

# **The Doctrine Of Justification: The Foundation Of The Church's Life And Its Work**

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Our study today is a topic that has been the focus of much discussion in our synod these days. It's the doctrine of church and ministry. This is not something new. Discussions concerning church and ministry have been on the agenda of conferences, conventions, and intersynodical debates throughout the history of our synod. For example, in the middle of the 1800s church and ministry was the focal point of discussion as the Wisconsin and Missouri Synods combated the errors of Stephan and Grabau. Toward the end of the last century there was discussion about whether or not the parochial grade school teacher had a divine call like the pastor. At the turn of the century a discipline case in a Missouri Synod congregation in Cincinnati, Ohio, raised questions about whether or not a synod is church in the same sense as the local congregation is church. During the 1940s and 50s the question of military chaplaincy and the continuing debate about church fellowship brought church and ministry to the forefront of discussions again within the Synodical Conference which ended in the 1960s when the Wisconsin severed fellowship with the Missouri Synod. Within the last decade the doctrine of church and ministry has been on the agenda of our synod again as we wrestled with questions about new forms of the ministry and about the ordination of male teachers.

Perhaps the biggest reason why the doctrine of church and ministry has been the focus of renewed study in our synod is because of the influence the Church Growth Movement has exerted on churches in America. Although many papers and books have been written about the Church Growth Movement and although many, if not all of us, have already heard of and know some things about the Church Growth Movement, it's good for us to take a closer look at it. The reason for this is because of the old adage "all that glitters is not gold." The Church Growth Movement certainly has its glitter. But the question we want to answer is this, "Is there any real 'gold' in the Church Growth Movement that we can mine for our own use, or is using Church Growth techniques, methodologies, and buzzwords only chasing after fools gold?"

Answering this question will be the main goal of our study today. Time and space will not allow an in-depth study of either the doctrine of church and ministry or Church Growth. So let us review briefly the doctrine of church and ministry through the words of Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:18-21. Then on the basis of that review, we shall discuss briefly what the Church Growth Movement is and evaluate it.

Using 2 Corinthians 5:18-21 as our basis, let us proceed with our study today under this theme:

## **The Doctrine of Justification—The Foundation of the Church and Its Ministry!**

Why choose Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 5:18-21 to begin our study today? We begin our study with these words because they give a brief yet beautiful overview of what the Scriptures teach about the church and its ministry. Paul writes: "All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling us 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" (2 Cor 5:18-21).

The general subject matter of second Corinthians is "ministers of Christ." Yet note that in this summary the underlying foundation is the doctrine of justification. What is the doctrine of justification? The doctrine of justification reveals to us the amazing truth that by a forensic act, God declared the guilty "not guilty." This was accomplished by God through Christ Jesus. He did it by reconciling the world to himself.

In these verses Paul makes it very clear that God didn't need to be reconciled to man. Man was the guilty party which had broken faith with God. If God and man were to live together again in perfect harmony and peace, God would have to act on man's behalf. Man could not reconcile himself to God. God had to reconcile man to himself. He did it by "not counting men's sins against them."

The picture Paul paints with these words is that of an accounting process. In man's account there were only the debits of sin. But in an amazing act of love God made a transaction. He didn't just wipe man's slate clean and forget about that load of sin. God is holy and his justice demanded that the debt of sin be paid. So he took man's sin and charged it to the account of his own Son. Paul put it this way: "God made him who had no sin, to be sin for us." And what did God do to the one who was made sin for us? He struck him down. As Paul states in Romans 3:26: "God did this to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies the man who has faith in Jesus."

Jesus' death in our place is only half of the transaction which God performed in our behalf to reconcile us to himself. Through the death of his Son, God took away the guilt of our sin. But we needed more than just an absence of sin to be in heaven. We also needed righteousness. This too God has given to us. He not only took sin from our account and gave it to Christ, he also credited to our account the righteousness of Christ. We refer to this as "Christ's imputed righteousness."

This is the beautiful gospel message of justification which is the foundation of our faith. Christ accomplished reconciliation for the entire world. The status of every single human being has been changed. This is an objective fact whether or not one believes it or even knows about it. It is on the basis of this imputation of Christ's righteousness that we can confidently sing:

Jesus, your blood and righteousness  
My beauty are, my glorious dress  
Mid flaming worlds, in these arrayed  
With joy shall I lift up my head. CW 376 v.1

Does this mean then that every human being will be saved? Sad to say, no. Although Christ has accomplished reconciliation for all people, (Objective Justification), only those who come to faith personally receive and enjoy the blessings of reconciliation, namely life and salvation, (Subjective Justification). That is why Paul called upon the Corinthians, "Be reconciled to God." This is just another way of saying, "believe on the Lord Jesus."

Concerning the doctrine of justification, Article IV of the Augsburg Confession states: "Also they teach that men cannot be justified before God by their own strength, merits, or works, but are freely justified for Christ's sake, through faith, when they believe that they are received

into favor, and that their sins are forgiven for Christ's sake, who, by his death, has made satisfaction for our sins. This faith God imputes for righteousness in his sight."<sup>i</sup>

This now brings us to the matter of the doctrine of the church. What is the church? The church consists of all those who have been brought to faith in the Lord Jesus. And how does one come to faith? Only through the message of reconciliation does the Holy Spirit sanctify hearts, adding them to the invisible assembly of those who are being saved. "God was pleased through the foolishness of what we preached to save those who believe" (1 Cor. 1:21).

And where will believers, the Church, be found? Through the prophet Isaiah the Lord assured us that his word will not return to him empty or fail to achieve the purpose for which he sent it (Is. 55:10-11). And so we believe and teach that believers, the Church, will be found wherever the Gospel is proclaimed and the Sacraments rightly administered. These are the true marks of the Church. Our Lutheran forefathers put it this way in Article VII of the Augsburg Confession: "Also they teach that one holy Church is to continue forever. The Church is the congregation of saints, in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments are rightly administered."<sup>ii</sup>

The message of reconciliation is not only the source of the church's life, it is also the foundation of the church's ministry. Paul states: "... he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were hushing his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God" (2 Cor 5: 19b-20). Since it's through the message of reconciliation alone that the Holy Spirit creates and sustains saving faith in the heart, the ministry of the church must always be tied to the Word. For when hearts are brought to faith, the Holy Spirit is building the kingdom of God. This is how the church grows. Anytime the church attempts to do its saving work apart from the Word, it has stepped outside the bounds of the only means which God has entrusted to the church to carry out its ministry. Paul said, "he has committed to us the message of reconciliation." Why? So that we, like Paul, can proclaim to sinners, "Be reconciled to God."

Let us also note here that when we speak of the message of reconciliation, we speak of it in terms of the Gospel in the narrow sense. The Gospel's message, in the narrow sense, is the message of what Christ has done for us. He has reconciled us to God. But we also know that in order for this message to do its work in the human heart, the Law must do its work too. People must first know that they are sinners who deserve God's eternal condemnation. Once the Law has been applied, then the soothing balm of the Gospel is to be applied too! In an article from the *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Professor Richard Balge makes an important point that bears repeating about our work of applying the Law and the Gospel: "We know that there is more art than science in applying the messages of law and gospel, and that it is an art taught by the Holy Spirit. God grant that in all our work it is always evident that the work of the law is "alien" even when necessary."<sup>iii</sup>

And who is to share this message of reconciliation? To every believer Christ has entrusted the Word to share. This is what we call the priesthood of all believers. But to the church Christ has also given the public ministry. In behalf of a group of believers an individual or individuals are called to proclaim the message of reconciliation.

The role of public servants of the Word is described by Paul as being "ambassadors for Christ." An ambassador is someone who represents the king. His task is not to share his own ideas or opinions. It's to speak the words of the one he represents. The message which Christ's ambassadors are to proclaim is the message of reconciliation.

That preaching the message of reconciliation is the ministry which Christ has entrusted to his church, through which alone hearts are brought to faith, is clearly taught by our Lutheran forefathers. Article V of the Augsburg Confession states:

That we may obtain this faith, the ministry of teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted. For through the Word and Sacraments, the Holy Ghost is given, who works faith, where and when it pleases God, in them that hear the Gospel, to wit, that God, not for our own merits, but for Christ's sake, justifies those who believe that they are received into grace for Christ's sake.<sup>iv</sup>

Since we have made numerous references to what our forefathers have said about the doctrines of church and ministry, let us refer to them one more time. The reference deals with the doctrine with which we started, justification. Regarding justification, Article III of the Formula of Concord states:

The article concerning justification by faith is the *chief* article in the entire Christian doctrine, without which no poor conscience can have any firm consolation, or can truly know the riches of Christ's grace, as Dr. Luther also has written: If this only article remains pure on the battlefield, the Christian Church also remains pure, and in goodly harmony and without any sects; but if it does not remain pure, it is not possible that any error or fanatical spirit can be resisted.<sup>v</sup>

With such thoughts in mind, it is easy to see why Paul connected the doctrine of church and ministry so closely with the doctrine of justification. Like a thread that holds a garment together, the doctrine of justification weaves its way throughout the Bible. Cut the doctrine of justification in any way and the whole fabric of the Scriptures falls apart. That is why we maintain that justification is the foundation of the church's life and its work. It is against this background that we wish to take

### **A Look At The Church Growth Movement.**

We begin with the most obvious question. What is the Church Growth Movement? Simply put, Church Growth is a philosophy about how to do church work. Its main goal or objective is to make the church grow in numbers. Its advocates believe that if one follows the strategies and methodologies of Church Growth, one will experience "success" in growth.

From where did Church Growth come? Although the Church Growth Movement rises out of Reformed theology, which is an important point to underscore, it cannot be associated with any one denomination. Its strategies and methodologies are being incorporated by many churches. To think that it has not touched our synod, for better or worse, would be rather naive.

The father of Church Growth is a man by the name of Donald McGavran. Concerned about the slow growth of churches in the mission field where he served, he tried to find out why some churches grow and others do not. In 1955 he published his findings in a book entitled *The Bridges of God*. In 1970 he came out with a more definitive work on church growth in a book entitled *Understanding Church Growth*. About that same time he became the Dean of Fuller Theological Seminary's School of World Missions. There he was joined by C. Peter Wagner and

together they taught the gospel of church growth to Win Arn. Another prominent name that is often listed among the “founding fathers” of Church Growth is Lyle Schaller.

Again, time and space will not allow us to go into great detail about the Church Growth Movement. So for our purposes today, we will take a brief look at and make a brief evaluation of some of its main principles, methodologies, and terminology.

### **“Church Growth is the Will of God”**

One of the main concepts of Church Growth is that *church growth is the will of God*. This, perhaps, is the fundamental principle of Church Growth on which all the others are built. In other words, since God wants all to be saved, the church’s primary goal is to add people to the visible church on earth. A man by the name of Arthur Glasser, a close co-worker of McGavran, has this to say about God’s will for the church:

God wills the growth of his church ...Only through the deliberate multiplication of vast numbers of new congregations all over the world will the church be able to evangelize this generation. When she ceases to perform this mission, something fundamental is lost in her very essence as the people of God in the midst of the nations. The church that does not grow is out of the will of God.<sup>vi</sup>

Certainly, we would agree that it is God’s will that all people be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth. And we certainly believe that Christ’s commission to his church is to make disciples of all nations. But it seems, as one reads more and more of Church Growth material, that “growth” for the sake of “growth” almost becomes one of the marks of the church. However as we read in the Augsburg Confession, the true marks of the church are the Gospel and the Sacraments. If ever we lose sight of this fundamental truth, it can draw our attention away from the real priorities of our work. The work of the church is to preach the good news of justification through which souls are added to the Holy Christian Church.

Professor David Valleskey from our Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary makes a valid evaluation concerning the danger of Church Growth’s emphasis on adding people to the membership list rather than preaching the Word of God. He writes:

Though this does not appear to be the intention of the Church Growth practitioners, you will note a shift in emphasis from creating faith to creating church members. With this shift, this altered goal, comes a corresponding shift in means to accomplish this goal. Now the primary question is no longer: What is needed to bring this person out of darkness into light? out of death into life? out of hostility against God into peace and friendship with God? Instead the question is: What can we do to make our church—its buildings and grounds, its people, its programs—as attractive as possible as to bring more people in?<sup>vii</sup>

### **“Harvest Theology”**

Another principle of Church Growth is that if the church wants to grow it must endorse a *harvest theology, not a search theology*. What the advocates of Church Growth mean by this

principle is that a church should be seeking to do mission work where the greatest potential for growth is.

Closely connected with the harvest principle is the concept of *receptive people*. McGavran defines receptive people as a segment of society “friendly to the idea of becoming Christian.”<sup>viii</sup> Therefore, one should test various areas to find out where people are most receptive to the gospel, and then direct efforts there to harvest greater numbers.

There is certainly some common sense in this harvest principle. In determining what missions fields to enter, doesn't our synod also take into account the potential for the greatest Gospel work? But there are two obvious concerns about the Church Growth harvest principle. First of all, our function as ambassadors for Christ is simply to sow and water the seed. God is the one who grants the increase and he is the one who harvests!

Another concern is the matter of receptive people friendly to the idea of becoming a Christian. This concept of Church Growth reveals its theological roots. As we stated before, Church Growth has risen out of “reformed soil.” According to Reformed theology, man's nature was not totally corrupted by the fall. There is still a remnant of moral goodness in man that makes him able to be kindly disposed to the Gospel. This is entirely contrary to what the Bible teaches about the nature of man. In Ephesians 2:1 Paul writes, “As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sin.” By nature man is spiritually dead and, as such, wholly incapable of choosing to believe in Christ or be receptive to the Gospel.

If one were to buy into this receptive people idea, that would totally destroy the Gospel. As we heard earlier, Paul stated, “*all this is from God.*” When it comes to our justification, man plays no part. God has done it all. God sent his Son. God's Son paid our debt. God's Holy Spirit revealed this glorious truth in the Bible and creates the faith in our hearts to believe it.

### “Discipling”

Another principle of Church Growth is that *discipling is primary, perfecting is secondary*. The basic premise of this principle is that one should not demand too much from people before baptizing them and taking them into the church. The important thing is simply getting them into the church and then later giving them further instruction. Such an approach, according to Church Growth advocates, would help the church grow more quickly.

Since *discipling* is such an important concept in Church Growth, it's important to define what its advocates mean by *discipling and disciple*. According to Church Growth, there are three identifying marks of a disciple. First, one must believe in Jesus Christ. Secondly, one must agree to be obedient to the Lord. And thirdly, one must be an active responsible church member. Listen to the following statements by Wagner on what a disciple is:

In order to become a disciple one has to agree to obey Jesus from that point on. It means Jesus is Lord as well as Savior ... The test used through the years by the Church Growth Movement is responsible church membership. A person's commitment to Christ may be invisible, but the same person's commitment to the Body of Christ is visible and measurable. The two commitments should not be separated. If a person who professes to be a Christian is not a responsible church member, I need at least to raise questions about the validity of the profession.<sup>ix</sup>

There is certainly some truth to what Wagner says about responsible church membership. We look at attendance at church and communion and offerings as a gauge for the spiritual health of our members. But again, there is something wrong with the emphasis Church Growth places on “discipleship.” Notice the confusion of justification and sanctification. According to Church Growth, obedience to Christ becomes the cause of one’s right relationship with Christ, not the result, a part of faith rather than a fruit of faith.

### “Felt Needs”

Another key issue in Church Growth is the *felt needs* approach to evangelism. According to the *felt needs* strategy, one must find the needs that people have and then fill them. The hope is that if people’s needs, real or perceived, can be met by the church, we can harvest them for God. Wagner defines a felt need in this way: “The conscious wants and desires of a person; considered to be an opportunity for Christian response which stimulates within the person a receptivity to the gospel.”<sup>x</sup>

According to this strategy, if you can fill the need of an individual then that person would be more receptive to hearing the gospel. For example, if a person suffers from loneliness, grief, marriage or financial problems, all we have to do is help them with that need and they will be more receptive to hearing the Gospel. Listen to how several Church Growth authors explain this concept in more detail:

The church that discovers where people are hurting and meets that need in the name of and with the message of Jesus Christ deserves to succeed. The big question is not, How can we get these people to accept the message? That is the wrong question! The big question is, Where are these people conscious of pain and how is Jesus Christ good news to that situation? What can we do to heal the open wounds and throbbing aches of the people in our community?<sup>xi</sup>

Again, there is a grain of truth in what is being said here. God’s people will want to do good to all people, especially those of the household of faith. Yet, there is a danger in buying into this strategy. What the felt needs in Church Growth strategy can do is to lead to a socialization of the Gospel and to rob the sinner of what he/she really needs. Professor Valleskey’s thoughts on this danger are worth noting:

The Gospel thus becomes a band-aid to cover up a minor sore, leaving the gaping wound untouched. The real problem—sin, alienation from God—has not been exposed and the real Gospel, the good news of full and free forgiveness won by Jesus, has not been proclaimed. The person might well conclude that all is now right between him and God because he now feels better about his problem. According to the Church Growth felt needs approach ... one would leap right from “problems” to “solutions,” thus eliminating both law and gospel. The “gospel” simply becomes the solution to the many problems of life rather than the solution to the problem. Perhaps, because the term “felt needs” is being widely used in this way and thus open to misunderstanding, it would be advisable for us not to use it and simply talk about the need to find a point of contact or an opening which can provide an opportunity to verbalize law and gospel.<sup>xii</sup>

What Professor Balge wrote in another *Quarterly* article also has much to say about the *felt needs* approach of Church Growth, as well as many of its other methodologies. It is a rather lengthy quote, but it will be worth our time to read it. Professor Balge writes:

Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit (2 Cor 2:17a). In view of our assigned topic, may we substitute “personal success” for “profit”? We do not peddle the word of God to enhance our own reputations, to gain power over people, for self-gratification in “meeting human needs.” We do not “peddle” the word of God at all ... Our commitment to God’s Word includes our formal subscription to the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments as given by inspiration of God, the only perfect rule of faith. But it also includes this, that we avoid using methods which, although they may not be immoral or an explicit denial of Scripture, are somehow unworthy of the gospel. It means patiently pointing out, again and again, that gimmickry cannot establish and strengthen healthy congregations. We have announced secret and shameful ways; we do not distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God (2 Cor 4:2).<sup>xiii</sup>

The question we need to raise about the felt needs approach is this: Is it a form of gimmickry? Are we trying to “peddle” the gospel as a fix-all to social problems simply to try and get people into the church? And then, once we “have” them in the church, we tell them what we really wanted to tell them in the first place, and what they really needed to hear?

Like Jesus at Jacob’s well or Paul at the Areopagus in Athens, we want to look for opportunities to meet people where they’re at, not primarily to fill their physical, emotional, or social needs, but to bring them what they really need, to hear the Law and the Gospel of God’s forgiveness in Christ.

### **“Doctrinal Pluralism”**

Although many of Church Growth’s proponents express concern about taking the Bible seriously as God’s Word, there is a spirit of toleration when it comes to doctrine. In the following quote take note of how McGavran expresses concern for people accepting the Bible as the verbally inspired Word of God, yet downplays faithfulness to all the doctrines of Scripture:

Each denomination is a separate branch of the one universal church ... As long as each branch is firmly in the vine, as long as each branch believes on Jesus Christ as God and only Savior and the Bible as the inspired and totally reliable Word of God, real differences in regard to baptism, ecclesiastical organization and other less central doctrines can be tolerated.<sup>xiv</sup>

As one reads Church Growth material it become obvious that it is based more on social sciences and methods rather than on God’s Word. Church Growth experts make no apology for this. The North American Society for Church Growth defines Church Growth in this way: “Students of church growth strive to combine the eternal theological principles of God’s Word concerning the expansion of the Church with its best insights of contemporary social and behavioral sciences ... ”<sup>xv</sup>



Church Growth looks upon itself as a science and considers its principles scientific in nature. Donald McGavran states, “The great obstacles to conversion are social, not theological.”<sup>xvi</sup> In commenting on this statement of McGavran, George Hunter states: “As he applied the categories and tools of the social sciences to evangelization questions, he quietly ushered Christian evangelization into a new era, similar to the new era in pastoral counseling that came when its leaders began taking the behavioral sciences seriously.”<sup>xvii</sup>

Since Church Growth places so much confidence in the social sciences and its primary concern is the growth of the church, it is no surprise that adherence to Church Growth principles takes precedence over adherence to all the doctrines of God’s Word.

We too want to be cognizant of societal issues in our work. But our “success” is not outward growth determined by application of social sciences, but faithfulness to and with the Word of God. For without the Word, there can be no church, no Gospel, no justification.

### **“The Means of Grace and the Public Ministry”**

It is no secret that Reformed theology has a different view of the Holy Spirit’s work. According to Reformed theology the Holy Spirit does not work through the Word, but alongside of the Word. To the Reformed, Baptism and the Lord’s Supper are not means through which God graciously creates and sustains faith, but merely acts of obedience by those who have already become disciples.

Since it is basically Reformed in its theology, the Church Growth Movement downplays the role of the Means of Grace. Although Church Growth literature speaks about the role that the Holy Spirit plays in church work, it does not make the connection between the Means of Grace and the Holy Spirit’s work. Listen to the following statement made by one Church Growth advocate:

People today who respond to the Christian faith ... are those who respond to love and caring of Christ’s people, not to a set of ideas or theological statements. People are not talked into the kingdom. They are loved in. Reflecting God’s unconditional love is the essence of the Christian gospel. And love is experienced, not verbalized.<sup>xviii</sup>

Again, we do not debate the fact that Christian love is a way in which a Christian lets his/her light shine so that others may see their good works and glorify their Father in heaven. But when “deeds not creeds” becomes the battle cry for outreach, then we have lost sight of the power of the Gospel. Make no mistake about it, the end or goal of Church Growth is adding people to the visible church. I don’t believe that I am overstating the case when I say that in Church Growth the ends justify the means. Unfortunately, the means are not the Means of Grace.

It is also important to note how church history has shown that whenever there has been a depreciation of the Means of Grace, there has also been a corresponding depreciation of the public ministry. When this happens, there is a tendency to blur the lines between the priesthood of all believers and the office of the public ministry. The whole chapter of pietism in the Lutheran church is a sad reminder of this. Recall how pietism in the Lutheran church led to an improper emphasis on cell groups, sanctification, and a diminished use of and appreciation the Means of Grace.

It should be no surprise that this is also one of the dangers of Church Growth. In discussing the need for change in the way churches conduct their ministry, one book which is sympathetic to Church Growth states this:

All believers are priests, all are gifted for ministry, and all are called to be the servants of Jesus and others. The point of leadership is to make disciples rather than perpetuating the clergy/laity distinction, which is a later historical development not found in Scripture. Those who practice this kind of ministry, (that is an equipping ministry) will see themselves doing what Jesus did. Equipping pastors focus on developing a small group of disciples who become ministers and disciplers themselves. As pastors do this, new ministries emerge organically, and more needs are touched.<sup>xix</sup>

Indeed, those who serve in the public ministry must guard against any kind of spirit which lords it over God's people. And certainly one of the goals of the public ministry is to equip God's people for works of service. But we must also be careful to maintain that the public ministry is not some historical development, but an office instituted by Christ for the proclamation of the Gospel. And whatever forms of the ministry that the Gospel will create for itself, the forms must not deviate from the main purpose of the ministry—preaching the good news of justification.

Hopefully, this quick review has given you a better idea of what the Church Growth Movement is and what some of its dangers are. It is noteworthy that throughout its literature and in its practice, the doctrine of justification receives very little attention. This is the reason why its basic principles emphasize the outward aspects of a church's work rather than the gospel assurance "*God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them*"; the reason why it dwells so much on "felt needs" rather than on the Gospel appeal, "*Be reconciled to God.*" This is the reason why its "discipling" has more to do with sanctification than proclaiming the message that in Christ, God has forgiven the sins of all; the reason why method is of greater importance than faithfulness to the Word of God. In closing this portion of the paper, let us hear again what Professor Balge wrote about the weapons we use in the ministry. It's from the paper we studied in last year's conference.

The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds- We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ, 2 Corinthians 10:4-5. The only effective implement of warfare in the struggle against idolatry, unbelief, and self-righteousness is the divine power of the gospel of Jesus Christ. No fleshly weapons—reason, research, righteous sentiment—can win hearts for God. But the gospel is the power to be used in God's service to demolish the strongholds of nay saying and to teach people to say "Amen" to God's "Yes" in Christ. The struggling missionary prays for and strives to develop the discernment to test the spirits and does not fall for the subtle legalism of many "practical helps." The evangelical pastor needs to give attention to the source of the materials and methods he uses. He must beware of the poisoned well, the evil tree which cannot bring forth good fruit, the piety which comes from the law and not the gospel.<sup>xx</sup>

## Some Practical Questions For Consideration

I would like to raise a few questions for your consideration. I raise these questions, not to criticize or pass judgment on any one or any program, but with the hope that they will stimulate some honest soul searching and healthy discussion within our respective faculties and in our conference.

Earlier we noted that the Church Growth Movement has exerted a wide influence on churches in America. It is no secret that its influence has been felt in our synod too. This leads us to the following thoughts:

1) Over the past several years there has been an increase in our synod of alternate forms of worship. We've all read and heard about chancel dramas, seeker services, and an increase of children's sermons and services. Forms of worship certainly lie in the area of Christian liberty. But the question that needs to be answered is this: Is the rush to use these alternate forms of worship truly an attempt to be "all things to all men"? Or does the fascination with alternate forms of worship reveal an underlying lack of trust in the power of the Means of Grace?

2) Another question arises in the area of education. I'm not an expert in the area of educational philosophies and methodologies. But I do know that the premise of outcome based education is to set goals or outcomes for what a student is to do or be when he/she finishes a set course of study. When applied to the areas of the three "R's"—'reading,' 'riting,' and 'rithmetic,' outcome based education can offer some good. You have to be able to identify and measure the results of student's work in order to determine whether or not that student is proficient enough to pass on to the next grade level.

However, does it not raise just a little concern among us when an outcome-based approach is applied to the most important "R," religion? One of the errors of Church Growth is trying to measure the sanctified life of a member to determine whether there has been sufficient growth to qualify as a real "disciple." Should or should there not be concern among us in programming goals or outcomes for our students in the area of sanctification?

3) Another way in which Church Growth has influenced our synod is terminology. In recent years we have been using terms such as "discipling," "church planting," "ministry," "felt needs" etc. These are Church Growth terms. It is not a coincidence that the use of these terms has coincided with an increase in our synod of the use of Church Growth material and attendance at Church Growth seminars and schools of theology. The terms are not wrong in and of themselves. Yet, should or should we not be concerned that these terms are ripe for misunderstanding and the possible source of much confusion among us?

4) Another area of concern is "felt needs." In recent years there has been an increase in our synod of various support groups within our churches to meet the various social, psychological, emotional, and prayer needs of our members. As God's people we will want to carry each other burdens and in this way fulfill the law of Christ. Perhaps such support groups in our churches may be one way in which we can do this. But the question I raise is this, "Are we putting into place the necessary precautions so that such support groups do not undermine or begin to replace the primary work of the ministry which Christ has entrusted to his church?"

As we consider these and other questions, let us always remember that Church Growth will continue to have its glitter. But let us also remember that in the Gospel, we have something that is more precious than gold—the good news that in Christ, God has forgiven the sins of all people. This is the beautiful doctrine of justification. And...

*The Doctrine of Justification is the Foundation of the Church's Life and its Ministry!*

## Discussion

On the basis of the discussion we've had so far, read the following statements and discuss whether or not there is any concern:

Discipling, that's our work. Disciples of Christ, that's our goal ... The challenge for us as disciple-makers is to describe a disciple and then to design the curricula and instruction in the educational programs in our churches and schools so that we achieve that goal.

In Article X of the Formula of Concord, the whole matter of adiaphora was discussed. The question was this, "in times of controversy and persecution, could one give in to false brethren in matters of church rites and ceremonies, which are adiaphora, without violating conscience, offending the weak, or perverting the Gospel?" This is the answer the formulators gave:

We believe, teach, and confess that in times of persecution, when a plain confession is required of us, we should not yield to the enemies in regard to such adiaphora, as the apostle has written in Gal 5:1: *Stand fast, therefore, in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free, and be not entangled again in the yoke of bondage.* Also 2 Cor 6:14: *Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers, etc. For what concord hath the light with darkness?* Also Gal 5:2: *To whom we gave place, no, not for an hour, that the truth of the Gospel might remain with you.* For in such a case it is no longer a question concerning adiaphora, but concerning the truth of the Gospel, concerning Christian liberty, and concerning sanctioning open idolatry, as also concerning the prevention of offense to the weak in faith; in which we have nothing to concede, but should plainly confess and suffer on that account what God sends, and what He allows the enemies of His Word to inflict upon us.

A practical application of the formulators' answer is our practice of baptizing. Why don't we immerse when we baptize? Does this answer have anything to say about our use of Church Growth materials, terminology, and methods?

## Endnotes

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- <sup>i</sup> Augsburg Confession, Article IV, *Concordia Triglotta: The Symbolical Books of the Ev. Lutheran Church* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921).
- <sup>ii</sup> Augsburg Confession, Article VII:1, *Triglot*.
- <sup>iii</sup> Richard Balge, "The Gospel Ministry: A Triumphal Procession in Christ," *WLQ*, Vol. 91, No.1 (Winter 1994), p. 17.
- <sup>iv</sup> Augsburg Confession, Article V:1-3, *Triglot*.
- <sup>v</sup> Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord, Article III:6, *Triglot*.
- <sup>vi</sup> Arthur Glasser, "Church Growth Perspectives," *Theological Perspectives on Church Growth*, (1976), pp. 30-31.
- <sup>vii</sup> David Valleskey, "The Church Growth Movement: An Evaluation," *WLQ*, Vol. 88, No. 2 (Spring 1991), p. 105.
- <sup>viii</sup> Donald McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth* (1980), p. 170.
- <sup>ix</sup> C. Peter Wagner, *Strategies for Church Growth* (1987), p. 53-54.
- <sup>x</sup> C. Peter Wagner, ed., *Church Growth: State of the Art* (1986), p. 44.
- <sup>xi</sup> Charles L. Chaney and Ron Lewis, *Design for Church Growth* (1977), p. 75.
- <sup>xii</sup> David Valleskey, "The Church Growth Movement: An Evaluation," *WLQ*, Vol. 88, No.2, (Spring 1991), p. 108.
- <sup>xiii</sup> Richard Balge, "The Gospel Ministry: A Triumphal Procession in Christ," *WLQ*, Vol. 91, No. 1, (Winter 1994), p. 17.
- <sup>xiv</sup> Donald McGavran, *Effective Evangelism*, (1988), p. 105.
- <sup>xv</sup> "Growth Partners," Vol.3, No. 3, May/June 1966, p. 1.
- <sup>xvi</sup> Donald McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth* (1980), p. 250.
- <sup>xvii</sup> George Hunter, Forward to *How Churches Grow*, by Donald McGavran (1966), p. 43.
- <sup>xviii</sup> Chaney and Lewis, *Design for Church Growth* (1977), pp. 74-75.
- <sup>xix</sup> Howard A. Snyder and Daniel V. Runyon, *Foresight* (1986), pp.92-94.
- <sup>xx</sup> Richard Balge, "The Gospel Ministry: A Triumphal Procession in Christ," *WLQ*, Vol. 91, No. 1 (Winter 1994), pp. 17 & 18.

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