

Maintaining Doctrinal Principles and an Effective Evangelism Outreach

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Then Peter stood up..., raised his voice and addressed the crowd: "...Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. You, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on himGod has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the factGod has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."

When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?..

Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven."...

With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer

And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. (Acts 2, selected vss.)

How did Peter do it? Why did three thousand people get together and form a church? Why did they devote themselves to the apostles' teaching?

In our day and age, will the same method work? What causes people to accept our message and devote themselves to the apostles' teaching? How can we maintain our doctrinal principles (the apostles' teaching) and an effective evangelism outreach? We can do so by remembering our calling, and remembering God's promises.

To discuss the boundaries of our efforts to bring people to the knowledge of the truth, let us consider the following theses:

Thesis One: As evangelists, we want all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

Thesis Two: As evangelists, we rely solely on the Word of God to convert people.

Thesis Three: As evangelists, we recognize that only the Law of God will lead people to repent of the sins and realize their need for a Savior.

Thesis Four: As evangelists, we recognize that only the Gospel works devotion to the Word of God.

In my preparation for this paper, I also contacted Professor David Valleskey, and Pastors Forrest Bivens and Thomas Franzmann. References to their responses will be made throughout the paper.

With these four theses, let us consider what we are to do, and what we are forbidden from doing, as Christ's ambassadors.

We begin first of all by stating the norm for our confessional principles: God's Word. All that we think, say and do must be guided by God's Word if we are to maintain our confessional principles and an effective

evangelism outreach. Unless we keep God's Word before us as we work as evangelists, we cannot expect him to bless our work. August Pieper recognized this Spirit-worked conviction in C.F.W. Walther:

No person, no matter how naturally gifted he might be, can accomplish something great in the church unless he stands unswervingly on this foundation (i.e., taking every word of the prophets and apostles as the word of the Holy Ghost). Our Lord has said, "The Scriptures cannot be broken" (John 10:35). And through Paul he has told us, "This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom, but in words taught by the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor. 2:13).

Unconditional faith in the verbal inspiration of the "prophetic and apostolic Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments" is therefore as sacred and inviolable a moral requirement as faith in Christ himself in all his words and deeds. Whoever makes the Lord out to be a liar in this has barred the way for the Holy Ghost, who testifies through this word of Christ, too, that the Spirit is truth. And whosoever even so much as wavers in this article should not and cannot accomplish anything great in the church, for the Holy Ghost, whom he continually resists, cannot pour out on him the fullness of his power and gifts.¹

Our confessional principles stem from God's Word. We know that we cannot compromise God's Word for the sake of growth, although we recognize that greater numbers can be generated if we would compromise God's Word. Dr. Walther also recognized the great potential for numerical growth if he would allow lodge members into the church, but he refused to have anything to do with the "idolatrous" lodge organization. He refused, as August Pieper notes, based on his first love for Jesus and his Word:

But this was [Walther's] greatness and the basis of his authority and success, that under no circumstances and at no price was he to be deflected, even in the smallest matter, from what he clearly recognized as the Word of God. In his faithfulness lay his strength.²

Faithfulness to God's Word must come first, not only in our teaching, but also in our work as evangelists, for what else is being an evangelist than preaching repentance and forgiveness of sins in the name of Jesus Christ to all nations? (Luke 24:47) Our teaching in evangelism ought to be as sound as our instruction in Bible Class, Confirmation Class, and our preaching from the pulpit.

The struggle for effective and doctrinal methods of evangelism is nothing, new, as Professor Balge reminds us:

Our Commission (on Evangelism) and our synodical constituency are not the only 20th Century Christians who have struggled with the problem of developing methods that are theologically sound... The German evangelist Paul Scharpff wrote: "It was... inevitable that as the church made an effort to communicate the Gospel to ever enlarging groups, methods would be developed. The development was natural and often uncritical. The church members who were occupied with methods in their business simply transferred these to their church. Much of this has been valid and helpful. However, there have been cases where individuals tried to find too close a parallel between giving a witness for Jesus Christ and selling some piece of merchandise. As a result, the person was made secondary to the 'sale' and the response of faith which the Gospel of Christ calls for has been oversimplified. (At the other extreme there have been those who have so deplored the use of any method of doing anything in the church that the impression is given that there is inherent evil in techniques)... Among teachers of evangelism, pastors and

¹ A., Pieper, "Anniversary Reflections," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, vol. 84, no. 1, (Winter 1987), p. 18.

² A. Pieper, *op. cit.*, vol. 84, p. 26.

denominational leaders there is the feeling that biblical theology and the techniques by which the church proclaims her message should be brought together.”³

We can and ought to be concerned about maintaining our confessional principles while we work as evangelists. We all realize that if we do not maintain confessional principles in our work as evangelists, we will lose those principles altogether. To do that would be to fall away from our first love, Jesus and his word. Therefore let us consider the following theses:

1. *[God our Savior] wants all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. (1 Timothy 2:4)*

Thesis One: As evangelists, we want all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

The first and foremost necessity in being an effective evangelist is a love for souls. That means continually putting down our old Adam which would see people as young or old, black or white, of German heritage or Indian, or rich or poor. The blood of Jesus Christ knows no prejudice. Every person on earth is deserving of the same punishment: temporal and eternal death. Every person on earth was cleansed by the blood of our Savior and theirs, Jesus Christ. Whenever we see people, whether it be at church or at home, on the street as they pass by in their cars or on the sidewalk, in a shopping mall or at school, we ought to have in our minds the atoning sacrifice which was made for our sins and theirs (1 John 2:2). An evangelist is one who has an undying concern for souls. An evangelist is one who has an ever-growing love for souls as Christ’s love continually compels him.

In response to the question, “What is the key to effective growth in the congregation,” Pastor Bivens responds:

I seriously doubt if there is a single “key” other than the will of God for a body of believers at a certain time and place for his purposes. God gives no guarantees that touch numbers and statistics and this should be remembered. If, however, you refer to high priorities for local leadership and congregation to keep in mind as they seek to remain open to growth, I suppose I would emphasize two factors: 1) a healthy, vigorous and growing commitment to Christ and each other on the part of our existing members; and 2) an equally healthy and confident attitude that looks for any and all opportunities to reach out to non members and share what we have been given. The first quality (inner strength, mutual commitment within the existing flock) dare not be overlooked. Biblically and historically, only those who “disciple/discipline” internally do much good when trying to “make disciples” of outsiders. Internal discipline, a continuous emphasis on Bible growth, and a growing appreciation for our confessional stance as a gift from God will inevitably produce a greater ability to attract outsiders and to keep their interest.... When we really believe and rejoice in the gospel proclaimed and applied within our circles, those outside the circle will be drawn toward it.

Antithesis One: As evangelists, we do not desire to see anyone lost.

“Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked? declares the Sovereign LORD. Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live?” (Ezekiel 18:23) We reflect the will of the LORD when we are saddened by unbelief. We find no pleasure in someone dying without the knowledge of their Savior. We find no pleasure in those who refuse to see their sins against God when we point them to the Law. We don’t want to see people lost forever from God’s eternal kingdom of glory. Our great pleasure would be for every person to confess their sins against God and believe in the atoning blood of Jesus Christ, who sacrificed his body once for the sins of all (Hebrews 10:10).

³ R.D. Balge, “A Brief History of Evangelism in the Christian Church,” *WLQ*, vol. 76, no. 3, (July 1979), p. 258-259.

As these convictions grow in the evangelist's heart (that he wants everyone to be saved and that he takes no pleasure in the death of an unbeliever) there will also be a growing conviction to carry out this holy will of God by the means which God provides. Let us now consider the means which God provides for bringing all people to himself through us.

2. *Faith comes from hearing the messages and the message is heard through the word of Christ. (Romans 10:17)*

Thesis Two: As evangelists, we rely solely on the Word of God to convert people.

How do people come to faith? What can we do to bring them to faith? From the above passage we are given our parameters. We are to share a message with people. That message is defined for us in the word of Christ. That is the way the Holy Spirit works. Make the means available and he will work through it. Our Lutheran confessions speak of it in this manner:

God the Holy Ghost... does not effect conversion without means, but uses for this purpose the preaching and hearing of God's Word, as it is written in Romans 1:16: "The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth." Also Romans 10:17: "Faith cometh by hearing the Word of God." And it is God's will that His Word should be heard, and that man's ears should not be closed. Ps. 95,8. With this word the Holy Ghost is present, and opens hearts, so that they, as Lydia in Acts 16,14, are attentive to it, and are thus converted alone through the grace and power of the Holy Ghost, whose work alone the conversion of man is. For without His grace, and if He do not grant the increase, our willing and running, our planting and sowing, and watering, all are nothing, as Christ says John 15:5: Without Me ye can do nothing. With these brief words He denies to the free will its power, and ascribes everything to God's grace, in order that no one may boast before God. 1 Cor. 1:29; 2 Cor 12:5; Jer. 9:23. [F.C. Epitome; II. 3. (Triglotta p. 787)]

This portion of our Lutheran Confessions must be highlighted in our day because of the great unbelief in the power of the Holy Spirit to work through means. Much of the emphasis on church growth today comes from those who believe that having an experience or making a decision is the way God works in people. They don't place any confidence in the Means of Grace. Professor Valleskey offers this when asked about the key to effective growth:

A second key, as I see it, is to be thinking not so much in terms of the growth of the congregation as the growth of the Church, which is a far loftier objective. Thinking in terms of the growth of the Church will keep me from taking any short cuts, e.g., "quickie" Bible information classes, becoming soft on lodges, etc., that might lead to a bigger congregation, but won't contribute to the growth of the Church. Congregations can grow by all sorts of means (think, e.g., of the growth of Robert Schuller's Crystal Cathedral through a gospel-less power of positive thinking message); the Church grows only by *the* Means.

And Pastor Franzmann offers this brief summary of the keys to effective growth:

- 1) The Sunday Sermon. It *must* be worth coming for.
- 2) Visitation.
- 3) Bible Classes. Thoroughly prepared, plenty of application.

Professor Balge also points to the same in a paper entitled "A Brief History of Evangelism in the Christian Church":

The sin and grace orientation of our preaching, counseling, and witness is the sine qua non of true evangelism. The confidence in the authority of God's Word, the classes with large and small groups for the study of the Word, the publishing of helps for private study by lay persons are going to help Christians grow ...We have all learned to acknowledge that the results of our labor will come in God's good time, and understand that we may never see them in this life.⁴

Professor Spaude, in his commentary on Jonah, also reminds us what is effective in bringing people to faith:

We can learn a double lesson from Jonah's effective preaching. First, he was brief and to the point. He let the Word do the talking for him. He proclaimed God's law simply, directly, and with no holds barred. God does not trifle with sin but punishes it with his wrath and eternal judgment. Only when he realizes the severity of the law will the sinner be led to truly grieve over his sin and seek the Savior's forgiveness. Then Jonah proclaimed the gospel, again simply and directly. There is forgiveness with God because his Son died to pay for all sins. No further payment of any kind is demanded by God. No conditions are to be attached to the Gospel. Second, Jonah did not seek to draw attention to himself by his preaching. Note that once Jonah proclaimed his message, his name is not mentioned again in (the third) chapter (of Jonah). At this point he was no longer important. Accordingly, the account does not say, "The Ninevites believed Jonah." Jonah did his job well; he let God have all the glory. What an admirable quality in a preacher to impart to his hearer's God's message so fully and clearly that he himself recedes into the background.⁵

We rare to be simple preachers of the Word. If we are declaring it faithfully and fully to the people which God places along the path of our life, God will bring what he desires from it, as he reminds us through his prophet Isaiah:

As the rain and the snow come down from heaven,
and do not return to it without watering the earth
and making it bud and flourish,
so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater,
so is my word that goes out of my mouth:
It will not return to me empty,
but will accomplish what I desire
and achieve the purpose for which I sent it. (55:10-11)

God wants us to focus on preaching his Word faithfully to everyone that we meet. Our focus should always be on our faithfulness to the message of God, for through that means alone God brings the results which he desires. God does have a purpose for us in the callings which we have received. His great desire is that we should be faithful watchmen, warning the people about what we see coming: His great wrath; and imploring them to be reconciled to Him through Jesus Christ. Only the Word of God converts people. That is to be the focus of our ministry as evangelists.

As we have emphasized the Means by which God brings people into the church, let us now turn and sample some of the means by which God does not cause the church to grow.

⁴ R.D. Balge, *op. cit.*, vol 76, p. 259.

⁵ C.W. Spaude, *Obadiah, Jonah, Micah* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1987), p. 69.

Antithesis Two: As evangelists, we recognize no other means for bringing people to faith than the Word of God.

The reason for examining this antithesis is clear: There are many in our day who offer ways and means to enlarge our congregations. Do they have any merit? Are there any reasons to be concerned? What should we guard against? Of greatest importance today is the Church Growth movement, founded by Donald A. McGavran, and furthered at Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, California. Professor Ernst Wendland offers this summary of Church Growth Theology:

- Church Growth is primarily faithfulness to God, who commands us to find the lost. Quantitative expansion is the top priority item of “church business.”
- Mission (in a narrow sense) is an enterprise devoted to proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ and to persuading men to become his disciples. Some churches wish to do mission work by means of “search theology,” proclaiming the Word everywhere by word and deed, without regard for results. This, however, is not what God wants. The Lord wants his followers to have “harvest theology.” The number of found people are important to him. We must search, find, persuade and harvest!
- In 1964 there were 42,000 Protestant missionaries serving the cause of missions. But there was little growth in world mission fields. Too little attention was given to growth results.
- For effective work we must aim for measurable growth. A numerical approach is essential, since the church is made up of countable people. Such an approach requires a careful study of all the circumstance involved: membership statistics; results of other churches working in a given area; manner of growth over a period of years (whether by birth, transfer, conversion); causes of growth (radio, literature, revival, political climate, use of national workers, etc.). Study with graphs in hand!
- We hinder an understanding of church growth by confusing “perfecting” with “discipling.” The Great Commission makes a distinction here. First disciple by an initial thrust, aimed to achieve rapid, quantitative growth. Then perfect, that is, nurture in the faith to achieve qualitative growth. While both areas are important for the growth of the church, each requires its own kind of strategy in order to achieve maximum results. All too often too much effort has been expended in concentrating on the few who have been won rather than on the many who still need to be won.
- We should occupy fields of low receptivity “lightly” as far as expending mission effort is concerned!
In the final analysis one must use every available resource in order to answer two questions: [1] What factors and methods yield successful growth and [2] which ones retard such growth? Missionary organizations will constantly review their priorities in the light of church growth principles in order to ascertain which programs are to be given maximum support.⁶

Many of the concerns that I have had over the methods of evangelism which have been advocated in the recent years have been addressed in an excellent paper by Pastor Robert Koester entitled: “Law and Gospel in The Church Growth Movement.” One of his conclusions merits our consideration:

The conclusion I have come to after reading a good chunk of the Church Growth library is that Donald McGavran’s basic principles lead to a ministry that to a greater or lesser extent revolves around the social Gospel. While the “homogeneous units” and “people movements” might

⁶ E.H. Wendland, “Church Growth Theology,” *WLQ*, vol. 78, no. 2, (April 1981), p. 108 109.

appear to be “neutral” ideas, the underlying nature of those principles cannot be separated from a way of doing evangelism that uses the subject’s human needs, and avoids creating a need through the Law, and solving that need with Christ’s forgiveness. While we might observe the validity of “homogeneous units” and “people movements” in our mission work, a missiology that wraps itself up in these principles will tend toward advocating the use of the social sciences as its means at the expense of the means of grace. The only difference between Church Growth social gospel and Liberal Social gospel, is that to the Liberal the social gospel is his gospel, while to the Church Growth advocate, the social gospel is used as a tool to get a person to a point where he can hear the real Gospel.⁷

Should we be using the social concerns of people to bring people to the point where they will hear the Gospel message? Let us turn to the Holy Scriptures and see a time when Jesus was faced with just such a question:

Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. “The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!”... Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority... (Then Jesus casts an evil spirit out of a man.) The people were... amazed. The people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon possessed. The whole town gathered at the door.... Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. Simon and his companions went to look for him, and when they found him, they exclaimed: “Everyone is looking for you!” Jesus replied, “Let us go somewhere else to the nearby villages so I can preach there also. That is why I have come.” (Mk. 1:14-39)

Why did Jesus come? To preach. Did he use his abilities to affect the social conditions of people to preach the Gospel message? No. In fact, though he did have compassion on them, he realized that addressing social needs prevented him from doing the work he came to do. There is no biblical support for using social needs as a means for presenting the Gospel. In fact, to me, this portion of God’s Word points out the pitfalls in doing so.

But doesn’t the Bible encourage us to use any means to save people in 1 Cor. 9:19-22? Because much of what is done today in the name of evangelism is done on the authority of this passage of Scripture, let us briefly examine it:

Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God’s law but am under Christ’s law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. (1 Cor. 9:19-22)

The key to understanding this passage is verse 22: “To the weak I became weak, to win the weak.” Does the word “win” here mean “to convert to faith”? Of course it can’t. A weak person must already be a believer. Therefore, there must be a different meaning to the word “win.” Looking at the Greek we discover the word *kerdh/sw*. This word can mean “to bring to faith” as in 1 Peter 3:1. However it can also mean “to make a profit,” which in the case of money means to gain interest on the principle, or in the case of weak believers, to

⁷ R. Koester, “Law and Gospel in the Church Growth Movement,” p. 27.

strengthen them. Therefore, let's substitute "strengthen" in the place of "win" in the above passage. And let's use "preserve" in the place of "save" (1 Timothy 4:16). Then this passage would not support any efforts to convert people. It would refer only to the efforts we make following their conversion to strengthen them. This is clearly supported by the context of 1 Corinthians, especially chapter 8. We go beyond the clear words of the Scriptures when we apply this passage to support any and every possible means to get people to hear the Gospel message. Jesus recognized this. We ought to recognize this also. Jesus has sent us out to preach repentance and forgiveness of sins to all nations in his name. Let us not get caught up in addressing felt needs other than the need for forgiveness, reconciliation, and assurance. We can make things worse for people if our goal of preaching the Gospel deteriorates into reforming the outward lives of people through the threats of the Law, while failing to use that Law to lead people to see their sins against God and their need for their Savior, Jesus Christ (Mt. 23:15).

Another danger of the Church Growth movement which we must guard against is in the area of goal setting. To understand the concern better, let us consider a few of the statements made by Donald McGavran from the above summary: "The number of found people are important to [the Lord].... For effective work we must aim for **measurable growth**. A numerical approach is essential, since the church is made up of countable people." The church is made up of those people who have repented of their sins and believe that Jesus Christ is their Savior. The church cannot be seen here, nor can it be counted. We simply know that the church is where the Word of God is preached and the Sacraments are properly administered. Certainly we can and should set goals for ourselves in our areas of responsibility (e.g., time spent in study of the Word, in sharing that Word with people both inside and outside of the Church, in feeding the sheep and seeking the lost sheep). The reason the Reformed have a "harvest theology" (search, find, persuade and harvest), is because they have no confidence in the Means of Grace to convert. They have to persuade, because the Holy Spirit doesn't work through the Word as far as they are concerned. They need to set goals for themselves in the numbers converted because the responsibility for conversion rests in their abilities. As confessional Lutherans, we do have confidence in the Holy Spirit, and his ability to convert through the Word. Why set goals for God when it is up to God to do with the Word as he sees fit? He'll achieve the purpose for which he sends it (Isaiah 55:11), the in gathering of the elect. That number is already set. It has been since the creation of the world (Ephesians 1:4). Ours is the great privilege of calling on people to repent of their sins and believe in the forgiveness of sins won for them through the blood of Jesus Christ. Our responsibility is to call the elect. As with the people in Acts 2, those who accept the message we preach will gather around the apostles' teaching, the fellowship, the breaking of bread and prayer. We will never be able to count the elect, neither here (Luke 17:20-21) nor in heaven (Rev. 7:9). Ours is to proclaim the, Word. It is God's responsibility to convert through the Word we proclaim. We are simply to be the instruments through which God works. God is still the efficient cause of the conversion of people. God has told us to go and preach the word to people. They will listen (Acts 28:28).

To lay an extraordinary emphasis on numbers is to create a pressure that will cause us to stray from the faith. Even those outside of our confessional fellowship recognize that danger:

The situation (declining membership) cannot but represent a challenge to evangelistically minded and theologically responsible Christians and churches. For one thing, such reactions reflect fear and panic on the part of many church leaders. For another, they reveal a tendency toward simplistic analyses and reductionistic solutions. Above all, they disclose two equally dangerous pitfalls. There is, on the one hand, the danger of becoming so deterministic in one's view of the church and its missional possibilities that one ends up giving up far too soon on some (numerically stagnant) churches or oversupplying with resources other (successfully growing) churches. On the other hand, there is the peril of becoming so entrepreneurial that one will do

literally anything to grow a church, including selling down the river the basic tenets of the Christian faith.⁸

When we do set goals for what we expect God to work through us, we run the risk of falling into the depression which Elijah knew after his big end impressive mesa media event (1 Kings 79:10: “I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.”); or we run the risk of pride, the sin into which David fell (2 Samuel 24:10 “David was conscience stricken after he had counted the fighting men, and he said to the LORD, “I have sinned greatly in what I have done. Now, O LORD, I beg you, take away the guilt of your servant. I have done a very foolish thing.”) In the case of Elijah, the LORD reminded him that his strength wasn’t in big outward events but in the Word (1 Kings 19:12), and that he ought to go back and minister to the elect (v.18). In the case of David, he took responsibility for his wrong action, and repented of it.

Another issue to which this leads is the matter of persuasiveness. Donald McGavran, as noted above, believes it is our responsibility to persuade people to believe in Jesus as their Savior (Mission is an enterprise devoted to proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ and to persuading men to become his disciples). Recent issues of TELL have also called on us to be persuasive:

Christians today must rely on the only thing which changes hearts, the gospel of our Jesus. But we should also by convincing argument and persuasion make sure it is really the gospel which is heard.

Once believers in Corinth heard both from God’s apostle. Paul wrote, “Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men.” (TELL, Summer 1987, p. 1)

We have in St. Paul the model of tireless, persuasive “ingenuity” in bringing the Gospel to people repeatedly. (TELL, Winter 1988, p. 2)

The same encouragement was also given at our most recent Synod convention:

God given ability to persuasively engage strangers in sin and grace conversation will surface most readily in relational witnessing and invitation outreach though such a spiritual gift may be recognized apart from these every believer levels of evangelism equipping. (That boldness and persuasiveness are not the same as manipulative should be apparent in verses such as: Colossians 4:5 6, 1 Peter 3:15b, 2 Corinthians 4:2, 1 Thessalonians 2:36, Acts 4:29 31, Acts 19:8 and 28:23, 2 Corinthians 5:11.) (Proceedings, 1987, p. 277)

Certainly the above passages encourage us to be bold in our Gospel witness. And they do encourage us to be persuasive in some areas, but none of them support persuading people to believe in the Gospel. We do not have to persuade or convince people of the Gospel. The Holy Spirit grants repentance (2 Timothy 2:25). Perhaps persuading people to believe the Gospel, while not directly supported by Scripture, can be allowed as a matter of adiaphron. Does Scripture have anything to say as to the matter of persuading people to believe the Gospel message? Not only does Scripture not support being persuasive in our efforts to convert people, it expressly speaks against it:

When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling.

⁸ O. Costas, “A Wholistic Concept of Church Growth,” *Exploring Church Growth*, (Shenk, Wilbert R., ed.) (Grand Rapids: Eerdmann Publishing, 1983), p. 96.

My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power. (1 Corinthians 2:1-5)

Professor David Kuske offers the following commentary in connection with these verses:

The method you use to convey this message [of reconciliation] is not gimmicks or games or verbal gymnastics of your own devising. No, yours is a ministry established by God which begins and ends with the Word. With Paul we say, "I am not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God" (Romans 1:16), and (1 Corinthians 2:1-5) "When I came to you brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified... My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power." And this message you do not speak mechanically but with an inner conviction which makes every word you speak a concerned appeal: "Be reconciled to God!"⁹

"For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified." (1 Cor. 2:2). "Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God... It is because of [God] that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: 'Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.'" (1 Cor. 1:22-24, 30-31) We are limited in our work as evangelists to the message of Jesus Christ and him crucified as the sole means for bringing people to faith. Faith comes solely from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ (Romans 10:17). We have no other means, nor dare we rely on any other, lest the faith of the person we are involved in converting rests on our wisdom. Their faith is to rest on God's power, which is found alone in the Word.

When we don't rely solely on the Word of God, but we begin being concerned about the felt needs of the people we are trying to reach, we start down a trail that has a disastrous ending. Consider the following: Success is the name of the game today, not only out there in the world, but inside the church as well. Paul's inspired declaration that Christ "emptied himself, taking the form of a bond servant... [and] humbled himself by becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross (Philippians 2:7,8) is now explained by Robert Schuller, in the context of today's success oriented world, to mean:

Jesus knew his worth, his success fed his self esteem... He suffered the cross to sanctify his self-esteem. And he bore the cross to sanctify your self-esteem. And the cross will sanctify the ego trip.

Success and self esteem have become so important in the church that they seem to over shadow everything else. Robert Schuller states: "A person is in hell when he has lost his self esteem." What does Schuller find wrong with the old gospel? Although Paul wrote that "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (1 Timothy 1:15), and Christ Himself said that He came to call "sinners to repentance" (Luke 5:32), Robert Schuller writes:

I don't think anything has been done in the name of Christ and under the banner of Christianity that has proven more destructive to human personality, and hence,

⁹ D. Kuske, "'Objective Justification' in Our Mission Outreach based on An Exegesis of 2 Corinthians 5:18 19," *WLQ*, vol. 77, no. 4, (January 1980), p. 26.

counterproductive to the evangelism enterprise than the often crude, uncouth, and unchristian strategy of attempting to make people aware of their lost and sinful condition.¹⁰

Robert Schuller came to this conviction because he went out and surveyed his neighborhood to determine what their needs were. He found that they wanted to hear about self esteem. They wanted to hear a positive message. They didn't want to hear that they were sinful. To which Jesus replies: "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." (Luke 5:31-32) Let those who want to hear that they aren't sinners go to those who will tell them what their itchy ears want to hear. We are here to call people sinners, remembering that we are sinners ourselves, and to call on them to believe that Christ Jesus died for their sins and ours. Success theology has no room for why Jesus really died. It attempts to remove the offense of the cross. It does not want to lead people to say, "My sins did this to you, Jesus." It does not want to see that the wages of sin is death. How can those who will not preach that the wages of sin is death have any appreciation for the gift of God, which is eternal life in Christ Jesus, our Lord? (Romans 6:23)

Let us stick to preaching the Word, for only through the clear division and application of Law and Gospel in our efforts as evangelists will the lost be won.

3. Through the law we have the knowledge of sin. (Romans 3:31)

Thesis Three: As evangelists, we recognize that only the Law of God will lead people to repent of their sins and realize their need for a Savior.

It becomes very tempting as an evangelist to talk about anything else other than a person's faults. Especially when he meets them for the first time. Especially when he wants them to join his congregation. But let us see what the Scriptures have to offer in the way of presenting the Law to people.

In the case of Jonah, to whom we have already referred, he certainly didn't take time to develop a relationship with the "hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left." (Jonah 4:11) He simply proclaimed the message which God gave to him, "Forty more days and Nineveh will be destroyed." (3:4) This gives us a good insight into the power of God's Word. Despite the fact that this might have seemed the worst thing to say to the powerful and ruthless Ninevites, who would have dust as well flayed a person alive as listen to him, it worked! Calling people to repent of their sins worked then and it can work today. In fact it is the only means we should be using. I am thankful that more and more simple presentations of Law and Gospel are coming from our Synod's Commission on Evangelism. As evangelists, we ought to take the message of the Law to people, which calls them sinners, and call on them to confess their sins to God. True, we are to do this gently (Galatians 6:2), but we are not to be such diplomats about telling people that they are on the road to hell that they actually look forward to the trip. God reminds us in the book of Leviticus, "Do not hate your brother in your heart. Rebuke your neighbor frankly so you will not share in his guilt." (19:17)

Or we can consider Jesus, when a ruler came up to him and asked, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

"Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good except God alone. You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother.'"

"All these I have kept since I was a boy," he said.

When Jesus heard this, he said to him, "You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

When he heard this, he became very sad, because he was a man of great wealth. (Luke 18:18-23)

¹⁰ D. Hunt & T.A. McMahan, *The Seduction of Christianity*. (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers, 1985), pp. 14-15.

Notice the first truth to which Jesus draws this man: “No one is good except God alone.” In our presentations of the Law, we present it remembering that we ourselves have sinned mightily against God and are deserving of nothing but his wrath and eternal punishment. And we ought not be afraid of freely admitting to people that we are sinners. We tell them that this is not a reason for great pride on our part, but that we believe what Scripture says about us, “All have sinned,” (Romans 3:23) and we tell them what we know we deserve because of our sins against God: “The wages of sin is death.” (Romans 6:23) If we cannot confess that about ourselves, how can we ever hope to lead others to confess their sins and trust in Jesus Christ? Though the conversion of other people does not depend on our faith, we can speak from our own recognition of sinfulness within ourselves. (1 John 1:8-10)

Then, when the man does not recognize that he has sinned against God, Jesus points him more specifically to the Law by telling him, “Sell everything you have and give to the poor.” Again we notice that Jesus did not tell the man, “Your dreams, your goals, your success are important to us... Come to me and you can experience a life changing relationship.” He pointed the ruler to his sinful nature. Jesus preached the law and then let the law take its course. He found out where the ruler was at by pointing him to the Ten Commandments. If the ruler had acknowledged that he was a sinner, Jesus would have preached to him the forgiveness of his sins. As it was, Jesus left him with the law, for the law is what he needed.

Or consider the Apostle Paul when he presented God’s Word to the Athenians. Did Paul use an understanding of his audience to tailor his message? Yes. The first thing he recognized was that Athenians did not believe in the resurrection of the dead (Acts 17:32), he began to preach the good news about Jesus and the resurrection (Acts 17:18). As we go about our communities, we will soon recognize the greatest sins of the community. We know that there is great disregard for God’s gift of life (abortion), there is a great love of material possessions, and a great disregard for God’s word about sexual relations outside of marriage. It is through clear presentations of the Law of God that people receive the knowledge that sins are damnable and deserving of the wrath of God.

Antithesis Three: As evangelists, we recognize that no one will be struck with terror over their sins by the love of God found in the Gospel.

Dr. C.F.W. Walther addresses this clearly in his XI Thesis on the proper distinction between Law and Gospel when he says:

In the seventy place, the Word of God is not rightly divided when there is a disposition to offer the comfort of the Gospel only to those who have been made contrite by the Law, not from fear of the wrath and punishment of God, but from the love of God.

An unconverted person who claims that he loves God is stating an untruth and is guilty of a miserable piece of hypocrisy, though he may not be conscious of it. He sets up a specious claim, because only faith in the Gospel regenerates a person. Accordingly, a person cannot love God while he is still without faith. To demand of a poor sinner that he must, from love of God, be alarmed on account of his sins and feel sorry for them is an abominable perversion of Law and Gospel.

Here the Biblical doctrine: The sinner is to come to Jesus just as he is, even when he has to acknowledge that there is nothing but hatred of God in his heart, and he knows of no refuge to which he may flee for salvation. A genuine preacher of the Gospel will show such a person how easy his salvation is: Knowing himself a lost and condemned sinner and unable to find the help that he is seeking, he must come to Jesus with his evil heart and his hate of God and God’s Law; and Jesus will receive him as he is. It is His glory that men say of Him: Jesus receives sinners. He is not to become a different being, he is not to become purified, he is not to amend his

conduct, before coming to Jesus. He who alone is able to make him a better man is Jesus; and Jesus will do it for him if he will only believe.¹¹

Do not forget, my dear friends, that there is but one way to arrive at true faith... There is no other way to faith than that which leads through a person's knowledge of his sin and damnable condition, through the inward crushing of his heart in contrition and sorrow. A person that has not come to faith by this way is not a believing Christian, much less a theologian.¹²

Certainly our primary goal in being evangelists is to tell the people the good news that Jesus died for them, and that their sin are forgiven. There is only one thing that will lead a person to desire that forgiveness: The realization that he is a sinner. That realization comes only from God, who grants repentance. God only works through the law to work that repentance. God's love found in the Gospel message does not work that repentance. God's love reflected through us does not work that repentance. Nothing other than God working through the Law will work repentance in a sinner's heart. The most loving and caring thing we can do is to gently and firmly share the law with people, not doubting, but firmly believing that through the law people receive the knowledge of their sins.

4. For Christ's love compels Mgt because we are convinced that one died for all and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. (2 Corinthians 5:14-15)

Thesis Four: As evangelists, we recognize that only the Gospel works devotion to the Word of God.

What wonderful and glorious news! He died for me! He was raised far me! Though I deserved eternal death, God in his unfathomable love and mercy has given me the forgiveness of my sins through this great gift. I praise God for this indescribable gift of his Son. He died for my sins, and he was raised to life again, which guarantees to me this message: NOT GUILTY! But God, when I have done so many horrible sins against you, when, by breaking the law in one point, I am guilty of all, how can you have forgiven me?

Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!

How unsearchable his judgments,
and his paths beyond tracing out!

Who has known the mind of the Lord?

Or who has been his counselor?

Who has ever given to God

that God should repay him?

For from him and through him end to him are all things.

To him be the glory forever! (Romans 11:33-36)

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this:

While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)

Why do we desire to remain a doctrinally sound confessional church in both word and deed? Why are maintaining our confessional principles so important to us even if they may seem to hinder our growth? Simon Peter gives us our answer: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God." (John 6:68-69) The focus of our church is not to be positive or negative, optimistic or pessimistic. The focus of our church is not on our doctrinal soundness. The focal point of the church is to be on the forgiveness of sins. That forgiveness of sins has been won solely by Jesus (Acts 4:12).

¹¹ C.F.W. Walther. *The Proper Distinction between Law and Gospel*. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House) p. 236-237.

¹² *Ibid.* p. 235-236.

There is no other savior beside him. There is no where else to go. Jesus Christ, and the forgiveness of sins which he brings, always must be the focal point of the church. As has often been said, the church stands and falls on the doctrine of justification. Unless there is faith in Jesus Christ, which is worked through the preaching of repentance and forgiveness of sins, no one will love God's Word.

It is that Gospel message which works devotion to the Word of God. We see God's great love for us in Christ crucified, and we no longer want to live for ourselves. We want to live for him who died for us and was raised again. We want to be Easter Christians, rejoicing in the angel's message, "He is risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him." (Mark 16:6) Because this good news works such great love in our hearts, we come to Jesus and ask, "How can I show you that I love you?" "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free," Jesus replies to his disciples still today. We hold so tenaciously to Jesus' teaching because it is there that we learn that we are sinners, and that we have been forgiven. There we learn that the wages of sin is death, and that the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus, our Lord. It is the Gospel message which works that devotion to all of God's Word. It is the Gospel message which convinces us that the Bible is the verbally inspired Word of God. It is the Gospel message which convinces us that God works through his Law to bring sinners to repentance. It is the Gospel message which convinces us that only the Gospel will cause people to devote themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. It is the salvation we see by faith, the light which has opened our eyes, which causes us and others to be devoted to the apostles' teaching. In Jesus Christ and him crucified we have new life. That is why we strive as evangelists to know nothing but Christ and him crucified among the people to whom God has sent us.

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good. (Titus 2:11-14)

Antithesis Four: As evangelists, we recognize no other means for calling on people to be devoted to God and his Word than the Gospel.

Professor Kuske says it well:

And what motivates me to obey? Fear of punishment if I don't obey? No, I fear no punishment from my Redeemer. Reward for obedience? No, I already have heaven as my home. A sense of indebtedness? Oh, I know I could never even begin to pay him back for what he has done for me. What then? Simply love. With Paul we say, "Christ's love compels us." His sacrificial love dwelling in my heart by faith has made a whole new creation of me. The love which he had for all men when he died for them surrounds me and guides me in all I do. With Paul in his words of Galatians 2, I say I am, "in Christ" and "Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me."

Objective justification provides the motivation for mission outreach: It provides us with a whole new view of our lives which moves us gladly and willingly in thanks to serve as his instruments in bringing the gospel to all men.¹³

What does objective justification mean for a missionary from the Wisconsin Synod of our day? It motivates you also in two ways. It leads you to look beyond the flock entrusted to your care to see all those in your community who are unchurched or who are being misled by non Christian

¹³ D. Kuske, "'Objective Justification' in Our Mission Outreach based on An Exegesis of 2 Corinthians 5:18 19," *WLQ*, vol. 72, no. 4, (January 1980), p. 22.

teachers as souls to be won for Christ. You do not regard anyone from a worldly point of view ([2 Cor. 5:]16), such as sex, age, wealth social status, etc. No, you see only souls bought by the blood of Christ which ere losing the benefit of this blessing through ignorance and unbelief. You are also motivated by objective justification in this way that it gives you according to your new roan a whole new view of the purpose of your life. To be sure you will not neglect your wife and children, for they are gifts God has given you to appreciate and to care for but the greatest treasure you have is the knowledge that Jesus died for you and that in him you are a totally new creation. Therefore, you no longer can live for yourself but for him who died for you and rose again ([2 Cor. 5:]15). He has given you the special privilege of being a public minister of his Word and it is Christ's love in you, which compels you to share it with all men.¹⁴

It is in the application of this love of Christ that we must be the most watchful as evangelists. It is very tempting to motivate with anything other than the love of Christ. The love of Christ takes time to grow in people, whereas if we appeal to the old Adam in some way, external results are much quicker. But we are not to appeal to anything else other than the love of Christ in calling on people to be devoted to God and his Word. We do not hold out faith as a means to financial success, for that can lead people to think they are believing in God, when they are really worshipping money. The devil can also seemingly grant the world to people (Mt. 4:8). Jesus still says to those who would be his disciples: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Mt. 16:24-26) The Christian's life is one marked by denying ourselves the sinful pleasures this world has to offer, taking up our cross and following him. I am well aware that such a message does not appeal to the people of this day and age, but then, I am not a worshipper of the gods of this age. Christ's love compels me to preach repentance and forgiveness of sins in his name to all nations (Luke 24:47). That's not a popular message for evangelists, but then we aren't running for a public office.

If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

As God's fellow workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain. For he says, "In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you." I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation. (1 Corinthians 5:17-6:2)

The Gospel is the only means, and by far the best means, to call on people to be devoted to God and his Word. Nothing else can even come close to replacing the message of sins forgiven as the moving force behind people devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching.

We will maintain our confessional principles and an effective evangelism outreach if we remember to preach repentance and forgiveness of sins in Jesus' name to all nations, and we remember God's promise as we preach his Word:

It will not return to me empty,
but will accomplish what I desire
and achieve the purpose for which I sent it. (Isaiah 55:12)

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

In connection with this paper, I would like to share with you a met of questions developed by the LC-MS Commission on Theology and Church Relations. I view them as a starting point for evaluating the many programs which we are offered. I believe we ought to be asking these questions of every evangelism program we are using or plan to use:

Guidelines for Evaluating Evangelism Programs:

- A. Does the program or technique suggest approaching the unconverted first with the Gospel rather than seeking to discover whether the person has a knowledge of his or her sin and lost condition without Christ?
- B. Does the program or technique present the Gospel in a way that suggests that human beings have the ability within themselves to make a decision for Christ rather than that faith comes through the operation of the Holy Spirit?
- C. Does the program or technique either directly or indirectly, focus attention on what is taking place within the individual rather than on what took place on the cross of Jesus Christ? Does it tend to regard the presence of certain extraordinary or even ordinary gifts of the Spirit as a basis for certainty of forgiveness and salvation? Does it foster the impression that faith is a good work that merits God's favor?
- D. Does this program or technique suggest that there are at least three categories of people: unrepentant sinners, believers or those who have accepted Jesus as Savior but not as Lord, and disciples or those who have accepted Christ as both Lord and Savior?
- E. Does the program or technique give the impression, either directly or indirectly, that spiritual growth is always visible to the human eye and can therefore be measured by statistics and plotted on charts and graphs?
- F. Does this program or technique create the illusion that the acceptance of the Gospel by sinners is attributable to the use of this program or technique?
- G. Does this program or technique lead to the conclusion that the lack of positive results, when this occurs, is attributable solely to the way in which it was implemented?

When questions such as these must be answered in the affirmative, there is a confusion of sanctification with justification and a falling into works righteousness.¹⁵

With these questions in mind, let us briefly work on improving the recently suggested program, "The Phone's for You!"

Organizationally the program is fine. It presents an idea for reaching out to the community that I plan to implement. However, consider the following statement in the light of question G above:

The law of large numbers is a science and not just a game or a guess at what the results might be. It simply means that if we do A, B, & C, D will almost always result.

This program is built around the known fact that if we ask a large number of people to do a certain thing a predictable number of them will agree. This includes coming to church on a specific day.

The results are very accurate. The number of people who come to your opening service is directly related to the number of phone calls you make.

In light of question C. above, let's evaluate the following statements:

¹⁵ *Evangelism and Church Growth, with special reference to the Church Growth Movement*, A Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1987), p.48-49.

It's important to keep in mind that we are appealing to their senses and to their emotions. They have come to see if what we have to offer really meets their needs. It is your responsibility to assure that the quality of image and the excellence in performance is all that you want it to be. If you are expanding an existing church, it requires you to prepare the existing congregation to perform at a level that is commensurate with that image.

It is important to remember that you will keep the people the way that you win them.

The last statement points to the importance of winning people through the preaching of repentance and forgiveness of sins in Jesus' name, for that's what we want people to come to hear Sunday after Sunday.

The idea of sending out a four-week series of flyers is good, but in place of the series they suggest (Appendix A), how about a four-week series chosen from the flyers put out by our Synod's Commission on Evangelism? (Appendix B)

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