. For when we are baptized, when we eat the Lord’s body, when we are absolved, we must be firmly assured that God truly forgives us for Christ’s sake... But just as the Word enters the ear in order to strike the heart, so the rite itself strikes the eye in order to move the heart. The effect of the Word and of the rite is the same, as it has been well said by Augustine that a Sacrament is a visible word, because the rite is perceived by the eye and is, as it were, a picture of the Word, signifying the same thing as the Word (Ap. Art. XIII, 5).

The forgiveness pronounced in the Gospel is the same as offered and conveyed in Baptism or the Lord’s Supper. They offer men God’s forgiveness and also create and strengthen faith. Thus, the Augsburg Confession teaches, “the Sacraments were ordained to be signs and testimonies to awaken and confirm faith in those who use them,” as the same as the Gospel itself (A.C. XI).

Lest we take it for granted that this is an obvious and foregone conclusion, we should remember that most of the Christian religious world does not view this as an obvious fact or even as a fact at all.

Professor and missionary Ernst H. Wendland writing in *Missiological Perspectives* under the topic, *The Means of Grace* writes:

Very few missiological treatises, if any at all, have very much to say about the Means of Grace. George Peters, for example, scarcely mentions this subject in his otherwise exhaustive treatment, other than to quote Robert D. Culver’s exegesis of Matthew 28:19, where Culver refers to ‘baptize’ as ‘a controversial word,’ which he prefers ‘to define no further on this occasion.’ Robert Culver ignores the subject as well. David Hesselgrave has a brief section on baptism as an act of symbolic confession. He adds the comment: ‘there is a danger in regard to the doctrine of baptism which saves (I Peter 3:21) and the water baptism which is only symbolic’ (*Planting Churches Cross-Culturally*, p. 257).<sup>8</sup>

Even Waldo J. Werning, who writes extensively about the Word mentions the Means of Grace very little that I can recall in his book, *The Radical Nature of Christianity*. No doubt, Werning would agree that the Means of Grace are central but it is a shame that he does not say so. To his credit he does speak about the Word and the Sacraments as part of the internal program of the church which is carried on for the benefit of the individual members of the congregation.

Professor Wendland gives us some insight as to why there is such a lack of material on the subject of the Means of Grace in mission work.

Apparently the sacraments are generally avoided for two reasons. First, the subject is controversial, even among Evangelicals. Second, those coming out of Reformed persuasions attach only a symbolic significance to the sacraments. Our own statement of belief .... on the other hand, stresses that ‘it is by these Means that He (the Lord) preserves and extends the holy Christian Church throughout the world.’

This points us emphatically to the difference between our Lutheran approach to church growth and that of all other Protestant churches. ***With us, the Word and Sacrament are highlighted in the process of***

<sup>8</sup> Wendland, E.H., *Missiological Perspectives*, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wisconsin, 1981, p. 83.

*conversion, since these are the means whereby the Holy Spirit does his work.* We instruct people thoroughly in the basic teachings of the Bible. First, we bring adults to the stage of baptism. After they have learned to know the Triune God as the God of their salvation and are ready to confess him as such, we arrange for a baptismal service in which they are received into God's kingdom of grace by the washing of regeneration and renewing in the Holy Ghost. Their baptism is immediately followed by a further instruction in the teaching of God's Word, particularly the doctrine of the Lord's Supper. As they are received into communicant membership of the church, they at the same time receive the true body and blood of Christ 'in, with, and under' the bread and wine, according to Christ's own institution.<sup>9</sup>

Missionary Wendland stresses that,

The whole use of the Means of Grace has become such a *modus operandi* in our Lutheran church that we are inclined to take it for granted. We sometimes wonder if we appreciate our emphasis upon the use of the Means of Grace, and what an important role they play in our entire approach to building up and edifying the body of Christ. To us they are the marks of the Church. They are the visible signs and tokens of grace, the means through which God offers and assures his grace to man (cf. A.C., Article XIII; Apol. Art. XII and Art. XIII).<sup>10</sup>

Few can say it better than Professor Wendland. Others accuse us of making too much of these Means of Grace, especially the Sacraments. We wonder if we make enough of them. True, they set us apart from Protestantism. But they set us apart in the right direction. They demonstrate visually that salvation is a gift of God's grace rather than an achievement of man. 'Receive!' they declare. Be strengthened and assured by a gift from God, who by his Spirit gives power to earthly elements.<sup>11</sup>

Professor Wendland concludes his section on the Means of Grace with words that reinforce and which summarize the truth in the title before us today, *The Centrality of the Means of Grace in Confessional Lutheran Mission Work*. "Truly, our Lutheran Church has objective instruments which others may fail to recognize, but which to us are of fundamental importance for preserving and extending the faith."<sup>12</sup>

In agreement with that statement, our Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod declares in *This We Believe*, "We believe that God bestows all spiritual blessings upon sinners by special means, ordained by Him. These are the Means of Grace, the Gospel in Word and Sacraments."<sup>13</sup>

"When you lack the right tool, a simple job can become a chore," Pastor Ronald D. Roth writes in an editorial for the Fall 1980 issue of *The Evangelism Life Line* under the heading *Baptism: The Right Tool*. He goes on,

Everyone who has tried to tighten a screw with a table knife, or open a can with a screw driver knows what I mean. To have the right tool for the right job is a real help.

In the Church God has given us the right tools we need to carry out the commission He has given us to make disciples. Like skilled craftsmen we need to know which tool to use in the right way at the right time.

Take baptism, for example. Baptism is one of the finest manifestations of the grace of God exercised on behalf of sinful mankind... Obviously this marvelous 'tool' of God's grace is to be applied in the case of unbaptized infants and adults.<sup>14</sup>

God alone determined the plan and the means by which He prepared and carried out the salvation of mankind. He sent His Son, Jesus Christ to bear the sins and punishment of all people and procure salvation for

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 83.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 84.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> *This We Believe*, VI: The Means Of Grace, Northwestern Pub. House, Milwaukee, Wis. p.15.

<sup>14</sup> Roth, R.D., *The Evangelism Life Line*. Vol. 4, Issue 1. Fall 1980, p. 2.

them. God is the only one who has the right to determine the means by which His grace is to be revealed and transmitted to the world. It would be extremely presumptuous call us to proscribe God's chosen means of grace and institute or turn to our own or other means.

*This We Believe* correctly states that "The means of grace are the Gospel in Word and Sacrament." Here we should remind ourselves again that the Law is not a means of grace, although it stands in the service of the gospel. Prayer is not a means of grace nor man made rules or various austerities no matter how firmly man may believe that he can by observing them win God's grace. "Therefore we ought and must constantly maintain this point, that God does not wish to deal with us otherwise than through the spoken Word and the Sacraments. It is the devil himself whatsoever is extolled as Spirit without the Word and the Sacraments." (S.A., Part III, Art.VIII, 10, Triglot, p. 497).

The Sacraments are a means of grace because of the Gospel promise attached to them. Therefore it is sometimes stated that there is only one means by which God's grace is imparted to sinful mankind. Thus, *This We Believe* states correctly, "The means of grace are the Gospel in Word and Sacrament." Since the Gospel is God's own proclamation of grace and pardon, it actually gives and conveys to men what it offers. All the means of grace offer the same grace and have the same purpose and power. The Lord's Supper and Baptism are simply different ways in which the grace of God is conveyed to mankind. "Through the same Word and forgiveness the Holy Ghost bestows, increases and strengthens faith." (Large Cat., Art. III, 62, Triglot, p. 695).

*This We Believe* states it this way. "We believe that the Lord gave His Word and the Sacraments to His disciples for a purpose. He commanded them: Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost (Matt. 28:19). It is by these Means that He preserves and extends the holy Christian Church throughout the world. We should therefore be diligent and faithful in the use of these divinely ordained Means of Grace in our own midst and in our mission efforts. These are the only means through which immortal souls are brought to faith and to salvation."<sup>15</sup>

In Tsuchiura, Japan in 1974, in a paper entitled *The True Mission Of The Church* (Theses for indoctrination of seminary students with reference to the doctrine of the two kingdoms) presented to the World Seminary Conference Professor Lawrenz writes the following under the heading *The Church and Salvation*.

The church is the spiritual body of all those whom the Holy Spirit through the gospel has brought to faith in Christ as their Savior. The marks by which the presence of the church is recognized are the means of grace, the gospel in Word and sacraments. In a wider sense the designation of the church is therefore applied to those who profess Christian faith by being gathered about the gospel Word and holy sacraments.

The only task or mission specifically entrusted to the church is proclaiming the gospel, the whole counsel of God in Christ, to men for their salvation. To the unregenerate the church is to proclaim the gospel, the whole counsel of God in Christ, in order to make disciples of them, i.e., that through its testimony the Holy Spirit may bring more and more sinners to saving faith in Christ (mission work). To those who have already come to faith, the church is to continue to proclaim the gospel, the whole counsel of God in Christ, that they may be built up in Christian faith, joy, comfort, understanding, hope and a sanctified life (Christian education).<sup>16</sup>

The means with which the church is to carry out its one entrusted task, or mission, of bringing sinners to salvation for time and eternity is the gospel, and together with it the entire Word of God, the Scriptures. In proclaiming any part of God's Word to men the church is to keep it in close relation to the central message of pardon and salvation in Christ. Only in this way will the testimony of the church remain a part of the task or mission specifically assigned to it.

The gospel message is offered in the Word of God, which is the power of God unto salvation. The sacraments are the same gospel message with a seal attached to it (**the visible Word**). Forgiveness of sins is also the fundamental gift of the sacraments. All other blessings

<sup>15</sup> *This We Believe*, VI The Means Of Grace, Northwestern Pub. House, Milwaukee, Wis. p. 16.

<sup>16</sup> Lawrenz, Carl, *The True Mission Of The Church*, World Seminary Conf. 19, Tsuchiura, Japan, p. 1.

also of the Lord's Supper are transmitted in and through this fundamental gift of forgiveness apprehended ill faith and sealed by the real presence.<sup>17</sup>

I am sure J. Herbert Kane was not thinking of the sacraments, nevertheless, he writes very concisely regarding mission work. "The Christian mission is part of God's sovereign activity in the realm of redemption. From first to last, the Christian mission is God's mission, not man's. It originated in the heart of God. It is based on the love of God. It is determined by the will of God. Its mandate was enunciated by the Son of God. Its rationale is explained in the Word of God. For its ultimate success it is dependent on the power of God."

How will God apply that power and how are we to make disciples? The words of the Great Commission are well known, but even in Lutheran circles that may not be well understood, or perhaps they are understood, but for various reasons the desire to follow that Commission is lacking and other voices, strident voices, have been raised demanding other agendas for the church. Last year I sat at a table with representatives, high-powered representatives from other Lutheran bodies. One asked in definite distress and confusion, "what is the purpose of the church and with what means do we go about carrying out that purpose?" Sad to say there was nary an answer, finally I asked, "what commission did Jesus give as He parted from the disciples on the day of ascension and what means did He tell the disciples to use?" There was total silence! All knew the answer, but I doubt that it was the answer that they wanted to entertain.

Leonard Klein writing in the January 25, 1992 issue of *Forum Letter* observes,

...flirtation with the church growth movement at the highest levels of the ELCA is yet another cause for concern about the direction of the denomination... The question for Lutherans is to what degree, if any, the evangelistic event so central to such experiments can be used by us without compromising the centrality of Word and Sacrament or, worse, replacing them.<sup>18</sup>

Of course, we want to see churches grow. Resistance to the movement is not an argument against growth. It is an argument about whether it will be the church that grows or some pseudo-church that is not the assembly around Word and Sacrament. It is not church growth if it is not the church growing.<sup>19</sup>

The medium is the message. An upbeat middle class religion-in-general where the Law is not invoked to condemn sin, where the Gospel is not preached as real forgiveness, and where the sacramental forms of the Gospel are sidelined may be exciting to lots of people, but it is not the church.<sup>20</sup>

The effort by factions in both Missouri and the ELCA to promote these methods bespeaks a desperate lack of confidence in the only means that God has given his Church. The resort to such methods indicates that many of us believe that Word and Sacrament don't really work and that the liturgical assembly in which they occur is only so much baggage. What a devastating indictment.<sup>21</sup>

But we need not be in doubt! "'Go ye,' He said, using the aorist active participle 'preuthentes' which can be translated with imperative force,"<sup>22</sup> explained Pastor Richard Lauersdorf in his paper, *Developing Indigenous Churches - The Scriptural Principles Involved*. Pastor Lauersdorf goes on,

'Make disciples,' Jesus commanded, using 'matheteusate'. More is involved than making converts. We are told to make disciples. Only three other times is this verb used in the New Testament... These uses

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>18</sup> Klein, L., *Forum Letter*, "Methodology Without A Theology," Vol. 21, Numb( 1, (Jan. 25, 1992) p. 2.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Lauersdorf, R.E., *Developing Indigenous Churches - The Scriptural Principles Involved*, p. 1

of the verb form show us that instruction is involved, learning about matters pertaining to the kingdom and about Jesus.”<sup>23</sup>

From Christ we turn to the Apostle Paul to whose example proponents of the indigenous church policy like to point and whose words they like to quote. The Apostle Paul who in little more than ten short years proclaimed the Word and established churches in four provinces of the Empire showed that he both knew and took seriously Christ’s command. At Miletus, as he was heading back to Jerusalem one last time, he could tell the Ephesian elders, ‘I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you,’ and ‘I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God’ (*pasan ten boulen tou theou*, Acts 20:20,21). His own ministry involved ‘teaching them to observe all things whatsoever Christ had commanded’, nothing more, and certainly nothing less.<sup>24</sup>

“Paul literally labored to supply as full amount of the Word as possible to those to whom he preached so that there might be maximum growth in knowledge, faith, and godly living.”<sup>25</sup>

Pastor Lauersdorf summed up with a quote. “All the foregoing prompts us to say ‘we agree’ as we read Franzman’s evaluation, ‘Everything that we know of Paul’s missionary preaching and his missionary methods makes clear that he did not aim at creating a vague, emotional and enthusiastic movement, but rather the firmly rooted, grounded and established church of God, in which the Word of Christ dwelt richly.’”<sup>26</sup> For Paul the Word and the Sacraments were central to his mission and that is what he taught. Certainly that was the case of those Christians who gathered after Pentecost Day. “They continued to hold firmly to the teaching of the apostles and to the fellowship, to the breaking of the bread, and to the prayers.”(GWN)

In a sermon which appeared in May 1980 addition of Concordia Journal, Professor Richard Klann preaching at the installation of a local pastor scores this centrality of the means of grace in the work of the ministry.

“Thus, the means of grace are means of access to God’s unmerited favor, to the loving disposition which He has for us on account of the person and saving work of Jesus Christ.”<sup>27</sup>

Through the means of grace we have been made God’s very own. Now we have access to Him in prayer; we have access to Him through our baptismal covenant; we have access to Him every time we hear the words of absolution: ‘Thy sins are forgiven.’

**The means of grace are the only missionary means which the Lord of the church has given to His disciples or followers.** The church, which is the totality of all believers in Jesus Christ, increases as multitudes obtain access to the throne of grace through the means of grace.<sup>28</sup>

The Biblical teaching regarding the means of grace is of the utmost important not only to mission work but for the whole life of the church and of the individual Christians. If a Christian begins to neglect the means of grace a faithful servant of the Lord can’t help but be vitally concerned, because such a person is in grave danger of falling from faith and losing salvation (John 8:43-47).

Mueller’s *Christian Dogmatics* on page 457 points to Luther.

In the final analysis it was Luther’s loyalty to the Scriptural doctrine of *sola gratia* and *sola fide* that moved him to espouse and maintain the Biblical teaching of the means of grace. Without it he could not have taught the central article of the Christian faith, the so called material principle

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>27</sup> Klann, R., “Access To The Throne Of Grace Through The Means Of Grace.” *Concordia Journal*, Vol. 6, Number 3,(May, 1980), p. 87

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.



of the Reformation, namely justification by grace through faith in the *satisfactio vicaria* of Christ . . . the doctrine of *sola fide* stands and falls with that of the means of grace . . . A perversion of the doctrine of the means of grace always leads to the perversion of the central article of the Christian faith, namely, the doctrine of justification by faith without works.<sup>29</sup>

It is abundantly clear that the doctrine of the means of grace is of absolute importance not only for mission work but the whole life of the church. This is what Scripture teaches. As stated, the Scriptures clearly teach that regeneration and preservation of faith occurs through the Word and through the Sacraments. Those who neglect them are in grave danger and those who hold the means in contempt are in rebellion against the Lord of grace and mercy. Surely no Lutheran pastor or missionary will fail to use these God-appointed means or fail to warn about neglect of the use of the means of grace nor fail to clearly warn about the dangerous teachings and teachers who pervert God’s Word also concerning the means of grace.

Dr. Won Yong Ji in the November 1985 issue of the *Concordia Journal*, records the following story. “

There was a flood. A young man was standing along the street. Water already reached his feet. A car came along and the driver offered a ride. But he refused, saying, ‘In my prayer God has promised to offer me His helping hand.’ Water steadily rose up to the level of his chest. A boat approached him and the operator offered assistance. But the young man refused with the same reason. The water came up to his chin. At this crucial moment a rescue helicopter came flying over head; the pilot shouted: ‘Hey, grab this rope tight!’ lowering a rope ladder. But the young man way; mumbling, ‘God promised help through my prayer,’ rejecting the most decisive offer. At last, the water swallowed him up, and he died. Upon his arrival at the gate of heaven the young man was met by the Archangel. He said in anger and disgust, ‘God did not keep His promise to send His helping hand, and I drowned in the water.’ The angel replied. ‘Didn’t I send you, upon God’s order, three different means to help you - a car, a boat, and a helicopter? Unwise and stubborn, you consistently rejected them. Go away!’”<sup>30</sup>

Mueller in his *Christian Dogmatics* puts it this way. “It is a plain doctrine of Scripture that all who will not receive God’s grace as it is proffered to sinners in the means of grace shall not receive it at all, Matt. 10: 14,1 5; Acts 1 3:46, 51.”<sup>31</sup>

The Smalcald Articles also brings the centrality of the means of grace for all the work of the church into focus. “... God gives no one his Spirit or grace except through or with the external Word which comes before... God will not deal with us except through or with the external Word and Sacrament.” (S.A., III, VIII, 3,9-13. See also AC,V; FC.Ep,II,13; FC, SD,II,71-72,etc.).

Luther in his *De Servo Arbitrio* (1525) said:

He (God) could, of course, do this apart from the Word; but He does not want to do it in that way. And who are to inquire in the reason for the divine will? It is enough for us to know that God so wills it; and it becomes us to reverence, love, and adore this will and to bridle the impertinence of our reason.

“Sin and grace, Law and Gospel—the heart of our proclamation, the motivating force behind all our missionary activity! Because of sin the need of all people is desperate. But because of Christ the sin of all mankind has been atoned, the debt paid in full. In boundless mercy God has declared his verdict of righteousness to all sinners. This is the very heart of the message of our Christian ministry. Sin—redemption—justification. These truths go together.

<sup>29</sup> Mueller, J.T., *Christian Dogmatics*, Concordia Pub. House, St. Louis, Mo., 1955, 9. 457.

<sup>30</sup> Wong Yong, Ji, “The Work of the Holy Spirit And The Charismatic Movement.” *Concordia Journal*, Vol. 11, Number 6, (Nov. 1985) .205, 206.

<sup>31</sup> Mueller, J.T., *Christian Dogmatics*, Concordia Pub. House, St. Louis, Mo., 1955, p. 445.

Upon these objective truths of Scripture the entire work of the church of Jesus Christ stands or falls.<sup>32</sup>

To proclaim this gospel in all its fullness and in all its power is not only our heritage. It is our distinct privilege. It is a unique privilege. A Lutheran missionary in some far-off world mission field is going to find himself at times surrounded by all sorts of other sects and denominations. Sometimes he is going to wonder if his methods are as effective, or his tools as powerful, particularly if others seem to be enjoying more outward success. Is he perhaps wasting his time—and other people’s money? Does he have *Existenzberechtigung*, a right of existence? At times he needs to remind himself of that crown which God himself has placed upon his head, and with the trembling fingers of humility and appreciation touch that crown again. The unconditioned gospel of Christ! There is nothing to equal it.<sup>33</sup>

There aren’t many, if any, who have a knack for saying it better than Professor and Missionary E. H. Wendland. If you don’t have a copy of *Missiological Perspectives*, you are missing some very valuable and down to earth Scriptural guidance and encouragement.

We believe, teach, and confess that God has entrusted his precious Means of Grace, the gospel in Word and Sacraments, into our undeserving hands, so that the Holy Spirit can preserve and extend the holy Christian Church through us. Our missionaries do not have to depend upon themselves or their own powers or persuasion to win “decisions” for Christ. Equipped with the Spirit’s power they can find assurance in God’s promise.<sup>34</sup>

Professor Wendland writes further on page 96 of the *Missiological Perspectives*,

At the risk of being repetitive we’ll say that what might already have been said: If any church has a theology which stresses the importance of world mission, it is certainly our Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. This emphasis flows out of the Synod’s unequivocal stand upon the Holy Scriptures and its uncompromising confession to the truth of the Scriptures.

The teachings of man’s total natural depravity since the fall into sin, the revelation of God’s will of grace toward all mankind, the justification of every sinner in the death and resurrection of Christ, the Holy Spirit’s sanctifying power through the Means of Grace, the work of Christ’s Church in the light of his second coming to judge all people—all are a part of the Lord’s commission to disciple all nations and to teach them all things according to his command.

Our world mission rests upon these sacred, eternal truths which in themselves impel us to share them with those who are still without Christ, lost in sin and unbelief, doomed to eternal destruction. Our Lutheran emphasis upon *sola gratia*, *sola scriptura*, and *sola fide* is in itself a powerful *missio Dei*.<sup>35</sup>

“Today the task of the church is the same as in the Acts of the Apostles -engage in evangelism in carrying out Christ’s commission. The source is the same—the working of the Holy Spirit through the Word and Sacrament. The witnesses today, sad to say, frequently exhibit weaknesses and shortcomings similar to the early leaders in Acts. At times personalities may loom as more important than unity in teaching. But, evangelism will continue and the church will overcome

<sup>32</sup> Wendland, E.H., *Missiological Perspectives*, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. 1981, P. 78.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 79

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 94, 95.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 96.

opposition—not by gimmicks and new techniques, but by the blessing of the Lord of the church, who has promised to be with His people always, even to the end of the age.”<sup>36</sup>

“Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; for he is faithful that promised;” (Heb. 10:23). The term *homologew* is used 23 times: translated in KJV: “confess” 18 times; “profess” 3 times; “give thanks” once: “promised” once. *Exomologeomai* is used 11 times: translated “confess” all 11 times; *homologia* is used 6 times: translated “profession” 5 times and “confession” once.

The roots of the terms *homologew* and *exomologeomai* are in the courtroom where, D. Fuerst notes: ‘A man agrees with another’s statement, concedes or confesses something (e.g., his guilt before a judge), agrees to something (e.g., another’s wishes) and so promises.’ After the use of the term in the LXX to translate *yadah* יָדָה with the double aspects of ‘to confess guilt’ and ‘to give praise,’ the way was prepared for the threefold theological dimension of the term in the New Testament. There the confession of the church involves confessions of sin, of a shared faith, and of praise.<sup>37</sup>

Herman Sasse in his book, *We Confess Jesus Christ*, Vol. I, states that confession “separates pure doctrine from false doctrine, the Christian faith from the religions of the world, the church from all that is not church.”<sup>38</sup>

Larry Vogel in *Mission Across Cultures and Traditional Lutheran Culture* states, “The world will not see the seriousness of the Christian’s confession of sin; it will think the creeds to be full of silly curiosities, useless to contemporary life; and in the church’s praise it will hear only a melody. This alienation is the consequence of the fact that the world does not share the hope of the church.”<sup>39</sup>

He sums up in this way:

There is an important conclusion to be drawn here from our consideration. The proper desire of the church for mission may not lead to a false intention to do away with all that the visiting world would find difficult or even offensive in its *cultus* (worship). While it is certainly a worthy goal for the church to seek to remove needless obstacles to those outside the church, the church can remove all alienating characteristics only by expelling confession from service.<sup>40</sup>

He concludes, “It is crucial that the church recognize the need for a faithful maintenance of Biblical and Confessional *cultus* and a faithful response to our Lord’s call to mission. More and more there are ‘all nations’ in our own community. They have ears to hear the Word of the Gospel. They have voices to be added to the prayer, confession and song of one holy, catholic, and apostolic church.”<sup>41</sup>

Werner Stoehr brings confession further into focus for us with the following words in his article “Teach Them To Obey Everything That I Have Commanded” in the *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Summer 1991, on page 193.

”Permit me to say a few words first about the basic principles of a confession. The roots of confessional faithfulness in doctrine and practice lie in the understanding of what a confession is. To confess something means that a person takes a stance of wholehearted conviction toward the content of the confession and also bear public witness to his conviction. ... Wherever and

<sup>36</sup> Hoerber, R., “Evangelism In Acts,” *Concordia Journal*, Vol. 7, Number 3, (May, 1981), p. 90.

<sup>37</sup> Vogel, L.M., “Mission Across Cultures .And The Traditional Lutheran Culture,” *Concordia Journal*, Vol. 12, Number 3, (May, 1981), p. 84.

<sup>38</sup> Qtd. in Vogel, p. 84.

<sup>39</sup> Vogel, p. 84.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p.89.

whenever God's Word is proclaimed, this proclamation becomes confession. A true Christian confession is always equivalent to what the Holy Scriptures say, since they are the fundamental norm and source of the confession. When people depart from the content of biblical statements, as the sects have done again and again in the course of church history, the Holy Spirit has always given his true church the gift of clear doctrinal definitions. We see the gift of the Spirit in the formulation of confessions during the early Christian centuries and again in the Reformation period. The fathers struggled to find unequivocal expression, drawn from the Word of God, which would not be subject to misunderstanding. The unequivocal nature of the expression—excludes contrary opinions, i.e., condemns them. The exclusion of error takes place through language that is not subject to misunderstanding or, if that is not sufficient, through added condemnations."<sup>42</sup>

Kurt Marquardt adds in the May 1982 issue of the *Concordia Journal* (p.87),

The fact is that there simply is no neutral, undogmatic, generic Gospel, which may then be flavored to taste with denominational additives, say a dash of delicate Anglican mint sauce here, and hearty Lutheran sauerkraut or Baptist okra there. Every confession of the Gospel is at once and inevitably dogmatic or 'denominational.' For no honest presentation of the Gospel can escape the necessity of saying yes or no to basic evangelical ingredients like the power of Baptism, grace alone, universal grace, the Gospel as means of grace or the real presence of Christ's body and blood in the Holy Supper for our salvation.<sup>43</sup>

"We also believe and therefore speak," Paul declares in 2 Cor. 4:13. "Confessional conviction leads to bold proclamation. That was our theme at a synod convention not many years ago. That still is true today. Does the Book of Concord have something in common with world mission work? Yes, indeed, what we are helping to build is truly Lutheran. Yes, indeed, if we are convinced that what we have is also worth sharing."<sup>44</sup>

I am sure you all recall the thrilling day when these words were spoken and directed only to you: "Whereas, dear brother, you are about to enter upon the performance of the duties pertaining to the holy office of the ministry, in accordance with the Word and the will of the Lord Most High, I now ask you in the presence of God and this congregation: Do you believe the canonical books of the Old and the New Testament to be the inspired Word of God and the only infallible rule of faith and practice? 'I do so believe.'

Do you accept the three Ecumenical Creeds—the Apostles', the Nicene, and the Athanasian—as faithful testimonies to the truth of the Holy Scriptures, and do you reject all the errors which they condemn? 'I do.'

Do you believe that the Unaltered Augsburg Confession is a true exposition of the Word of God and a correct exhibition of the doctrine of the Evangelical Lutheran Church; and that the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, the two Catechisms of Martin Luther, the Smalcald Articles, and the Formula of Concord—as contained in the Book of Concord—are also in agreement with this Scriptural faith? 'I do.'

Do you solemnly promise that you will perform all duties of your office in accordance with these Confessions and that all your teachings and your administration of the Sacraments shall be in conformity with the Holy Scriptures and with the aforementioned Confession? 'I do.'"

That was the commitment and confession you and I made on the day of ordination. More recently in your installation or commissioning to the office in which you presently serve: "I ask you, therefore, dear brother, in the presence of God and this congregation: Will you preach and teach the pure Word of God in accordance with the Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church and adorn the doctrine of our Savior with a godly holy life? 'Yes, with the help of God.'"

<sup>42</sup> Stoehr, Werner, "Teach Them To Obey Everything I Have Commanded You," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol. 88, Number 3, (May, 1991) p. 193.

<sup>43</sup> Marquardt, Kurt, "Central Lutheran Thrusts For Today," *Concordia Journal*. Vol. 18, Number 3, (May 1982), p. 87.

<sup>44</sup> Wendland, E.H., *Missiological Perspectives*, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, 1981, p. 109.

Yes, “with the help of God” that was our confession. God will do what He promises as His Gospel is proclaimed in Word and Sacrament. Let us proclaim and make use of the Means of Grace in the Lord’s mission with conviction and joy and holy ebullience created by the working of the Holy Spirit through those very means, the Means of Grace.

For you and I surely confess together: “I believe that I cannot by my own thinking or choosing believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him. But the Holy Ghost has called me by the gospel, enlightened me with his gift, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. In the same way he calls, gathers, enlightens and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. This is most certainly true.”

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