

1. Historical Observation concerning Missions

- A. The Lutheran Reformers lived in a Christian country, where people were already baptized, catechized (at least formally), living under the Church's public presence. The problem was not people who had never heard of Christ. The problem was false doctrine, superstition, clerical corruption, and ignorance among the baptized. **Thus their work was re-evangelizing the baptized and restoring the Gospel to the Church.**
- B. Lutheran missions beyond Europe were controlled by princes and emperors. Limited in scope, the Lutherans had no mission orders, **no overseas infrastructure**, and no political reach.
- C. The Lutheran Church does not treat "mission" as a separate doctrine or program, the way modern Christianity does. **Lutherans assume that if the Church is doing what Christ instituted her to do (preaching the Gospel and administering the sacraments, or Mt 28), then "mission" is already happening.** Modern mission theory arises when that assumption breaks down, so that "a mission problem" needs a doctrine of missions to solve declining church attendance, etc.
- D. The irony is that modern churches often think that Luther (and Lutheran churches) didn't care about mission. Actually, Luther trusted the means of grace so completely that he saw no need to invent a separate mission doctrine. Modern mission theory arises precisely where confidence in the Word has weakened.

2. Theological Explanation

- A. **The Lutherans Understood Mission Differently Than Modern Evangelicals.** The Great Commission (Matthew 28) was seen as fulfilled through the Pastoral Ministry. Christ instituted the preaching office by which the Church would endure until the end. **Thus, the apostles were sent uniquely. Pastors succeed them in office. Lay Christians witness through vocation. Mission was ordinary, ongoing, institutional, and not event-driven, nor packaged as a program.** Modern Mission theory thinks that every generation must reinvent methods to reach the nations.
- B. **There Is No Separate "Doctrine of Mission" in the Confessions or Dogmatics.** In classical Lutheran theology, doctrines are organized around: God, Sin, Christ, Justification, Word and Sacraments, Church and Ministry, Vocation, etc. Mission is not a separate locus because **it is embedded in the doctrine of the Word, and the doctrine of the Church.** Thus, the Church exists by the Word. The Word by nature goes outward. So they did not ask, "How do we do mission?" They asked, "Is the Word being preached purely and the Sacraments administered rightly?" If yes, then mission is occurring.
- C. **The Outreach / Inreach Distinction** is modern and functional (internal growth vs external expansion), not dogmatic. The Lutherans make distinction of Law and Gospel, Word and Sacrament, Church and world, Pastoral Office and vocation, etc. Preaching is the Church's defining act. Catechism teaches the Faith (missionary/re-education or growth)
- D. Ministry is defined as public proclamation. Ecclesiology is centered on marks of the Church. A corrupted Gospel is the greatest anti-missionary force imaginable. Therefore, there is an emphasis on pure doctrine so that the Gospel is not distorted. **The Word faithfully preached, will call, gather, enlighten, and sanctify people** (the Small Catechism). Whether believer or unbeliever, the same message is repentance and forgiveness, followed by good works.

3. Loss of Confidence in The Word

Modern Lutherans have lost confidence in their own theology. This can be shown historically and theologically, not as a single betrayal but as a series of shifts where Lutherans slowly stopped trusting that their own categories were sufficient for the Church's life. What replaces them are borrowed pragmatic frameworks of protestants.

1. Pietism: Confidence Shifts from Means of Grace → Experience (Late 1600s–1700s)

Pietism does not deny doctrine, but it relocates assurance. Assurance shifts from the external Word and Sacrament to internal experience, renewal, fruitfulness. How do you know if God is working? The answer is not in whether God has spoken or promised. The answer is the experience which it produces within you. Mission becomes awakening the unawakened, stirring the lukewarm, producing visible conversion. Evangelism is no longer simply preaching Christ, but eliciting a response. This is the birth of **outcome-driven mission thinking** inside Lutheranism. There is a loss of

confidence. Lutherans begin to suspect that preaching alone is insufficient, that catechesis must be “activated” emotionally, and that faith must be observable to be real.

Spener's *Pia Desideria* (1675)

1. More Scripture
2. Priesthood of Believers
3. Practice trumps Doctrine
4. Love in controversy
5. Pastoral Training in Piety
6. Daily Christian living

2. From “The Word Does the Work” → “The Word Needs Help” (Late 17th–18th century)

Lutherans originally trusted that the preached Word created faith, catechesis formed Christians, and the Sacraments sustained the Church, as taught by the Small Catechism, “**The Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel...**” There is no technique, no strategy, no supplementation. After the age of Lutheran Orthodoxy (1580–1700), pietism sees moral decay in “Christian” society, widespread nominalism, and perceives a cold intellectualism. Pietism determines that Pure doctrine is not enough.

3. Enlightenment Rationalism: Confidence Shifts from Revelation → Reason (1700s)

Miracles are downplayed. Doctrinal precision is seen as divisive. Christianity becomes a moral system. The Gospel is recast as timeless truths rather than saving acts. Mission becomes moral education, civilization-building, cultural uplift. The Gospel is assumed, muted, or abstracted. This weakens confidence in preaching Christ crucified as necessary, catechesis as anything more than ethics.

4. The 19th Century: Lutheranism Imports Mission Structures (1800s)

As Lutherans came in contact with others, they borrowed: mission societies, revivalist methods, and activist frameworks from other denominations. With these borrowed models, mission becomes a specialized activity requiring specialized methods. These new programs directly contradict Lutheran ecclesiology, where the Church herself is the missionary, the ministry of Word and Sacrament is sufficient. Without Lutheran teaching, mission becomes para-church, programmatic, and optional.

5. The 20th Century: Sociology Replaces Theology (1900s)

New questions dominate: Why are numbers declining?, Why aren't people attending? What attracts people? The Church begins measuring success by: attendance, engagement, demographics. Mission becomes a growth problem. The result is that Lutheran churches begin softening Law and Gospel, minimizing catechesis, experimenting with seeker models. Not because Luther failed— but because Luther is thought to be insufficient for modern people.

6. Late 20th–21st Century: Identity Confusion (Very recent)

“Lutherans” are embarrassed by Lutheran doctrine and practice: exclusive claims, sacramental theology, doctrinal boundaries. There is anxiety about appearing “unwelcoming.” “If we say who we are clearly, people will leave.” It is a fear of the offense of the Gospel. Mission is recast as “accompaniment” or “presence.”

At every stage, the same shift occurs:

<u>Original Confidence</u>	<u>Replacement</u>
Word creates faith	Technique helps
Sacraments sustain	Programs engage
Catechesis forms	Experience proves
Church is sufficient	Structures supplement
Gospel offends rightly	Gospel must be safe

Modern Lutheranism changes to adapt to modern mission theory, because they stopped trusting in the Word. **Lutheran theology was never weak on mission. It was too strong to be easily adapted to modern expectations.** Modern Lutheranism lost confidence in its theology not because it failed to explain mission, but because it trusted methods, metrics, and moods more than the promise that Christ Himself works through His Word.

Modern Seeker models reorganize the Church's life around a very different logic than **Lutheran/Scriptural theology**.

1. Two Competing Organizing Principles

Lutheran Model

Organizing principle: God gives His gifts through Word and Sacrament

Movement: Law → Gospel → Baptism → Teaching → Absolution → Supper

The Church is shaped by what God does.

Modern Seeker Model

Organizing principle: Lower barriers so the unchurched will attend

Movement: Felt needs → Relatable message → Gradual spiritual interest → Later instruction (maybe)

The Church is shaped by how people respond.

2. How Each Model Treats “Outreach”

Outreach in Lutheran Model

Outreach is proclamation.

- The Law is allowed to offend.
- The Gospel is allowed to sound exclusive.
- Christ crucified is central from the beginning.

Outreach assumes:

- People are dead in sin, not merely disengaged.
- Faith comes by hearing, not by comfort or relevance.
- The goal is church membership through public profession of faith and baptism.

The Catechism is used early, even with outsiders, because it tells the truth plainly.

Outreach in Seeker Models

Outreach is attraction and accessibility.

Typical assumptions:

- People are spiritually interested but turned off by “church stuff.”
- Christianity must first feel safe, useful, and non-threatening.
- Doctrine, sacraments, and confession come later.

Thus: - Law is softened into “brokenness” or “dysfunction.”

- Sin becomes “not living your best life.”
- The cross becomes an illustration, not an offense.
- Catechesis is postponed until after “buy-in.”

3. The Role of “Inreach” in Each Model

Lutheran Model: Inreach is constant and central. Teaching never stops. Faith assumed fragile and in need of care.

Seeker Model: Inreach is secondary. Discipleship optional. Many remain perpetually “seeking.”

4. Theological Consequences

Lutheran Model Produces: Christians who know what they believe, Confidence rooted in external promises, Churches centered on Word and Sacrament

Seeker Model Tends to Produce: Christians unsure of doctrine, Assurance tied to feelings or decisions, Churches driven by metrics and novelty

5. One-Sentence Contrast

Lutheran model: The Church adapts people to the Gospel.

Seeker model: The Gospel is adapted to people.