

THE LCMS—ITS PAST AND FUTURE

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The following is an informal essay written in a popular style about the church in which I was born and raised. This church is now deeply divided and increasingly directionless, causing some to drift away to other churches, and many to no church at all (Hebrews 2:1).

One now in LCMS leadership has helped advance a plan to revitalize this church. As noted in the this essay, the LCMS World Mission staff member has also asked publicly for a response to this plan. This essay is my response. There are about 30 pages in this essay, followed by some anecdotal appendices, if you care to read a bit more. The writing in this essay could be tightened up; and some of the appendices may be a bit repetitive. With more time, the essay could be more evenly written, but I also have a day job.

Lord, live within us (John 14:23). As we struggle, save us from our own dreams. Draw us unto You and Your vision for Your church. On our own, we mess up everything—not only for ourselves, but also for others. Live within us, O Lord, to do what we can never do ourselves. “Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to Thy name give glory” (Psalm 115:1). Amen.

In 1839 a group of German Lutherans arrived by ship to the U.S., seeking a place to practice their faith without state interference.

CRISIS AT BIRTH!

Shortly after its arrival, the group faced a number of unexpected challenges that intensified as the months passed. Food and decent housing were in short supply; sickness and death stalked these pioneers; they became disillusioned with their spiritual leader, Rev. Martin Stephan, whom they ultimately sent packing.

This tiny band of Lutheran immigrants soon found themselves in a crisis that caused their morale to plunge. The leadership finally arranged for a debate between a lawyer and a young pastor—C.F.W. Walther. The purpose of the debate? To determine whether this small band of Lutherans was a legitimate church in the sight of God; or, should they split up and some even return to Germany? **THEIR CRISIS WAS FAR MORE SERIOUS THAN WHAT THE LCMS FACES TODAY!**

Then came the moment of truth. In the debate, grounding his arguments in God’s Word, Rev. C.F.W. Walther demonstrated that this small band of believers was indeed a legitimate church. Walther’s Biblical perspective gave hope and strength to the crisis-riddled group of Lutherans. Now rooted deeply in the living Word of God, this fledgling church soon grew strong and bore much fruit. A resource for more information on the experience of the LCMS forefathers is in this footnote.¹

The above brief introduction has a very important message for us today: Through the experience described above, God taught the LCMS forefathers a lesson not soon forgotten. Later

in life, Walther stated quite emphatically that the Altenburg crisis drove these early LCMS Lutherans back to God's Word, their only hope (Jeremiah 24:7).

THE KEY TO RESOLVING ANY CRISIS IN CHRIST'S CHURCH ALWAYS HAS BEEN, AND ALWAYS WILL BE, A RETURN TO GOD'S WORD. This was true in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. If the LCMS is currently in crisis, only God can salvage it—by His Word. Only God can salvage the LCMS from its current crisis. God's Word always heals: "He sent His Word and healed them" (Psalm 107:20).

In dealing with church crises, one needs to forget all the romanticized ideas of what God's church should be. A perfect church on earth never will exist. Just as sure as the devil exists, so also exists the certainty of church controversy.²

A perfect Synod or earthly church will never exist. With this awareness, we continue this essay discussing, "The LCMS and Its Future." What follows is a brief recap of the historic Altenburg crisis and its resolution, followed by an overview of additional significant crises in the LCMS. The subsequent predestination crisis was resolved in a God-pleasing way. We will then look at whether the LCMS did, or did not, turn to God's Word in times of additional crisis, and what this condition means for LCMS members today.

THE FIRST MAJOR LCMS CRISIS

As explained, our LCMS forefathers' first major crisis culminated in the Altenburg debate, a crisis which was resolved in a God-pleasing way when early LCMS leadership turned to God's Word. This Spirit-led return resulted in God's healing through His Word. "My son, give attention to My words; incline your ear to My sayings. Do not let them depart from your sight; keep them in the midst of your heart. For they are life to those who find them, and health to all their whole body" (Proverbs 4:20–22).

THE SECOND MAJOR LCMS CRISIS—PREDESTINATION CONTROVERSY

The second major LCMS crisis was the predestination controversy, which began festering around 1878.³ The devil had sown tares (Matthew 13:25) of human reason and logic into the Biblical teaching of predestination. In January 1880, C.F.W. Walther was forced to debate the issue with an opposing group led by F. A. Schmidt. In this second major crisis in LCMS history, doing as God taught him at Altenburg, LCMS President C.F.W. Walther turned the church back to the Lord's healing Word. Note: here is something very, very, important in the resolution of the second crisis that dare not be missed today: To help the church understand the Biblical teaching of predestination, Walther wrote compelling Scripture-based essays for the pastors. Plus, in order to BRING THE ENTIRE CHURCH along under the Word of God, Walther wrote essays for lay people, essays which clearly delineated the festering issue. These tracts showed how God's Word resolved the issues. The way God used C.F.W. Walther to resolve the Predestination crisis cannot be emphasized enough, especially for our church's current crisis.

THE THIRD MAJOR CRISIS—THE STATEMENT OF THE "44"

Some sixty years after the Predestination crisis came THE THIRD MAJOR CRISIS. On September 7, 1945, 44 LCMS clergymen expressed their dissent by signing "A STATEMENT."

The primary concern of “the 44” was that the Synod lacked inter-Lutheran and ecumenical relationships.

Much has been written on the issue of “The 44,” including sections of C.S. Meyer’s book *Moving Frontiers*. “The 44” crisis was the first major crisis in LCMS history in which the leadership did not clearly follow the lesson God taught LCMS forefathers at Altenburg. Early on in this crisis, President Behnken did not clearly explain the issues facing the LCMS. Records also do not show he ever directly applied His Word, His “plumb line” (Amos 7:7–8) to the issue. Tragically, President Behnken’s failure to “step up to the plate,” as Walther surely would have done, to resolve the issues raised by the “signing of the 44,” marked a new era for the LCMS. “801” (Concordia Seminary, St. Louis) professor C.S. Meyer notes the final step taken by Behnken: “The President [of the LCMS] continued to submit to pastors and congregations material for the Scriptural study of the question at issue.” Of course, submitting documents to pastors and congregation is a procedure that must be followed; but, as St. Paul instructs us in 2 Corinthians 12:20–13:10, in all controversies there is a time to settle the issue. Endless festering produces strife, not blessing.

THE FOURTH MAJOR CRISIS—SEMINEX

SOME THIRTY YEARS after the unresolved “44” CRISIS, the LCMS found itself in its fourth major crisis known as SEMINEX.

A controversy that began to fester in the 1950s culminated in the early 1970s. The controversy came to a head when complainants said Saint Louis seminary members were not teaching what historically had been taught in the LCMS.

By the late 1960s, LCMS President Oliver Harms received many complaints about the theology taught by the Concordia Seminary, St. Louis faculty. However, he either did not believe them, or he did not believe these complaints were as significant as some claimed. When the crisis was heating up, I was a senior at Concordia Teacher’s College, Seward, NE. President Harms came to the campus to address the graduating class in the dining hall. After his presentation, he provided time for questions from the audience. I inquired whether there was any truth to the rumors that some professors were teaching false doctrine at the Concordia Seminary–Saint Louis. President Harms went to some length to assure the graduating class that the issues were not serious. I don’t recall my reaction at the moment. I believe I was reasonably satisfied with the answer of President Harms. After all, he was the president!

Here is a lesson for us in hindsight. Even if he was unwilling to speak publicly on the matter, the LCMS president should have understood the seriousness of the “new teaching” going on at “801” (Concordia Seminary, St. Louis). In itself, “new teaching” is not necessarily bad. However, hindsight shows more to the story.

When I was first elected as a vice-president of the LCMS, President Barry appointed me to a special committee to re-hear, allegedly for the last time, the “Otten case.” The committee was chaired by then-Missouri District President James Kalthoff. After many committee meetings, endless hours of testimony, and reviewing stacks and stacks of documents, one moment stands out more in my mind than any other. One person, who had been a Concordia Seminary, St. Louis faculty member in the 1960s, testified that the Concordia Seminary faculty had agreed—privately—that they would keep introducing new teaching, some might charge in a conspiratorial

way, even if this new teaching was not what the LCMS had historically taught. Eventually, they believed, the new teaching would take root throughout the Synod.

Whether or not the “new” teaching was better than the old is not the focus of this essay. The critical point is this: The LCMS president should have put forth extra effort to explain to the Synod, pastors and laypeople, exactly what was troubling the church. The LCMS president did not have to agree immediately with either side. He did not have to come down hard on anyone. He did not have to demand a resolution overnight. However, he clearly should have first isolated the issues. He should have, as Walther did at Altenburg, offered clear testimony from the Word of God as God’s “plumb line,” to resolve the crisis.

In cases that disturb the church, the LCMS president is not to side with any party or complainants. He is not to be a dictator. Rather, he is to declare, as Ezekiel does repeatedly, “Thus says the Lord” regarding the issue. **IF HE IS NOT THEOLOGICALLY UP TO THE TASK, HE SHOULD NOT BE PRESIDENT.** The LCMS is not a corporation, but rather a confessing movement. Although the LCMS president does not need a post-graduate degree in theology, he must be able to understand clearly basic Bible-based teaching; and he needs also to be able to articulate the issues clearly, preferably using precise, compelling illustrations and analogies the man in the street can understand. To say that God’s powerful Word cannot resolve current LCMS issues is to tempt God. The same Word God used to create the world, He can use to heal and re-create a church. “Nothing is either so difficult or impossible that He could not bring it about by His Word” (*Luther’s Works*, vol. 1, p. 49).

Even though the LCMS president at that time was either unaware, or in denial, many others in the LCMS leadership were not. Seminary faculty, district presidents, and many laypeople understood the difficult situation of the church. Informal observers became increasingly aware of the following: the polity of the LCMS had placed so much power and trust in the office of the LCMS president that, like a major military battle, a drive to capture the office of the president had to be undertaken, no matter how many casualties and no matter at what cost to the church.

Along with the gathering storm clouds, one needs also to recall the larger political atmosphere: In the 60s, the so called “conservative” wing of the LCMS felt increasingly helpless. Many were convinced their church was beyond hope. Some despaired to the point of bailing out. Others migrated to more “pure” church bodies. Still others started their own church body. In all of this turmoil, along came “Jack,” as he was affectionately known by his friends. Through some careful political preparation, Dr. J.A.O. Preus II. captured the office of LCMS president, and all the power that goes with it. President Preus immediately became the “point man” to eliminate the great liberal threat, located primarily in the faculty of Concordia Seminary–Saint Louis, along with its district president supporters.

THE 9-11 OF LCMS POLITICS

Although an exaggeration, I submit the following: Just as 9-11 totally changed the U.S. public opinion toward the Islamic world, so did the election of J.A.O. Preus to the Synodical presidency affect the thinking about LCMS politics, primarily the thinking of those who are the so-called conservative wing.

Before the “Jack Preus era,” many conservatives practiced church politics privately. Why privately? Because they had a conscience problem. Although they generally frowned on political

activity, they were honest enough to know that politics often involves a type of “less than forthright” approach to dealing with issues. Nevertheless, with the election of Jack Preus, and seeing the incredible “miracles” he produced, the conservatives did a 180° turn, a complete about face! For the conservatives, Dr. Preus became a type of “messiah,” a deliverer. Since Dr. Preus had accomplished so much good in ridding the LCMS of liberals, it was easy for conservatives to accept that “the end justified the means.” They became, by default, closet political LCMS Jesuits.

Note carefully at this point: We are not here talking about theological issues involved in Seminex (both sides agreed that the theological issues were serious!). Rather, we are here discussing HOW the issues were handled! The HOW is the focus of this essay: “How” God initially taught the LCMS to handle crisis, and whether we are practicing what God taught us—years ago.⁴

WAS THE SEMINEX CRISIS HANDLED BY THE THEN-PRESIDENT OF SYNOD AS GOD TAUGHT C.F.W. WALTHER AND LCMS FOREFATHERS TO RESOLVE THE ALTENBURG ISSUES?

The first question is this: In the Seminex crisis, did the LCMS, through its president, follow what God taught the LCMS forefathers at Altenburg? In a way, “yes,” and in a way, “no.” There is simply nothing inappropriate in the LCMS president’s appointment of a committee to interview the seminary faculty to determine what the faculty believe and teach. What is taught in seminaries is a matter of the entire church. This action was a way to isolate the issues. For further information on the gravity of the Seminex situation, see this footnote.⁵

Was the “plumb line” of the Scriptures (Amos 7:7–8) then used? Was the LCMS constitution clearly followed? Not really. Why not? Because Article XIII of the LCMS Constitution states expulsion or retention of its members is based only on God’s Word and the Confessions. Period! In brief, this means that when it comes to expulsion or retention of LCMS members, only the Scriptures must be used as the gauge, the measuring stick, and the plumb line. No other provisions are made in the Constitution for additional plumb lines.

How do people get around this? They conveniently cite Resolution 2-12,⁶ giving the LCMS the right and duty to formulate and adopt doctrinal statements, even if the documents become additional standards of orthodoxy. (To see Luther’s comments on this procedure, check this endnote.⁷) As a tool to determine the orthodoxy of the Concordia Seminary faculty, President Preus had someone (no one at the time would say exactly who) prepare a document called, “A Statement of Scriptural and Confessional Principles” which he and the conservative element of the Synod then were able to approve at the LCMS convention, citing Res. 2-13. This Synodically approved tool was then used to decide whether the seminary professors were orthodox in their teaching. Again, this essay does not weigh in on whether or not the findings were helpful. We are allowing that these “Scriptural and Confessional Principles” are 100% orthodox. However, this essay examines whether the end justifies the means; this essay further argues that the increasing use of the cliché “the end justifies the means” is precisely what bedevils and divides the LCMS. Intended or unintended, this was a precedent begun in the handling of Seminex that is being used widely and freely. Does anyone believe this produces peace?

The plot gets thicker! Why is this issue of extra-theological yard sticks (in addition to what the Constitution allows for) becoming so very critical in the LCMS today? Because, in very recent

years, the LCMS president has used, in an unprecedented way, authority given to his office to appoint members to the CTCR, the CCM, and other committees, thereby producing tools for taking care of any dissent, or any one who does not believe according to the wishes of those politically in power. The question here is whether a Synodical president is operating by the letter or spirit of the handbook. Here also is another lesson for the conservative wing of the LCMS: the so-called conservative wing of the LCMS helped create the tools your previously-elected President designed to eliminate others—now your tool is being used on yourselves. What goes around comes around! “He has dug a pit and hollowed it out, and has fallen into the hole which he made. His mischief will return upon his own head, and his violence will descend upon his own pate” (Psalm 7:15–16). Summary: To repeat, we are not here arguing about the orthodoxy of the results achieved by these special “tools.” In many people’s eyes, the results may be most laudable. We are here pointing out that the LCMS Constitution does not allow for these extra tools for expelling or retaining members. The increasing use of these extraordinary tools—documents, resolutions, or opinions—has created endless hell throughout the LCMS. Thomas Hobbes said, “Hell is seeing the truth too late!”

Consider again the early history of the LCMS. If Walther had faced the Seminex issue, surely he would have isolated the issues of Seminex on the basis of the Word of God and the Confessions. He then would have worked toward a resolution of the Seminex problem on that basis. It is my opinion that, since Walther was very well versed in the Scriptures, the Confessions, and the writings of Luther, he would have not had to draw up another document, even if Synod’s machinery was available to do so! Nor would he have worked to manipulate committees, had they been available. By isolating the issues in a very simple and clear way, and by providing laypeople with brief and clearly written tracts, thereby helping them to understand the issue, Walther, patiently, decisively, and Biblically, “brought the entire Synod along.” To use simple English: “Ya simply gotta do this!” You have to bring the whole church along on the basis of God’s Word alone! This “bringing along” is something that can be done also today. And, indeed, must be done today! Instead, today congregations and people receive heavily written, ponderous documents issued by commissions. The Confessions warn against such unclear writing. In the *Formula of Concord*, a “formula” for bringing concord and harmony to the Lutheran church in the late 1500s, the authors note: “Necessity demands explanation of these disputed articles on the basis of God’s Word and reliable writings so that those with proper Christian understanding could know which position regarding the points under discussion is in accord with God’s word and the Christian Augsburg Confession, and which is not” (*Formula of Concord*, Solid Declaration, 10. Kolb, p. 526).

There will be many on all sides vigorously opposing the arguments advanced in the above paragraphs. But how do you think the LCMS can survive as a viable tool of God if each president seeks to create the LCMS in his own image? Did not God demonstrate a better way at Altenburg?

Finally, for those desiring to oppose the above arguments, think things through very carefully. Your time may also come to be on “trial.” And you may appeal correctly to the Bible and Confessions, as clearly outlined in the LCMS Constitution. However, it might also happen that an LCMS president in charge (who disagrees with you), may prepare a special document customized **just to eliminate you!** Think about it!

DON'T LIVE IN DELUSION. CHURCH POLITICS HAS ALWAYS TURNED STOMACHS!

As we move along in this discussion, let's keep another point in full view: to see early governance of the LCMS as some type of "lily white" operation is "romanticized," fictional, and wrong. Governance of the external structure of the church has always been difficult. At times, man's worst character traits often show through in church administration matters,⁸ since church governance is never totally free of man's sinful "behind the scenes manipulation." **So, what is the answer?**

WHAT IS GOD'S ANSWER TO CHURCH POLITICS?

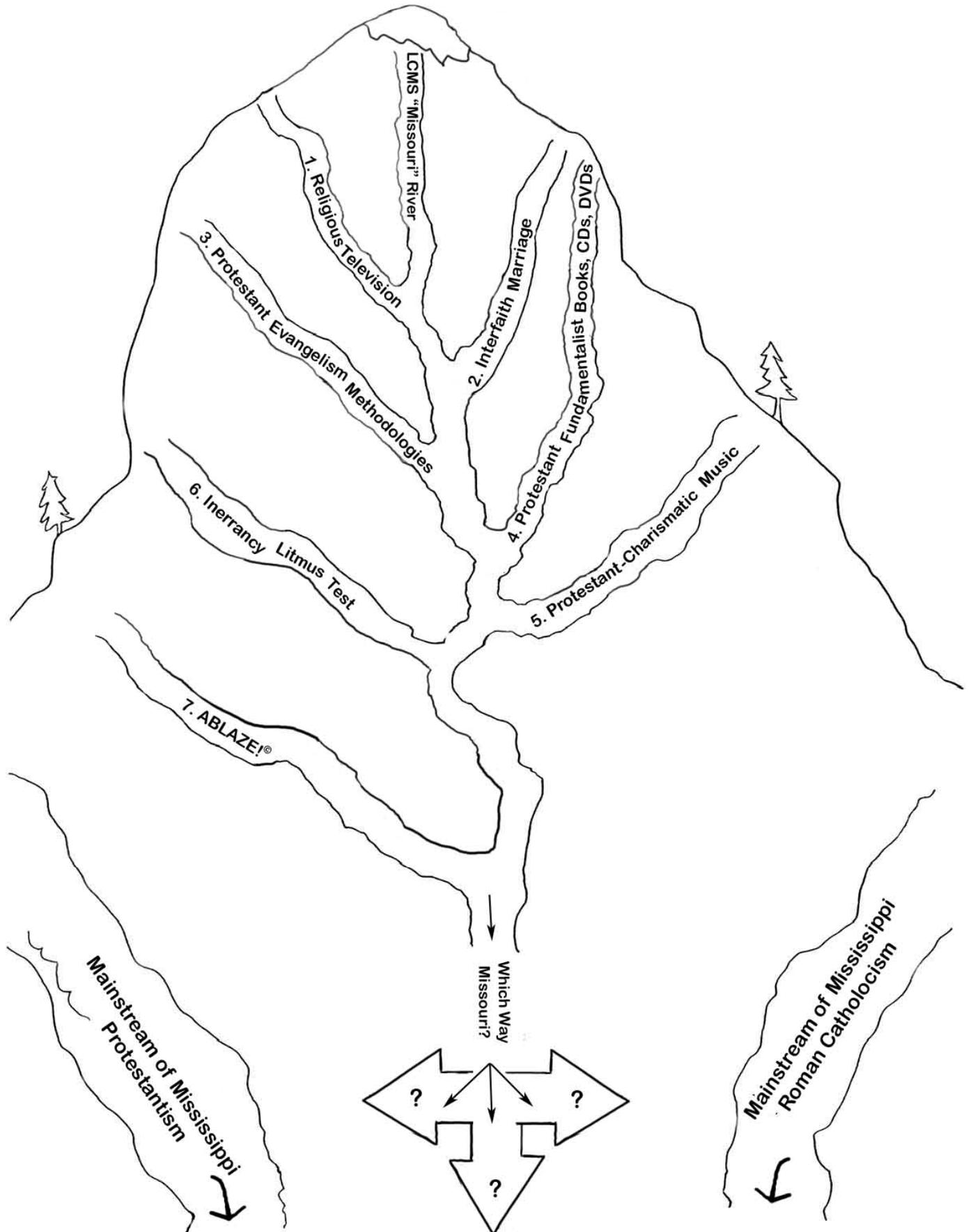
God's Word reveals that, whenever Christians gather, even in conventions, Satan is there in the midst of them. "Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves to the Lord, and Satan also came among them" (Job 1:6). "The whole world lies in the power of the evil one" (1 John 5:19). "No matter what play we make, he [Satan] is a master and expert at the game" (*Luther's Works*, vol. 37, p. 13).

So, what can the LCMS and its leaders do? Is there any hope? Yes! They know the Biblical teaching that the devil will not only always be in the mix, but that he is a power to be reckoned with in church politics. This reckoning also is what God teaches in Romans 6: sin is not only always around us, sin also exists within us. Then God makes this critical differentiation: "Do not let sin reign in your mortal body." This is to say, just because there sin is inside you as a power, you don't have to let it control your life. Likewise, just as "under the table" and less-than-forthright elements of church politics are always in the church, this does not mean, therefore, you have to let them control your church. In fact, God is commanding you to fight against them.⁹ Paraphrasing Romans 6:12, God would say to us today: "Although politics will always exist in the LCMS 'body,' do not let sinful politics **REIGN** in the LCMS, or take over the LCMS." To say God's Word, not politics, must reign in the LCMS is neither naive nor pietistic. In Galatians 2:11, Peter tried a little politics to save face and Paul "opposed him to his face!" Church politics can and must be faced, and vigorously opposed, head-on. Anyone trying to argue for the necessity of a politically dominated church on the basis of the kingdom on the left is going to be appealing to a God, or a god, who is not listening! "They will call on Me, but I will not answer" (Proverbs 1:28).

THE FIFTH MAJOR CRISIS—WHERE WE ARE TODAY—2007

Now, the entire matter heats up. It is impossible to understand where the LCMS is today unless one first discusses the forty year interval between 1973–1974 until now. This period is, bar none, **THE MOST COMPLEX PERIOD IN THE HISTORY OF THE LCMS**. The complexity is further intensified by powerful foreign forces flowing into the LCMS and increasingly affecting and confusing LCMS theology and practice.

Below is LCMS history pictured as a mountain stream with various minor tributaries. The tributaries show the forces flowing into, and influencing, the LCMS. Hopefully, this visual will help explain the current conflict and confusion in the LCMS.



In the above visual, the LCMS stream begins at the top with a Reformation-understanding of the Word of God, as outlined in the Lutheran Confessions. This visual shows how LCMS theology and practice has become increasingly polluted with foreign and false teaching, primarily U.S. Protestantism and Fundamentalism.

IDENTIFYING THAT WHICH IS UNDERMINING US!

Since “Fundamentalism” plays not just a “key,” but a pivotal role in this essay; and since Fundamentalism will surely play a huge role in the LCMS future, Fundamentalism needs to be clearly and simply explained. In 1966, CPH published the book *Fundamentalism and the LCMS* by Dr. Milton Rudnick. The book is helpful, but nowhere does it show the deadly force of Fundamentalist teaching as it quietly undermines Bible-based, Christ-centered Lutheran theology. Many in the U.S. consider themselves to be Fundamentalist Christians. They are proud of this. In fact, some Lutherans even claim to be “Fundamentalists.”¹⁰ Thus, any claims that Christian Fundamentalists attack or undermine Christ and His teachings, these are fighting words!

Here is a simple explanation of Fundamentalism. Let us say the National Association of Doctors and Nutritionists got together to set forth what they agree are the ten most fundamental dietary components needed for a healthy body. Having no political or ideological orientation, this group, on the basis of their best scientific studies, would make a list of minimum requirements, or “Fundamentals” of a healthy diet, including such things as protein, vitamins, minerals, etc.

Now, let’s say another health “movement” in the United States got together and decided that, for a healthy body, a person would need a somewhat different diet. They leave off their list protein, iron, and calcium! You can imagine the reaction by the one thousand doctors and nutritionists, or the reaction of any concerned doctor or nutritionist. When they would see protein, iron, and calcium missing from this list of fundamentals, they would go ballistic!

Now let’s look at Fundamentalist religion as it is commonly understood in the United States religious community. Beginning in the early 20th century, Fundamentalism was a movement based on widely circulated writings which isolated and promoted a list of basic doctrines of the Christian faith, including the virgin birth, creation, the atonement, etc. The founders of Fundamentalism then said these doctrines are the basic and necessary components for a healthy “faith diet.” When looking at this list, however, Lutherans, go ballistic! Why? Because Fundamentalists omitted some of the most needed and nourishing of Christ’s blessings and teachings, elements Christ Himself insists are part of the “fundamentals,” especially the Sacraments.

How does this happen? To begin with, Fundamentalists have a different guideline for understanding what is important for nourishment. They have an understanding of the nature and character of the Word that is different from that which is in the Scriptures, and what Christ Himself teaches. God teaches His Word is living, efficacious, and active. This “Word power” gives divine power to the sacraments. Because of their blindness based on human reason, Fundamentalists first deny the living Word and thereby see the Sacraments—Baptism and the Holy Supper—as little more than ordinances that have no regenerative, life-giving power. In other words, they believe a church can remove the living and life-giving Word in preaching and

the Sacraments from the Christian's diet, in spite of the fact that Christ Himself demands they be part of the diet!

Long before Fundamentalism's limited spiritual diet was formulated, Luther vigorously objected to this approach and wrote repeatedly in a very strong way against those who tried to teach that neither Baptism nor the Lord's Supper had any divine power. The Anabaptists and Sacramentarians were the Fundamentalists of Luther's day. Luther wrote: "Thus, in our day we, too, must labor with the Word of God, against the fanatical opinions of Anabaptists and Sacramentarians, to set free those who have been taken captive by them [2 Tim 2:26], to recall them to the pure doctrine of faith and to keep them in it" (*Luther's Works*, vol. 26, p. 194).

Pointing out the false teaching of Fundamentalism is not something Lutherans invented. These false teachings are rooted in Fundamentalism's refusal to receive Jesus' teaching on His living Word. Jesus says in John 6:63: "The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life." Throughout both the Old and New Testaments are clear verses of Scripture which tell us that God's Word is alive, active, cleansing, healing, forgiving, and new-life giving. When Jesus says in John 5:17: "My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working," He means that through His Word and Sacraments, God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are constantly nourishing the Christian Church. God's living Word also gives divine power to the Sacraments, a teaching of Jesus that Fundamentalists reject.

Does this mean that Fundamentalists are not Christians? No! But it does mean this: Fundamentalists are promoting a spiritual diet that causes Christians to be vulnerable to all kinds of satanic infections and other spiritual weaknesses. Just as our Federal Government would respond vigorously to any kind of health movement that would eliminate protein and calcium from the diet, so also we as followers of Christ vigorously oppose any movement that eliminates the Sacraments and the living Word as part of the necessary diet for everyday living. Fundamentalism is further clarified and illustrated in Appendix 2 titled: "Jesus' Balanced Diet vs. Fundamentalist's Distorted and Dangerous Diet."

THIS IS WHAT ABLAZE DOES

By intent, or by default, *Ablaze!*[®] theology/missiology not only permits but actually promotes Fundamentalist theology and methodology, a foreign theology now taking deep root in our church. This will be discussed as the essay moves ahead.

With a definition of Fundamentalism in hand, let's discuss some of the forces (many tied to pernicious Fundamentalist teaching) that have been flowing, unabated, into the LCMS "Missouri." Let's be candid, even if it is uncomfortable. I also have blood on my hands, as I was, in my younger days, a fellow traveler (at least to a degree) with some Protestant evangelism missiology.

THE FIRST FOREIGN TRIBUTARY FLOWING INTO, AND CHANGING, LCMS THEOLOGY AND METHODOLOGY: RELIGIOUS TV

A powerful foreign tributary that has been flowing into "Missouri" for years is seductive religious television programming, starring televangelists.

Secular studies have reputedly shown that, to be successful on TV, one simply has to have an “entertainment” flair. Television is big business. It works with the “bottom line!”

Furthermore, ideologists clearly recognize the power of television to seduce and brainwash. While sugar-coating their primary intent in a drama or even comedy format, ideologists and moral change agents are busy altering people’s thinking and values. In other words, people are having their brain or “DOS” (Disc Operating System) remapped unawares, while **actually enjoying it!** Yes, they actually laugh while outside forces are seductively changing their thinking!

Now, here is the “kicker” for this essay! This mental “remapping” is happening “big time” in religion. Even staunch Lutherans have been enjoying having their theological mind remapped, all the while not knowing what is happening.

THE SECOND “TRIBUTARY” FLOWING INTO “MISSOURI”: INTERFAITH MARRIAGE

The second “tributary” flowing into “Missouri” has been interfaith marriage. This powerful influence could well be called the “dirty little non-discussed” LCMS secret.

Since the founding of the LCMS, intermarriage has always occurred. However, in the past 30–40 years intermarriage has dramatically accelerated. LCMS young people have increasingly married non-Lutheran young people including Catholic, Reformed, Methodist, and what might be called “American Protestant.” Marriage to a non-Lutheran is not wrong in itself. However, if arrangements are not made, either before or after the wedding, for the non-Lutheran spouse to take instructions and embrace the Lutheran Christian faith (and say with Ruth: “Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God” Ruth 1:6), this failure will allow the devil to be vigorously at work dividing the family and the local congregation.

The LCMS is now populated by thousands of families with mixed faiths. To maintain harmony, these mixed religion families (who often do not insist that their spouse be thoroughly catechized in the Lutheran faith), often make a silent agreement never to bring up the subject, at least not in the immediate family. In an attempt to maintain family harmony, the issue is painted over like a rust spot on a car. Although many know otherwise, they simply say, “All religions teach the same thing.” Thus, they create a time bomb waiting to explode each time communion is served in an LCMS congregation. Thus, each time Johnny and Mary come home for Thanksgiving and Christmas and want to take communion and each time the pastor makes any remark whatsoever comparing, in a non-condemning way, Bible-based Lutheran teaching with the teaching of non-Lutheran religions, conflict and congregational division is inevitable! Even though the pastor did not cause the problem, he gets blamed. This problem is so wide-spread and festering that no LCMS pastor needs it explained to him. Most LCMS pastors have already had this bomb go off in his face. Seasoned LCMS pastors also know that many who become members of LCMS churches (without being thoroughly catechized) are the ones who chafe most about restrictions on who may receive the Sacrament, insisting that the LCMS give up its theological position. When it comes to divisiveness, the devil knows how to get people on his side. Satan is, as Luther says, “The master of a thousand arts.” This trick of the devil is bolstered by the false idea that thorough catechization hampers the growth of the church. **This contention is a lie**. The March 2005 *Religion Watch* reports that in spite of its rigorous catechization requirements, “Southern

Catholics saw a growth of almost 30% in the 1990s, compared to the less than 10% for the dominant Baptists.” Amazing statistics, when some in the LCMS say we need to become less liturgical and more Baptist in our evangelism approach.

Am I the only one writing about this? Of course not. Already, in 1955, the University of Chicago Press published *Protestant, Catholic, Jew*, authored by Wil Herberg, a Jewish professor at Drew University. Dr. Herberg has embraced the Catholic faith, providing him with a good vantage point. Dr. Herberg’s book, which has seen many reprints, contends that even churches and religious groups with a clear confession or theological position on paper remain highly susceptible to the Protestant-Fundamentalist religious culture in America. Herberg demonstrates, compellingly, that even non-Lutheran denominations realize that, unless they keep clearly instructing their members, American cultural religion will eventually swallow them.

THE THIRD TRIBUTARY FLOWING INTO MISSOURI: PROTESTANT EVANGELISM METHODOLOGIES

The third foreign tributary began to pour into the LCMS “Missouri,” in the mid and late 1960s. This tributary was/is Protestant evangelism “methodology.” Now, here is the shocker! This foreign methodology/theology did not flow in by itself. It was aggressively solicited by LCMS evangelism leaders.¹¹ LCMS leaders charged in the mid 1960s with finding plans and methodologies to increase LCMS membership, hoped “mating” Fundamentalism methodology/theology with LCMS Bible-based theology would produce the “new man,” as the Soviets used to say. This new “LCMS evangelism man” would be aggressive evangelistically, and thereby stop LCMS membership hemorrhaging. This new LCMS evangelistic man would also bring in new members. Although young and immature at the time, in the late 60s and early 70s, I was not only close, but actually involved in, this movement to bring foreign Protestant missiology into the LCMS, **something I am not proud of.**

Briefly, this is what happened. The devil seduced LCMS leaders to believe that Lutheranism was strong theologically, but inherently non-evangelistic. Of course, this was a lie cooked up in the deepest caverns of hell. In actuality, those involved simply did not even begin to understand how evangelistic and aggressive Lutheran theology was from its inception. The natural and compelling connection between Lutheran theology and its natural end result, evangelism, please see this endnote.¹²

These same, well-intentioned but misguided LCMS evangelism leaders unknowingly brought foreign methodologies into the LCMS as a huge Trojan horse. And, at least to a degree, I participated. Not only was the Trojan horse brought into the LCMS, **it was given a special stall in the headquarters to reproduce.** A new Department of Evangelism was created to breed and reproduce Protestant and Fundamentalist methodology and, by default, its theology. People in these positions of top LCMS missiological influence began visiting and drinking deeply of the man-centered evangelistic techniques of Protestant and Fundamentalist churches and parachurches, thereby integrating them into their personal thinking and also into the Synod at large. I myself made some “trips to the trough.” Included were the Presbyterian-Reformed teachings of D. James Kennedy’s “Evangelism Explosion,” methodologies from Campus Crusade for Christ, and many others. Bringing Protestant methodologies into the LCMS has clearly been one of the biggest Trojan horses the devil ever slipped inside the gates of the LCMS. Like the serpent who said to Eve: “Take a bite, only good will happen to you,” the devil came

also to LCMS leaders and said “Take a big bite out of the apple of Protestant missiology, it will not affect your theology!” And they ate! Ever since, the LCMS has experienced increasing missiological hell! Again, as Thomas Hobbes said, “Hell is seeing the truth too late!”

To try to run a Lutheran church on Fundamentalist theology is like trying to run a gasoline car with diesel fuel. Or, if you are from the farm, it works this way. Farmers know that mating a horse with a donkey, commonly known as a jackass, produces a mule, which cannot reproduce itself. Likewise, when you mate a Lutheran theological horse with a Fundamentalist theological jackass, this will produce a mule, which any theologian knows cannot reproduce. This in itself should tell you what will happen as the LCMS tries to increase its “Lutheran” membership. If any reproduction does occur, it will only be, at best, more stubborn Fundamentalist jackasses.

THE FOURTH KEY TRIBUTARY FORCE: BOOKS, TAPES, CDs, SEMINARS, AND INTERDENOMINATIONAL BIBLE STUDIES

In many, probably even most, LCMS homes, one will see prominently displayed on coffee tables, shelves, and in the “throne” room, a wide variety of Fundamentalist, anti-sacramental, anti-Baptism literature from Billy Graham, James Dobson, Bill Hybels, Rick Warren, Joyce Meyer, etc. These popular teachers steadfastly refuse to receive Jesus’ key teachings on Baptism and Communion.¹⁵ Yet these are the leading religious teachers now misleading our people. As already alluded to, religious television has permitted these winsome personalities to slowly but effectively re-map the religious mind of thousands of Lutherans to the extent that, if you make any even slight negative comment about any of the religious personalities above, you will have your hands full! You can say anything you want about your pastor, bad-mouth your district president, or even demean your Synodical president. However, you better not even hint that you might disagree with the teachings of popular Fundamentalists, who, as previously explained, so maliciously undermine the clear teachings of Jesus. Many of our LCMS members will defend their Fundamentalist mentors. How has this happened?

Have our LCMS leaders ever clearly explained the poison of Fundamentalism? Also, seriously consider the impact of another part of the foreign tributary of non-Biblical books pouring into Missouri. For years, when LCMS pastors have retired, many donated all or part of their personal libraries to the Concordia Historical Institute. The majority of these pastors’ libraries contained Bible-based Lutheran commentaries, *Luther’s Works*, prayer books, reference books, etc. Let it also be said that most LCMS pastors have always had a few non-Lutheran theology books in their library, **but never the majority**. That has changed. We were told already some years ago that when libraries of retired LCMS pastors arrive at CHI, the majority of the books are by Protestant and Fundamentalist authors. If the shepherds are feeding on these types of books, what would you guess the sheep are eating?

When LCMS pastors and people nourish themselves on Fundamentalist literature, tapes, DVDs, etc., there are consequences. As a man “thinketh in his heart, so is he” (Proverbs 23:7). Thus, even though many LCMS churches have the sign “Lutheran” posted outside; many think differently inside. As a result of religious TV pouring into the “Missouri” stream, the sheep inside have been grazing, both at home and at the church library, and have drunk deeply of a different and opposing teaching. Jesus warns: “Take care what you listen to” (Mark 4:24). Is this being too critical? Are we not being too picky? Can’t you just use a little supplement to help Lutheran theology come “alive”? “A little leaven leavens the whole loaf” (Galatians 5:9).

THE FIFTH TRIBUTARY OF FOREIGN INFLUENCE TO THE LCMS: PROTESTANT AND PENTECOSTAL MUSIC

So interesting have some American church struggles become (not only in the LCMS but also in many other denominations) that secular institutions could not but make some observations in recent months. Since the religious right has clearly affected U.S. politics, ecclesiastical strife has become a great interest, even apart from doctrine.

For instance, Rick Warren claims to have taught 400,000 pastors to think and act like he does. Yet, ABC News claims his “Purpose Driven Life” is actually “Purpose Driven Strife.” Why? ABC explains that wherever Warren’s ideas are employed, the outcome is usually church division and animosity, with one group being forced to leave.

ABC reporters are now asking if it is God’s words or Warren’s dreams that are dividing churches. In one situation cited, a recent President Bush Supreme Court nominee got caught in the Purpose Driven meat grinder and lost out. Events like this make news. ABC news reporters further point out this interesting fact: churches that want success and increased membership, and want to consider the Warren paradigm, should know that one change is not negotiable: music and worship style. Change is part of the Warren package. In other words, even secularists understand Warren’s package is designed to change not only externals, but also the internal theology.

This struggle in American Protestant churches gets even more interesting. The bulk of Protestant hymnody has historically been doctrinal, one of God’s most effective tools to teach His doctrine to the next generation. Only more recently has American Protestantism began to use what can be called “singspiration” music, musical lyrics that can be interpreted by each singer, but whose primary purpose it is to lift one’s spirit, rather than assist in teaching what Christ has taught. All of this in spite of Christ’s command in the Great Commission: “teach all things I have commanded” (Matthew 28:20).

Amazing also that it has not been the Lutherans who have “blown the whistle” on this new influence, but rather people such as the president of Maranatha music (a company that was one of the original pioneers in promoting singspirational music) and even the first vice president of Focus on the Family, both of whom you would assume to be 100% behind the singspirational movement now flooding the LCMS. They have opined that, since hardly any of this music is doctrinally driven, it will not assist in perpetuating the true Christian faith to the next generation. This lack of doctrine becomes a very, very serious concern. In other words, If singspiration music now overtaking the LCMS does to us what it had done to others—heads up! This new music could very well help the Lutheran church joyfully sing itself into its own demise.¹⁴

Let’s not forget that one of history’s greatest heretics, Arius, did his dirty work long ago (about 260–336 A.D.) by packaging his false teaching in enjoyable and “catchy” music. He was extremely successful. Who has not heard a new modern music tune one day and disliked it, only to catch oneself humming the tune the next day. Even the Greeks wrote about the seductive power of music. The serpent in the Garden could not have done better. He was “more crafty than any beast of the field” (Genesis 3:1). Televangelists are often the most sorry people on television. They stoop to “whatever works!”

THE SIXTH TRIBUTARY FORCE: INERRANCY—THE FORCE NO ONE, ESPECIALLY THE SO-CALLED “CONSERVATIVES”—WANT TO TALK ABOUT!

In the Seminex crisis, a major argument ensued over the expression, “inerrancy” of the Bible, meaning the Bible contains no errors. Actually, inerrancy has been a key word/doctrine among Fundamentalists, used as their “weapon of choice” against liberals. The Seminex teachers claimed inerrancy is found neither in the Bible nor in the Lutheran Confessions, and was foreign to genuine Lutheran theology. In two articles which appeared in the *Concordia Historical Quarterly*, LCMS pastor Dale Huelsmann, traces the use of inerrancy in American Lutheranism. {More information on this is available at this footnote.¹⁵}

Although the concept of “inerrancy” was the second thesis of the LCMS dissenting 44 in 1945, it came into greater prominence in the Seminex crisis when the investigating committee used “inerrancy” as a gauge to call into question, and to ultimately condemn, “critical” studies of the Bible used by certain Seminex faculty members. Much has already been written on this controversy and is available for those who want to pursue it.

But, why bring up inerrancy here? As the embattled LCMS emerged from the Seminex crisis, “inerrancy” increasingly became the centerpiece of LCMS theology. Not only did inerrancy become the lynchpin of LCMS post-Seminex theology, it began to drive LCMS ecumenical theology, which in turn greatly impacted LCMS evangelism and missiology.

Here is how it worked. LCMS conservative leaders, embattled with Seminex, sought fellow soldiers to fight a common enemy: liberals. They found these brothers in Protestant and Fundamentalist individuals such as Francis Schaeffer, Harold Lindsell, and others. Once the inerrancy vs. Seminex liberal battle was over, many, if not most, LCMS leaders, saw no problem continuing to be fellow-travelers with Protestants and Fundamentalists in other matters also. As Milton Rudnick points out in his book *Fundamentalism and the Missouri Synod* LCMS leaders, including Lutheran Hour Speaker, Walter A. Maier, were fully aware of the difference between Fundamentalist and Lutheran theology; however, they/he did not see the difference to be of any great concern. This faulty judgment has had, and will continue to have, long range negative implications for LCMS missiology. Fleeing one enemy, they run headlong into another. “As when a man flees from a lion, and a bear meets him, or goes home, leans his hand against the wall, and a snake bites him” (Amos 5:19). The LCMS and Protestant-Fundamentalist theology can live side-by-side in the larger U.S. religious cultural context; however, one cannot have Fundamentalist and Protestant Reformed theology working inside the LCMS anymore than you can have Lutheran theology operating inside Fundamentalist churches without causing changes. This practice is like white blood cells and cancer cells in the same body. These two forces do not live in harmony with each other inside the same organization; one will ultimately triumph and kill off the other. Those who try to supplement or blend Bible-based Lutheran teaching with Fundamentalist teaching or music need to remember, “Do you not know that a little lump leavens the whole lump of dough?” (1 Corinthians 9:6).

If the coming of post-Seminex Fundamentalist theology into the LCMS was a concern, it was obviously seen as a harmless concern. This great deception of Satan has become the sword driven into the heart of Christ-centered Bible-based Lutheran theology. Fundamentalists operate with a basic and opposing understanding of the Word of God, which requires them to deny Jesus’ clear teaching on the life-saving power of Baptism and the miraculous power of

Communion. Luther writes, “Christ instituted Baptism to be a washing of regeneration (Titus 3:5). But haven’t the sects stirred up a great offense on account of it? Has not the entire doctrine concerning Baptism been wretchedly corrupted? And yet, what is more necessary to us than the institution of this very rite?” (*Luther’s Works*, vol. 1, p. 94).

If the post-Seminex LCMS leadership had made as their litmus test for the LCMS’s future the “efficacy” of the Word (as Luther discusses it in his commentaries on John, Genesis, etc.) instead of the inerrancy of the Word, this reprioritization would have prevented much current confusion and division. It would have caused the entire Synod to have the proper and most important “WORD” orientation, therefore also helping the LCMS to remain on the historic “middle road,” a road between Catholicism and the rest of Protestantism, a lonely way, but a God-pleasing way. Historic Lutheranism has never joined forces with those of other doctrinal persuasions, such as Fundamentalism, even to fight the common enemy of liberalism! Although the historic LCMS did not teach that there are errors in the Bible, “inerrancy” is not the doctrine of Christ that drives Lutheran teaching. It is rather Jesus’ teaching in John 6:63, “The words that I have spoken to you are Spirit and are life.”

For further discussion on the issue of inerrancy in the LCMS and recent world Lutheranism, see the book translated by “801” faculty members Ronald Feuerhahn and Jeffery Kloha: *Scripture and the Church—Selected Essays of Herman Sasse*. The plot of the book picks up at page 333 and following.

THE SEVENTH TRIBUTARY ENTERING THE LCMS STREAM: ABLAZE!®

Ablaze!® is definitely a new “influence” in the LCMS. There is no doubt that those promoting *Ablaze!*® sincerely intend *Ablaze!*® theology to be, not only a major influence, but also the official missiology in the LCMS for many years, at least through 2017! The question then becomes even more urgent: Is *Ablaze!*® a foreign influence, a foreign tributary flowing into Missouri that will help move Missouri into the mainstream of Protestant and Fundamentalist theology and practice? Or, has God kept elements of *Ablaze!*® theology, such as the “critical event,” or “igniting congregations,” deeply embedded in Biblical Lutheran theology so that He can now surface these elements “for such a time as this?” There are those who argue that either we in the LCMS get on board with the mega-church and “Igniting Congregations” movement, or else the LCMS has no future. For interesting details on the practical implementation of mega-churches in the LCMS, see this endnote.¹⁶

Ablaze!® and “Igniting Congregations” are not easy to understand. The materials seem to have become available over time, as the writer of Hebrews says, “In many portions, and in many ways.” The most helpful early source is the Concordia, Seward *Issues in Christian Education* journal which had on its Fall 2005 front cover a number of pictures, plus the following bold headline: ***Ablaze!*®: Origins, Theology, Structure, and Impact**. Here we need to commend the promoters of *Ablaze!*®. They have been very forthright in saying *Ablaze!*® has a definite theology. The lead article by Dr. Scudieri also helps the reader understand how the new missiology (which the entire Synod is now being told is the official theology of missions (missiology), at least through 2017) was conceived and born.

The one item I thank God for in this *Issues* magazine, more than any other, is in the lead article by Dr. Scudieri, in his statement on page 12: “In my opinion *Ablaze!*® provides us with the

OPPORTUNITY TO DISCUSS topics that have been in disagreement, at least in ‘confusion,’ in the LCMS.” [emphasis added] I have written this paper precisely for this reason: to discuss this topic. Since we are told that *Ablaze!*[®] is now our official LCMS missiology for worldwide evangelism and outreach; and, since I have been called to serve in the LCMS as an evangelist, this new missiology strikes at the heart of what I do and what I am expected to believe and practice. I am sure others, especially pastors, have similar feelings, especially since God says to each pastor: “Do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry” (2 Timothy 4:5). Since Dr. Scudieri’s invitation was public, I assume a public response is acceptable.

THE GENESIS OF ABLAZE![®]

On page 9 of the Seward *Issues* article one reads: “Laity on the Board of Missions understood . . . that a movement in the LCMS to bring missions to a new height would have to be spurred on by the laity.” Where are the pastors? Don’t they count? Immediately after this point is made, we read: “The firm Systone Ryan was engaged,” followed by a “second consultant,” followed by a third “outside consultant was engaged . . .” Why are we reading about secular consultants but see no reference to our pastors and our seminaries, at least one of which offers a PhD in missiology, precisely regarding the issues now presented to us? In all of this confusion, one begins to wonder whether those at the helm of the LCMS know that when the LCMS began, it was the congregations that formed the Synod and not the other way around. How is it that we now find, in *Ablaze!*[®] the tail wagging the dog, especially in the all important area of missiology? When *Ablaze!*[®] is all over, and if *Ablaze!*[®] does not significantly improve LCMS communicant membership, who will be held accountable? I will tell you. The pastors will be blamed, even though most LCMS pastors had no input whatsoever in creating *Ablaze!*[®]

Again, the entire LCMS owes Dr. Scudieri a great expression of thanks for saying that *Ablaze!*[®] gives us all a chance to discuss these issues, albeit, after the horse is out of the barn! Thus, I am stepping up to the plate, not for political reasons, but as a called evangelist in the Synod. I am now face-to-face with a new missiology—about which I have some very serious questions. If I am going to support and implement this effort, at least, I have to see the Biblical basis for what we are trying to do; and, I would be much more comfortable if I could see that this has at least some roots in our historic LCMS missiology.

On page 16 of the Seward *Issues* magazine, Dr. Daniel L. Mattson, currently on staff at LCMS World Mission, writes in his article, *The Ablaze![®] Initiative in the LCMS Theologically Considered*: “The central thesis of this paper is that the *Ablaze!*[®] initiative is a 21st century outreach effort consistent with Lutheran theology and practice and an example of the mission emphasis that has characterized The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod from the beginning.” With respect to *Ablaze!*[®], as an evangelist, I respectfully disagree with this statement. In fact, for discussion starters, I would rewrite Dr. Matson’s statement to say that the *Ablaze!*[®] initiative is a 21st century outreach effort **NOT** consistent with Lutheran theology and practice and **NOT** an example of the mission emphasis that has characterized The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod from the beginning.

With this serious disagreement stated, I now proceed to accept Dr. Scudieri’s sincere invitation to enter into some non-personal and issue-oriented dialog. As I set forth concerns, I would be surprised to learn that I am the only LCMS clergy with concerns regarding the theology of *Ablaze!*[®]

My first concern is Dr. Mattson's statement in the 2004 Seward *Issues* magazine: "Especially significant here is President Kieschnick's involvement in the *Ablaze!*[®] movement. . . . He has been a tireless unwavering proponent of the *Ablaze!*[®] initiative, speaking with compassion to district conventions and countless other settings of the need for Lutheran Christians to be intentionally involved in what he calls the 'Critical Event:' the sharing of the Good News of Jesus Christ with an unreached or uncommitted person to the extent that it provokes a response from the person addressed." If you go online to the official LCMS website, you will see that this definition of the Critical Event has not changed. Currently online there is also posted the LCMS President's restatement of the Critical Event: "When one Lutheran Christian gives witness about Jesus of the hope that is within him or her to another person so that person may encounter Christ." This is obviously meant to emphasize the centrality of the "critical event" as the heart of *Ablaze!*[®] missiology. The primary problem with this definition is that it is false teaching. Why? Because the engine of *Ablaze!*[®], the Critical Event, makes no provision whatsoever for the evangelization of the newborn. Evangelization of newborns is a basic teaching of Jesus, practiced by historic Lutheranism, as clearly stated in the Baptismal formulas used throughout the LCMS. So great is Jesus' concern regarding the baptism of children that, unless this neglect of children is changed, one wonders around whose neck the millstone may hang?

It is also therefore both curious and troubling that other official definitions of the "Critical Event" are now floating around in the LCMS. For what purpose? A "Lutheranized" definition of the Critical Event has been published, first in the little-known journal *Missio Apostolica*, where it is defined by the LCMS president as: "When one Lutheran Christian gives witness about Jesus of the hope that is within him or her to another person so that person may encounter Christ that results in, or can be measured by, Baptism and/or Confirmation and a life of faith and good works in that person." The confusing wording may say more about the confusing goals than it intends to. The *Ablaze!*[®] website insists that we "are not specifically counting baptisms or conversions." Are we or aren't we? Such confusion!

As previously noted, on the President's page one still reads the official *Ablaze!*[®] missiological version that makes no provisions for the evangelization of the newborn. To make things even more complicated, confusing, and troubling, the current instructions for counting "hits" for *Ablaze!*[®] continues to use the old "non-Lutheranized" version of the Critical Event. Let's try to put the best construction on all of this. With all the controversy surrounding the original definition, and the way the "count" is done, it is difficult to believe that something "forthright" is going on here. At minimum, we are faced with God's admonition: "If the trumpet gives an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?" (1 Corinthians 14:8)

WHERE DOES THE BIBLE OR HISTORIC LUTHERANISM SPEAK ABOUT GOD'S SALVATION PROCESS WITH THE TERMS "COMMITTED AND UNCOMMITTED?"

A second and potentially even greater problem with *Ablaze!*[®] is the phraseology now being constantly repeated in connection with *Ablaze!*[®] (and "Igniting Congregations"). This phrase is "unreached and uncommitted."

For example, on the front page of the November 2003 *Missionary To Missionary* newsletter, the author says: "'Uncommitted' is a term we use for people who have been exposed to the Word, who have had an opportunity to hear the Good News of Jesus, but who have not accepted Jesus. This phrase, "not accepted Jesus as their personal Savior" has never been used in 500 years of

Lutheran history to describe how God saves people. This expression unabashedly puts man in the driver's seat of salvation. In evangelicalism, this phrase always runs in tandem with the false teaching of man's free will in spiritual matters, a teaching condemned in John 1:13, Romans 9:16, etc.

Now, back to the frequently used *Ablaze!*[®] expression, "uncommitted." "Uncommitted," the *Ablaze!*[®] author says, "are people may even have been baptized or raised in a Christian home, yet somewhere in their lives fell away from the Church. Uncommitted people live mainly in areas like Europe, Australia, North America, and South America." The author begins the above definition by claiming, "'Uncommitted' is a term we use . . ." Who is the "we?" This is certainly not been the way the LCMS has historically spoken of those outside of Christ; this is certainly not how Luther spoke about the unsaved; I don't know where you would find such a definition in the writings of Saint Paul; and I cannot imagine Jesus even thinking of such an expression, especially after His pointed discussion with Nicodemus (John 3). So, is the "we" the promoters of *Ablaze!*[®]; or, is this the type of nomenclature the *Ablaze!*[®] promoters hope will catch on in the LCMS, if it is repeated often enough, especially in official publications?

When Jesus speaks about God's salvation work He does not use the phrase "committed or uncommitted," nor does He ever promote the ideas currently associated with these words. Neither does this type of terminology reflect historic Lutheran missiology. Even the secular world understands that by changing terminology and nomenclature, one can totally change how a subject is discussed. In this case, changing the terminology changes the theology. "As a man thinks within himself, so he is" (Proverbs 23:7).

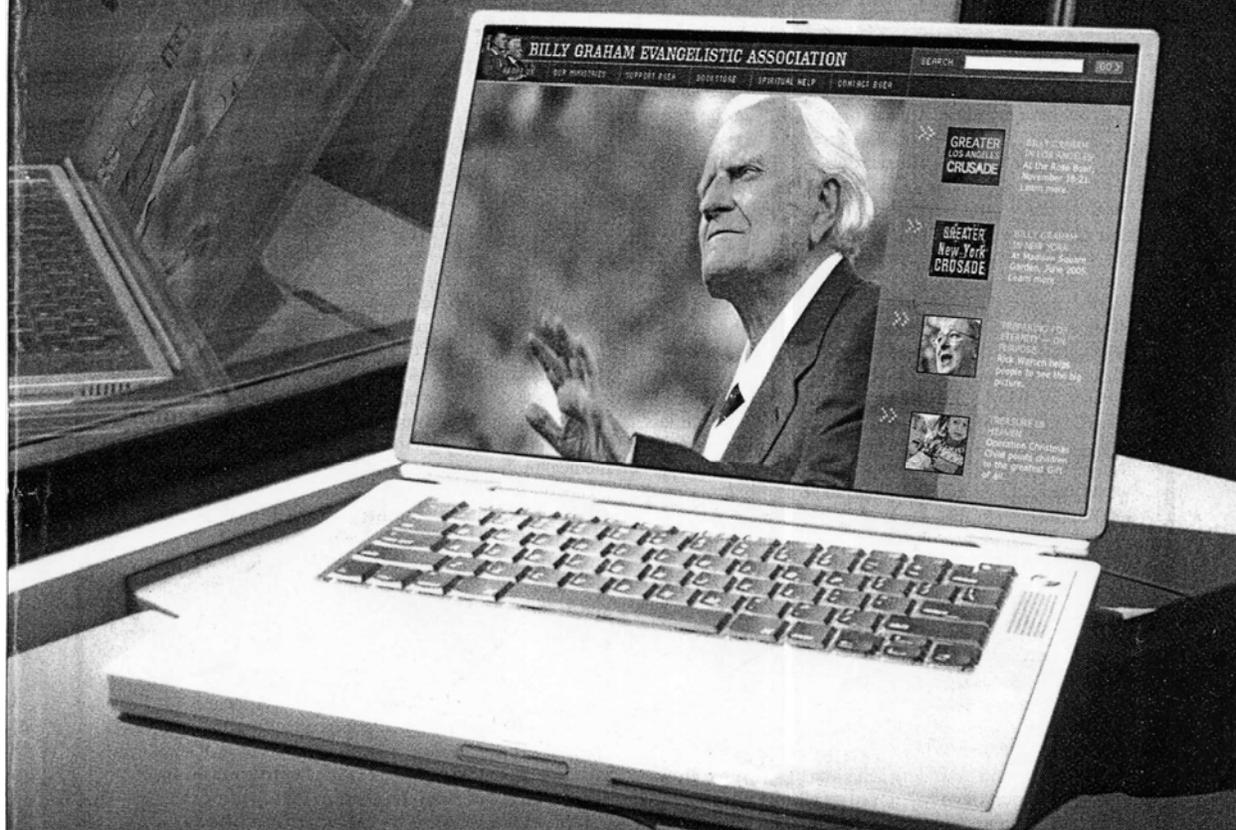
In his book, *Fallacies and Pitfalls of Language*, S. Morris Engel states: "**The reality we live in is largely created by the language with which we describe it.**" This is to say, when we describe our evangelistic and mission outreach approach by using terms such as "uncommitted" (which automatically assumes the opposite as being the "committed"), we are clearly moving away from language and theology used, not only in historic Lutheranism but by Christ himself. When Jesus confronted Nicodemus (John 3:1ff.) about the necessity of being born again of water and the Spirit (of being baptized), Jesus was not speaking about something Nicodemus could accomplish by "committing" himself to something. God's own meaning is made crystal clear when we understand that Jesus said to Nicodemus that he had to be born again "from above," not from below! Jesus' was not asking Nicodemus for commitment, as is *Ablaze!*[®] missiology!

Therefore, to begin using "committed/uncommitted" terminology in describing the most basic and key parts of outreach and evangelism, as in *Ablaze!*[®] then moves Bible-based Lutheran theology into the Protestant-Fundamentalist arena, clearly an environment where such terminology unabashedly describes a man-centered theology. This assertion is by no means a slur on Fundamentalists, Baptists, etc. Not long ago, I received material published in *First Things* in which Timothy George writes that Baptists are increasingly concerned that their members are picking up too much theology reflecting God's initiative and role in salvation. This trend, they say, plays down man's role and therefore lessens the desire for people to be evangelistic. There you have it! In their own words! In other words, the devil has gotten us in the LCMS to believe that, in order to increase our evangelistic fervor and outreach, we must, like the Baptists and Fundamentalists, put man in the driver's seat of salvation. We have to start using the expression "uncommitted" rather than "unbaptized." Such was not the case when Lutheran outreach burst forth in the Reformation, and it does not have to be the case now.

Thus, while I have no problem using the term, “unreached,” I would make a very powerful argument that the term “uncommitted” **DEFINITELY** reflects how Protestantism, and especially Fundamentalism, expresses its missiology. Historically, Lutherans express missions and outreach as being directed to the baptized or the unbaptized, terminology based on how Jesus taught and practiced missiology. We as Lutherans do not accept the Roman teaching of *ex opere operato*, which would imply that because you are baptized you are automatically saved. However, we also do not use the word “uncommitted” because it clearly places man in the driver’s seat of the salvation process.

Finally, we in the Bible-based Lutheran faith talk about the “miracle” of salvation as tied to the miracle of Baptism. Protestants see the salvation “miracle” as being tied closely to man and the “commitment” he makes. The difference between Lutheran and Protestant-Fundamentalist missiology can be vividly seen in the following advertisement from *World* magazine where man’s decision produces the miracle!

EVERY 60
SECONDS
A MIRACLE HAPPENS.



Last year, on average, one person made a decision for Jesus Christ every minute through the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. Visit billygraham.org and see the amazing things God is doing worldwide through BGEA Crusades, TV, radio, training, and more. You'll also find answers to life's questions from Billy Graham, free books and resources, tools to help you share your faith, and ways you can join us in taking the Gospel to the ends of the earth.

TAKE A MINUTE AND SEE GOD AT WORK.

BILLYGRAHAM.ORG

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BUT, WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE?

The scribes and Pharisees enjoyed endless arguments in fine points of theology. We in the LCMS are daily tempted to do the same—to criticize and whine endlessly, all the while having our finger pointed, with no vision to set forth. Thus, unless we can show in a compelling way how our concerns about doctrine and practice significantly impact the daily life of the average LCMS member, God will not only hear, but will condemn our worthless whining. “Do not complain, brothers, against one another, so that you yourselves may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing right at the door” (James 5:9).

To be sure, those promoting *Ablaze!*[®] and “Igniting Congregations” definitely have a sincere goal to make a difference in the LCMS. I wholeheartedly agree: *Ablaze!*[®] and “Igniting Congregations” theology and practice will definitely affect the LCMS; but, with *Ablaze!*[®] seed sown in the mulch of Fundamentalism, the potential for making a negative difference is much greater than the chance of making a positive difference.

Here is one of the great impacts *Ablaze!*[®] and “Igniting Congregations” will make on the future of the LCMS. In their effort to get people into the churches, sincere and well-trained LCMS pastors attempt to put together a church service using standard, historical liturgical terminology **while simultaneously integrating** a Protestant worship format, including popular singspiration hymns. This is to say, well-intended LCMS pastors who use “blended” services may well end up producing fruit they neither expected nor intended!

For instance, consider the long-range fallout for LCMS children who are, and will be, products of the “blended theology” services. Each Sunday morning, these youth enter this arena of blended theology and worship without the years of grounding and training in Scripture possessed by the pastors promoting this approach. These young people will then be misled to believe that this “blend” of singspiration lyrics (usually with a cannibalized historic liturgy) is characteristic of Lutheran or historic Christianity! But then the plot thickens. What happens when these unsuspecting, “blended” young people go off to college, or find a job in a far-off city? Hoping to remain Lutheran, they may first go to one of the many historically liturgical LCMS congregations around the country. However, even in LCMS churches that do historic liturgy well, many of these young people will surely find themselves either unfulfilled or out of place. They will deeply yearn for the more “alive” Protestant or Pentecostal service, the “blended service” emphasizing “experience,” something they grew up with and something **they were told was Lutheran**.

Once comfortably inside and “at home” in non-Lutheran churches, these unaware Lutheran students will hear sermons based on the Calvinist “obedience of faith” (the Gospel turned into Law—something that appeals to our flesh); they will sing hymns designed to lift their spirits through feeling, rather than through doctrinal teaching and the efficacy of the Word; they will go occasionally to Holy Communion without the Real Presence; and most damning of all, they will no longer hear the Absolution, the pure Gospel based on Jesus’ promise of forgiveness, of His keys, something clearly pointed out by both Herman Sasse and C.F.W. Walther. The greatest tragedy may be this: at this point in their life, when they are so prone to stumble and make mistakes, youth dearly need the power of pure forgiveness in the **Absolution**. The efficacious Word in Absolution staves off the devil’s attempts to move them to despair over their mistakes. What they most desperately need, they will no longer have. Thus, to move Lutheran churches

from doctrinally-based hymns to modern shallow singspiration, just to increase numbers for each service, will cause the future of the LCMS membership to be a wasteland of spiritual confusion, reverberating into eternity.

In all of this, will these young people “feel” good? Of course! Will they believe they are involved in genuine Christianity? Certainly! Will they do all they can to raise their children in the “alive” Fundamentalist church, and invite others to these spiritually “alive” and often big-name churches? Sure! But what does Jesus say about “alive” churches? Where does Jesus warn about churches that appear to be alive but are not? Answer: in Revelation 3:1, Jesus says, “I know your deeds, that you have a name, that you are alive, but you are dead!” What is Jesus talking about? To some, Jesus is involved in double-speak. How can Jesus say that there will be big-name and popular churches that appear to be alive, and yet they are dead? How is this decided? It is all decided upon how these churches understand the “Word.” The difference in how Lutherans understand the nature and character of the Word, as compared to how Protestant-Fundamentalists understand the Word, is as far as the east is from the west! There is probably no greater misunderstanding or Biblical misconception in the LCMS today, a misconception that will lead, and is already leading, thousands out of the historic Biblical, Christ-centered Reformation faith.

By encouraging so-called “blended theology” (so-called “alive” churches within the LCMS as the example of what all pastors should strive for, according to “Igniting Congregations” and what the laity now increasingly demand) **all the while not explaining the fundamental day and night difference in how Lutherans and Fundamentalists differ in their understanding of an “alive” church** (as Jesus explains in Revelation 3), will only produce an endless stream of those migrating from so-called outwardly “dead” LCMS churches to “alive” fundamentalist churches. In this sense, the *Ablaze!*[®] and “Igniting Congregations” initiative will be seen as extremely impressive in the short run, yet will be deadly for LCMS communicant membership in the long run. Again, as Thomas Hobbes has observed: “Hell is seeing the truth too late!”

Are the arguments above solid? I can only say that, in a very short time, I could produce a significant number of young people who were born and baptized in the LCMS but have since moved on, leaving the “dead” LCMS for churches and denominations that are “alive!” And you know what? As Luther notes in his commentary on Galatians, the chances of getting these bewitched youth back into the historic Christian faith and the Lutheran church are next to nil!

Improper diagnosis and a wrong prescription often lead to the crippling, or even death, of a person. So also, as well-intended as *Ablaze!*[®] may be, by coming together with the foreign theology already in the LCMS, this fatal combination will inevitably lead to the crippling ,or even death, of the LCMS, beginning with our youth.

IS JESUS’ PRIMARY MISSIOLOGICAL COMMAND TO “WITNESS” OR IS HIS COMMAND TO PREACH, BAPTIZE, AND TEACH?

A second decisive difference in *Ablaze!*[®] and “Igniting Congregations” stems from using “witnessing” as the **the** driving force, or **the** engine, of a churches missiology. President Kieschnick is to be highly commended for encouraging all LCMS members to be a witness to Christ whenever and wherever possible. However, simply being a “witness,” as important as that may be (“You shall be my witnesses” Acts 1:8; Matthew 5:16; 1 Peter 2:12, etc.) is not the

engine of Christ's Great Commission. Historical LCMS missiology and historic Christian missiology has always been built upon solid foundation of Christ's command to preach, *baptize*, and *teach*. As noted in Matthew 28:19–20, there is a crucial difference between these activities, a difference glaringly seen when *Ablaze!*[®] theology and methodology are compared to historic Christian and Lutheran missiology.

The great difference will be shown in the ultimate fruits of the programs. When launching the *Ablaze!*[®] initiative, the LCMS president noted the significantly alarming statistics of LCMS membership. There is nothing wrong with doing this. In fact, we all need a wake up call. However, here an intentional, or unintentional, sleight of hand occurs. The entire *Ablaze!*[®] initiative has been sold to the LCMS, by saying, if not directly, then at least by implying, that *Ablaze!*[®] will not only stop the hemorrhaging of communicant membership numbers, but *Ablaze!*[®] will significantly increase communicant membership. But note this very, very carefully. The promoters of *Ablaze!*[®] have never claimed that *Ablaze!*[®] will significantly increase LCMS communicant membership, something critics and promoters have to keep in mind. It is not so much what is being said, or what is not being said, **BUT WHAT IS BEING ASSUMED!** If there is a “gotcha” in all this, here it is!

Wagering is not pleasing to God. And simply condemning large churches is foolish, even sinful. God is not pleased when we condemn either large or small congregations. He can use them all. However, for the sake of discussion, I would “bet the farm” that *Ablaze!*[®] and “Igniting Congregations” not only will fail to stop the membership hemorrhage, but in the long term will make it worse. Why? Because *Ablaze!*[®] theology is close enough to Protestant-Pentecostal-Fundamentalist theology and practice that *Ablaze!*[®] will make it possible for LCMS members from congregations with “blended” services to migrate comfortably from perceived “dead” LCMS congregations to perceived “alive” Fundamentalist congregations. With *Ablaze!*[®] theology, they will already be half-way there. Most will not even perceive that they have made a change! They will claim “we all believe the same thing.” Again, the only difference, as they see it, is that Protestant-Fundamentalist-Pentecostal churches are more “alive”! So why get so upset?

AN ALTERNATE TO *Ablaze!*[®]

In his 1844 short story, “The Purloined Letter,” Edgar Allen Poe tells how people searched in vain for a missing letter. How dumb they were! All the while they searched, the **letter was under their noses, in plain view, on the mantel in the front room!**

Regarding LCMS missiology, the devil has played the same trick. In recent decades, as LCMS leaders have searched high and low for an evangelistic “methodology,” the devil has blinded them from seeing what Jesus has always placed in front of our noses: preaching, baptizing, and teaching, teaching, teaching, all He has commanded!

Earlier in the essay, I expressed disagreement with a mission staff member who claims *Ablaze!*[®] is characteristic of traditional LCMS missiology. LCMS history shows otherwise. LCMS forefathers were focused not primarily on witnessing, as important as that is, but rather on Christ's more central and demanding element of the Great Commission: Teaching!

“Within days” after the LCMS forefathers arrived in St. Louis, they built a school.¹⁷ Even before the LCMS existed, Walther wrote to Dr. Sihler, the man soon to be the first LCMS vice-

president saying: “The number of school children averages 130–140, of whom one-third are such whose parents have not yet joined our congregation, but only attend our public services.” For Walther to say, “not yet joined” is critical. He fully realized the outreach power (the missiology) of the day school. Walther understood that the mission outreach of schools is very, very possible. Why? Because in His Great Commission, Jesus commands: teach, teach, teach!

From its beginning, the LCMS has had the best non-Catholic religious education system in the United States, bar none, as even non-LCMS Lutherans have pointed out.¹⁸

In more recent decades the superb outreach tool of teaching and education has, for any number of reasons, fallen into great disrepair. Day schools have closed, for whatever reason. In all of this change we seem to have lost the desire to rise to the command of Jesus to “teach,” thereby strengthening the saved and bringing in the lost. Sunday schools in many churches have simply dwindled to nothing, or have even collapsed. In all of this we whine and complain, try to convince God: “We have no money.” Baloney! In some of the poorest sections of Cairo, Egypt, 300,000 Coptic Sunday school teachers are at work—with almost no resources! It is time for all of us to “get off our lazy duff,” as Walther said, and get to work. A couple years ago, when a local church was short of VBS teachers, I volunteered and taught the 3rd graders. None of us is above teaching those Jesus loves so dearly. Genuine Jesus-commended evangelism is hard work. Why? Because you are contending with the devil, one soul at a time.

A POWERFUL ROLE MODEL!

What our LCMS so desperately needs at the moment, both pastors and people, is a decisive dose of humility as shown by the pioneer black woman, Rosa Young. A century ago, in Alabama, Rosa Young sought help from a variety of church and secular groups to establish schools. After being repeatedly turned down, Rosa finally wrote to Booker T. Washington. Washington told Rosa to contact the Lutherans. She wrote to the LCMS mission board. They in turn sent a pastor who instructed Rosa Young in the historic, Bible-based, Christ-centered Lutheran faith.

Thereafter follows the most incredible story ever told in domestic LCMS missions. Rosa’s story can be found, in her own words, in the 200-page paperback, *Light in the Dark Belt*, published first in 1930 and reprinted by CPH in 1950. God led Rosa Young to follow Jesus’ Great Commission command to teach, and she built school after school. Through this first step via education, God used Rosa to establish church after church, all across Alabama, and even into other areas of the South. Her work was very, very hard, much harder than mission work is today. In addition to the physical hardships, she was bitterly opposed by other denominational leaders. She was always out of money. Yet, she soldiered on.

The devil might tempt us to believe that Rosa Young had greater and easier opportunity than we do today. This is not the case. Since historic LCMS’s middle name is “education,” anyone aware of the current desire many U.S. parents—black, white, Asian, and Hispanic—have for good schools knows our church’s great potential. We don’t have to look for a new missiology. Like Poe’s purloined letter, it sits under our nose! Our history reveals effective missiology! We in the LCMS have a long tradition of responding to Jesus’ words to go and “teach” as a way of reaching people with His Gospel.

But let’s not be mistaken. This teaching approach that Christ has commanded as a fundamental part of His Great Commission, involves very, very hard work, and much sacrifice. It will not be

done by simply driving your comfortable Buick up to your local Lutheran church, which is using Protestant singspiration to comfortably attract people into man-pleasing experiential religion via the “worship experience.” What Jesus did in His teaching was hard; what Paul did in his instructing was demanding; what Luther did in his theological teaching, and also in helping to straighten out the schools across Germany, was difficult. What Rosa Young, and others, have done in our Synod to bring thousands into the faith has sometimes been more than the flesh could bear. “We shall through much trouble enter into the Kingdom,” even as we bring others with us through teaching. As Walther said of the lazy Lutherans in Germany, they need to “get off their duff” and get to work.¹⁹

Why has the LCMS gotten so far off-track from the Great Commission to teach? Why has the LCMS in recent decades, like a “wild donkey in heat” (Jeremiah 2:23), gone whoring after all kinds of Protestant, man-centered methodologies for outreach, especially after the Lord has given the LCMS its magnificent historic harvesting machine (John 4:35) in its vast educational system.

A now famous *Wall Street Journal* article gives a clue as to why some of us have been tricked into whoring after other Protestant methodologies. In explaining the sudden rise of Rick Warren (who now claims to have trained 400,000 pastors around the world) and his *Purpose Driven Life*, or, as ABC now reports, his “Purpose Driven Strife,” the *Wall Street Journal*²⁰ reveals that, ahead of others, Warren understood how to get in front of the pack. He was savvy enough to obtain large mailing lists of pastors. He then dangled in front of them the most effective bait possible: success stories.

People want success; LCMS pastors yearn for success; LCMS mission execs demand success or, as they say in the *Reporter*, your LCMS church has no reason to exist. (This is further expanded upon in Appendix 9, titled: “Late Bulletin! Many, If Not Most, LCMS Churches Have No Need To Exist?”) Thus, if we are going to get back on track—if we expect to be blessed by God—we need to retool LCMS evangelism and missiology, away from that which has been borrowed from endless Protestant “success stories,” and return to Jesus’ Great Commission command: “Teach.” We need to study the story of poor Rosa Young. What God did through Rosa, He can do through all of us. Effective evangelism in God’s eyes is possible, as Jesus said to the rich young ruler: “With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible!” (Matthew 19:26).

REAL EVANGELISM, NOT MINIMUM TILLAGE!

I hesitate to use the next illustration because it is not apropos to all areas of U.S. agriculture. But it does help us understand that a bountiful harvest demands serious tilling and planting. There was a mid-western farmer I stayed with not long ago who wanted to harvest more grain with less effort and less input. So he turned to the latest trend called “minimum tillage.” In some cases, minimum tillage works! However, for this farmer at harvest time, the results were disappointing. So, the next year the farmer got his old machinery out of the shed, plowed deeply and planted precisely. This old way to plant seeds took much more work and greater investment than minimum tillage. However, the harvest was far beyond anything he ever dreamed!

We in the LCMS need to set aside the minimum tillage of *Ablaze!*[®] and “Igniting Congregations,” as inviting and as alive these may seem, and return to our Christ’s Great Commission missiology. We need to get the old “teaching machinery” out of the shed (no one in U.S. Protestantism has anything like what we in the LCMS have) and set our hand to the plow,

as Jesus has commanded. We can then be sure that the harvest for eternity will be great. “And the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands” (Revelation 5:11).

SUMMARY

At this point, as the reader, you may feel like saying “This paper is too difficult to understand. It begins talking about LCMS governance, then focuses upon Fundamentalism, then speaks about *Ablaze!*[®], etc. This all ends up seeming very confusing!”

The reader is correct. And there is a reason for the “seeming confusion.” **The seeming confusion of this essay reflects the actual confusion in the LCMS.** You have a current governance which no longer follows the “Word alone” governance of our forefathers. Into this legalistic climate we now have Protestant and Fundamentalist theology and practice pouring in upon us. Furthermore, we are now told this can be all corrected by using Acts 1:8 (witness) instead of the historic mission mandate of Jesus’ Great Commission in Matthew 28:19–20 (making disciples by baptizing and teaching). Thus, any honest attempt to describe the LCMS situation today will automatically appear to be confusing.

AT THE SAME TIME, SORTING THIS OUT IS NOT SPACE SCIENCE! Getting back to a Word-based, instead of human-ordinance-based governance, is the first step. The second step is to return LCMS missiology to the command of Jesus in Matthew 28:19–20, emphasizing preaching, baptizing, and **teaching**, as Walther and our forefathers did. This is the Christ-mandated approach the LCMS has used effectively in the past, both domestically and internationally.

Will we see the immediate great numbers that some Protestant and Fundamentalist groups claim, and the quick numbers some among us now demand? Probably not. But we serve God and not man. Even in our evangelism and mission outreach, as tempting as numbers may be, we obey the Word of Christ and “walk by faith and not sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7).

So, for decades the LCMS has been “reeling to and fro like a drunkard” (Isaiah 24:20) trying to find his way home. All the while, to overcome the staggering of the LCMS, some have been searching for the CEO or the politician who will bring all the parties together. This maneuvering has been tried and tried again, only to fail repeatedly. God is not interested in bringing parties together. He is interested only in one who will disregard all party spirit and lead only by His Word. Thus, we need to repeat one last time what has been said before, **especially since our missiology has now become increasingly and inextricably intertwined with our governance**, that, unless and until the LCMS finds a theologian like Walther who can sort out the issues and provide the appropriate Word from God’s all-powerful healing Scripture in a simple and easy to understand way (as Walther did), helping the man in the pew sort out the issues, there will be no peace. There can be no peace! This leader will have no choice but to deal, as Walther repeatedly did, with Protestant and Fundamentalist teachings now undermining the LCMS, especially in missiology. Why? By their very nature, Protestantism and Fundamentalism are not only opposed, but also deadly destructive to, Bible-based, Christ-centered Lutheran theology, to such an extent that Fundamentalist teaching dare not be used even as a supplement to the efficacy of the Word-driven Lutheran theology and practice. “Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough?” (1 Corinthians 5:6).

To blame the current LCMS president for all present LCMS ills is not only foolish, it is sinful. Our most serious LCMS ailments, such as our missiological crisis, have been festering for decades. Yet, they have never been clearly diagnosed, nor clearly addressed with God's living Word.

The first thing a newly elected LCMS president should do is to say: "To hell with all political parties, especially those who operate secretly." Second, the newly elected president needs to grasp with one hand the Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God (Ephesians 6:17). With his other hand, he needs to grab the shepherd's crook of God's Law and Gospel and walk before the sheep—leading them, not coming behind them with the stick of man-made rules, convention resolutions, and commission rulings, thereby dividing the sheep by beating them.

If the struggle in the LCMS is essentially spiritual, and it is; and if the so-called conservatives are going to try to challenge the current LCMS president using political and logistical tactics, they might as well fold up their tents, put their six guns back into the holsters, and ride back to Dodge City. By his unprecedented use of the CCM and CTCR, the current president has these well-intended conservatives outmanned and outgunned 1,000 times over.

Is anyone listening? Here is what God says about the struggle in the LCMS: "**Our struggle is not against flesh and blood.**" This is to say, our battle is not with each other in the LCMS, but with the devil (Ephesians 6:12). Why does God make this distinction? Because the devil gets into all of us and uses each of us, including myself. Therefore, all involved in contending for the truth (Jude 1:3) must say, "For though we walk in the flesh, **we do not war according to the flesh**, for the weapons of our warfare are of the flesh but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying speculations in every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God and **we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ**" (2 Corinthians 10:3–5). Therefore let no one, absolutely **no one**, plan to arrive at the bar of Justice on Judgment Day, chest thrust forward, to try to impress Christ with how he/she saved His church with political maneuvering!

In recent years we have had several LCMS presidents try to get the old "ship" of missions back on track. The most recent attempt to give new direction and heal the LCMS is now *Ablaze!*[®], a "movement" the current leadership claims will stop the hemorrhaging of members and increase communicant membership. Here is the problem we now face. But let's also be honest, because *Ablaze!*[®] has so much in common with the various Fundamentalist forces flowing into the LCMS over recent decades, there is a high degree of probability that *Ablaze!*[®] will backfire, pulling the LCMS into mainstream Fundamentalism, thereby causing the LCMS to cease to exist as a significant tool for the Lord in proclaiming His pure grace.

Why is this such a great concern? In 1929, on the occasion of the 400th anniversary of the *Small Catechism* in Copenhagen, Dr. Michael Reu, in his address titled, "What Is Lutheranism?" stated: "The distinctive characteristic of the Lutheran church is that it is the church of assurance, assurance of salvation. This fact not only gives it a right to separate existence, **but also binds upon it the sacred obligation** to maintaining this separate existence among the churches of our country."

Making the distinction called for by Dr. Reu will not be easy. In fact it will be humanly impossible! Why? Consider this: The sword now poised, ready to pierce the very heart of the

LCMS and its historic Christ-centered teaching, is the sword of Fundamentalism. Ironically, yes, very ironically, it is not the so called “liberal” wing of the LCMS, but rather the so-called “conservative” wing of the LCMS that most eagerly welcomes the fatal sword of Fundamentalist theology, terminology, music, and worship forms. Indeed, in the current LCMS struggle “Truth is stranger than fiction!”

For LCMS pastors to provide their members the comfort found only in the Words of Christ and His Sacraments (as urged in this essay), and not be sucked into mainstream Protestant Fundamentalism, is an **increasing** life-and-death struggle. Certainly, outside influences will always flow in upon us. However, when we first take the term “inerrancy” (a term that describes the heart of Fundamentalist theology), and adopt it as our litmus test for Lutheranism; second, when we absorb Fundamentalist terms which carry their distinctive theological meaning such as “uncommitted” instead of “unbaptized,” thereby adopting, consciously or unconsciously, Fundamentalist views of man, God, His Word, and their missiology; third, when we base our outreach missiology on Acts 1:8 (which omits the Sacraments) instead of on Christ’s Great Commission in Matthew 28:19–20 (which includes the Sacrament); fourth, when we introduce Protestant hymnody and get our people to sing Fundamentalist theology, thereby making fundamentalist lyrics our theology by default; then, along with *Ablaze!*[®] theology, as a consummating force, these Fundamentalist ingredients will combine to produce a result from which the LCMS will never recover. In other words, when we adopt Protestant Fundamentalist ways of thinking, speaking, and singing about faith and outreach, “as a man thinks, so he is” (Proverbs 23:7), we will become part of the larger flow of Protestantism, forever losing our Gospel-centered, Christ-centered identity. For an example of how music helped move one denomination into non-existence, see endnote 9.

Again, the first step to getting back on track for a renewed and vigorous LCMS is to have leadership who will possess the theological knowledge, the integrity, the honesty to forthrightly diagnose the issues and not claim, as did some Old Testament religious leaders, that there are no problems; or if there are, they are not of any serious concern. As we search our souls, pastors and people in the LCMS need to turn to the Lord! No matter how bleak things may seem, our gracious God can cleanse and heal His people in the LCMS with His living Word: “Come, let us return to the Lord. For He has torn us, but He will heal us; He has wounded us, but He will bandage us” (Hosea 6:1).

I am not questioning the sincerity of those who are promoting the new *Ablaze!*[®] and “Igniting Congregations” missiology/theology in the LCMS. My first “hands on” foreign mission experience in Guatemala 1962 started me on 45 years of constant involvement in domestic and foreign missions and evangelism efforts, primarily as an evangelist. I am not proud of all I have been involved in. I have made my share of mistakes in evangelistic work, mistakes for which I am sincerely sorry, and mistakes I am willing to confess publicly. I am also of the deep conviction that, no matter who you are or what station you may have in the LCMS, each of us needs to examine our thoughts and ideas regarding our missiology, how we do evangelism, missions, and worship. None of us is beyond reproach and rebuke. Luther speaks about changing his mind in what he preached and taught after he learned the correct way. He said “I know of no one who had all things perfect from the beginning . . .” (*Luther’s Works*, vol. 47, p. 112). If the missiological/theological crisis now facing the LCMS is going to be resolved, we are going to have to talk to each other without making everything personal. “Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed” (James 5:16).

We need to plumb our missiology, and all that we do, with a clear understanding of God's Word, as noted by Paul in 1 Thessalonians 2:13 and taught by Jesus in John 5:17 and 6:63, and in many other places in Scripture. "Never try to argue on your own word, always refer to Christ and the Scriptures" (*Luther's Works*, vol. 29, p.20). As a Synod, we must come to grips with the sobering fact that the Bible-based understanding of the "nature and character" of God's Word is not only different, but in many cases, in opposition to the very popular, seductive, and widely-used Protestant and Fundamentalist understanding of God's Word. "No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other, or else he will hold to one, and despise the other" (Luke 16:13).

Along with others, I am now actively involved in domestic and international outreach, based not merely on Acts 1:8, but primarily on Christ's commission in Matthew 28:19–20 to "Go . . . teaching." Every day we are in contact with people in some 100 countries, encouraging them and providing them with teaching tools. If we were to adopt *Ablaze!*[®] as our engine, or heart, of our missiology, we would quickly come to a halt, since *Ablaze!*[®] does not emphasize preaching, teaching, or baptizing as its primary work. For us this is a serious matter, since, in one country alone, the Lutheran Bishop notes that over 30% of its new churches have resulted from the teaching tool we provide. While not every aspect of *Ablaze!*[®] is inadequate, we simply could not do what we are now doing if *Ablaze!*[®] was our engine or our missiology. And, what we are doing is nothing to brag about. What we are doing is nothing more than assisting what Rosa Young did, decades ago, in the south: Teach, teach, teach—and Christ's church will arise!

Very few, I believe, in the LCMS, would disagree that the missiological fork in the road that we now face is whether our primary outreach tool is going to be the "worship experience" undergirded by very popular singspiration Protestant music, or whether we are going to use the more historic approach of emphasizing a doctrinally, Word-driven liturgical service because of the efficacy of the Word therein, undergirded by doctrinally-driven hymns and a special emphasis on Baptism and teaching. I don't think anyone would argue that the former gives every outward appearance, and even feeling, of being more successful and desirable. Nevertheless, facing the same situation as the LCMS does today, Luther warned: "Since the time of the apostles so much heresy has arisen and gained ground against the doctrines of Christ, Baptism, the Sacrament, justification by faith, etc., that it seemed as though sound doctrine and the Christian Church would perish completely on this account. But God cut them off and preserved His branches, so that we retain the true doctrine, Baptism, and the Sacrament as they were transmitted by the apostles" (*Luther's Works*, vol. 24, p. 202).

Yes, we today in the LCMS find ourselves in precisely the same place Luther found himself. Do we go down the more popular, outwardly more successful road? Or, do we take the narrow road, the road less traveled, but the road where Jesus walks? I urge that, in sincere repentance, beginning with myself, we walk with Jesus and all His teachings, and not just some of them, as the Fundamentalists would invite us to do. After all, in His Great Commission Jesus said, "Teaching them to observe all things I have commanded you!"

Finally, there may be those in the LCMS who want to turn back the clock. I am not one of them. I agree with Walther who said, "Those who call our theology the theology of the seventeenth century do not know us."²¹ The Lutheran church of the Reformation, by nature, always looks ahead. Basing its theology on the living Word means the Lutheran church is always being renewed and recreated by God's living Word. We follow Jesus who says: "My Father is working

until now, and I Myself am working” (John 5:17). We need to stimulate our youth and pastors to constantly create new Word-driven hymns and Word-driven art work to adorn our worship. We need to be always encouraging new ways to teach, so that the Gospel of Christ might be understood and rejoiced in! We need to explain to our people, in a loving way, that a true “Confessional” Lutheran church is not just an adjective Lutheran church, but also an adverbial Lutheran church, a church where “confessional” means a church vigorously flowing with acts of love to all around us. In this new LCMS, as the Trinity continues to work among us with His living Word, He will permit old institutions to disappear, even as He did the Temple, and new ones to be established. Yes, even in the LCMS, the Father and the Son are “working still!” (John 5:17). Praise the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit!

CONCLUSION

Betting is wrong; however, just for the sake of discussion, let me say this: If I had a billion dollars I would wager every last penny that our LCMS loss of membership will not only continue, but increase at a more rapid rate in the very near future. Of course, some members always fall away. However, thousands of other will migrate to Protestant-Fundamentalist churches. Why? Because, by the means some choose to measure, these assemblies appear to be more “alive.” We in the LCMS are now adopting a theology and practice that blurs the distinction that Jesus calls for, and that Luther insisted upon, which will also cause us to lose membership. Christ’s distinctions are given to pastors—shepherds—to prevent the loss of His precious sheep. And, for those sheep who are lost, potentially for eternity, due to blurred borders and unclear distinction, who will be held accountable?

At the same time, LCMS pastors and people need not live in fear, confusion, or discouragement over their church. They have every reason to rejoice (Psalm 70:4). Throughout history, God has repeatedly shown His mercy, even when His children have been stubborn. God always cleanses; He always heals. But, He does this cleansing and healing **ON HIS TERMS**: not with the ordinances of man, but with His cleansing, healing, and living Word. “Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the Lord our God” (Psalm 20:7)

We in the LCMS may refuse to admit that our problems are basically spiritual and theological. And, if we feel we are going to heal ourselves with convention resolutions, commission rulings, and human opinions, God will permit our arrogance to be our own punishment and judgment. Jesus said to them, “It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick; I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners” (Mark 2:17).

Let the changing, cleansing, and healing begin with you. Open your Bible. Read and underline key verses in Psalm 119, as God speaks there to you about the power of His living Word—the only power God gives to cleanse and heal both you and your church.

Pray to God that He will raise up, not CEOs or politicians to “run” His church, but shepherds like Luther and C.F.W. Walther to “lead” His church. Get others to pray with you for your church and your shepherds (Acts 12:4).

Never give up hope for Christ’s church. “I will build My church,” Jesus says, “and the gates of hell will not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18). As it continues in the teachings of Christ, the LCMS is part of His Church.

Because of their Biblical and Confessional position, the LCMS and its partner Lutheran churches around the world continue to be most blessed by God; even today, the LCMS has a potential greater than any other U.S. church or denomination. This power resides in LCMS pastors and teachers as they proclaim God’s living and evangelistic Word. Thus, let it begin now! Let our church’s inherent God-given teaching gift (a dynamic divine power inherited from the Reformation’s commitment to “teaching” in the Great Commission), **be once again unleashed!** Then, people in our communities will not only be witnessed to, but also baptized, instructed, and grounded in the faith for eternity.

And, when you are discouraged with your church and you feel there is no answer, look to God’s servant, the poverty-laden black woman, Rosa Young. With little or no money; and with no bureaucracy to guide her; facing greater opposition and persecution than we have today; and, in her own words, with only the “pure doctrine” of Christ to empower her, Rosa’s evangelistic zeal **AND THE RESULTS** have never been matched in the history of LCMS missiology. What God did through Rosa 100 years ago He can, and desires to do though all of us today. In His Great Commission Jesus emphasizes: “Teach, teach, teach, teach!”

As the struggle in the LCMS continues, recall the words of President Lincoln during the Civil War: “The struggle of today is not altogether for today—it is for the vast future also.” The same is true for all of us in the LCMS. Our struggle is for a church our children and grandchildren will attend. Your struggle is not only for you, but also for your children. None of us wants our LCMS to be a church that teaches only some of Christ’s doctrines as do Fundamentalists. Rather, this church must teach **all** of His life-giving and life-sustaining teachings, as Christ clearly commands in Matthew 28:19–20. Thus, let us “contend vigorously for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints” (Jude 1:3). For, when we do, it is not only we who will be blessed, but also our children, and our grandchildren. “Dear Lord, grant this for Jesus sake! Amen.”

APPENDICES—ADDITIONAL CONCERNS

Appendix 1

ARE WE IN THE LCMS UNKNOWINGLY BUILDING BRIDGES OF SEDUCTION FOR OUR PEOPLE, ESPECIALLY OUR YOUNG PEOPLE?

By intent or default, if we in the LCMS, are going to adopt an outreach policy of “doing whatever it takes,” or of using “whatever produces numbers or results” (including our worship styles and music), we will then be creating not only a bridge, but we will be guilty of creating an especially seductive bridge, thereby inviting our people to migrate comfortably to Protestant, Fundamentalist, and Pentecostal churches. These Fundamentalist churches offer a limited diet of the Word as compared to the full spiritual diet Christ Himself says is necessary for a strong, healthy spiritual life. The fundamentals spoken of by Christ—but not offered by Fundamentalism—give life, strength, forgiveness, and hope. If Jesus is adamant about the difference between His fundamentals for the Christians life and those offered by the Fundamentalist, who now is responsible to point out these life and death differences to the people of our church? On Judgment Day, who will be held accountable to God for where His sheep were led, or permitted to stray, or to graze? Or will there be no accountability because all

U.S. churches that claim to be Christian “teach the same thing”? Jesus said to Peter the third time: “Tend to My sheep!” (John 21:17).

Appendix 2

AS YOUR DIVINE PHYSICIAN, JESUS IS PLEADING WITH YOU, FOR TEMPORAL AND ETERNAL REASONS: “WATCH YOUR DIET!”

Why are Fundamentalists satisfied with their limited, distorted diet of “limited fundamentals?” For the same reason it is difficult to get children and teenagers to eat certain fruits, vegetables, and take vitamin pills: they don’t **“FEEL”** they need them.

Much of what Jesus, the Great Physician, prescribes for us each day does not **“FEEL”** necessary for having a strong spiritual life. When Jesus said to Nicodemus: “You **must** be born again of water and the Spirit” (baptized), we can certainly see Nicodemus giving Jesus a quizzical look, or even a blank stare. Nicodemus surely did not **“FEEL”** any necessity for what the Great Physician was saying is indispensable.

So, if you are going to live your spiritual life on the basis of what you **“FEEL”** is good to eat, and in what form, you will have to bear the consequences in your body. If you feed your children the distorted Fundamentalist fundamentals, and not on the balanced spiritual diet Jesus stipulates must include the Sacraments and Absolution, then your loved ones will also suffer the consequences.

When our LCMS forefathers prepared the LCMS Constitution, Article VI, under “Conditions Of Membership,” they stated one thing clearly: there **must** be “Exclusive use of doctrinally pure agenda, hymnbooks, and catechisms in the church and school.” They did not include this stipulation in order to maintain ethnic purity. Neither were they promoting mere tradition. Mindful of Jesus’ stipulation of the **absolute necessity of a balanced spiritual diet** of His fundamentals, our LCMS forefathers wanted all LCMS members to be included in Jesus’ faith-planting, faith-strengthening diet. Jesus says: “Man [you] cannot live by bread alone, but by every Word (also the Word of Absolution and Sacraments) that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4). Without Jesus’ spiritual diet, you cannot be as strong as He desires you to be. By living on the distorted diet of “Fundamentalist fundamentals,” you are more vulnerable to the attacks of the evil one. “We need God’s Word for daily strength, as we do our daily bread. [And] we are in constant need of it to resist the . . . onslaughts of Satan” (Luther’s *Large Catechism*, Introduction, 9). From now on, don’t be satisfied with the distorted Fundamentalist diet that **“FEELS”** good, rather, insist on the diet Jesus, the Divine Physician, clearly stipulates will make and keep you spiritually strong—not only for this life, but for the life to come.

Jesus' Balanced Diet vs. Fundamentalist Distorted and Dangerous Diet

Jesus' Balanced Diet—"Teaching them to observe <u>ALL</u> things I have commanded" (Matthew 28:20)	Fundamentalist Distorted, Dangerous Diet
YES —Word preached; Bible-based Lutherans believe God's Word is informational; but they also believe the Word is alive . The Word goes, not only up to the persons eardrum, or into the eyes, and then stops to wait for man to act; rather the living Word goes into the body, where the Word creates, something out of nothing (Romans 4:17): repentance and faith.	YES —Word preached; but, Fundamentalists see God's Word as primarily informational and instructional, data each person must respond to and make a decision about.
YES —Baptism, Life-giving blood ; Bible-based Lutherans believe God's miracle of Baptism unites (Romans 6:5) a sinner, infant or adult, to Christ thereby grafting the dead to life (Romans 11:17–18).	NO —Baptism, Life-giving blood ; Even though most Protestants baptize, other than Lutherans none believe Baptism has a power to regenerate, a "washing of regeneration" (Titus 3:5) from death to life.
YES —Lord's Supper Protein ; Bible-based Lutherans teach and believe that Jesus is "bodily present in Holy Communion," thereby coming into His loved ones (John 14:23).	NO —Lord's Supper Protein ; Fundamentalists and virtually all Protestants deny that Christ is bodily present in the Holy Supper. Therefore there is neither body nor blood, and no forgiveness in the Holy Supper. "Without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" (Hebrews 9:22).
YES —Absolution Iron ; Lutherans, especially in their liturgy, lead people through God's law, after which a non-conditional Gospel is announced. With Jesus, even as He spoke to the woman "caught in the act," said: "Neither do I condemn you." No conditions; no ifs. Period! Period!	NO —Absolution Iron ; Except for Lutherans, all Protestants and Fundamentalists, when speaking about the Gospel, make absolution conditional upon what man does: IF he makes a decision to repent; IF he makes a decision to believe, surrender, etc., thereby making spiritual things dependent on man's free will and response. When the pastor announces, "Your sins are forgiven" these words of Jesus are efficacious and create the faith totally apart from even the tiniest contribution of man.

Fidel Castro has caused most Cubans to be on a dangerous and life threatening diet. By bungling the Cuban economy, Castro has caused a shortage in body building protein found in fish and meat. This has driven most Cubans to supplement their daily diet by either sucking cane sugar, or taking in excessive sugar in some other form. Lacking the needed protein for decades, and getting high doses of sugar instead, according to *National Geographic*, this high sugar diet has caused the bones and teeth of many Cubans to become brittle and weak, thereby greatly endangering their health.

In the same way, some LCMS churches are increasingly using a distorted Fundamentalist spiritual diet, or trying to use a Fundamentalist "blend" as a supplement, especially in music and worship. In so doing, LCMS people are take off the full and balanced diet Jesus prefers His children to have. Furthermore, because Fundamentalism denies that Jesus can live within you (since they erroneously believe Jesus ascended into heaven and can be present only in heaven and not on earth), the distorted Fundamentalist diet offers no internal protection from within, a protections Saint Paul referred to when he said: I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but **Christ who lives in me**" (Galatians 2:20). The real life-strengthening and saving diet includes Jesus living within you through His living Word and sacraments. "If anyone loves me, he will keep My Word; and My Father and I will love him. WE WILL COME TO HIM AND MAKE OUR ABODE WITH HIM" (John 14:23).

CAN WE GUARD OUR PEOPLE’S SOULS LESS THAN THE SECULAR WORLD GUARDS BODIES?

In August of 2001, the U.S. was shocked to learn that a Kansas City pharmacist had sold a cancer cure drug which he had diluted before dispensing. The crime was considered so heinous that federal investigators asked a judge to shut down the pharmacy immediately. As the nationwide front-page story continued to unfold, people began to increasingly ask who was supposed to be watching to make sure all of the fundamental cancer cure was given to patients, and not just the some watered-down version. This raises the question as to who is responsible among us in the LCMS as to who is to make sure our terminal sinful condition is not being treated by diluted and distorted Fundamentalist fundamentals, rather than Jesus’ fundamentals, including sin-destroying preaching, teaching, baptizing, absolution, and communion. If federal investigators were so concerned about what happened in Kansas City, will Jesus on Judgment Day be any less concerned about what has happened, or been permitted, in LCMS churches, especially since God says quite clearly: teachers shall “incur a stricter judgment”(James 3:1)?

Appendix 3

LUTHER ON LITURGY AS YOUR WEEKLY NEEDED DIALYSIS OF THE LIVING WORD

If Luther were to see the current trend toward Protestant and Fundamentalist music and worship in LCMS, he would be not at all surprised. In his day, he was contending with very much the same problem.

For those who believe Luther invented a liturgy just for his day, consider this. In his short essay *Concerning the Order of Public Worship*, Luther writes: “The service now in common use everywhere goes back to genuine Christian beginnings . . . so it is not our intention to do away with the service, but **to restore it again to its rightful use**” (*Luther’s Works*, vol. 53, p. 11). Luther understood the historic liturgy (already at his time over one thousand years old) not as mere tradition, but as God’s life-saving Word.

If you are struggling to understand why the living Word and historic liturgy are important for you and your loved ones, consider the following.

Look at a “living Word (John 6:63) Christian worship service” as a type of spiritual kidney dialysis. Each weekly worship service then becomes for you a much needed spiritual kidney dialysis treatment. God’s Word cleanses you from sin. But liturgy does more than a spiritual dialysis of cleansing—much, much, more! God’s Word of Absolution, preaching, and Holy Communion cleanses and ALSO provides you with a life-strengthening and saving substance similar to the rich milk a new mother has for her baby. This rich diet of God’s living Word is pumped through your system, a rich mixture that cleanses, quickens, and enlivens you. Now note this also: Just as kidney dialysis patients may not receive an emotional tingle, or even a “high,” they nevertheless know they are being helped because physicians assure them of that fact. These recipients know they are receiving life-sustaining treatment. In an even more important way, even though you may not feel emotionally high in a church service, God assures you that He is feeding you with His rich, life-giving Word and Sacrament. “Man shall not live by bread alone, but on every Word that proceeds out of the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4).

As the devil seeks to pull you away from the rich Word of the historic liturgy (the liturgy is actually a recipe drawn up by early Christians for their weekly meal), ponder what God gives you through His living Word: “Revive me according to Your Word” (Ps. 119:25). “Strengthen me according to Your Word” (Ps. 119:28). “Your Word has revived me” (Ps. 119:50). “I will never forget Your precepts, for by them You have revived me” (Ps. 119:88). “Revive me according to Your Word” (Ps. 119:107). “Sustain me according to Your Word, that I may live” (Ps. 119:116). “Revive me, O Lord, according to Your ordinances” (Ps. 119:149). “Revive me according to Your Word” (Ps. 119:154). “Revive me according to your ordinances” (Ps. 119:156). The above passages are from only one chapter of the Psalms. In His Scriptures, God provides endless other verses which also showing the life-giving power of His Word, the divine power that is at work in the historic liturgy. Thus, it is impossible to say that all that is needed for a Christ-centered worship service is to include the Confession and Absolution, after which you can do as you please. The entire historic liturgy is Word-impregnated to nourish body and soul.

In his *Concerning the Order of Public Worship*, Luther writes: “All that matters is that the Word of God be given free reign to uplift and to quicken . . . Let everything [in the worship service] be done so that the Word may have free course . . . We can spare everything except the Word. Again, we profit by nothing as much as by the Word” (*Luther’s Works*, vol. 53, pp. 11–14).

Finally, what you have just read, God’s recipe of life through Word and Sacraments, **is not part of the Fundamentalist diet** (a diet that is increasingly used and promoted as a supplement to the worship service in the LCMS). The Fundamentalist diet does not include Jesus’ Sacraments. Why? Because Fundamentalists and all Protestants deny Christ’s teaching that His living Word (John 6:63) provides life-giving power to those things Christ has given to His church: the Sacraments. Thus, Fundamentalist and Reformed theology must be pointed out and vigorously opposed, as Luther urges us to do: “Thus in our day we, too, **must** labor with the Word of God, against the fanatical opinions of Anabaptists and Sacramentarians, to set free those who have **been taken captive by them** [2 Tim. 2:26], to recall them to the pure doctrine of faith **and to keep them in it**” (*Luther’s Works*, vol. 26, p.194).

Appendix 4

THE NUMBERS GAME:

INITIAL BALLISTICS FROM THE UNEXPECTED, AND NUMBERS FATIGUE!

As *Ablaze!*[®] was being launched in the Spring of 2003, the LCMS President’s office arranged for a promotional story that appeared in the May 10, 2003 *St. Louis Post–Dispatch*. Like a cat on a mouse, this story was immediately pounced upon by Seminex professor Dr. Edward Schroeder. (Some in the LCMS claim that the present LCMS administration is revenge for Seminex, but this is hard to believe when what follows would seem to indicate that even Seminex professors would probably hold their nose and find the nearest exit when encountering *Ablaze!*[®] missiology.)

What uncorked Schroeder? Schroeder read that the LCMS President's representative told the *Post–Dispatch* that *Ablaze!*[®] will be successful because: “It’s all very objective, based on statistics.” Schroeder observes that Jesus is not looking for numbers; rather, He is looking for faith. For more Schroeder commentary, see this footnote.²²

After a quarter-century in media evangelism, it is difficult for me not to sympathize with Schroeder's comments on "driving" evangelism initiatives by numbers. Probably more than most LCMS pastors, I have a long history in the numbers game. When I was working in so-called "media evangelism," it was a curious thing that every few years there was the inevitable call for a new "campaign," as they called it. This need seemed to be constant! Although these campaigns were peddled as "Gospel outreach efforts," they were, almost without exception, thinly disguised fundraising efforts, designed again, almost without exception, by outside, non-Lutheran consultants. Almost anyone who has been around a "campaign/initiative" road show (and most LCMS pastors have), is aware that the tail wags the dog—the fundraising wags the outreach—if there actually is any outreach to the lost. Mostly, the outreach is to reach out to those who have money to give.

Let me also add that, in those days, I labored with great sincerity and with much effort trying to make media evangelism bear fruit. In order to look for the fruit of our labor, in one situation I took my camera and notepad to Asia. I visited Asian media offices, seeking names of people in Taiwan, Japan, and the Philippines, people who had been, not just "touched" by the Gospel broadcast, but people who became communicant members of the Lutheran church. Because, at that time, I believed in media outreach, I worked hard at getting stories from listeners. However, my notes (which are still available) clearly show that I came home with pretty much of an empty basket. When I followed up on those who were allegedly "touched," I found it almost impossible to find more than just a few who became communicant members of any Lutheran church as a result of the broadcasts—all this after years of broadcasting and much money spent. Might this numbers game be why the media arm of the LCMS is very much on board with *Ablaze!*[®], because they both agree in driving things by the numbers, as Dr. Schroeder found out?

I find the numbers game further interesting because, when I joined the team of media broadcasting, I recall the LCMS papers headlining that we were "reaching 40 million people every week!" Do the math. If we on the radio clearly proclaimed the Gospel every week, for 10 years, would it not be fair to say Dr. Hoffmann and I had "touched" **more than 100 million people every month**? If we continued behind the microphone for another 10 years, that should be good for multiple *billions*! Imagine how many people with whom we "shared the hope" so that they could "encounter Christ!" Imagine how the counter for *Ablaze!*[®] would spin! Do you see why a person like myself is led to say in response to *Ablaze!*[®]: "Haven't we been up this road before?"

Finally, those of us who have been around a while recall that, in the early 70s, U.S. evangelicals got together to form a massive outreach effort called "Key 73." Who was tapped to head up this outreach effort? LCMS pastor, Dr. Ted A. Raedeke, who, up to that time, had served as head of LCMS evangelism for 17 years. I was quite close to the late Dr. Raedeke, traveling extensively with him in the 70s, through Europe, the Communist countries, and Asia. When we were at a meeting in Europe (a gathering of some 10,000 evangelists), after it was announced that Dr. Raedeke would be heading up Key 73, he was asked to stand to be recognized. He received vigorous applause. People were all pumped up about what Key 73 would do. This was "heady" stuff. Through Key 73, we were going to save the local community, the nation, the world, and then some! What happened? Now, 34 years later, if you Google "Key 73", the most you will find is that the papers are archived at Wheaton College. You will not find a report of how many souls were saved—or even how many "Critical Events" came of it. For *Time* magazine's sobering report, see this endnote.²³

Appendix 5

IF EVANGELISM EFFORTS ARE TO BE EFFECTIVE, A CHURCH MUST INVOLVE ITS PASTORS UP FRONT!

In 2 Timothy 4:5, God says, “Do the work of an evangelist.” This means our pastors absolutely need to be in the “mix” when new mission or evangelism programs are instituted, and not consulted after the fact. Why do I say this? In my many years of experience in outreach programs, I have seen the numbers targeted by national leaders. But then, when the numbers don’t work out and the goals are far from met, who gets the blame? It is always the pastors. The bottom line? If the pastors are not consulted up front, even if they don’t all agree, neither should they be held accountable if the program is not supported or does not work.

Appendix 6

THE “GOTCHA!” OF *ABLAZE!*[®]

Integrity demands that those promoting *Ablaze!*[®] articulate the goal very clearly. First, we are told that LCMS communicant membership is spiraling downward. That’s fine. However, we are then told *Ablaze!*[®] will produce 100 million hits by 2017. But they are very careful never to say, but only imply, that our communicant membership will significantly increase as a result of *Ablaze!*[®]

Precisely here is the “Gotcha!” Let’s look at it this way. How would you respond if General Motors was losing car sales and, as a result, the leadership would tell their salesmen they would have to speak to 100,000 perspective buyers during the coming year? Would “reaching” or “touching” them alone make any difference in how many cars were sold? Of course not!

Those defending *Ablaze!*[®] say, “We’re not in charge of growth; God, through the Holy Spirit, causes the growth.” OK. I agree with that. The only reason I’m raising the issue of the numbers is that because from its inception, *Ablaze!*[®] was sold to congregations on basis of the “great numbers” of people who would be reached. If this is the case, surely there should also be real increases in communicant membership.

Frankly, I’ve worked so long in many international situations where work was so difficult that the whole numbers issue never becomes part of one’s missiological thinking. If you work abroad under extremely difficult situations, and if you think you are going to operate with numbers, your mission is going to be short-lived.

Finally, does the Bible speak about numbers in relation to missions and evangelism? Yes it does, primarily at Pentecost. However, the numbers at Pentecost do not show what man did or how many decisions were made. Rather, the numbers show what God did in Baptism. In his preaching, Peter may have “reached” and “touched” many more than the 3,000 “who . . . received his word [and] were baptized” (Acts 2:41). Peter may have “touched” 10,000. However, the total number “touched” is not noted. Furthermore, the Scriptures say that Jesus was constantly preaching to “multitudes.” He obviously “touched” thousands. However, it is never indicated in any way whatsoever that these thousands were ever brought into the Kingdom of God. If we are going to use numbers to drive campaigns, let’s use God’s way of numbering and record what *He does*, not what *we do*.

Appendix 7

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE INITIAL RED AND YELLOW FLAGS AT THE COP?

The *Ablaze!*[®] and “Igniting Congregations” program was first announced to the Council of Presidents in the Spring of 2004, in Luther Hall on the campus of Concordia Theological Seminary, Ft. Wayne. Because what was announced involved something I have been involved in all my life, my mind was on high alert. Thus, when the president of the Synod explained that he was arranging to replicate “effective” congregations, yellow and red flags immediately popped up. Here is the most amazing thing about the reaction, and what most people in the LCMS have never heard: The majority of those immediately responding with concerns did not represent the so-called “conservative” wing of the church, but rather the so-called “liberal-moderate” wing of the church. Even today, I can name the names of key people who spoke. The thing that “set off” some of the so called “liberal” or “progressive” District Presidents was the use of the phrase, “effective” congregations. They wanted to know immediately, and precisely, what was meant by “effective.” The DPs realized that, since they are often involved in trying to establish congregations, much of their own mission work might not qualify as “effective.” It is often slow going.

One so-called “conservative” speaker tried to explain that it is impossible to have an effective evangelism program to work from the top down in a bureaucratic way. The main point is this: The primary concerns expressed at this initial meeting came from people other than whom some might expect. At the break which followed the main presentation, I immediately spoke to one of the DPs. He represented a saltwater district and had expressed his concern to the LCMS president. He had explained that evangelism work in our Synod must flow out of the Gospel, which is Biblical (see Psalm 51:10–13, especially verse 13). I urged this DP to speak further with the president of the Synod. I don’t know whether he did.

Since these original concerns were raised, I have no idea if LCMS district presidents have subsequently been convinced of the *Ablaze!*[®] theology/methodology or if they have simply gotten on board politically. The point is this: the above information is indeed one of those little secrets many people don’t know, which leads many to conclude that negative response to *Ablaze!*[®] has come from isolated conservatives, those against anything new, especially evangelism. The entire approach, nomenclature, theory, and theology undergirding *Ablaze!*[®] has been an across-the-board concern of many church leaders, from both sides of the aisle, even from the beginning!

Appendix 8

DEAD THINGS THAT SPARKLE AND YET APPEAR TO GIVE LIFE!

Some in the LCMS are convinced it is OK use “whatever works” to get people through the church doors and, once they have a “worship experience,” they will stay. These same well-intended folks need to consider what is going on in botanical gardens all over the United States.

Some months ago the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* newspaper explained how, because attendance and membership at the Missouri Botanical Garden has been constantly dropping in recent years,

some gimmick was needed to get more people through the doors, in the hope this would result in an increase in paid memberships.

Now get this! In the St Louis Missouri Botanical Garden, a garden loaded and decorated with some of the world's most exotic and living beautiful flowers, ferns, etc., the Garden board hired a glassblowing artist to place brilliant, *but dead*, glass objects among the living plants!

My family went to see this dazzling mix. If your heart desires the glitz of man-made items mixed with the stunning beauty of God's creation, this was the thing to see! Has this gimmick worked? Absolutely! Attendance was up during the days of the special exhibition. However, note this very carefully: the *Post-Dispatch* article explains that those in charge live with the daily fear, as it now appears, that this gimmickry will not translate into increased membership!

What will we in the LCMS learn from the Botanical Garden experience? Like the plants in the Botanical Garden, God's Word is living; this is its essence. You cannot make God's Word "more alive" using contemporary worship, as one person advised in the *Reporter*. The essence of God's Word IS life!

Appendix 9

LATE BULLETIN! MANY, IF NOT MOST, LCMS CHURCHES HAVE NO NEED TO EXIST?

In an article which appeared online and in the *Reporter*, June 23, 2005, titled "Scudieri: Congregations must be 'Church Planters,'" author Ross quotes Scudieri as saying that when congregations stop focusing on outreach in their communities, "they become useless to God because that is why He put them there." This statement is extremely troubling. Who decides if a congregation is focusing on outreach? Is this determined by whether they participate in *Ablaze!*[®] or some other official Synodical program? What if a church has been focusing on outreach for years but, because the local Midwestern town is dying, the congregation shows not an increase of membership, but a decrease? There is, however, a question that goes even deeper: To whom do these congregations belong? To the LCMS, or to Jesus?

Let's go a bit further with an analogy. In Nairobi, Kenya, there are many Protestant and Catholic churches. One of the smaller Lutheran churches sits over a spring of clean water. If local people drink of it exclusively, they can expect to have a healthy and strong life. Some of the nearby Nairobi Protestant churches are large megachurches. These large churches do not have access to pure spring water, but only polluted water, which leads to health problems. Nevertheless, in spite of the fact that these Protestant churches offer polluted water to all whom come to drink, water which cannot guarantee health and strength, these churches are still seen as the "alive" churches.

Now, let's drive across Kansas or Nebraska, where we will see many large churches, a quality some feel is the key indicator of "life." And, in these same cities and towns are often smaller Lutheran churches, built over the pure spring of Absolution, something Sasse and Walther point out is available only in the Lutheran church.

We would not ask small Lutheran churches in Nairobi to close. Why not? Because they are providing pure and healthy spiritual water.

Similarly, why close down small Lutheran churches throughout the Midwest, and other places, when, according to the Scriptures, Sasse, and Walther, these are the only places the pure water of Absolution is available? It all boils down to how you understand the church and what indicates life: the outer indicators, or the often-hidden, pure, and living Word. Apparently, as I drive throughout the Midwest, I see Christ's churches in a totally different way than some mission execs who might say that these small, and even struggling, Lutheran churches have become "useless to God." To be sure, we all want Christ's churches to grow! But, can we say that those we feel are not alive by visible numbers standards, are "useless to God"? As indicated repeatedly in this paper, the conundrum now bedeviling LCMS missiology is in determining what signs God uses to indicate "life" in His churches.

Appendix 10

“UNCOMMITTED”: THE DEVIL HAS PUT A WORD IN YOUR MIND THAT MAY DETERMINE YOUR ETERNAL DESTINY

There are now those in the LCMS who believe one can speak about the "uncommitted" rather than the "unbaptized." This new terminology then clearly implies that "saved" or "unsaved," "uncommitted," "baptized" or "unbaptized," are interchangeable, since these terms mean essentially the same thing. According to God's Word, however, these expressions are not interchangeable.

If the devil has tricked you into including this missiological misunderstanding in your thinking, consider the following. Imagine a man walking down the street a small town. Suddenly, a teenage boy approaches him and says: "I admire you; I commit my life to you; I surrender myself to you; I commit myself totally and completely to you." Do the actions of this teenager mean that this teenager then becomes this man's son and part of the his "will" and "inheritance?" Even the secular world would consider this type of thinking absurd! But this is the trick the devil has now played in the minds of many. When it comes to being God's child and part of His will and inheritance, God speaks of these matters in a totally different way. Read Ephesians 1, along with Romans 1: 3ff. Read how God explains that, if anyone is going to be part of His inheritance, he is first going to have to be adopted by the Father! Even in secular life, adoption is an action the father takes. The child cannot initiate the process. And, if one is not adopted into God's family using the adoption procedure of Baptism as outlined in God's Word, one is only deluding himself in believing he will be part of the inheritance.

The next time someone uses the now widely-popular expressions of "surrendering themselves to Jesus," or "committing themselves to Jesus," remember, this is not how God speaks of these eternity-deciding matters! You might aggressively, and even sacrificially, commit your life to Jesus or the Father. Yet, if God's revelation is correct, you might find yourself outside His Will and His inheritance. Why? Because God is in charge of His adoption procedures, you are not. Furthermore, when the Father has made His adoption procedures so clear; and, when He has so clearly stated He loves you, why would you try to sidestep what He is graciously offering, in order to connive your way into His inheritance on your terms rather than His? Let it be God's way which then enables you to live with His blessed assurance.

Listen to your loving Father. Get rid of all foolish talk about "committing" yourself to God, and any desire to bring this new theology into LCMS missiology. Do it His way, through His

adoption, and receive, *with certainty*, His eternal inheritance, in Jesus! “In Christ . . . we have obtained an inheritance” (Ephesians 1:11).

Appendix 11

DOCTRINAL PARANOIA

When *Ablaze!*[®] was first being promoted throughout the LCMS, the promoters apparently realized that, because *Ablaze!*[®] was presenting terminology and methodology not previously known in the LCMS, doctrinal concerns over *Ablaze!*[®] were inevitable. To get ahead of the curve, these promoters came out of the starting gate on the offensive, stating unabashedly that excessive concern for doctrine was hampering LCMS mission and outreach! One of the LCMS vice presidents even spoke to a large LCEF meeting, painting a picture of how U.S. Protestant groups are extremely successful in outreach, but the LCMS is not. He then fixed the blame: LCMS evangelism is being stymied because of concern over doctrine!

So, first a brief word about defining the issue at hand. The 1975 version of the LCMS *Lutheran Encyclopedia*, page 241, in keying off Christ’s Great Commission —His missiology if you will— the editors point out that, in their outreach work, Jesus commanded His disciples to “teach.” **This is doctrine in its most clear sense.** The *Lutheran Encyclopedia* then goes on to note that: “**What the disciples taught was doctrine.**” Furthermore, all that has been taught by the Prophets, Jesus, and the apostles is *doctrine*, period! Any additional ideas added by man, even if they agree, are not doctrine, per se. Therefore, if anyone, in promoting evangelism, claims that our outreach is being held up because of our excessive concern over doctrine, he is either intentionally muddying the waters by not defining his terms or unknowingly “barking up the wrong tree.” I cannot imagine going up to Jesus on the Last Day and saying: “You know what, Jesus, we could have gotten a lot more done in LCMS evangelism and missions had we not always been hung up with Your doctrine.” Or, can you imagine going up to Luther, or Saint Paul and saying: “We could get much more done if we weren’t always so hung up over doctrine!”

When talking about LCMS missiology it is impossible forget Rosa Young. Equally interesting is that, if you read her own words in her book, she always connected her zeal for evangelism to **doctrine**. What are we to make of this?

Let me now give a simple and recent example of how Christ commands that Lutheran evangelism to be not only 100% doctrinally driven, but also denominationally-oriented! Let me explain how Jesus’ command for doctrinally driven evangelism plays out in our day-to-day work. Not long ago, I hired two women for some very basic secretarial help. One said she was of Baptist background. The second secretary had been born into the Catholic faith, but was not currently “practicing.” Both of these women had “been around the block,” as they say. Both were on their second or third marriage, and open to more! As I frequently do with those I work with, I take some time out to talk about the faith. One day I mentioned how all of us, including myself, have made wrong decisions, or taken wrong turns, all decisions we regret; and, if permitted to relive the situation, we would probably choose otherwise. I could see through simple body language and facial expression that these two ladies were clearly involved in the discussion. As I talked about my shortcomings, they also acknowledged that they, too, had failed often, leading to deep regret. After awhile, I pointed out: “You know what? In Christ, God sees you as perfect and pure, and holy, as if you had never done any of your past mistakes. Others may condemn you.” I

further explained, “your friends, and even your family members may see your mistakes, but God sees you as totally forgiven, pure and holy.” I spent some time on emphasizing this point, stressing Romans 8:33: “Who will bring a charge against God’s elect? God is the one who justifies, He is the one who forgives—not friends or neighbors.” This simple explanation, something they had obviously never heard before, made a huge impression on these two women. Next came the indispensable denominational element of Christ centered evangelism: I told these two ladies that this unconditional absolution (pure forgiveness in Christ where God sees them as if they had never committed any of their grievous mistakes) was available **ONLY IN THE LUTHERAN CHURCH!** Now comes the evangelism bombshell! One woman responded: “Where can I find a Lutheran church so I can hear this?” Do you hear the echo of the Samaritan woman at the well responding to Jesus words when she said: “Give me this water so that I will not be thirsty” (John 4:15)? This is Jesus-driven evangelism that is 100% effective, having no apologies for His doctrine and denominational orientation. So, the next time you hear someone say that LCMS evangelism is hindered by Christ’s doctrine, ask them if they have expressed this, not just to their friends in the LCMS, but also to Jesus in prayer. Christ-centered doctrine is not a hindrance to evangelism—it is the engine!

Appendix 12

A VOICE FROM THE DEAD IS NOW SPEAKING TO THE LCMS POWERFULLY!

There can be no doubt that many now part of the LCMS bureaucracy will, once they are no longer in office, reflect on actions they were involved in. I can also say: “been there, done that.” Many may **not** necessarily be proud of their part, even in their passive participation. Read the following words. But, before you get to the end of the quotation, try to guess who wrote these very, very, sobering words [emphasis added]:

“But institution that is essential for the church’s ministry is also inimical to it. That was a hard lesson for an organizational person like me to learn. Institution is not neutral but is predisposed to evil. Each institution is pervaded by the principalities and powers against which Christians wrestle. Institution is a part of what it means to be human, and it participates in the fallenness of our human condition. Institution dehumanizes, perpetrates injustice, and opposes God even when it is in the best of human hands, even when it is in the hands of Christians.

“Institution requires the compromise of integrity. Everyone has to engage in compromise in order to accomplish anything meaningful; we are willing to sacrifice a little principle for the sake of a greater good. But institution asks us to compromise to the point of selling our soul.

“INSTITUTION TEMPTS ITS PARTICIPANTS TO ENGAGE IN MANIPULATION AND TO USE POWER TO ACHIEVE THE GOALS OF MINISTRY. It seduces us to measure success by human standards rather than faithfulness in walking the way of the cross. It requires the use of power to achieve results in direct opposition to the words of Jesus to his disciples. “This is not the way it shall be among you” (Matthew 20:26).

“The problem is that we have to live with the paradox of institution. We cannot escape the tension imposed by the paradox. We cannot do without institution, because it is essential for ministry. We cannot enjoy what is good about institution without experiencing and participating in its subversion. We have to work with institutions and make them work for us. We have to do our best to see to it that they remain means to good ends. We have to make the church’s ministry our priority and use institution as means to ministry. Then, in spite of our best efforts, we have to acknowledge and confess our sins, knowing that our best efforts will not be good enough.”

The above damning indictment of anyone who sells his soul to an unbridled bureaucracy was boldly laid out by the late Rev. John Tietjen. As much as some may dislike what he stood for and what he did, it must also remain true for all of us: “Though dead, yet Tietjen speaketh.” For all he did in his life, it is entirely possible that, written not that long before death, these piercing words will be his most significant legacy! Tietjen himself admitted that he had been part of the bureaucracy. But, as he matured in life, he began to see how cold, cruel, and even anti-Christian the church bureaucracy can become, even toward the Gospel. As the “light brightened for him in the west,” in his last years before he succumbed to cancer, Tietjen described what he obviously hoped a younger man would clearly see. He began to see the absolute necessity that even as we must work vigorously to make sure that sin “does not **reign** in our[physical] body” (Romans 6:12), so also we must work especially hard to make sure that politics, which is also part of any church body, does not “**reign**” in the LCMS.

And, for those who simply refuse to let go of the “high-octane” power that a high church office supplies, note the following: Rev. John Tietjen played a big role in the LCMS bureaucracy. At one time, his was a household name in most LCMS parsonages. However, when Rev. John Tietjen died in February of 2004, a notice for a memorial service was placed in a Chicago paper. Only two people showed up and the event was canceled. If you seek immortality through the bureaucracy, it is almost inevitable that the same bureaucracy that was the first to lift you up will also be the first to let you down!

Appendix 13

THE LCMS’S MOST DESPERATE MISSIOLOGICAL QUESTION IS NOW SEEKING AN ANSWER!

Why is it that a desperately poor black woman, Rosa Young, nearly a century ago, a woman who under very, very, difficult circumstances and much persecution began school after school after school, resulting in church after church being built; yes, why could this wonderful saint see the close connection between the pure doctrine of Christ in her soul and the evangelistic zeal in her heart, and yet some of our spiritual leaders, leaders holding doctors degrees, are calling for a disconnect from doctrine in order to increase outreach zeal? In a similar vein, why is it that one of the latest CPH books on missions includes a chart to fill out showing the necessary ingredients for a growing church, one ingredient being the necessity of, not doctrinal, but topical sermons? All of this when, over at the ELCA (a church body we condemned in a recent national LCMS convention), one can read in the Augsburg Fortress Book Newsletter about an ELCA female pastor who wrote rather directly in a book review on preaching: “Preaching doctrine is really not a matter of choice. The only choice involved is whether we do it well and intentionally or poorly and unintentionally.” Then this female ELCA pastor adds the kicker: “The hope of the authors of

this book is that preachers will again invite lay people to become theologians. And,” get this, “create communities of faith which are able to articulate their faith in a world of ‘isms.’” Even if the LCMS, on clear Scriptural grounds, refuses to ordain women, unless it gets its missiological act together soon, we may end up with no choice but to, at minimum, hire women as missiological consultants, maybe even poor black or ELCA women! “The Lord gives the command; the women who proclaim the good news are a great host!” (Psalm 68:11).

Appendix 14

WE NEED MISSIOLOGY AND PASTORAL LEADERSHIP THAT HEALS

In recent years, especially since the Seminex days, we in the LCMS have degenerated into a very self-destructive form of governance, far different from the governance espoused and practiced by C.F.W. Walther. Instead of getting as many in the LCMS as possible (especially all pastors) to discuss the issues, we now, instead, have a situation where a select few take it upon themselves to dream up visions and theologies, which are then taken to a convention and, after careful politicking, passed by a 51% vote, or a similar close margin. We are then told that this razor thin decision is the “collective will” of the Synod (!) which now must be followed, or a DP will come out to see you as the enforcer, something that has already happened!

Here is an explanation of what can happen when the “collective will” is misused. To defend what is now going on in the LCMS you are going to frequently hear the phrase “collective understanding.” Don’t let this phrase fool you. This is essentially a secular expression used by bureaucrats who don’t want to admit that their favorite idea or proposal, after much propaganda and drum-beating, won by only a few, or even as little as one, vote. Instead of giving the vote count that is short of the overwhelming majority on a divisive issue, the vote outcome is suddenly called the “collective understanding.” This term was used against the unwitting when the old American Lutheran Church was hornswaggled into the ELCA. Fred Danker makes reference to this “collective understanding” approach in his criticism of how Seminex professors were handled. But, even more important, if you Google “collective understanding,” you will find this expression is used by feminists, global warming proponents, etc., as a way to give the impression that their ideology or theology is the choice of the great majority, when it actually is not. If you move quickly, on Amazon you can get your own personal copy of the book *Dialogue At Work: Skills for Leveraging Collective Understanding* for \$8.76; and, if you act immediately, the shipping is free!

ENDNOTES

¹ Among many available, a brief account of the LCMS forefathers’ struggles can be found in *The Life of Dr. C.F.W. Walther*, by Lewis Spitz, Sr., CPH 1961.

² Why is church controversy inevitable? Jesus explains this in His parable of the tares among the wheat in Matthew 13:25 In Matthew 13:24ff., The sowers (pastors, teachers, evangelists), on behalf of Jesus, sow the Seed of God’s living Word, a seed from which new life comes and congregations are planted. In the very next verse, Matthew 13:25, Jesus explains how, as soon as God’s living Word is sown, when night comes and Christ’s men are sleeping, The devil comes and sows tares among the wheat and goes away. Furthermore, In 1 Timothy 4:1, God says the devil has “doctrines” of his own which function like living seeds, or viruses, or infections such as gangrene. (2 timothy 2:17) We should daily fear the devil as we fear AIDS, but only a billion times more! The evil seeds (doctrines, teachings) look so much like the real wheat seed that even the farmer is often initially deceived and discovers the seriousness only after it is too late (Matthew 13:26).

³ In a nutshell, the “Predestination” crisis of the 1880s arose when some taught falsely that God elected some people to salvation “in view of faith, in Christ, that God had foreseen.” Walther argued that this false teaching makes faith a cause of our salvation, the reason God saves us. Walther correctly explained that God’s Word teaches we are saved only because of God’s grace in Christ. Faith receives the gift of salvation. Faith does not cause the gift to be given any more than the earth makes the sun to shine.

⁴ It is not the responsibility of the LCMS president to “clean house,” “knock heads together,” or rid himself and the party-in-power of dissenters. These are ego-centered and politically-driven ideas of the devil. Rather, the LCMS president must be an articulate theologian who can, without initially taking sides, isolate the issues troubling the church in a crystal clear way; and then, as Walther stressed, use only the “naked text” without elaborate exegesis, and thereby raise the appropriate Word from the Lord as a clear plumb line (Amos 7:8), so that the pastors and people can settle the issues in their assemblies.

If young pastors see that the top leadership of the LCMS relies primarily on resolutions backed, not by Scripture, but by *Robert’s Rules of Order*, they will follow the pattern, as previously explained. According to one veteran vicarage supervisor, vicars are now arriving in the field armed, not only with a Bible, but with a copy of the “enforcer,” *Robert’s Rules of Order*. If these young men witness how LCMS leaders muscle their vision through conventions, often at any cost, are these young seminarians, by example, preparing themselves to do the same in congregations?

⁵ If the “801” (Concordia Seminar, St. Louis) Board of Control Report is to be believed (and there is no reason to not believe the report, since they claimed to have a direct transcript of one Seminex professor’s testimony), the following is sobering! In the heat of the battle, this professor told an LCMS pastors conference: “I believe that many of my Christian brothers have problems with the virgin birth of Christ. . . . Don’t ask me, ‘Do you believe in the 6 day creation? . . . I have problems with the virgin birth, real presence, bodily resurrection. . . . I can’t bear the burden of Scriptural infallibility.’” See *Exodus from Concordia: A Report on the 1974 Walkout* by the 801 Board of Control.

⁶ See *Exodus From Concordia: A Report on the 1974 Walkout*, by the Board of Control, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri, 1977. p. 54.

⁷ Luther wrote an eye-opening explanation of how history repeatedly demonstrates that the devil gets doctrinally driven churches to eventually degenerate into churches driven by laws and ordinances of man. How does this happen? Here is Luther’s sobering explanation of how human ordinances gradually replace God’s Word **“In order to keep the people together in the face of divisions!”** These human laws and ordinances, similar to Synodical resolutions, doctrinal statements, and CCM rulings, “do not replace Scripture, but are put alongside Scripture.” This happens because **the devil is always telling the church God’s Word is “not sufficient,”** and that **“we also need the laws and the interpretations of the councils.”** Here, Luther says, the devil is finally the total victor, having “caused men’s turning wholly and completely away from the Scriptures to mere human drive!” (*Luther’s Works*, vol. 37, p. 13ff.).

⁸ Already in 1872, a mere twenty-five years after the birth of the LCMS, the first President C.F.W. Walther wrote to District President Ottomar Fuerbringer: “Please consider, my dear old friend, if you do not come to Missouri [convention] this time, to this very important stage of activity, then you probably will never come at all. . . . I well know that certain impressions that you have received earlier have filled you with a certain aversion to the general Synodical convention, and I do not intend to argue with you whether these impressions were caused by others or not. But I think we are here dealing with interests that go far beyond our feelings. I believe you owe it to yourself as a Christian, to yourself as a member of the synod, as a pastor, as a district president. You owe it to the kingdom of God to overcome this reticence. I know that you complain that you always feel physically unwell at these meetings. But even in this you ought to make a sacrifice to the Lord and His kingdom” (*Selected Writings of C.F.W. Walther*, CPH, 1981, p. 128).

⁹ “Sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it” (Genesis 4:7).

¹⁰ Fundamentalist teaching have always flowed into the LCMS, via Sunday school literature, VBS literature, and even sermons. *Christian News* has also vigorously promoted Fundamentalism by promoting fundamentalist writers. *Christian News* has changed decidedly in recent years to a more Lutheran approach, totally apart from publishing material I have written. And, since I am confessing the sins of others, I confess my own previous failures in my early missiology in another part of this essay. In LCMS history no man came closer to walking on water than did Walter A. Maier, first speaker on the Lutheran Hour. The following he had in his day was nothing less than stunning. What theological legacy did Maier leave in the LCMS—one that continues to drive the thinking of people today? Milton Rudnick in his book *Fundamentalism and The Missouri Synod* touches on this significant issue, as it relates to Fundamentalism. You can also read in greater depth more about this question in an unpublished PhD

dissertation: "The Militant Evangelicalist of Missouri: Walther Arthur Maier and His Theological Orientation," available from University Microfilms International, 300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106.

¹¹ D. James Kennedy left being an Arthur Murray dance instructor to study at a Presbyterian seminary. He then became a "successful" pastor in Florida, where he now has a worldwide television ministry. Early on, Kennedy began to export his "success" methodology to other denominations. In his early days, when Kennedy was still running his promotional material off a mimeograph, Dr. Ted Raedeke invited Kennedy, in the fall of 1968, to "train" LCMS pastors to be "successful" evangelists. After the training sessions, LCMS President Harms blessed the event with a few words and a prayer including: "Action without prayer is arrogance; and, prayer without action is hypocrisy!" That was "heady stuff." I was there. I thought, as did others, "Now we are finally going to become evangelistic. Where would we put all the new members?" The LCMS Board for Evangelism appointed a fellow board member to "Lutheranize" the Presbyterian materials. He tried. But, as usual, the evidence of the "Lutheranized" Kennedy program is more on the shelf of the Concordia Historical Institute than in the LCMS pew! Most LCMS pastors seemed to prefer to use the original Presbyterian theological approach.

¹² At the opening of his massive 892-page *Luther and His Times* (CPH 1950), E. G. Schwiebert used one full page to show the dynamic evangelistic power of Luther's Bible based outreach theology. Shown like spokes on a wheel exploding out from the Wittenberg hub to the far corners of western Europe, Luther's Christ-centered writings not only changed minds, they transformed empires! The first Lutherans may not have had a bureaucratic department of missions as many churches do today; but, as Dr. Schwiebert points out: "The German Reformation was possible only because of a well-organized educational program that made Wittenberg the nursery of the whole movement. . . . In fact, it was the new Lutheranism produced in parochial schools, the Latin schools, the boys schools, the girls schools, that caused the Reformation to triumph. . . . To explain Luther's tremendous influence, one must consider the value of the printing press, and especially his use of the . . . tract Luther realized [the tract's] possibility as an inexpensive means of reaching the common man. . . . [The tracts included] . . . attractively illustrated woodcuts . . . **all of which would familiarize the average layman with the Gospel.**"

Dr Schwiebert is not alone in describing the immediate, and extensive, outreach power inherent in Luther's Christ-centered and Bible based writings and teachings. Many more writers and historians have pointed this out over the decades. With the above background in mind, one can understand the embarrassment in being at an LCMS District pastors conference where a retired LCMS district president was invited to serve as the key speaker to instruct LCMS pastors in outreach. In his opening remarks he quipped: "Luther said 'Here we stand,' but St. Paul said, 'There we go!'" Again, this was said to reinforce the myth that Lutheranism is inherently "wanting" in missiology. The inevitable conclusion planted in the pastors minds? We in the LCMS have such an unbalanced understanding of the Bible that we need to go to outside sources to import that which we do not have: **PROTESTANT AND FUNDAMENTALIST MISSIOLOGY.** Does this help explain why we are where we are, evangelistically?

¹³ Lutherans normally have a very difficult time sorting out how their Bible-based teaching on Baptism differs from the rest of Protestantism. Of course, most Protestant churches baptize, but they do this only as an ordinance and deny that Baptism has any regenerative power. On the other hand, basing their teachings on God speaking through Peter and Titus 3:5, the Lutherans believe that Jesus teaches that Baptism has regenerative and life-giving power. "Baptism now saves you" (1 Peter 3:21).

¹⁴ There is precedent in U.S. Lutheran church history as to how musical lyrics and worship eventually determine a denomination's future. In a 1931 *Kirchliche Zeitschrift*, Dr. Michael Reu cites a Rev. Glasco in the Norwegian church magazine *Lutheran Herald*. The article was titled "Are We Singing Our Members Right Out of the Lutheran Church?" Reu cites Glasco as saying: "We are taking so many non-Lutheran hymns and melodies into our church, especially in our Sunday Schools and youth groups, but also, in many cases, in the church services, that many of our people abandon not only an appreciation of Lutheran hymn-singing, but also consequently an understanding of the peculiar nature of our Lutheran church in general." The lesson for us? Fast forward: This same Norwegian group has long since disappeared. Remnants of it may be found in the ELCA which itself embraces, without concern, churches laden with Fundamentalist and Reformed doctrine and practice.

¹⁵ "The Nature and Function of Holy Scriptures as Discussed in Nineteenth Century Lutheran Free Conferences: Part One and Part Two. Dale B. Huelsman. *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly*, vol. 76, 3 (Fall), 163-180; vol. 76, 4 (Winter), 220-241, 2003..

¹⁶ Some LCMS people say they would prefer to remain with historic doctrinally-based hymns and teaching; but, they say, all indications show that when it comes to effective outreach, the future of the church and the LCMS is in the large mega-churches which use Protestant singspiration music. They try to say there is simply no choice. Go with the flow, or perish. Whoa! Is there still a place for honest discussion using the bare facts? Church growth experts say to qualify as a growing mega-church you need to "worship 2000" per Sunday. With all the hoopla from

PLI, and all the PR drumbeating over the past decade, how many LCMS churches do you think now worship 2000 people or more per week? Only four! That's correct, only four! All of this after the thousands upon thousands of dollars used to promote the idea in the LCMS. Why not let "God be God?" Worldwide, average weekly church attendance is 100. By that standard, God is richly blessing the LCMS, in spite of our tragic membership loss. So, let's not chase "moonbeams!" Rather, let us humble ourselves and base our missiology on God's living Word: we will plant with great joy, and He will provide the increase! We will then rejoice, no matter where the numbers end up! We need also to point out that, when the office of the LCMS president contacted the *St Louis Post-Dispatch* to promote a feature story on *Ablaze!*; and, when the *Post* reporter explained President Kieschnick's "best-case-style mentoring project 'One Mission *Ablaze!*: Igniting Effective Congregations,'" they made a stunning observation about one of the leading, growing LCMS congregations in the St. Louis area. This church had grown rapidly from 250 to 800. However, the *Post* said: "Many members came from other denominations, he [that pastor] said." If this is true; and if the churches in the LCMS selected for "Igniting Congregations" are to train others for reaching out; and if these already "ignited" congregations are themselves getting members *primarily* from other denominations because these new members prefer the worship style of their new home, then, as an life-long evangelist, I must say this is little more than sheep stealing, or cannibalizing nearby churches, probably many of them LCMS! This is not a charge against anyone. This is a stunning and deeply disturbing public admission published in the *St Louis Post-Dispatch!* And the LCMS is being asked to embrace this type of foreign missiology until at least 2017?

¹⁷ "Within a few days after the arrival of the first division of the emigration company in St. Louis a school was founded here." Dr. C.F.W. Walther, *The Lutheran Publication Society*, 1917, p. 190.

¹⁸ Solberg, Richard W., *Lutheran Higher Education in North America*, Augsburg Publishing House, Minneapolis, MN. 1985. p. 139ff.

¹⁹ *Selected Letters: Selected Writings of C.F.W. Walther*, translated by Roy A. Sueflow, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, 1981. p. 104.

²⁰ *Wall Street Journal*, "A Popular Strategy for Church Growth Splits Congregants," by Suzanne Sataline, September 5, 2006, p. A1.

²¹ "Vorwort," *Lehre und Wehre*, XXI, 3 (March 1875), 67, translated by W.H. Dau, "Confessionalism of the Missouri Synod," *Theological Monthly*, I, 5 (May 1921), 148-44.

²² There are those in the LCMS who have a long held hatred for Seminex. That is their option. At the same time, I think it is important for us to hear what a leading Seminex spokesman wrote when *Ablaze!* and "Igniting Congregations" was announced in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. After the *Post* ran a story promoting the Kieschnick theology/strategy/missiology, a leading Seminex spokesman, Dr. Edward Schroeder stated this interesting insight: After the Seminex professors were removed from Concordia for, in his words, a Gospel teaching "not to be tolerated in the church of God, much less excused and defended," Schroeder said he found the Kieschnick missiology/theology much worse. So much worse, in fact, that Schroeder made no bones about pulling his insurance policies out of Thrivent since Thrivent was "supporting Kieschnick!" It is rather amazing that, while the previous Seminex faculty that was removed from 801 would themselves have clearly rejected the *Ablaze!* theology, the present 801 faculty has been stunningly quiet!

²³ **Regarding the results of Key 73, Time magazine, on January 14, 1974, wrote:** "On New Year's Eve television screens, Evangelist Billy Graham, sports-jacketed and gray-templed, delivered a fireside jeremiad. Citing the year's woeful parade of scandals, crises and other miseries, Graham warned that the U.S. would experience even worse difficulties if Americans did not forthwith repent and return to God. 'The only answer,' he said, 'is Jesus.'

Throughout the half-hour sermon, Graham never once mentioned the campaign that was supposed to have been the evangelical catchword of the year: Key 73 (TIME, Feb. 19). As labored over for six years by Graham's organization and more than 150 other participating groups, Key 73 was intended to be a broad ecumenical effort to spread the Gospel—CALLING OUR CONTINENT TO CHRIST as the slogan put it. But by year's end most people on the continent had scarcely heard of it.

What happened? For one thing, admits the Rev. T.A. Raedeke, Lutheran executive director of Key 73, 'it was a fiasco financially.' Organizers had hoped for at least \$2,000,000 for the national campaign; less than \$600,000 materialized. Most of the money went for a television special and other activities of 'Launch Weekend' a year ago. Local and regional groups, though, spent at least \$10 million on Key 73.

Controversy also upset the effort. Taking the evangelical rhetoric too literally, Jews were initially incensed by the 'Christian America' overtones of the campaign. But Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum of the American Jewish Committee, one of the most vehement critics, conceded later that the fracas had actually promoted better Jewish-Christian understanding of evangelism.

Some fundamentalist Christian critics were less easy to appease, especially when 43 Roman Catholic dioceses joined Key 73. The fundamentalists charged that the campaign was sacrificing important doctrinal distinctions for the sake of a watered-down Gospel. Its defenders counter that the basic Christian message is difficult enough to sell without ecclesiastical infighting.”