

WISCONSIN LUTHERAN SEMINARY

CULTURAL IMMERSION AND STRESS POINTS: HOW THE MINISTRY OF MARK  
CARES TYPIFIED A SHIFT IN WELS EVANGELISM PHILOSOPHY

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## ABSTRACT

Cross-cultural evangelism opportunities present the Christian with unique challenges for carrying out the Great Commission. Various historical factors left the WELS employing a largely monocultural approach to evangelism for much of its history, but recent years have seen a shift towards a multicultural focus. The Mormon outreach work of Mark Cares serves as a perfect example of this shift. This thesis examines the scriptural principles relating to cross-cultural outreach. This is followed by a history of cross-cultural outreach in the WELS, focusing on the factors that contributed to maintaining a largely monocultural approach and the factors that led to a shift towards a multicultural focus. Lastly, the outreach approach of Mark Cares will be placed into the context of this shift.

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## INTRODUCTION

Jesus sends out his disciples to “go and make disciples of all nations” (Matt 28:19 NIV).

Carrying out this call naturally leads to the difficulties associated with cross-cultural communication. The initial language barrier will certainly present difficulties, but, as will be demonstrated, this is only the beginning. Love drives Christians to recognize these difficulties and adapt their approach in order to reach souls with the gospel. In the world today, one does not need to travel far to reach these opportunities for cross-cultural evangelism. People from all nations can be found in a congregation’s local community. The fields are ripe for harvest.

How has the WELS responded to these opportunities? Historically, the WELS has struggled in this area, for several reasons. In recent years, there has been a shift in evangelism philosophy, resulting in a greater focus on cross-cultural outreach. Mission efforts are expanding into more and more cultures, and the gospel is reaching more and more people.

An example of this is the Mormon outreach work of Mark Cares. This may not seem obvious at first, but an examination of the history and intricacies of Mormonism demonstrates that it really is a distinct culture. This means that Mormons communicate in a distinct way. Any attempts at sharing the gospel with Mormons will be hindered if we do not recognize this, so we must learn how to best communicate with them in order to best reach them with the love of their Savior.

What does Scripture tell us about how to handle such cross-cultural outreach? How did this shift in WELS evangelism philosophy take place? How has Cares’s outreach approach

typified this shift? This thesis will address these questions. The first section will examine the theological principles relating to communication in cross-cultural outreach. This will begin with a doctrinal discussion and follow with several case studies from the New Testament. The next section will set the context for Mark Cares's ministry by examining the history of cross-cultural outreach in the WELS and tracking a shift in WELS evangelism philosophy. The last section will examine the ministry of Mark Cares and his approach to Mormon outreach. This will demonstrate how Cares's approach typified this shift in WELS evangelism philosophy toward taking the culture and background of individuals into account in reaching them with the gospel.

## THEOLOGICAL PRINCIPLES

Mark Cares’s approach to evangelism has a strong Scriptural basis. God’s Word urges Christian missionaries to take the culture and background of individuals into account in the way they reach them with the gospel. This will first be demonstrated by a discussion of the relevant doctrines of Scripture. Several case studies of these principles at work in the New Testament will follow.

### **Doctrinal Discussion**

When examining the doctrines relevant to this approach to evangelism, Wendland’s division of this matter into a two-sided paradox is helpful: “In Christ, culture doesn’t matter... In communicating Christ, culture matters a great deal.”<sup>1</sup> This division will serve as the basis for the unfolding what Scripture has to say on this matter.

#### **In Christ, Culture Doesn’t Matter**

The gospel changes everything in the life of the believer. Paul demonstrates the impact of the gospel on our approach to outreach in his second letter to the Corinthians:

For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us (2 Cor 5:14–20a NIV).

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1. Paul Wendland, “The Apostle Paul and Culture” (Paper presented to the World Seminary Conference in Mequon, Wisconsin, August 7–11, 2006), 4.

Those in Christ have died and been raised together with Christ as a new creation. This new creation “is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none.”<sup>2</sup> This grants us a new perspective where we “regard no one from a worldly point of view.” The things of this world are now viewed from a spiritual, eternal perspective. This includes culture.

The apostle Paul serves as a prime example of what this looks like. Paul had much he could have tried to boast about concerning his culture, for “from [the Jews] is traced the human ancestry of the Messiah” (Rom 9:5 NIV). He was “of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews” (Phil 3:5 NIV), and yet he was able to “consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ” (Phil 3:8 NIV). It was this mindset of the new creation that urged Paul on to carry out his calling to proclaim [God’s] name to the Gentiles and their kings” (Acts 9:15 NIV).

The same is true for all Christians. We recognize our own culture, but also recognize that it is not inherently better than any other culture. We realize that God not only “reconciled us to himself through Christ,” but also “that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ,” and that “he has committed to us the message of reconciliation” (2 Cor 5: 18–19 NIV). We see all people of all backgrounds that have not yet received the blessings of this reconciliation as those for whom Jesus died who still need to hear this message. “For Christians, there are really only two tribes. There are those who belong to Christ Jesus and those who do not.”<sup>3</sup>

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2. Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works: Volume 31*, ed. Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1957), 344.

3. Wendland, “The Apostle Paul and Culture,” 5.

### In Communicating Christ, Culture Matters a Great Deal

We now carry out that ministry of reconciliation, no longer living for ourselves but for him who died for us and was raised again. An important part of living for Christ is living for others. In the words of Luther, “A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.”<sup>4</sup> In reference to his own approach to evangelism, Paul put it this way: “Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible.... I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some” (1 Cor 9:19, 22b NIV).

In evangelism, this includes seeking to understand the culture and background of others as best as we are able, because culture matters a great deal in communicating Christ.

Culture matters a great deal in communicating Christ because culture matters a great deal in communicating. In order to understand the role that culture plays in communicating the gospel, and in communication in general, one must understand communication. At a basic level, “communication occurs whenever persons attribute significance to message-related behavior.”<sup>5</sup> These messages must be transmitted by someone and received by someone. Effective communication occurs when the meaning intended by the transmitter is the same as the meaning received by the receiver.

It’s important to recognize the difficulties of intercultural communication, because “the diversity of backgrounds, experiences, and assumptions resident in communicators due to their culture has the potential to make communication very difficult—and in some instances essentially impossible.”<sup>6</sup> This is because each person’s “individual make-up (personality,

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4. LW 31:344.

5. A. Scott Moreau, Evvy Hay Campbell, and Susan Greener, *Effective Intercultural Communication: A Christian Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2014), 11.

6. Larry A. Samovar and Richard E. Porter, *Communication between Cultures* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thompson Learning, 2001), 2–3.

education, emotions, beliefs, values, traits, attitudes, motives, etc.) has much more impact on how you perceive your environment and how you behave in regard to it than does your physical handling of incoming stimuli.”<sup>7</sup> Within a culture, individuals often perceive similar meanings and exhibit similar behaviors since they have been exposed to similar experiences.<sup>8</sup> It becomes clear that “culture strongly influences our subjective reality and that there are direct links among culture, perception, and behavior.”<sup>9</sup>

Christians who seeks to effectively reach people of other cultures with the gospel will recognize these difficulties and strive to overcome them. They recognize that these difficulties are not necessarily caused because others view things wrongly. They often simply view things differently. At a broad level, seeking to overcome these difficulties means understanding the culture of a group one is seeking to reach out to. At an individual level, it means listening and seeking to understand where that person is coming from. When taking culture into account, there is always the danger of stereotyping. It’s important to use what is beneficial from an understanding of someone’s culture and background while still recognizing that they are individuals who are not simply defined by their culture.

Someone may argue that focusing too much on communication strategies diminishes the power of God’s Word. As we seek to effectively communicate the gospel across cultures, we do need to remember that the gospel is still “the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes” (Rom 1:16 NIV). We cannot make the word more effective, yet we can still put

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7. Samovar and Porter, *Communication between Cultures*, 53.

8. Samovar and Porter, *Communication between Cultures*, 53.

9. Samovar and Porter, *Communication between Cultures*, 54.

stumbling blocks in its path. We may cause offense through cultural misunderstandings or fail to actually communicate the message properly.

When communicating the Word, it can be helpful to remember the distinction sometimes made between the *forma* and *materia* of God's Word. The *materia* is "the letters, syllables, words, and phrases that together constitute Scripture."<sup>10</sup> The *forma* is "its inspired meaning, the thoughts of God concerning our salvation and divine mysteries."<sup>11</sup> Purely speaking of the *materia*, "Scripture is the Word of God only in a secondary and inappropriate sense ... inasmuch as it is only the vehicle that brings the thoughts of God to us. It is the *forma* of Scripture, the inspired meaning, that makes Scripture what it is—the Word of God—and distinguishes it from all other books."<sup>12</sup>

If one speaks the *materia* of Scripture, yet it is spoken in a way in which the proper meaning of the *forma* is not correctly communicated to the intended audience, in a sense, one has not successfully proclaimed the gospel. The Word works both psychologically and supernaturally, yet it does not work magically. It has power in itself, yet it is not a kind of incantation that simply works *ex opera operato*. Therefore, a Christian who understands the immense power of the gospel will seek to communicate it as effectively as possible and remove any stumbling blocks that may be in the way. The Christian will be a servant to others not simply by seeking to share the love of Jesus with them, but also by communicating with them in ways they can grasp.

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10. Robert D. Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism: A Study of Theological Prolegomena*. St. Louis: Concordia, 1970.

11. Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, 267.

12. Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, 267.

## Case Studies

Scripture provides several examples of cross-cultural outreach. There are examples from the Old Testament, such as Rahab, Naaman, and the widow of Zarephath, among others. After Christ came, the ceremonial distinction between Jews and Gentiles was removed since he “destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility” (Eph 2:14 NIV) created by the law. Outreach to Gentiles then became a more prominent theme, and the examples become more practical for the discussion of culture and communication. The case studies will be taken from the New Testament examples of Jesus, Peter, and Paul.

### Jesus

Jesus, as the perfect Son of God, is also the perfect evangelist, so there is much we can learn from his example. Jesus did spend most of his personal ministry working among “the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt 15:24 NIV), yet there are some notable examples of what was to come following Pentecost.

The first example from the ministry of Jesus is his discussion with the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4. There are many evangelism lessons to be learned from Jesus in this section, from the transition to a spiritual discussion to the use of law and gospel. Here the focus remains on the cross-cultural interaction.

One of the most important lessons is found in the simple phrase, “Now he had (ἔδει) to go through Samaria” (John 4:4 NIV). The simple truth was that there was no natural reason why “he had to go through Samaria.” It may have been the most direct and most convenient way, yet it was not the expected way for a group of Jewish to travel from Judea to Galilee. “Strict Jews, like the Pharisees, disliked the Samaritans so intensely that they avoided their territory as much

as possible. Their route from Jerusalem to Galilee lay through the region beyond the Jordan. This was considerably longer, but it avoided contact with the Samaritans.”<sup>13</sup>

Jesus could have, and many in his day would have even said he should have, gone a different route, and yet “he had to go through Samaria.” The necessity was not absolute, but rather it “lay in the nature of the mission of Jesus.”<sup>14</sup> Love for the individual compelled Jesus to break through the cultural barriers of the day and pass through Samaria, so that this woman and many more Samaritans would believe that “this man really is the Savior of the world” (John 4:42 NIV). This love of Christ is reflected in his disciples when they go out of their way to bring the message of salvation to those from a different culture or background from them, even when it’s a group that “their own people” tend to look down on. “I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest (John 4:35 NIV).

The way in which Jesus introduced himself as Savior is also significant. In response to the Samaritan woman raising the issue of the proper location of worship, Jesus replied,

Believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth (John 4:21–24 NIV).

Jesus used the auxiliary question of worship location to transition into the far more important issue of salvation. He did not shy away from the theological issues with Samaritan religion, but instead confronted them. He first, however, made clear that what he is offering is not a simple rehashing of the debates she was familiar with between Jews and Samaritans, between Jerusalem and Gerizim. This was a new kind of worship, a worship in Spirit and in truth that transcends

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13. Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 226.

14. Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 226.

historical conflicts and cultural barriers. He pointed to his own people, the Jews, but only to demonstrate that “salvation is from the Jews,” for in pointing to ἡ σωτηρία, he was really beginning to point to himself, ὁ σωτήρ.

Certain culture differences may at times be the issue that opens up a spiritual discussion. There are also times, especially in instances like this where religion features strongly in culture, where an aspect of the target culture must be confronted. This must always be done in love, and it must be made clear that this is not merely an “us vs. them” situation. A confrontation may not necessarily be confrontational. This is usually easier said than done. Through all of this, the goal remains sharing the love of Jesus with this soul for which he died.

The next two examples from the ministry of Jesus are slightly different. In each case, the person coming to Jesus seems to already have some sense that Jesus is the Messiah, the Savior. Cross-cultural mission work is more than simply planting seeds, so they remain relevant for the missionary seeking to communicate the gospel across cultures.

The first is the centurion in Capernaum with a servant who was dying:

When Jesus had finished saying all this to the people who were listening, he entered Capernaum. There a centurion’s servant, whom his master valued highly, was sick and about to die. The centurion heard of Jesus and sent some elders of the Jews to him, asking him to come and heal his servant. When they came to Jesus, they pleaded earnestly with him, “This man deserves to have you do this, because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue.” So Jesus went with them. He was not far from the house when the centurion sent friends to say to him: “Lord, don’t trouble yourself, for I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you. But say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, ‘Go,’ and he goes; and that one, ‘Come,’ and he comes. I say to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.” When Jesus heard this, he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd following him, he said, “I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel.” Then the men who had been sent returned to the house and found the servant well (Luke 7:1–11 NIV).

The cultural awareness in this section that most catches the reader’s attention is not likely Jesus’s, but rather the centurion’s. He was a Gentile, yet he understood the culture of the Jewish

people he governed and knew that he was considered ceremonially unclean. As he brought this request to Jesus, he sent others in his stead and requested that Jesus not enter his house and make himself unclean.<sup>15</sup> Jesus, on the other hand, went with the elders and appeared to be more than willing to go to this Gentile's home. When the centurion demonstrated his great faith that his servant could be healed with only a word, Jesus then demonstrated that this faith was warranted.

The centurion, despite not being the missionary in this situation, is a great example of accommodation to another culture. He had clearly immersed himself among the people he governed and sought to understand their culture. He now had a request for Jesus and was willing to meet Jewish cultural expectations to remove any barriers and make this happen. Examining the centurion as a prospect teaches that people will sometimes be willing to make allowances, especially if they themselves have a high awareness of cultural differences or if the gospel has already been at work. It may be important to first earn people's good will so they will be more willing to be patient as the missionary seeks to communicate across the cultural gap and give the gospel a hearing.

Next is the case of the Canaanite woman whose daughter was possessed by a demon:

And Jesus went away from there and withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon. And behold, a Canaanite woman from that region came out and was crying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon." But he did not answer her a word. And his disciples came and begged him, saying, "Send her away, for she is crying out after us." He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." And he answered, "It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." Then Jesus answered her, "O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire." And her daughter was healed instantly (Matt 15:21–28 ESV).

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15. "The Mosaic Law itself does not go this far, yet it becomes clear from the case of Peter and Cornelius that the Pharisaic traditions and Jewish cultural standards of the day considered this close of an association with a Gentile as making one unclean." Frederick F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, NICNT, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 209–10.

At first, this section may come off as an example of what not to do in intercultural communication. First, Jesus ignored the woman. Next, he seemed to indicate that she and her people were excluded from his mission. Finally, he indirectly referred to her as a dog.

On further evaluation, this was exactly what the situation called for. Jesus knew of this woman's faith and was testing her, giving her a chance to demonstrate this faith and grow in this faith. His comment about the "lost sheep of Israel" simply demonstrates the general nature of his personal earthly ministry and the unique role of Israel in salvation history. Some have argued that the word used for "dog" (κυνάριον) is in reference specifically to a pet dog, yet this "hardly transforms the image into a compliment."<sup>16</sup> This is simply another comment concerning the unique role of Israel in salvation history. The overall effect of the discussion is Jesus leading this woman to confess just what it meant that he was the "Lord, Son of David." This Messiah coming out of Judea would bring salvation and healing with an abundance that transcends the boundaries of Judea.

It is not recommended that a modern missionary without the ability to read hearts use a similar strategy to Jesus here, yet there are still important applications. There is some overlap with the case of the centurion. The lesson about accommodation applies. Both cases seem to be prime candidates for cross-cultural gospel proclamation. The gospel already had a foothold, so much so that they were the only two people, including from among the Jews, that Jesus ever praised for great faith. These people who seem to defy many of the challenges of cross-cultural evangelism can be valuable assets in gospel ministry moving forward. They can provide a bridge to others in their culture group and remove more barriers than the missionary would be able to bypass alone. They may even become candidates for public ministry themselves.

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16. Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 416.

Another important application of this section is that no culture is an exception to gospel outreach, no matter how different or even immoral their culture may seem to outsiders. If any group could have ever been considered an exception, it would have been the Canaanites. When the Israelites entered the land of Canaan, God commanded them to completely wipe out the Canaanites. After they failed to do this, the Canaanites became a constant problem for the Israelites, leading them into idolatry and sinful practices. Here Jesus granted the request of this woman whose ancestors should have been wiped off the map by divine decree and even praised her faith.

### Peter

The next case comes from the ministry of the Apostle Peter. In this case, Peter visited the home of a Roman centurion named Cornelius. This is a pivotal section in the Book of Acts and of the history of the church. In case its importance was missed the first time through in Acts 10, Luke repeats the account in Peter's defense in Acts 11 for emphasis, much like he repeats the account of Paul's conversion.

While he was at his home in Caesarea, Cornelius, a God-fearing man, received a vision from God telling him to invite Peter to his home. Meanwhile, Peter had his own vision:

He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles and birds. Then a voice told him, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat." "Surely not, Lord!" Peter replied. "I have never eaten anything impure or unclean." The voice spoke to him a second time, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean." This happened three times, and immediately the sheet was taken back to heaven (Acts 10:11–16 NIV).

The meaning of this vision became apparent when the visitors from Cornelius arrived and invited Peter to visit Cornelius and preach the message of Jesus: "I now realize how true it is that God

does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right” (Acts 10:34–5 NIV).

By all appearances, this should not have been a new realization for Peter. He knew his Old Testament. The promise of salvation for the Gentiles was found in the promise to Abraham (Gen 12:3) and the prophecies of Isaiah (Isa 49:6). He had also observed the ministry of Jesus. He saw his interactions with Gentiles. He likely began to make that walk with Jesus to the other centurion’s house. He had heard Jesus’s command to “go and make disciples of all nations” (Matt 28:19 NIV) with his own ears. He had even heard Jesus’s assertion that “nothing outside a person can defile them by going into them. Rather, it is what comes out of a person that defiles them” (Mark 7:15 NIV).

Peter may have had some idea that there was to be no distinction between Jew and Gentile in Christ, yet it is clear from this account that he had not yet realized the full implications of this truth. He was still religiously holding to Jewish dietary laws.<sup>17</sup> He states that “it is against our law for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile” (Acts 10:28 NIV) as if it had been his own practice until this special revelation. Finally, the circumcised believers in Jerusalem criticized him for this, as if he were doing something new (Acts 11:2–3). Peter now needed to learn how to apply this truth that until now remained purely theoretical. He would have to relearn this truth down the road from Paul when “he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group” (Gal 2:12 NIV).

The case of Peter and Cornelius demonstrates that Christians can have blind spots in the way they apply the truths of Scripture. An application that appears so clear to an outside observer

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17. This is not to say a Jewish Christian could not choose in Christian freedom to continue to follow the ceremonial law. His reaction three times in the dream rather seems to indicate that he still viewed eating these unclean foods as wrong.

with hindsight is not always so clear in the original context. Much like in cross-cultural communication, different factors from backgrounds are affecting the perception of the situation. In Peter's case, it was hard to see past laws and customs that he had followed his whole life and his people had held for 1500 years. "This may be the veriest truism to us, but it was a revolutionary revelation to Peter."<sup>18</sup>

### Paul

Lastly is the example of Paul. Paul was an expert at understanding the culture of his audience and fashioning his sermons to fit this background. Two of his sermons will be examined here: his sermon in Pisidian Antioch in Acts 13 and his sermon in Athens in Acts 17.

There are a few interesting elements at work in Paul's sermon in Pisidian Antioch as it pertains to cross-cultural evangelism. He was in many ways preaching to his own culture, Jews, yet in a sense this was his "old culture." Once again, as in the case of the Samaritan woman at the well, religion features strongly in culture.

This sermon in Pisidian Antioch was specially written to communicate to the culture of Jews in the Diaspora. The form and structure Paul used would have been what was expected of a synagogue address. Paul's message demonstrates a strong grasp of the rabbinic hermeneutics of the day.<sup>19</sup> He led his audience to Jesus by retelling Israelite history with the aim of proving that Jesus was the promised Messiah, pointing to Psalms and prophecies as further proof. He also appealed to them as members of the Diaspora. He began the history with their time staying in Egypt, away from Israel, which likely led his audience to think of their own situation. He pushed it even further by focusing on the fact that God "made the people prosper during their stay in

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18. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, 210–1.

19. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, 254.

Egypt” (Acts 13:17 NIV). He may have even tapped into some tension with the establishment in the homeland by focusing on the fact that “the people of Jerusalem and their rulers did not recognize Jesus” (Acts 13:27 NIV). His message of Christ certainly made an impact, for they were asked to come back, and many followed them in the grace of God after the dismissal (Acts 13:42–3).

Paul met a much different audience in Athens. This was a less familiar culture, though his quotations from Greek poets demonstrate that he did have some familiarity with Greek culture. His background in Tarsus likely contributed as well. Whatever knowledge of the culture he had, it could still be improved, so he began by walking around the city, visiting the marketplaces, and getting to know the people (Acts 17:17). This work yielded fruit, as he gained to some level the respect of the locals and piqued their curiosity. This culture may have been strange to Paul, but his message was also strange to the Athenians (Acts 17:18).

He then used what familiarity he had in his message to remove as much of this confusion as possible. Rather than boring them with the history of a tiny nation far to the east, he began by complimenting them on their religiosity that was apparent to anyone visiting the city (Acts 17:22). Having built up their good will towards this foreigner, he approaches them based on common ground, the natural knowledge of God. From there, “he works from the known to the unknown, adapting concepts from Greek poets and philosophers that were in harmony with the Scripture's message while correcting those that were not.”<sup>20</sup> The reaction was much the same as in Pisidian Antioch, with some wanting to hear more and others believing, though here sneers are mentioned (Acts 17:32, 34). This underscored the truth that cross-cultural outreach, by its very nature, tends to be more difficult at the start.

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20. Wendland, “The Apostle Paul and Culture,” 7.

The applications vary in different contexts, but Scripture makes it clear: the gospel is for people of all nations, cultures, and backgrounds. Christian love then compels God's people to understand the culture and background of others in order to remove any stumbling blocks cultural differences may present and more effectively communicate the love of Christ for all people.

## SHIFT IN WELS EVANGELISM PHILOSOPHY

An evangelism approach that takes the culture and background of individuals into account may seem like a clear application of Scripture, yet one's context may prevent this application from being too clear. This was the case for the WELS. Several factors led to a mostly monocultural approach to home missions for many years in the synod. In the years leading up to Mark Cares's work in Nampa, Idaho, the necessary factors came together to bring about this shift towards a more multicultural approach to evangelism in home missions.

The history of this development will now be traced, beginning with the factors that brought about the monocultural approach once dominant in the WELS and continuing with the factors that brought about the shift in approach.

### **German Origins**

The monocultural approach to evangelism once prevalent in the WELS largely developed out of the makeup, context, and cultural isolation of the early Wisconsin Synod. In the earliest days, language was the biggest factor. The Wisconsin Synod was formed by gathering together groups of German immigrants, and German was therefore the primary language. It was even common for church constitutions to state that worship and instruction should be conducted "in German forever."<sup>21</sup> As late as 1911, only 3% of churches in the Synodical Conference used English.<sup>22</sup>

As the synod moved deeper into the twentieth century, it became more and more apparent that a shift to English would be necessary. August Pieper saw primarily a twofold goal in this transition, both focused on serving members rather than outreach: "On the one hand, we dare not

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21. Mark E. Braun, *A Tale of Two Synods: Events That Led to the Split between Wisconsin and Missouri* (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 2003), 37.

22. Braun, *A Tale of Two Synods*, 37–38.

reduce the quality of spiritual care we offer to those members who are German and will remain German. On the other hand, we must begin to supply equally strong spiritual ministry to the growing English-speaking segment of the membership.”<sup>23</sup> The Wisconsin Synod would eventually make the shift to English “because of the pressures brought on by World War I and because of the need to retain our own members, not because of any mission drive.”<sup>24</sup>

Even in these early days dominated by German, a few voices throughout confessional German Lutheranism in America identified the opportunity and even duty to conduct mission work to English speakers. Matthias Loy, an Ohio Synod professor, insisted that “without question” the Lutherans had the mission “to proclaim the great deeds of God in the English language in this country.”<sup>25</sup> A series in the *Lutheran Witness* made this plea:

If we wait till Americans are willing to learn German or Norwegian or Swedish, before we approach them with the pearl of great price, we may as well label our doctrine, our churches, our periodicals, our seminaries, our colleges, our normal schools with the motto: For Germans only and always. This would prove that we are German Levites and Priests, and not Lutheran Samaritans.<sup>26</sup>

Pieper, in the same article in which he identified the twofold goal of the transition into English, also identified an assignment for the church brought about by the current situation in America: “by means of the English language to carry the Lutheran gospel to the English-speaking American people who are still outside of our church.”<sup>27</sup> He viewed this as an assignment, however, for “the orthodox Lutheran church as it becomes English-speaking,”<sup>28</sup> rather than as an

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23. August Pieper, “Our Transition Into English,” (Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Essay File), 3.

24. Paul Wendland, “WELS Attitudes Towards Foreign and Minority Language Speakers and Their Cultures” (Paper presented to the ESL Conference in New Ulm, Minnesota, June 26, 2001), 3.

25. Braun, *A Tale of Two Synods*, 36.

26. Braun, *A Tale of Two Synods*, 37.

27. Pieper, “Our Transition,” 10.

28. Pieper, “Our Transition,” 10.

assignment for a German-speaking church to learn English in order to reach English speakers. The voices were there, yet “this type of mission voice went largely unheard.”<sup>29</sup>

This should not be confused for a lack of mission mindset. German immigrants, many of whom were “neglecting their spiritual needs,”<sup>30</sup> were flooding into the country at this time, bringing a constant stream of German mission prospects to the Upper Midwest. President Bading viewed this as “a holy and important mission” that the synod “will not be able to finish in our whole lives.”<sup>31</sup> At this time, “there was no need for us to cross cultural barriers to do mission work.”<sup>32</sup> There was more than enough work to do gathering and reaching out to the recent German immigrants. It’s important to remember that at this time, the early members of the Wisconsin Synod “were German foreigners and still very much in the minority in this English-speaking land.”<sup>33</sup> Much like the WELS today sees the advantages of national pastors and members of minority groups leading evangelism efforts among their own culture, the early Wisconsin Synod Lutherans would have seen the mission efforts among the German immigrants as the best use of their time and resources.

### **Early Cross-Cultural Missions**

These early days did give rise to two main mission efforts to other cultures: the Synodical Conference’s mission to the freed slaves in the South and the Wisconsin Synod’s first solo

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29. Wendland, “WELS Attitudes,” 3.

30. Braun, *A Tale of Two Synods*, 56.

31. Braun, *A Tale of Two Synods*, 56.

32. Wendland, “WELS Attitudes,” 3.

33. Wendland, “WELS Attitudes,” 2.

foreign mission venture to the Apaches of Arizona. These mission efforts were an important step, but neither was without problems.

The first missionaries sent to the South beginning in the 1870s were “ethnocentric in the extreme.”<sup>34</sup> With the emphasis placed on German hymns and culture by many of the missionaries, the impression was given that in order to be a “good black Lutheran,” one had to also become a “good black German.”<sup>35</sup> The German publications of the Synodical Conference synods portrayed a negative attitude towards the African American mission prospects, referring to them as “the perishing darkie heathen,” or “the children of Ham.”<sup>36</sup>

Despite its shortcomings, the gospel was at work driving the hearts of these missionaries to bring the gospel to a people far different from themselves. The care in this work was visible to many, including Booker T. Washington, who asserted that the Lutherans “were doing more for [African-Americans] than any other denomination.”<sup>37</sup> In addition, the missionaries in the South fairly quickly learned the lesson of placing “an early emphasis on the training of church workers from the culture it was seeking to reach.”<sup>38</sup>

The Apache mission also came with its share of issues, yet most of these were caused by inexperience and the typical challenges expected with cross-cultural work. The first missionaries who arrived in 1893 had no real special training.<sup>39</sup> They did not know the language, they knew

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34. Wendland, “WELS Attitudes,” 5.

35. Jeff G. Johnson, *Black Christians: The Untold Lutheran Story* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1991), 154.

36. Johnson, *Black Christians*, 156.

37. Rosa Young, *Light in the Dark Belt: The Story of Rosa Young as Told by Herself* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1929), 90.

38. Wendland, “WELS Attitudes,” 7.

39. Edward C. Fredrich, *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans: A History of the Single Synod, Federation, and Merger* (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 2003), 99.

no special strategies for Native American outreach, and the synod had no special training for this new type of missionary.<sup>40</sup> Missionaries regularly faced feelings of culture shock and alienation.<sup>41</sup> Because of these issues, there was a quick turnover of missionaries in the early years, with lessons learned by trial-and-error passed on to the next missionary.<sup>42</sup>

Despite its many issues, this trial-and-error mission would eventually take root and become an early positive example of cross-cultural outreach. The missionaries began to learn more about the Apache culture and how best to minister to them. Through a combination of natural gifts and hard work, Paul Meyerhoff became proficient in the Apache language and was even recognized by the Smithsonian Institution as the authority on the language.<sup>43</sup> Other missionaries learned to speak Apache, but many of the other early missionaries relied on interpreters.<sup>44</sup> These interpreters would prove to be invaluable assets for the mission, even beyond their work in translating. They also served as advisors for the missionaries, teaching them the language and the intricacies of their culture and customs.<sup>45</sup> The interpreters were thus able to help fashion the message of the missionaries to best reach Apache ears. Perhaps most of all, they served as “living demonstrations that Christianity was a religion for Apaches not just white men.”<sup>46</sup>

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40. Arthur A. Guenther, “The Ministry among the Apaches after 100 Years” (Paper presented to the Arizona Pastoral Conference, San Carlos, AZ, May 4–5, 1993), 5.

41. Wendland, “WELS Attitudes,” 8.

42. Guenther, “The Ministry among the Apaches,” 5.

43. William B. Kessel, “WELS Pioneers in Apacheland” (WELS Historical Institute Journal, April 1995), 27.

44. Kessel, “WELS Pioneers,” 27.

45. Kessel, “WELS Pioneers,” 28.

46. Kessel, “WELS Pioneers,” 28.

Today, it would seem a natural next step for the interpreters to take up formal training as pastors in order to best serve the Apache mission. The Apaches themselves wanted native workers and native missionaries.<sup>47</sup> Edgar Guenther, one of the missionaries, recommended that a way be worked out for this to be accomplished, yet the mission board simply responded with an invitation that anyone interested in becoming a pastor could attend Northwestern College and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary.<sup>48</sup> The synod at this time was unwilling to accommodate these minority brothers interested in entering the ministry, but instead left the onus on the Apaches to learn within the context of the dominant synodical culture.

These early mission efforts were important first steps for the Wisconsin Synod in cross-cultural outreach. They helped to plant early seeds of future efforts, yet their immediate impact on the attitudes of rank-and-file members was minimal, and they were mostly outliers. The people were happy and even eager to support these mission efforts financially and even send missionaries, yet these mission efforts were always somewhere else. Many of these missionaries developed a cross-cultural mindset out of necessity, yet this mindset largely did not spread back to the Upper Midwest. What would now be called home missions still maintained a mostly monocultural outreach approach, focusing mostly on Germans, or after the language shift, English-speaking Northern Europeans.

### **Relationship with Missouri in the Synodical Conference**

In addition to the language barrier and focused mission of the early days, the unique relationship between the Wisconsin Synod and the Missouri Synod also contributed to the cultural isolation of the Wisconsin Synod. Despite earlier doctrinal disagreements due to the Wisconsin Synod's

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47. Kessel, "WELS Pioneers," 30.

48. Wendland, "WELS Attitudes," 9.

pietistic roots and earlier unionistic tendencies, the two synods were in fellowship in the Synodical Conference by 1872. Missouri was always the “big sister” of this relationship due to extraordinary early growth.<sup>49</sup> “Missouri was half again as large in 1897 as Wisconsin is more than a century later.”<sup>50</sup> This would have a significant effect on the mission efforts of the Wisconsin Synod.

After the state synod plan failed to materialize in 1877,<sup>51</sup> the two synods needed to confront the challenges brought on by two distinct church bodies working together in the same territory. Over time, certain “gentleman’s agreements” developed, though the nature of these agreements and how formal they really were is up for debate.<sup>52</sup> Whatever the case was, the result was that generally speaking, “Missouri did the towns and [Wisconsin] did the country.”<sup>53</sup> As a result of Wisconsin’s rural character, it “‘was not so exposed to the rapid Americanization process’ and was ‘rooted more in traditionally Lutheran and even German areas.’ Its membership was “still more inhibited by the habits of the German, often Pomeranian, farming communities, who are not inclined to move very fast.”<sup>54</sup> The unique relationship with Missouri contributed to maintaining a primarily rural character, and therefore contributed to the relative cultural isolation of the Wisconsin Synod.

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49. “Missouri grew 58 percent during its first three years, 343 percent during the 1850s, and another 154 percent during the 1860s, so that by its silver anniversary in 1872 it numbered 415 pastors serving 77,832 members in 26 states. During the next quarter century, it grew more than 800 percent to 687,334 baptized members in 1,986 congregations and 683 additional preaching stations. By the turn of the century, Missouri had members in all but three states in the United States, plus 42 congregations in Canada.” Braun, *A Tale of Two Cities*, 52.

50. Braun, *A Tale of Two Synods*, 55.

51. Braun, *A Tale of Two Synods*, 50–1.

52. Braun, *A Tale of Two Synods*, 57.

53. Braun, *A Tale of Two Synods*, 57.

54. Braun, *A Tale of Two Synods*, 59.

Recognizing itself as the “little sister” to Missouri likely contributed to an inward-focused attitude in mission philosophy. Koehler was a leading voice. He was primarily responding to things he saw as waste and inefficiency in synod expansion such as the acquisition of the Tacoma mission<sup>55</sup> and the overlap between Wisconsin and Missouri Synod churches. He claimed that “there are organizations, like peoples, that remain small in number and in that have a token of their mission to do intensive rather than extensive work.”<sup>56</sup> In response to some who claimed that “a church is not living up to its mission unless it engages in heathen-mission work,” he said, “That idea is dogmatism, with a streak of pietism.”<sup>57</sup> There was some truth here, yet these comments “caused a lasting impact on the synodical personality,”<sup>58</sup> likely doing more harm than good. Some at this time even argued that “the natural limits for Wisconsin’s extension was the parent soil of Wisconsin, Minnesota, Nebraska, and Michigan.”<sup>59</sup>

The result was that the synod largely, but not exclusively, focused expansion inwardly on this parent soil. The notable exceptions were the Tacoma mission, which would grow into the Pacific Northwest District, the Minnesota Synod’s natural expansion into the Dakotas, which would grow into the Dakota-Montana District, and the area around the Apache mission, which would grow into the Arizona-California District.<sup>60</sup>

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55. This mission largely fell into the synod’s lap. In 1898 a Lutheran congregation in Tacoma, Washington founded by the General Synod requested and was granted membership in the Wisconsin Synod. By the time of the formation of the Pacific Northwest District in 1918, the mission work in the area had grown to eight pastors serving ten congregations and sixteen preaching places. Fredrich, *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans*, 140–1.

56. John P. Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod* (St. Cloud: Sentinel, 1970), 196.

57. Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 198.

58. Braun, *A Tale of Two Synods*, 57.

59. Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 195.

60. Fredrich, *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans*, 140.

The Wisconsin Synod could “remain small in number” and focus on “intensive work” because of the extensive work of their big sister Missouri. The size, resources, and “modern synodical machinery”<sup>61</sup> of Missouri made Missouri the natural synod in this pairing to focus on extensive mission work across the nation and across the world. Wisconsin would partner in some of these efforts through the work of the Synodical Conference, such as the Nigerian mission,<sup>62</sup> yet Missouri was mostly in the driver’s seat.

These factors contributing to the cultural isolation of the Wisconsin Synod had lasting impact beyond their immediate context. The transition from German to English was more or less complete by the end of the 1930s.<sup>63</sup> Continuing urbanization trends would force the synod to move into the cities, or at least the suburbs. After 1961, the WELS could no longer rely on Missouri. All of these demonstrate “the way a cultural pattern (formed in one generation out of necessity) can persist to become a norm in the next.”<sup>64</sup> There were reasons why the early mission work in the Wisconsin Synod focused on German immigrants, why those early missions were predominantly in the country, and why those early efforts had an intensive focus. What happened, however, was that the things that “had to be that way for now” began to be viewed as “the way things ought to be.”<sup>65</sup> The synod would need to be forced to rethink these suppositions as the years went by.

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61. Braun, *A Tale of Two Synods*, 59.

62. Fredrich, *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans*, 168.

63. Wendland, “WELS Attitudes,” 9.

64. Wendland, “WELS Attitudes,” 8.

65. Wendland, “WELS Attitudes,” 8.

### The 1961 Split with Missouri

The first major event that forced the synod to rethink its outreach presuppositions was the break in fellowship with the Missouri Synod in 1961. In some ways, this tragedy in the history of American Lutheranism became a blessing for the WELS outreach effort. The Wisconsin Synod would no longer be able to count on its big sister in the Synodical Conference to head up mission work, so, “like it or not, the Wisconsin Synod had to trade in its original, confined viewpoint of synodical purpose and mission outreach for a newer, larger model.”<sup>66</sup>

The split accomplished this in two main ways. More generally, areas that had once been considered in some sense Missouri Synod territory were now open to WELS expansion. More specifically, the split led to many requests for new missions from both disgruntled LCMS members and WELS members who had been attending LCMS churches because there was no WELS church in the area. In fact, “the many calls coming from concerned Lutherans caused the General Board for Home Missions (GBHM) to list as a third primary objective, besides reaching the unchurched and conserving the membership of the WELS, the objective, ‘To serve on request people who share our confessional concerns.’”<sup>67</sup>

In the years surrounding the split with Missouri, The WELS was not excluded from the growth in national mobility. “To be born, live, and die in one place—once the general rule—had become the rare exception.”<sup>68</sup> When WELS members moved into traditionally Missouri Synod territories prior to 1961, pastors would typically direct them to the nearest LCMS church.<sup>69</sup>

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66. Fredrich, *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans*, 209.

67. Norman W. Berg, “Home Mission Moods and Modes—125 Years in WELS” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 73 (1976), 264–5.

68. Fredrich, *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans*, 210.

69. Andrew T. Naumann, “Rediscovering the New World: The Years Preceding the Formation of the North Atlantic District” (Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Essay File, 2007), 3.

Following the split, this presented a problem. These WELS members and any disgruntled LCMS members who sympathized with the WELS in the break now had no local churches with which they were in fellowship.

These requests of these scattered Lutherans fueled much of the growth in the years immediately following the break with Missouri. The most notable instances were in Texas and on the East Coast. In 1962, a mistaken delivery of multiple Northwestern Lutheran magazines to the same house led to the original nucleus of Calvary Lutheran Church in Dallas, composed of these concerned Lutherans, meeting together with pastors from the District Mission Board of the Arizona/California District of the WELS.<sup>70</sup> In 1964, almost half of the membership of St. Paul's Lutheran Church (LCMS) in Edna, Texas left their church, totaling almost one hundred members. This became the nucleus of Redeemer Lutheran Church in Edna.<sup>71</sup> In all, "more than a dozen other WELS congregations appeared in Texas and the surrounding states over the next few years, and the majority of them had their roots in the WELS/LCMS split."<sup>72</sup>

Similar requests came in from the eastern seaboard. The question of where to start in this massive new mission field was answered by a request from a group of confessional Lutherans near Washington, D.C., for a new mission. This grew into the core group for Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church in Falls Church, Virginia.<sup>73</sup> Grace became the base of operations on the East Coast as similar requests came in for new missions. "Over the next ten years, more than twenty

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70. Kyle Bitter, "Growth Out of Conflict: Opening WELS Missions after the Synodical Conference Dissolved" (Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Essay File, 2010), 3–4.

71. Bitter, "Growth Out of Conflict," 4.

72. Bitter, "Growth Out of Conflict," 7.

73. Bitter, "Growth Out of Conflict," 7.

new congregations were added to the WELS numbers on the East Coast, including two entire congregations that left the Missouri Synod with their pastors to join the WELS.”<sup>74</sup>

This strategy of focusing on confessional Lutherans left without church homes by the break in fellowship with Missouri was an effective strategy for growth that kept WELS mission efforts occupied for many years, much like the waves of German immigration in the early years. It ensured that most of these missions had strong initial core groups. Those who were willing to break off from their former LCMS congregation were often the “cream-of-the-crop of the LCMS”<sup>75</sup> in terms of commitment and conviction. “The former LCMS members [of Grace in Falls Church, Virginia] realized that sometimes you have to stand up and contend for the truth. They also loved the East Coast and wanted to see WELS expansion into it. Many also had a better feel on the various geographic areas than our officials in Milwaukee.”<sup>76</sup> In total, the members of these core groups had the double advantage of both being strong Christians and also understanding the area and the people.

The break with Missouri definitely spurred incredible growth in the synod. The WELS did not quite reach “Every State by ’78,”<sup>77</sup> but it was close. By 1975, only four states lacked WELS congregations. By 1983, congregations had been planted in West Virginia, Vermont, Maine, and Mississippi, and all fifty states were reached.<sup>78</sup> The WELS was breaking out of its rural and midwestern isolation, yet the core of the main strategy almost epitomized the idea of

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74. Bitter, “Growth Out of Conflict,” 9.

75. Bitter, “Growth Out of Conflict,” 9.

76. Bitter, “Growth Out of Conflict,” 11–2.

77. Berg, “Home Mission Moods and Modes,” 264.

78. Fredrich, *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans*, 217.

going to people who were “just like us.” The strategy didn’t ignore the locals, yet it focused on transplants.

This meant that despite the widespread nature of WELS mission work, relatively little diversity was added to the synod, at least initially. “These new churches were by and large started in growing suburbs,”<sup>79</sup> since that was where the majority of transplants were moving, so the diversity that would have been found in the city was absent. Norman Berg, executive secretary of the General Board for Home Missions (GBHM), observed in 1971 that “Paul’s reaching of the high born on occasion and the slaves in many cases does not find frequent parallels in our Synod. The question arises whether our traditional manner of the presentation of the Gospel may be a partial reason.”<sup>80</sup> During these years, early instances of cross-cultural outreach were beginning, which will be discussed in the following section, yet it took more time for these efforts to fully develop and begin taking advantage of multicultural communication.

### **The Move Toward a Multicultural Approach**

The original expansion in the years after the break with Missouri may not have brought about a major shift in WELS evangelism philosophy, but it did lay a foundation. After this initial push to meet the requests of confessional Lutherans all around the country, two factors came together to lead the WELS into a multicultural approach to home missions. One was a result of that expansion. Once pastors and congregations finished the work of consolidating Lutherans in the area and got settled into their new setting, they got to know the area better and naturally began to explore other areas for outreach.

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79. E. Allen Sorum, “Bringing the Gospel to North American Cities” (Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Essay File, 1995), 4.

80. Norman W. Berg, “A Comparison of the Mission Methods Used in the Early New Testament Church with Those Used Today in the WELS Home Mission Program,” (Paper presented to the Western Wisconsin District Missionaries Conference, September 27, 1971), 7.

The other was a result of changes going on in the nation at time and continuing in the present. Demographics were shifting across the nation, bringing minority groups into traditionally WELS areas. “Because of changing birth rates and immigration patterns the percentage of the American population coming from a Northern European background [was] decreasing while the percentage of the population from other ethnic and racial backgrounds [was] increasing.”<sup>81</sup> The WELS had moved in among other cultures, and other cultures were moving in among the WELS. The natural isolation of the WELS was beginning to diminish. The synod could now choose to embrace this change or impose its own isolation. As WELS pastors and congregations began to embrace these new mission opportunities, they naturally learned to understand the nuances of cross-cultural evangelism beyond the language barrier often involved.

The clearest example of this demographic movement in relation to the WELS was the changing demographics of Milwaukee. This shift initially hurt the WELS churches in the area: “as the population became predominantly black, the well-established congregations began to find themselves quickly turning into skeletons.”<sup>82</sup> Some churches moved or closed. Some churches merged. Others realized that it was time to “integrate or disintegrate.”<sup>83</sup>

This was a process. The pastors in the area identified three stages that this transition tended to follow. The first was a segregationist phase as the neighborhoods were beginning to change that actively excluded the new black neighbors. This took place mostly in the 1960s.<sup>84</sup>

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81. WELS Seeking Our Neighbor Committee, “Report of the WELS Seeking Our Neighbor Committee,” *Reports and Memorials for the Fifty-fourth Biennial Convention* (Assembled at Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wisconsin, July 28–August 1, 1997), 37.

82. Mark Albrecht and Charles Gumm, “WELS’ Outreach in the Inner City: Challenges and Strategies.” (Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Essay File, 1985), 11.

83. Albrecht and Gumm, “WELS’ Outreach in the Inner City,” 11.

84. Albrecht and Gumm, “WELS’ Outreach in the Inner City,” 25.

The unloving nature of this attitude is clear. Next was the survival phase. “This was the realization that if the church was to survive, it must incorporate the black people who live in the neighborhood.”<sup>85</sup> This attitude turned the black neighbors into a last resort, a means rather than an end. Finally, “the third stage ... is that of the church accepting its ministry where it is at and enthusiastically sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ with those people in the area surrounding the church.”<sup>86</sup> This is the attitude of a heart that is loved by Christ and seeks to share that love with others.

The inner-city Milwaukee churches soon learned from experience many of the nuances of mission work in inner-city African American communities, whether it was the lingering issue of racism,<sup>87</sup> economic discrepancy,<sup>88</sup> family structure,<sup>89</sup> worship style,<sup>90</sup> and many more.

Similar developments occurred among other culture groups, especially moving into the 1980s and 1990s. During his vicar year from 1984–1985 at First German in Manitowoc, Wisconsin, Loren Steele became heavily involved in outreach among the Hmong immigrants in the area and started up a Bible class.<sup>91</sup> He continued this work among the Hmong and other immigrants from Southeast Asia when he arrived at Emanuel Lutheran in St. Paul, Minnesota.<sup>92</sup> In his immersion in the Hmong culture, he learned many of the “peculiar problems encountered

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85. Albrecht and Gumm, “WELS’ Outreach in the Inner City,” 25–6.

86. Albrecht and Gumm, “WELS’ Outreach in the Inner City,” 26.

87. Albrecht and Gumm, “WELS’ Outreach in the Inner City,” 28.

88. Albrecht and Gumm, “WELS’ Outreach in the Inner City,” 18.

89. Albrecht and Gumm, “WELS’ Outreach in the Inner City,” 22.

90. Albrecht and Gumm, “WELS’ Outreach in the Inner City,” 31.

91. Loren Steele, “A Personal Account of the Beginning of Mission Work with the Hmong Peoples Living in Manitowoc, WI” (Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Essay File, 1986), 8.

92. Loren Steele, “Our World Mission at Home” (Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Essay File, 1988), 2.

in our efforts to reach the Southeast Asian peoples with the Gospel”<sup>93</sup> and unique approaches needed in response.

Hispanic outreach took off during this time as well. Robert Dick identified the need for Hispanic outreach and outlined barriers and potential outreach methods focused on this culture, but he described the current Hispanic outreach efforts in the synod in 1984 as “woefully inadequate.”<sup>94</sup> The call, however, was answered. Hispanic outreach ministries began to appear on the south side of Milwaukee, at several sites in California, in Falls Church, Virginia, and many more places.<sup>95</sup>

It was in this context of change that Pastor Mark Cares found himself serving among a large concentration of Mormons in Nampa, Idaho and began to look into the best way to reach out to them. This will be the focus of the final major section of the paper.

As these pastors and congregations responded to the opportunities that lay before them, and it became more and more apparent that this was the way the nation was moving, synod leadership began to take notice and take a proactive role in promoting a multicultural approach to evangelism. Direct synodical involvement grew out of the Inner City Pastors Council (ICPC), a group formed in 1967 by ten pastors in the Milwaukee area to address the unique needs of congregations in urban Milwaukee.<sup>96</sup>

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93. Steele, “Our World Mission at Home,” 2.

94. Robert J. Dick, “The Need for a Hispanic Outreach,” (Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Essay File, 1984), 3.

95. Benjamin W Berger, “Hispanic Outreach in the WELS” (Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Essay File, 2000), 2.

96. Jeff Enderle, “MC2: The Roots and Beginnings of the Multi-Cultural Ministry Committee,” (Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Essay File, 2002), 3.

In 1975, an official sub-committee of the Southeastern Wisconsin District Mission Board was formed. It had a similar role and was called the Inner City Mission Committee (ICMC). In order to be effective, the ICMC often needed to go around the District Mission Board (DMB) directly to the GBHM, where the ministry had strong support.<sup>97</sup> In 1981, the name of the ICMC was changed to the Multi-Cultural Mission Committee when the Hispanic outreach on the south side was included and “it became more concrete to the committee that cross-cultural work in Milwaukee involved reaching across more than one culture.”<sup>98</sup> After it became apparent the synod as a whole would benefit from a committee focused on multicultural outreach, the Multi-Cultural Ministry Committee (MC<sup>2</sup>) was formed in 1990.<sup>99</sup> This committee saw their role as one of raising awareness for cross-cultural ministry within the WELS and for offering assistance for those working in cross-cultural ministry.”<sup>100</sup>

The MC<sup>2</sup> met some resistance as they worked to fully develop its philosophy. In the summer of 1992, the MC<sup>2</sup> presented their philosophy at several district conventions. Responses were mostly positive, though the Southeastern Wisconsin District Convention rejected the paper that was presented.<sup>101</sup> “Many in attendance felt that the ethnographic and demographic emphasis took the emphasis off of Scripture and the efficacy of Scripture,”<sup>102</sup> among other issues. E. Allen Sorum, then pastor at Garden Homes in Milwaukee and the author of the document in

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97. Enderle, “MC2,” 7.

98. Enderle, “MC2,” 7.

99. Enderle, “MC2,” 12.

100. Enderle, “MC2,” 15.

101. Enderle, “MC2,” 21.

102. Enderle, “MC2,” 22.

collaboration with the committee, took the paper to the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary faculty, and they found no doctrinal issues.

Professor John Brug, however, according to Pastor Sorum's recollection, said "something to the effect that, 'You seem to say a lot in your paper about listening to your audience so you can know your audience and speak to them in a sensitive way. You seem to have forgotten your own point when you brought this paper before this convention.'"<sup>103</sup> The paper and its principles needed to be worded more clearly and more carefully, and it was therefore revised.<sup>104</sup> This was immensely important, because this audience was still coming to an understanding of the nature of cross-cultural evangelism, something which has been shown was largely not a part of their experience until recently. They knew, to some extent, all of the Apostle Paul's lessons about equality under Christ and being "all things to all people." They may have even been beginning to recognize some of the subtler difficulties of cross-cultural communication. Yet, like Peter in the case of Cornelius, they had not yet realized the full implications of what this meant.

The MC<sup>2</sup> carried out its mission to promote cross-cultural evangelism in the WELS in many ways. In 1996, Pastor Sorum's book, *Change: Mission and Ministry Across Cultures* was published, which laid out a theology of missions and contained guidance for churches seeking to engage in cross-cultural outreach.<sup>105</sup> The committee helped support the growth of a cross-cultural emphasis in the WELS worker training schools.<sup>106</sup> It was also an important voice for the "idea of training future pastors in their settings without taking them out of their homes"<sup>107</sup> in the case of

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103. Enderle, "MC2," 21.

104. Enderle, "MC2," 22.

105. Enderle, "MC2," 24.

106. Enderle, "MC2," 31.

107. Enderle, "MC2," 32.

students from non-traditional backgrounds. These sorts of needs and ideas eventually led to the founding of the Pastoral Studies Institute (PSI).

The last forty years have brought huge changes to the WELS. The modern world is changing and has brought down many of the barriers that separated the WELS from much of the world. The synod has responded with increased mission zeal. A glance through the average WELS congregation, however, will still primarily reveal a gathering of white, middle-class Germans from rural and suburban areas. But this is changing. Many WELS churches have recognized people of countless cultures in their neighborhoods and have begun the steps towards getting to know their neighbors so they can share the love of Jesus with them. This is definitely a work in progress, yet it has definitely begun and borne much fruit.

## MARK CARES'S APPROACH TO LDS OUTREACH

In the midst of this larger shift in the evangelism philosophy of the WELS, Pastor Mark Cares of Messiah Lutheran Church in Nampa, Idaho began his specialized outreach work to the LDS<sup>108</sup> of his area. The approach developed by Cares exemplified this shift in philosophy toward taking the culture and background of individuals into account in reaching them with the gospel. This may not seem obvious at first. As one begins to understand Mormonism and the intricacies of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, it becomes clear that Mormonism is its own culture.

Cares's approach was a significant change from other approaches to LDS outreach at the time, both in the WELS and in other churches. After a brief examination of the relevant history, these contemporary approaches will be examined, followed by an examination of the development and characterization of Cares's approach. Lastly, the adaptability of this approach will be explored.

### **The History of LDS Outreach at Messiah Lutheran Church and Beyond**

The mission field in Nampa, Idaho assumed mission status in 1973.<sup>109</sup> Nampa is about twenty miles west of Boise, located in the intermountain region of the American West. At the time, the nearest WELS neighbor was "some 350 miles away."<sup>110</sup> This new mission was in the heartland of Mormonism, which stretches down through Utah into Arizona. In the area around Nampa, the LDS made up roughly 25–30% of the population.<sup>111</sup>

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108. Latter-day Saints, members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. This term is generally preferred to Mormons.

109. Caleb Davisson, "The Mission to the Mormons" (Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Essay File, 2005), 2.

110. Davisson, "The Mission to the Mormons," 2.

111. Davisson, "The Mission to the Mormons," 2.

Messiah Lutheran Church called Pastor Mark Cares from Boulder, Colorado in 1981 to serve in this mission field.<sup>112</sup> When he arrived in Nampa, all Cares knew about Mormonism was the little he had been taught at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary.<sup>113</sup> That would soon change. Messiah began an extensive program of door-to-door canvassing. As they entered into their community for this work, they naturally encountered many LDS.<sup>114</sup> The congregation took note of this group that constituted a significant portion of their community and began to look into how to best reach out to them.

Cares began to educate himself in Mormonism and the various recommended witnessing techniques.<sup>115</sup> He experimented with many different techniques, yet found them all lacking. They primarily focused on reason and polemics and were largely based on LDS history and historic teaching and practice, rather than what was current.<sup>116</sup>

Upon recognizing the difficulties of LDS outreach, Messiah entered into discussion with others in the WELS who were involved in reaching out to the LDS. On November 26, 1984, the pastors and several lay members of Messiah and Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Salt Lake City, Utah met at Prince of Peace together with members of the Pacific Northwest District Mission Board and the Colorado Mission District Board, as well as two men from a group called “Saints Alive,” which was a group consisting of former LDS trying to reach out to LDS.<sup>117</sup> The end result of this meeting was a memorial submitted to the 1985 Synod Convention requesting a

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112. Davisson, “The Mission to the Mormons,” 3.

113. Mark Cares, in discussion with the author, September 11, 2019.

114. Davisson, “The Mission to the Mormons,” 3.

115. Davisson, “The Mission to the Mormons,” 3.

116. Mark Cares, in discussion with the author, September 11, 2019.

117. Davisson, “The Mission to the Mormons,” 6.

study to consider a form of specialized ministry for LDS outreach. The convention resolved that this would better be handled by the relevant district mission boards.<sup>118</sup>

Cares then sought support for the mission from the Pacific Northwest District Mission Board, which in turn looked to the Board of Home Missions. Neither board foresaw any available resources to support LDS outreach.<sup>119</sup> Messiah Lutheran next petitioned the Conference of Presidents for permission to “solicit gifts from several individuals within the WELS for the purpose of calling an assistant pastor to Nampa,”<sup>120</sup> which would give Cares the opportunity to develop a strategy for LDS outreach. This request was also denied.<sup>121</sup> The support finally came in 1987 from WELS Kingdom Workers. The support from Kingdom Workers allowed Messiah to call an assistant pastor for at least three years so that Cares could devote half his time to what became known as the Mormon Outreach Project (MOP). The MOP began with a three-year plan. Cares would develop a strategy in the first year, then teach the strategy to the congregation, and finally execute the strategy in the community.<sup>122</sup>

After years of trial and error, the focused time of that first year allowed Cares to develop a strategy based on focusing on the gospel, using the language of the LDS, and addressing areas that were pressure points for LDS.<sup>123</sup> This approach was then taught to the congregation, with nearly half of the communicant membership involved in the class.<sup>124</sup> Once the congregation

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118. Davisson, “The Mission to the Mormons,” 7.

119. Davisson, “The Mission to the Mormons,” 7.

120. Davisson, “The Mission to the Mormons,” 7.

121. Davisson, “The Mission to the Mormons,” 8.

122. Davisson, “The Mission to the Mormons,” 8–9.

123. Davisson, “The Mission to the Mormons,” 10–1.

124. Davisson, “The Mission to the Mormons,” 12.

began to apply what they learned in the community, the results were not staggering, but they were there. Whatever the results, there was an awareness that the gospel was now being communicated more effectively. Cares reflected after the initial efforts at applying the new approach:

Before we were frustrated because we knew we weren't communicating the Gospel to Mormons in terms they could understand. Now, we know we are hitting home with our witness. Then we were majoring in minors. Now we are spending our precious time together talking about the things that really count: our imperfection and Jesus' complete perfection. By being able to speak to Mormons in clear 'Mormonese,' we now can be effective ambassadors to Mormons.<sup>125</sup>

The missionary can only plant the seed and strive to do it as effectively as possible. God must make it grow.

Due to interest throughout the synod in the MOP and LDS outreach, Cares wrote the book *Speaking the Truth in Love to Mormons*, which was released in 1992.<sup>126</sup> The book presents Cares's approach in order to encourage pastors and lay people to engage in LDS outreach. The book drew praise from both inside and outside of the WELS.<sup>127</sup> With the popularity of the book, the ministry of the MOP continued to grow. In 2004 it became a separate corporation, since it was getting too large for Messiah to properly manage. At this time the Mormon Outreach Project was renamed Truth in Love Ministry,<sup>128</sup> which continues to support outreach to the LDS today.

### **Contemporary Approaches to LDS Outreach**

Cares's approach to LDS outreach was truly groundbreaking. This was an important factor in *Speaking the Truth in Love to Mormons* becoming so popular, even outside of WELS circles. In

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125. Davisson, "The Mission to the Mormons," 14.

126. Davisson, "The Mission to the Mormons," 14.

127. Davisson, "The Mission to the Mormons," 15–6.

128. Davisson, "The Mission to the Mormons," 23.

order to understand this one must understand the standard methods of outreach to the LDS that were going on at that time, many of which continue today.

The most general would be the all-purpose presentations of evangelism exemplified by D. James Kennedy in *Evangelism Explosion* and modified for the WELS's use by David Valleskey in *God's Great Exchange*. This approach was influential in many circles and was becoming the standard evangelism presentation of the WELS at the time. This is the style of approach many who were unfamiliar with Mormonism would default to.

This style is useful as a starting point for evangelism. This was especially true in its time when a larger portion of those evangelized tended to view religion from a mainstream Christian context, whether they were active or not. The usefulness of this approach diminishes for LDS outreach and other similar contexts. It encourages striking up a rapport and getting to know a person,<sup>129</sup> yet it remains primarily a monocultural approach. Kennedy encourages the prospective evangelist to “start where the person is. Do not assume that mid-twentieth century Americans know very much about the contents of the Bible.” His leading questions,<sup>130</sup> however, assume a standard Christian understanding of the afterlife. He also discourages using biblical questions like “what must I do to be saved?” because he assumes they will give a rote, preprogrammed, biblical answer without much thought.<sup>131</sup>

Using these questions with the LDS would likely lead to confusion, since they have a different concept of judgment and the afterlife. It is possible it could then open the door to

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129. D. James Kennedy, *Evangelism Explosion* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1971), 57.

130. The leading questions: “Have you come to a place in your spiritual life where you can say you know for certain that if you were to die today you would go to heaven?” “Suppose that you were to die today and stand before God and He were to say to you, ‘Why should I let you into My heaven?’ what would you say?” Kennedy, *Evangelism Explosion*, 22.

131. Kennedy, *Evangelism Explosion*, 62–3.

discussion, but it causes more confusion than it needs to. The difference in the meaning of terms in the presentation of the gospel would simply lead to confusion as well.

The rest of the approaches examined here are specialized to some degree on Mormonism. Despite this, many maintain a monocultural nature in the sense that they focus on the concerns of the evangelizer rather than the prospect. One such approach focuses on polemics. As stated previously, this was the dominant approach Cares came across in his initial research, and he found it wanting.

This style of approach tends to focus on the history and teachings of Mormonism in order to point out issues from Mormonism's past and seeming contradictions and deception in their history and teaching. Former LDS couple Jerald and Sandra Tanner have brought together many of those issues in their book *The Changing World of Mormonism*. Robert Morey advocates a similar approach aimed at destroying the credibility of Joseph Smith, the founder of Mormonism, by proving that many of his prophecies can be proven false.<sup>132</sup> Another variant of this approach focuses on the nature of God, pitting the biblical truth that there is one God against the LDS teaching of a plurality of gods.<sup>133</sup>

Such facts can be useful to know and may be helpful later on in a witnessing relationship, yet they are not the most effective in the early stages of evangelism. The Tanners even state that their book is ultimately aimed at "Mormons who are seeking the truth."<sup>134</sup> It seeks to help Mormons who are coming to them, rather than reaching them where they are.

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132. Robert A. Morey, *How to Answer a Mormon: Practical Guidelines for What to Expect and What to Reply When the Mormons Come to Your Door* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1983), 16–7.

133. Mark J. Cares, *Speaking the Truth in Love to Mormons* (Milwaukee: WELS Outreach Resources), 1998, 6.

134. Jerald Tanner and Sandra Tanner, *The Changing World of Mormonism* (Chicago: Moody, 1980), 12.

One concern with this approach is that it can be an immediate turn-off, and many LDS are taught to actively avoid such discussions.<sup>135</sup> In addition, this approach often leads to arguments over peripheral matters, rather than a presentation of the gospel. This approach typically fosters an “us vs. them” situation much like the case of the Jews and Samaritans at the time of Jesus. It is thus important to keep in mind that “the goal of debating is to win the argument, while the goal of witnessing is to win the Mormon. A debater usually addresses the problems Christians have with Mormonism, while a witness addresses (among other things) the problems Mormons themselves have with Mormonism.”<sup>136</sup>

There were other approaches at the time that were, at least in part, focusing on communicating the gospel. Walter Martin emphasized the importance of the message of redemption, though this focus could easily be lost in midst of other emphases, even claiming that “the only really unanswerable argument is the argument of a transformed life, properly grounded in the authority of the Scriptures and motivated by love for God and for one’s fellow man.”<sup>137</sup> A sanctified life and evident love can help to gain a hearing for the gospel, yet the gospel is what will change hearts.

Martin recognized many of the differences in vocabulary in this type of outreach work, yet he reached a different conclusion than Cares. He emphasized that “the Christian must *define*, *apply*, and *defend* the historic meanings of these terms, before it is possible to effectively proclaim the Gospel.”<sup>138</sup> “Key terms which must be carefully defined are: the new birth or “born

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135. Paul M. Koester, “The Role of Apologetics in Witnessing to Mormons” (Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Essay File, 2018), 35.

136. Davisson, “The Mission to the Mormons,” 10.

137. Walter Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1985), 399.

138. Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults*, 393.

again”; justification; atonement; Deity and Resurrection of Christ; resurrection; forgiveness, grace and faith.”<sup>139</sup> This approach forces the prospect to adapt to the evangelist, rather than encouraging the love-compelled believer to meet the LDS prospect where they are at. This easily descends into an argument of terminology rather than a presentation of the gospel.

On the other side, a Lutheran approach proposed by Edgar Kaiser places a strong emphasis on the gospel and the grace of God, yet ignores vocabulary differences.<sup>140</sup> This will likely lead to frustration, confusion, and talking past each other.

Kaiser also advised, “Don’t rely too heavily on what Mormons tell you about their faith. With no professional clergy to guide and direct the church members, you will often find a wide variety of religious opinions among Mormon followers.”<sup>141</sup> This advice can be helpful when seeking to understand official LDS doctrine, yet it can be problematic if pushed too far. Evangelism is ultimately focused on individuals, so the background and beliefs of individuals are immensely important for evangelism. In some cases, it may be helpful to point out any perceived discrepancy between the belief of an individual and official LDS teaching if it appears official teaching would be troubling to them. This must always be done with evident love. In most cases, however, pointing this out would likely only lead them to be a better Mormon.

Most of these techniques have their own advantages, yet most of them are ultimately based on human reason rather than communicating the gospel, and none of them seek to reach the LDS where they are at and focus on their problems.

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139. Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults*, 397.

140. Edgar P. Kaiser, *How to Respond to ... The Latter Day Saints* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1977), 37.

141. Kaiser, *How to Respond*, 37.

### Development of Cares's Approach

After realizing that he was not satisfied with any of the popular approaches he had discovered, he began to look into developing a new approach. After working with these largely rationalistic methods, a major breakthrough came when he remembered his simple Lutheran training focused on the means of grace and the proclamation of law and gospel.<sup>142</sup> Much like in the case of Peter and the early church, the lesson had been learned, but needed to be relearned since it had been forgotten in a new context. He then began to investigate how this focus on the means of grace and the proclamation of law and gospel would best be applied in an LDS context.

His next major breakthrough came out of a discussion he had with an LDS stake<sup>143</sup> president. He asked the stake president where he personally would direct someone looking to learn about Mormonism. The president pointed him to their current manuals, such as *Gospel Principles*. Cares soon discovered that few within Christian circles were reading these kinds of documents. Most were focused on their history and traditional teachings.<sup>144</sup> Kaiser had recommended that the “official writings and publications of the church itself”<sup>145</sup> were the best sources for learning about Mormonism, yet likely no one came near the level at which Cares then immersed himself in these materials. To date, Cares estimates that he has read 20,000–30,000

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142. Mark Cares, in discussion with the author, September 11, 2019.

143. In the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, a stake is a collection of congregations (called wards) similar to a Catholic diocese.

144. Mark Cares, in discussion with the author, September 11, 2019.

145. Kaiser, *How to Respond*, 37.

pages of LDS manuals and periodicals. He has even had Institute<sup>146</sup> teachers tell him that he has read more of these materials than they have.<sup>147</sup>

This cultural immersion strategy was twofold. In addition to the materials, Cares also immersed himself among the people. As he was working to develop his approach, he talked to many LDS to learn as much as he could from them, since books and manuals can only teach so much. As he talked to people, he began to pay attention to what topics caused them to close up their ears and shut down discussion and what topics caused them to perk up their ears and even ask questions.<sup>148</sup>

As he employed this twofold immersion strategy, he came to two realizations that allowed him to fine-tune his proclamation of law and gospel for an LDS audience. He needed to understand and speak their language and also speak to their unique stress points. It may seem strange to talk about “speaking their language,” because most LDS in America speak English. The LDS, however, have not only “coined numerous words and expressions unique to Mormonism, but they have also given unique definitions to commonly used words and expressions. Some have called this language ‘Mormonese.’”<sup>149</sup>

Using the same language is an important part of communicating with this different culture. If one does not properly understand their language, it will lead to much frustration,

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146. Institutes provide college level instruction in Mormonism to all LDS members. The high school level institutions are called seminaries. This instruction is offered in addition to regular school instruction.

147. Mark Cares, in discussion with the author, September 11, 2019.

148. Mark Cares, in discussion with the author, September 11, 2019.

149. Cares, *Speaking the Truth in Love to Mormons*, 256.

because a Mormon can in all honesty say that Jesus is their Savior<sup>150</sup> who won salvation<sup>151</sup> for them, and that they are saved by grace.<sup>152</sup> Upon realizing this difference in language, there is the temptation to have the attitude of Martin described above and attempt to define terms like salvation with the historic meaning. Love, however, compels the Christian to remove this barrier for the gospel and learn how to communicate the truths of the gospel in language that the LDS understand. An examination of how this is done will follow together with the examination of stress points. The time will come to teach LDS prospects the correct biblical meanings of these words, but first the gospel must be given an opening to work.

Out of this flows Cares's other main discovery from his cultural immersion, namely that one needs to speak to their unique stress points. Once these stress points are understood, the law and the gospel can more effectively be communicated to the LDS. A major theme in Mormonism is striving to work towards perfection. This idea, along with the closely related idea of being worthy, dominate much of the daily thoughts of the LDS. Every day, they strive to prove themselves worthy by meeting all the obligations required of them and make progress on the road to perfection, and hopefully godhood.

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150. "Mormons often refer to Jesus as their Savior. They believe he paid their debt to Heavenly Father and also conquered death for them. But they also believe that they have to pay him back in full.... In other words, they believe he saved them by assuming their loan, refinancing it, and spreading out the payments. They do not believe that he saved them fully and freely by paying for their sins and then canceling the debt." Cares, *Speaking the Truth in Love to Mormons*, 289.

151. "For most Mormons, this is equivalent to resurrection, which is the only free gift in Mormonism. This is why many can say they believe that they are saved by Jesus alone. They mean that they believe they don't have to do anything to gain resurrection." Cares, *Speaking the Truth in Love to Mormons*, 288.

152. "Not the unconditional, undeserved, unfathomable love on God's part that moved him to save us. Rather it is the power God gives people to save themselves, which he grants *only* after they have done everything they can do. 'This grace is an enabling power that allows men and women to lay hold on eternal life and exaltation after they have expended their own best efforts' (*LDS Bible Dictionary*, p. 697). 'We know that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do.' (2 Nephi 25:23)." Cares, *Speaking the Truth in Love to Mormons*, 256.

This emphasis on perfection and worthiness places much stress on the LDS. There is the idea that there is always more that can be done, and the LDS Church makes sure those options do not run out, whether it is work in the church, the family, or the encouraged success in the world.<sup>153</sup> The LDS emphasis on having kids regularly leads to large, stressful families.<sup>154</sup> Within this culture of perfection, the LDS tend to keep their issues to themselves to save face, leading to worry, isolation, and even more stress.<sup>155</sup> Understanding this dynamic of perfection and stress is important in reaching out to the LDS.

This idea of perfection is first a key concept in preaching the law. The emphasis on perfection places most Mormons on a spectrum from self-righteous to stressed out, depending on how well they feel they are doing.<sup>156</sup> Listening to them and identifying where they fall will determine how much of the law needs to be proclaimed. Probably the most quoted Bible passage in Mormonism is Matthew 5:48: “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect” (Matt 5:48 KJV<sup>157</sup>). LDS are generally more likely to listen to discussions on this verse and the topic of perfection because “many are looking for all the help they can get in this area.”<sup>158</sup> It is then important to focus on just what it means to be perfect and point out that “Jesus commands to *be* perfect, not to *become* perfect as Mormonism teaches.”<sup>159</sup>

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153. Cares, *Speaking the Truth in Love to Mormons*, 162.

154. Cares, *Speaking the Truth in Love to Mormons*, 165.

155. Cares, *Speaking the Truth in Love to Mormons*, 170.

156. Cares, *Speaking the Truth in Love to Mormons*, 184.

157. The KJV is the official translation used by the LDS. It is recommended that the KJV be used in all discussions with the LDS, since they typically reject what limited authority they assign to the Bible when other translations are used.

158. Cares, *Speaking the Truth in Love to Mormons*, 170.

159. Cares, *Speaking the Truth in Love to Mormons*, 190.

Another topic that Cares found effective in communicating the law to LDS is the idea of outer darkness, which is the closest LDS equivalent to hell. Their idea of hell, whenever they use the term, is more similar to Catholic purgatory. They believe that most people will end up in some level of heaven, while outer darkness is reserved for Satan, his angels, and, depending on the individual's beliefs, either a select few apostates<sup>160</sup> or all apostates.

Cares found Matt 7:13, 14 useful in confronting this idea and proclaiming the law: "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it" (Matt 7:13, 14 KJV). It often surprises Mormons to hear that the way that leads to destruction is wide. This then leads into an opportunity to tell them in love that they are on the path to outer darkness.<sup>161</sup>

Another way to proclaim the law to Mormons is simply to be their conscience. Oftentimes the sheer number of demands presented in Mormonism forces them to overlook many of them. Other times, they simply do not know these demands. Simply walking them through these requirements will demonstrate to them how far they are falling short of perfection.<sup>162</sup> Love is always key throughout.

Stressing the LDS concept of repentance can be effective as well. Mormonism places such a strong emphasis on abandoning the sin that there can be no certainty of repentance, and therefore forgiveness, until all sin is essentially never committed again.<sup>163</sup>

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160. Apostates are former LDS who left the church.

161. Cares, *Speaking the Truth in Love to Mormons*, 187–8.

162. Cares, *Speaking the Truth in Love to Mormons*, 194.

163. Cares, *Speaking the Truth in Love to Mormons*, 197–8.

Once the law has been proclaimed and had its effect, the gospel must quickly follow. The law emphasis on the lack of perfection is best followed by a gospel emphasis on already being perfect in Christ. An important passage that stresses this is Heb 10:14: “For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified” (Heb 10:14 KJV). This verse emphasizes that perfection is a completed action, and not an ongoing process or something to work toward. It also makes clear that this is all accomplished by the one offering of Christ. Hebrews 10:10 makes clear that even the sanctifying is a result of Christ’s sacrifice: “By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (Heb 10:10 KJV).<sup>164</sup>

Another helpful verse is John 6:47: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life (John 6:47 KJV). This verse stresses that eternal life is a present state received through believing in Christ. Eternal life, like perfection, is not something that has to be worked for, but rather something that has been received and is possessed already now through Christ.

An important concept to focus on for the LDS which is stressed in these verses is the idea of Jesus as their substitute, rather than their example. “They need to frolic in his perfection for them rather than struggle to become perfect themselves.”<sup>165</sup> The objective nature of the gospel can make all the difference for a Mormon when that message is proclaimed and the Holy Spirit works this realization in their heart. Suddenly the immense weight of guilt and stress that Mormonism places upon them is lifted off, and they too can enjoy the freedom found in Christ.

Cares’s approach strikes a careful balance of recognizing both the power of the means of grace and the human elements at work in communication. Much like many others in the WELS

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164. Cares, *Speaking the Truth in Love to Mormons*, 202–3.

165. Cares, *Speaking the Truth in Love to Mormons*, 202.

at this time, he was discovering what it really meant to be “all things to all people.” He learned to speak and think like a Mormon to reach Mormons with the gospel. He set aside what needed to be set aside from his own background, took up what could be taken up from Mormonism, and kept the one thing needful, the gospel of full and free forgiveness found in Christ.

### **Adaptability of Cares’s Approach**

Cares’s approach is flexible and can be applied to different cultures as well as Mormonism. After the success of *Speaking the Truth in Love to Mormons*, Cares was even asked to do a whole series of books, each focusing on a different religion or cult. He turned the offer down, however, because he simply did not have the time to immerse himself in each culture to do it right.<sup>166</sup>

The fact that he treated Mormonism as one would treat a foreign culture demonstrates that culture goes far beyond the commonly considered examples of race and ethnicity. Cares would even contend that “any ministry today is cross-cultural because of the non-Christian culture we are living in.”<sup>167</sup> The basic strategy of focusing on the means of grace, immersing in the culture, and focusing on that culture’s stress points can be applied to anything from another world religion to the local community. This whole process began by simply getting out in the community in Nampa, Idaho and beginning to understand the culture of the community. Each congregation has their own setting in which they can immerse themselves so that they can get to know the people and recognize the stress points in their community.

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166. Mark Cares, in discussion with the author, September 11, 2019.

167. Mark Cares, in discussion with the author, September 11, 2019.

## CONCLUSION

Understanding culture and backgrounds clearly plays an important role in communicating the gospel. In order to carry this out, we must first understand our identity in Christ. We have been given an eternal perspective that allows us to see past cultural differences and instead see others as those for whom Christ died. The love of Christ then drives us to live for others and communicate the truth of the gospel with them on their terms. This supports effective communication and prevents laying unnecessary stumbling blocks in the way of the gospel.

In our modern context, this may seem like a clear application of Scripture. An examination of the history of outreach in the WELS, however, is largely dominated by a monocultural approach to outreach. This was appropriate for the early mission of the synod, yet this focus outlived its original context. Developments in the synod and changes in the modern world have brought down many of the barriers that had kept the WELS culturally isolated and brought about a shift to a multicultural approach. Looking back, it can be easy to wonder why this shift took so long, yet the case of Peter and Cornelius serves as a reminder that people have blind spots. What's clear in one context may not be clear in another. The theological understanding may have been there, yet the practical implications had not yet been fully realized.

Mark Cares serves as a perfect example of this. He realized early on that any evangelism efforts to the Mormons would ultimately be rooted in a focus on the means of grace and the proclamation of law and gospel. It took time, however, to discover what that looked like in a Mormon context. Cares's work with the LDS can serve as a template for how the gospel can be shared with other cultures and backgrounds. One must be immersed in the target culture to understand how they communicate. Unique stress points can then be discovered so that the evangelist can reach them where they are at. Cross-cultural communication takes work and will

remain difficult, but the love of Christ drives Christians to reach out to their neighbors wherever they are at, whether they are down the street or across the world.

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