

THE BRAVE NEW WORLD OF GOSPEL MINISTRY: TAKING THE GREAT
COMMISSION SERIOUSLY AT A TIME OF PERCEIVED CHRISTIAN
MARGINALIZATION

BY

BRIAN L. WROBEL

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PROFESSOR E. ALLEN SORUM, ADVISOR

WISCONSIN LUTHERAN SEMINARY

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Abstract

It is a generalization, but certainly not simply a presumption, that there is consternation on the part of many Christians as they look at the present and toward the future of Christendom in America. Members of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, too, often experience and articulate a perceived tension between themselves and non-Christians—even against those non-Christians who are of a similar cultural background with similar economic achievement and stability. The basis for the tension on the part of many Christians is often attributed to a perceived marginalization of Christianity in American society. Is Christianity losing, or has it even lost, a central position it once enjoyed in politics, culture, values, and the economy? That is a scary and depressing thought for many Christians. Whether Christianity is becoming increasingly marginalized or not, a more thorough study of God’s Word, the people around us, and ourselves leads to a more sober and ultimately more optimistic view of the Christian role as gospel herald in American society at this time and in the future.

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Preface

O wonder!
How many goodly creatures are there here!
How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world,
That has such people in't.¹

The irony is not lost in the four hundred odd years since Shakespeare penned those words in “The Tempest.” This is a strange, brave new world for many Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) Christians.

It certainly is for Chris. Overall, things are going well for him. He has been blessed with eight years of marriage with his wife, Angie. The couple has two daughters, Riley and Paige, ages six and five. They recently moved from their starter home into a new one they designed and built thanks to Chris’ successful job at St. Mary’s hospital where he has been working for a decade. Chris and Angie are supportive members of St. Peter’s, their local WELS church, and send their daughters to the school. Sure, there are a few things that they would change, but overall, are content with the church and school. Chris’ life is not entirely carefree. During lunch in the cafeteria, Chris bites his tongue as his co-worker, Janet, tells him about her decision to move in with her boyfriend the past weekend. For a job that is heavily reliant on relationships and communication, Chris is extra careful not to offend. In the afternoon, he reads an e-mail that gives him the headache of having to consider the new legislation that had just passed and what that might mean for his job and the practice. When Chris gets home, the first question Riley asks him is if she can have a sleepover at Madison’s house. He mulls it in his head knowing that Madison’s mom just got divorced. Does he want to harm his sweet daughter’s naiveté with the concept of divorce? Chris then notices that Paige is watching a kid’s program that seems to him to be propaganda promoting evolution. To Paige’s protests, he changes it to the evening news just in time to catch the end of a segment on a progressive California school having gender neutral bathrooms. A commercial follows, advertising who knows what, but sells it through sexual persuasion. And off goes the television. Chris does not say so much, but wonders, “What kind of world are my little girls are growing up in?!” *O brave new world.*

¹William Shakespeare. *The Tempest*. Vol. XLVI, Part 5. Scene I. Lines 197-200 The Harvard Classics. New York: P.F. Collier & Son, 1909–14; Bartleby.com, 2001. www.bartleby.com/46/5/. Accessed February 2014.

It certainly is for Kelly. She just entered the physical therapy program at the state university. It is exciting, and her family is proud of her, but what they do not see is that she is dealing with significant spiritual struggles. She does not have any close friends who go to church regularly, which makes it easy for her to decide to skip on weekends. Sometimes religion comes up with her friends, but Kelly feels at a loss defending her church's stance on scientific and moral issues. The truth is she does not even find her own faith all that personally engaging anymore. In fact, for some time, she has been compromising some things she once held dear. She gave up her virginity to a boyfriend she had for three months last year, she does not have any issue with drinking under age, and no longer sees anything wrong with homosexuality now that one of her high school friends admitted she is gay. Kelly returns home for Christmas break and attends church with her parents on Christmas Eve. As she watches her little brother recite his narrations, she ponders her own sincerity to what her church body teaches. *O brave new world.*

It certainly is for Pastor Stein. He waits in line for his coffee thinking about his congregation of just over 400 souls. Pastor considers which congregational issues he should address today: marital problems, or the list he would rather not look at of the members who are supposedly living together, or the people in the books who have not been in church for months. On the newspaper rack, Pastor sees something about a church being sued in California. He wonders whether his church will continue to have the government's blessing and will remain tax exempt. His worrisome thoughts are broken by the effeminate voice of the barista. It is his turn to order. Assuming the barista is gay, Pastor Stein is extra conscious of his verbal and non-verbal cues not wishing to give any impression that he approves of his lifestyle and yet not wanting to look like a jerk either. On the way to his office, he calls up his son, himself a young pastor, to joke that it may just be time for this old pastor to hang up the hat. The elder Pastor Stein comments how the America he knew is becoming unrecognizable. He ends the call by lamenting on the different ministry and world his son and grandkids will enjoy. Ministry and raising a family were so much easier in the good old days. *O brave new world.*

It certainly is for Fiona. She scrolls down her Facebook newsfeed and stops at a post by one of her friends with thirty one comments. Her friend Elizabeth from church has posted an op-ed piece rallying local Christians to take action against the threat of America losing its Judeo-Christian ethic because the statue of the Ten Commandments has been ordered to be taken down in front of her county courthouse. The post has attracted interest from both sympathizers and

those who do not share Elizabeth’s political beliefs. Fiona could not agree more with Elizabeth, and it angers her to see the hurtful words against the article and against her friend. “What idiots!” she murmurs. *O brave new world.*

Introduction

The names and specifics are made up, but the general scenarios and concerns are far from fiction for Wisconsin Synod Lutherans. Among fellow Christians, the Shakespeare line, “O brave new world,” is turned into the oft repeated clichés, “What is America coming to?!” “America is going to hell in a handbasket!” “Times have never been so bad!” “Kids these days!” “America has lost its religion!” “The Gospel shower is about to dry up!”² These and their similar countless kissing cousin clichés can be understandable. The sentiments behind them are justified—to an extent. It is proper that people should be concerned with both the physical and spiritual well-being of themselves and the ones they love. It is also natural to react strongly to perceived threats and uncertainties to that well-being. As the above, rather contrived scenarios depict, there is a tension as Christians navigate and search for their niche in American society. Christians in America are and will be confronted with perceived tensions and potential causes for division.

Whether it is on the television, the internet, or through interactions with others, confessional Lutherans do not have to look very hard to see worldviews, beliefs, and morality that are in contradiction to what the Bible teaches. As members of our church body see their faith and values becoming increasingly marginalized and sin promoted in mainstream American society, how are they to react? How should they feel? What should they do? Some take to social media to let off steam. Others lament their concerns to friends and loved ones. Some take to the political sphere to wage battle. Others just try to ignore it and do their best to keep their mouths shut. Still others succumb to the road of least resistance by following the gospel of prevailing popular opinions, fads, and the consensus of the day.

Articulating God’s Word and living sanctified lives can seem difficult for those immersed in a culture where Christian faith and lifestyle seems marginalized and those around them appear so far removed in Scriptural language, concepts, and ethics. Before choosing this area of focus, I sought topic suggestions from a number of friends, relatives, and pastors. Admittedly

² These examples are quotations from anonymous respondents in the survey.

unscientific as it was, the majority of the responses could fit under the broad umbrella of concern about the present and future of Christendom in America. Based on conversations, along with the survey for this topic, and my own sentiments; it is apparent that many WELS members are full of uncertainty, consternation, pessimism, and even anger concerning the direction of Christianity in America.

How should pastors react to these concerns? Perhaps such concerns over the future could be dismissed. Perhaps they could be bandaged up with a providential promise that God is still in control. Perhaps these concerns need simply be handled at the pulpit with law and gospel preached to the hearts. Perhaps WELS church leaders share similar sentiments and can do no more than shake their own heads in agreement and frustration.

Perhaps. Perhaps there is some truth in all those reactions. But perhaps we can all do better. Perhaps none of those reactions fully or satisfactorily address the heart of the concerns. And perhaps we do tend to overlook or even ignore the real decisions confronting Christians immersed in American society who are daily interacting with real life, walking, talking unbelievers. Perhaps it is easier to ignore because the real questions that many WELS members want to know are much more complex. Perhaps they are the same spiritual questions with which congregational pastors and leaders often internally wrestle: “How do I even begin the spiritual conversation with someone with a worldview, values, and beliefs so drastically different than mine?” “How do I react to people and things that I am so morally opposed to?” “How should I feel about raising kids in this country?”

Uncertainty, consternation, and anger could all be legitimate sentiments when considering sin, unbelief, and the direction of our country. Perhaps, though, there is also a legitimate danger that we are overlooking our role as gospel heralds called by Christ and placed within our communities to make disciples. Instead of that role, we tend to exclusively focus on our roles as parents, students, employers, co-workers, people pleasers, income makers, congregational leaders, and whatever other hats we wear. Considering all our various roles in their respective contexts would be an unattainable task. Regardless of contexts and pretexts, there is far more clarity when we prioritize and focus on our role as part of the universal priesthood (1 Pt 2:9)³ called by Jesus Christ himself through the Great Commission to share and

³ All Scripture quotations in this thesis are taken from *The Holy Bible: New International Version*, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984.

teach the Gospel of salvation in the contexts God has placed us (Mt 28:19-20). Focusing on that role, there is no “perhaps.” No uncertainty. No reason for consternation, anger, or pessimism whether or not Christianity is becoming marginalized in America. No reason to be afraid of the brave new world.

This topic is really under the umbrella of evangelism. This paper is by no means exhaustive. It is barely even introductory as it primarily seeks to instill confidence and excitement in our role as gospel heralds within the time and settings God has placed us. The six part road map for this senior thesis can be found in the table of contents.

Thesis

Rather than uncertainty, consternation, pessimism, and anger toward the perceived marginalization of Christianity in America, WELS Lutherans will accept their role as gospel heralds in America with confidence and optimism.

Literature Review

The majority of the literature consulted is not heavily featured in this paper due to both the excellence in survey responses and for the sake of brevity. That is not a negative commentary on the literature consulted in any way. The materials proved just as personally valuable as the survey responses. Even where the ideas and concepts gleaned from the literature are not explicitly credited to specific sources in this paper, they are implicit throughout in having helped construct and mold certain concepts in my own mind.

The amount of literature that covers or at least touches on the topic is overwhelming. I was initially unfamiliar with most of the authors, and wasted too much time with unremarkable works. I slowly learned what was beneficial and what was burnable. Many great authors and sources were placed in my personal library and wish list as a result. Within this realm, there is a great deal of bad theology, but weighing through the writings listed in the bibliography there are many practical insights especially in the area of anthropology. Learning from the mistakes of my own backwards progression, a more logical progression to gain wisdom on the topic of gospel heralds interacting with their American culture could be as follows.

A possible place to start could be H. Richard Niebuhr’s proposal of the different ways that Christians relate to the world around them in his classic work, “Christ and Culture.” A

contemporary and more fundamentally sound follow-up and analysis of Niebuhr's word is D.A. Carson's "Christ and Culture Revisited." The essays in the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Essay File on the subject of "Church and State," particularly Dr. Brug's "The Lutheran Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms," along with Professor Deutschlander's "Civil Government" provided the Biblical moorings in understanding the dual citizenship role within the two kingdoms.

James Sire provides a solid introduction in comprehending the concept of worldview from a Christian perspective with "The Universe Next Door" and "Naming the Elephant." I appreciated his basic seven ontological questions that he claims a worldview seeks to answer or leave unanswered:

1. What is reality?
2. What is the nature of the external world around us?
3. What is a human being?
4. What happens to a person at death?
5. Why is it possible to know anything at all?
6. How do we know what is right and wrong?
7. What is the meaning of human history?⁴

"American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us" by Robert Putnam and David Campbell, while written from a social science rather than Christian perspective, is helpful in understanding how people of different religious backgrounds relate to one another. It also looks at the state of religion in the past, present, and future in America. The authors provide valuable quantitative research to support their conclusions.

Lesslie Newbigin's "Open Secret" was valuable in looking at the individual Christian's call to be a missionary. In our own synod, the essays in the Seminary Essay file by Ronald Roth reaching back as far as thirty-five years ago touch on the same subject.

In reaching the "post-Christian," "millennial," or whatever label one would like to attach to the younger adult generation and culture within the United States, the works by evangelicals that specifically target this demographic serve most valuable. Thom Rainer, Mark Driscoll, and Matthew Raley are examples of a few of these evangelicals.

The realm of apologetics seems to be booming right now which implies that people are searching for ways to articulate and defend their faith in our culture. These can be useful in providing conversation pieces in evangelism talks to clear some of the fog of reason's hot air. I

⁴ Sire, James W. *The Universe next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalog*. Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 1997. 20.

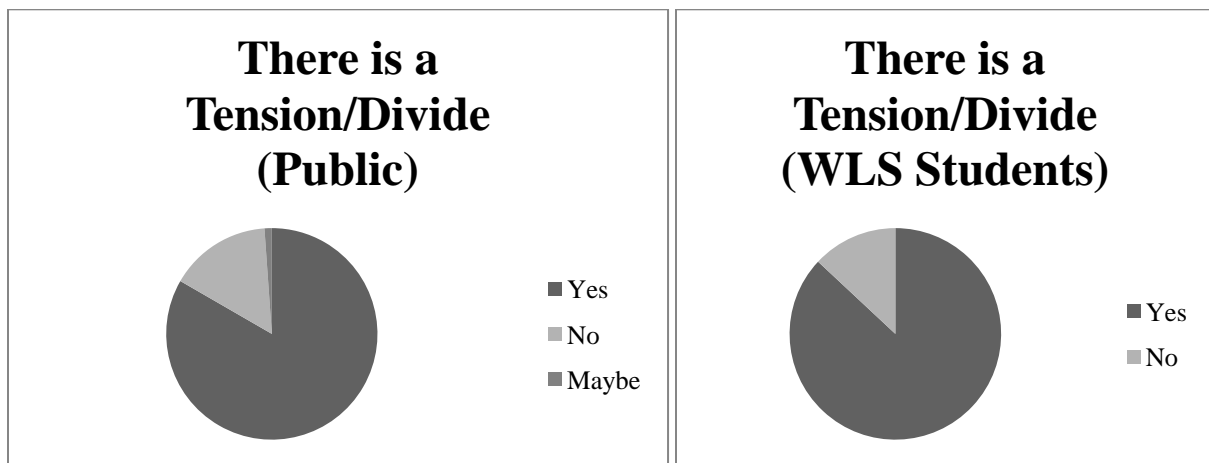
consulted Mark Paustian’s two volumes of “Prepared to Answer,” Timothy Keller’s “Reason for God,” Greg Koukl’s “Tactics,” and Ravi Zacharias.

The Survey

For the sake of brevity and the wealth of information exploited from the surveys, I will mainly allow the survey responses to speak throughout this thesis rather than the literature consulted. Details on the survey, the responses, and the process can be found in the appendix.

I. Clearing the Fog: Articulating the Concerns

The first step in addressing any problem is to admit whether there is a problem. Is there a legitimate tension or divide interfering with gospel sharing work that should be identified and addressed? Regardless of religious affiliation, seventy-five of respondents in the non-Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary (WLS) survey responded that there indeed is a tension or divide between Christians and non-Christians while only fourteen responded that there is no divide or tension. It should also be noted that those who responded “no” often qualified their answer.⁵ Of the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary participants, twenty felt there was a tension or divide, and only four did not share that opinion.

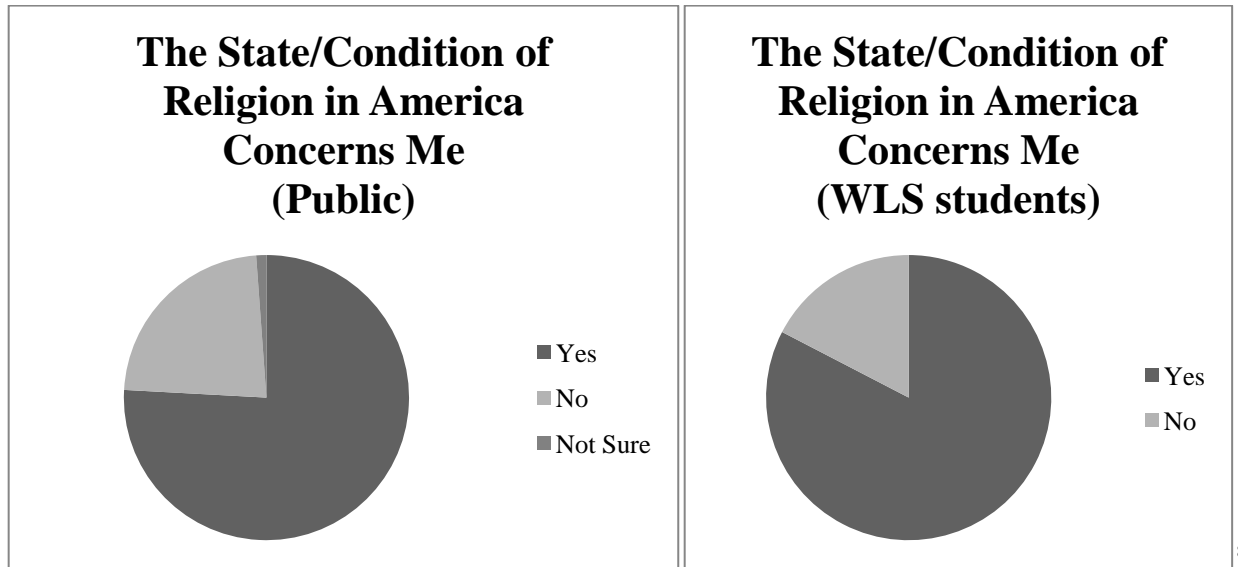


If this is an accurate barometer of the general population, then many do perceive there to be a tension or divide between Christians and non-Christians. The next step is to gauge whether or not the perceived tension or divide concerns people, so the same individuals were asked

⁵ See the individual responses of Survey Question 1 in the appendix.

⁶ Survey Question 1.

whether this concerns them. Sixty-six responded in the affirmative while twenty responded that it is of no concern. For the WLS students, the numbers broke down as nineteen who responded “yes,” and four “no.”⁷



Looking at the quantitative research of the survey, there is a striking inconsistency. The majority say there is a tension or divide,⁹ say they are concerned about the tension or divide,¹⁰ and claim to feel comfortable sharing their beliefs and worldviews.¹¹ Despite these claims, the large majority; however, do not seek opportunities to bridge that divide by sharing and talking about their values, religious beliefs, or worldview. This becomes even more striking considering that most claim to be in daily contact with those who do not share their beliefs or worldview¹² while even admitting that opportunities to do so often arise.¹³

⁷ Survey Question 2.

⁸ *Ibid.*

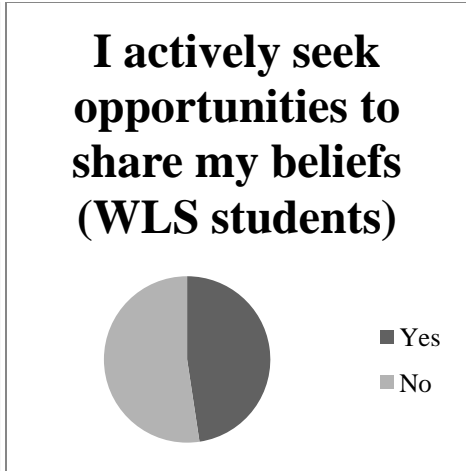
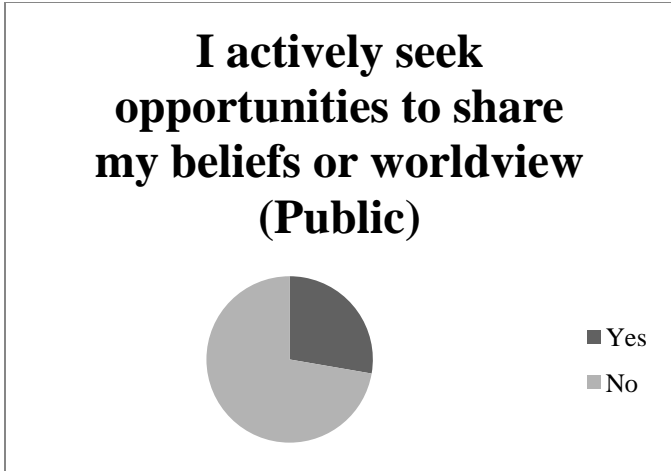
⁹ Survey Question 1.

¹⁰ Survey Question 2.

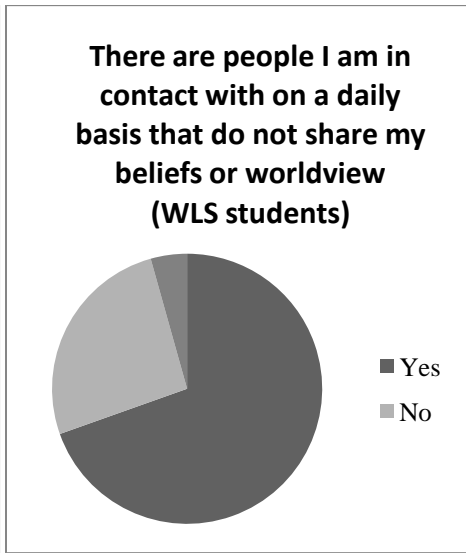
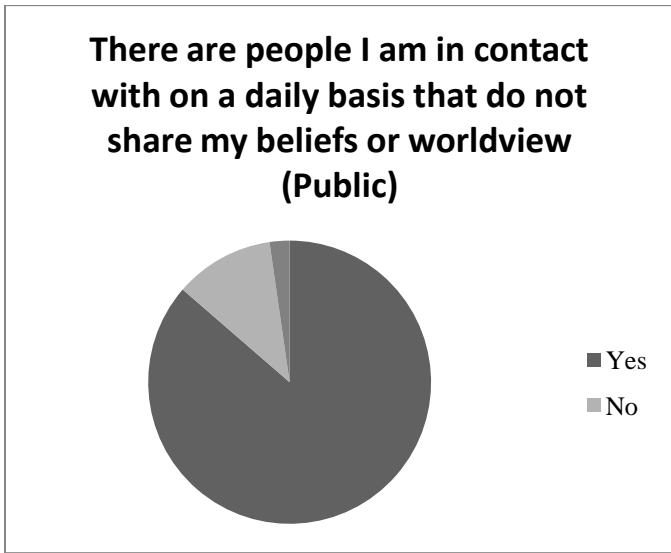
¹¹ Survey Question 4.

¹² Survey Question 13.

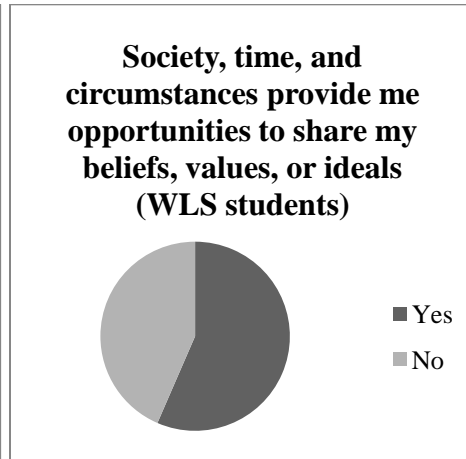
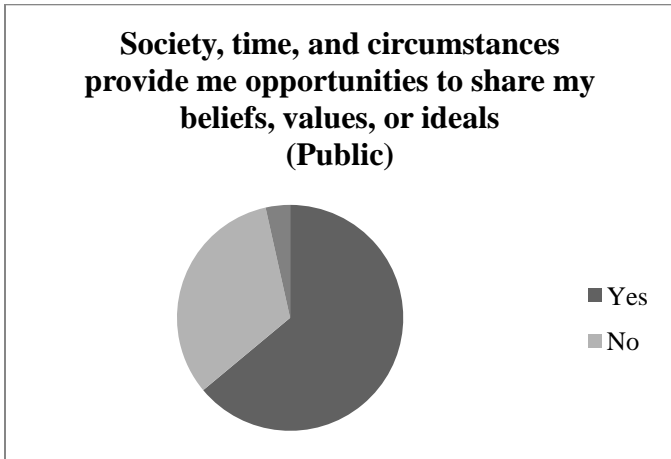
¹³ Survey Question 6.



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15



16

¹⁴ Survey Question 5.

¹⁵ Survey Question 3.

¹⁶ Survey Question 6.

If people are in contact with those who do not share their beliefs or worldview, have opportunities to do so, and are concerned about the diverging beliefs or worldviews, why is that dialogue not happening? To begin to understand, we must explore how people define and account for the tension or divide.

In interpreting the survey responses, I have attempted to remain objective in my findings, but because of biases there is always the risk for subjectivity in the evaluation and analysis of the responses. It is my hope that the labels themselves are not pregnant with my own biases and presuppositions.¹⁷ In an effort to organize the responses and discover some common themes in how people define or account for the perceived tension, I searched for trends in the responses. What seemed to be the most helpful in identifying key themes and trends was the type of terminology used. I have categorized and labeled each of the most common trends in terminology used. When people defined and explained the tension or divide, the four trends in terminology I found were: relational terms, political terms, moral terms, and religious terms. Many responses were not so neat as to qualify under solely one label, but contained a mixture of the four. It should be noted that the mere exercise of providing these categories can artificially separate these terms. For that reason, I offer the caveat that the four labels I have identified do often have close relationships with one another. Nonetheless, it is helpful to break down the responses into categories to clarify the sources of tension and division that could interfere with the sharing of the gospel.

Both Christians and non-Christians often spoke of the tension or divide in political terms. Respondents from both sides accused the other of using politics to push their beliefs and convictions. Contrast the following response: “Leaders of the Christian movement continually try to permeate the public sphere, ignoring the constitutional freedom from religion”¹⁸ with, “the state of the church is in grave danger as confessional Christians face the risk of being chastised, sued, or even imprisoned for "discrimination" against government mandates for abortion pills, euthanasia practices, homosexuality, or other hot-topics.”¹⁹ Can you guess the religious and political affiliations?! The above responses not only show—in negative terms—the accusation

¹⁷ All the survey responses have been retained at the end of this paper if you wish to assess the responses or to judge my evaluations.

¹⁸ Respondent 10. Non-WLS Survey. Question 1.

¹⁹ Respondent 41. Non-WLS Survey. Question 2.

one has against the other of misusing politics for harm, but also—in positive terms—how both Christians and non-Christians often seek to use politics to promote personal values, worldviews, and beliefs which they deem beneficial. Similar sentiments in political language are peppered throughout the individual responses for questions one, two, and five of the survey.

Political terminology usually bleeds into outwardly moral terminology as evidenced in this response, “I am concerned that people use [religion] to justify laws that impose their moral code onto people that do not share that moral code via legislation and government (ex. anti-choice laws, anti-LGBTQ²⁰ laws, etc.)”²¹ You can anticipate the similar Christian examples saying just the opposite but in the same terms and examples of outward morality. By far the most common moral term was sexual terminology, particularly concerning the issue of homosexuality, but abortion issues were also commonly referenced.²² Not all the responses that contained moral terms necessarily contained political language.

I was pleased to see that people did not solely speak of the tension or divide in terms of outward morality and politics, but religious terminology is common as well throughout the individual survey responses addressing the tension or divide. Religious terminology here refers to language that addresses a higher power, afterlife, or relationship with God. As far as gospel sharing, this is where the heart of the tension properly resides for Christians. A number of Christians identified it as such.²³ Indeed, for Christians the divide that comes about on account of faith in Christ is no surprise because the Bible is full of examples of believers being persecuted. Jesus warns his followers of this when he says, “All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved” (Mt 10:22).

The terminology that usually bled into the others, that was the most common, and that was often viewed as a result of the preceding three categories, was relationship (or relational) terminology. It comes as no surprise that many would state the tension in relationship terms because the ideas of tension or divide, themselves, are relationship terms. What is remarkable, though, when examining the Christian responses is how few Christians explicitly attributed

²⁰ Before this response, I was not aware of the “Q” attached now to the LGBT group. It stands for “questioning” as in someone who is unsure of their sexual orientation.

²¹ Respondent 12. Non-WLS survey. Question 2.

²² See Survey responses for questions 1 and 2.

²³ Respondent 6 in the Non-WLS survey even quoted 1 Peter 4:12-16 concerning this in question 1.

Christ as the source of relationship tension. Maybe this was implicit in a handful of responses, but the explicitly stated sources of tension in relationships were outward morality and politics focusing on temporal concerns rather than the eternal. What I propose this demonstrates is that the sort of tension or divide which most perceive and are concerned about is not the sort of tension that Christ describes. This will be further illuminated throughout the paper. The fact that most people say there is a tension or divide and are concerned about it; even though most admit to not sharing their beliefs or worldview, further demonstrates that the source of this divide is not on account of being gospel heralds. If it is not the sort of tension or divide that Jesus was addressing, then what is the tension or divide that many people experience? Further examining the relational terminology helps.

By far the most prevalent expression and theme within relationship terminology was the expression of victimization.²⁴ In reading the responses, it is clear that there is a predominant sense of victimization that Christians feel on account of unbelieving bullies and that non-Christians feel on account of Christian bullies. Who are these bullies? For Christians taking the survey it is the media, government (particularly the left), or simply generic unbelievers. For non-Christians it is the fundamentalists, extremists, government (particularly the right), the religious leaders, and generic Christians.²⁵ What all these bullies have in common is they are described as generic entities typically in pejorative terms rather than specific individuals with whom the respondents have personal relationships, even though most say they are in daily contact with those who do not share their beliefs. Some of buzzword labels describing the tension are “bigotry, intolerance, insular views, ignorance, misunderstandings, persecution, hate, separatist, old fashioned, and judgmental.”²⁶ If you look at the individual responses you will notice that those terms are not always used as labels for the other side. Especially on the part of Christians, they are labels frequently used to describe what the “victim” thinks the “bully” thinks of the “victim.”

While it was the most common theme, not all the relationship terms describe victimization. There is a prominent contrast in the responses between the individuals who did not use victimization language or pejorative labels and those who did. I indicated that the victim

²⁴ See especially the responses to questions 2,4, and 5.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ See responses to questions 1 and 2.

language was rather abstract. Those who do not use victim language speak not of ambiguous entities, but instead they refer to personal relationships with those who do not share their beliefs or worldview. One respondent aptly puts it in perspective, “In our daily lives Christians and non-Christians work together, are friends, and live together.”²⁷ Another similarly says the problem is that “[too many] don’t get to know the individuals.”²⁸ This is consistent with the findings of Robert Putnam and David Campbell when they conclude, “It is difficult to demonize the religion, or lack of religion, of people you know and, especially, those you love.”²⁹

This is important because it further shows that often the tension or divide is not the sort Jesus was referring to on account of being a gospel herald. The tension or divide on account of following Jesus is the sacrifice of personal relationships such as “a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law—a man’s enemies will be the members of his own household” (Mt. 10:35-36). If Christians are not seeking opportunities to share their faith in Jesus with those whom they know do not believe Christ, or do not seek to establish relationships with non-Christians in the first place, then it should come as no surprise that the type of division that Jesus is referring to is not the same sort that most Christians articulate.

We can now recognize that there is a problem of tension or divide that many WELS Christians do perceive and find disconcerting. We can also now recognize that the sort of tension or division on account of sharing the good news of Jesus, unfortunately, is not what Christians are typically expressing. Instead, most identify both the problems and solutions chiefly in temporal, political, outwardly moral, and relational terms rather than eternal terms concerning a relationship with Christ. The categorizations in the terms of tension or division will help us in addressing our own tendencies that get in the way of sharing the gospel. To do so, in the next section, we will need to examine our role in this kingdom as gospel heralds.

A pause beside a well

²⁷ Respondent 20. Non-WLS Survey. Question 1.

²⁸ Respondent 25. Non-WLS Survey. Question 1.

²⁹ Robert D. Putnam and David E. Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010), 4.

Tension between believers and unbelievers is nothing new. The model from Scripture on which this paper focuses is the account of Jesus meeting the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well in chapter four of John's Gospel.³⁰

The tension or divide between Jews and Samaritans was no secret. We do not know all the depth, breadth, and complexities of the hostility, but we do have both secular sources and sources in Scripture that make it clear there was considerable tension.

Just as we do today, first century Jews and Samaritans likely spoke of this tension in political, moral, religious, and relational terms. Relationship terms are the most common to see in Scripture. Jews genuinely disliked, even hated Samaritans. To begin to understand this broken relationship between these peoples occupying Palestine together, it helps to look at the other categories of terms.

In political terms the tension stems back to when the Assyrians forced the people of "Babylon, Cuthah, Avva, Hamath and Sepharvaim" to relocate to Samaria (2 Ki 17:24). These displaced peoples had been given a portion of the Promised Land and intermarried with Israelites and other nationalities becoming the diverse people known as the "Samaritans." The fact that this mixed race was not a legitimate heir to the Promised Land was not overlooked by Jews. The fact that they were not welcome in this land was not lost on the Samaritans. They argued that they did have every right to be there as heirs of Manasseh and Ephraim.³¹ If we are to take Josephus' word, the Samaritans were also political opportunists occasionally at the expense of the Jews.³² Both the Jews and the Samaritans appear very proud of their respective national or racial identities.

In religious terms, the displaced peoples' reluctant acceptance of the Israelite God, according to 2 Kings 17:25-33, resulted in what appears to be syncretism, a mixture of previously held beliefs incorporated into the worship of the Lord. Syncretism remained

³⁰ By far most common illustration of Jesus when used to show him bridging culture and unbelief. Matthew Raley used this story throughout his book, "The Diversity Culture," which provided the idea to use it similarly as the paradigm throughout this paper.

³¹ Brindle. "Brindle: The Origin and History of the Samaritans," Brindle: The Origin and History of the Samaritans, section goes here, accessed February 1, 2014, http://faculty.gordon.edu/hu/bi/ted_hildebrandt/ntesources/ntarticles/gtj-nt/brindle-samaritans-gtj.htm.

³² Josephus, Flavius, and William Whiston. *The Antiquities of the Jews*. Cirencester: Echo Library, 2005. 232.

prevalent up to the time of Christ, which alienated them from the orthodox Jews.³³ At some point, as the Samaritans adopted much of Jewish worship of Yahweh, they constructed their own temple on Mount Gerizim, and had a Samaritan Pentateuch. The Samaritan woman's question to Jesus concerning the proper place of worship shows that the temple at Mount Gerizim was a religious wedge between the Samaritans and the Jews who held that true sacrifice could only be practiced at Jerusalem (Jn. 4:20). In terms of religion, most Jews would likely view the Samaritans as a sect outside of true worship of Yahweh, while the Samaritans sought legitimacy and identity in their worship.

In outward, moral terms, I do not know exactly what caricatures and generalizations the Samaritans and Jews had for one another, though there were undoubtedly many. Instead, we can focus on the moral terms for one particular Samaritan—the woman at the well as a Jewish man walks up to her. She is a woman. She is alone. She goes to the well at the heat of the day when no one else is ever around. Who knows what shame she has brought to herself that makes her want to avoid the crowds at the well in the cool of the day. And there a Jewish man is, sitting at the well. He does not even move as she approaches. Talk about awkward and tense! Jewish men do not customarily even talk to Jewish women who are strangers, let alone a Samaritan woman. This is not the first Jewish man this woman has seen come through her town of Sychar. She has seen how they treat Samaritans.

All these tensions, and certainly more that we are unaware of, set up the backdrop as the Jewish man, named Jesus, sits and waits for this Samaritan woman to walk up to him as he sits at the well. They may appear of similar ethnicity, speak the same language, and celebrate many of the same holidays, but there are tremendous sources of tension present that would normally get in the way of having a natural conversation, much less a spiritual, soul-seeking, gospel-sharing conversation. How can the conversation between this Jewish man and Samaritan woman not buckle under the perceived tensions, awkwardness, and division between them?

Of course this is Jesus we are talking about, not just some ordinary Jewish man we are exemplifying. This is someone who has the advantage of reading thoughts, hearts, and knowing all things including this woman's entire life's story. Here is someone who is perfect so he will not succumb to the tensions or divisions of the petty variety. Nevertheless, here we see God humbling himself to the point of taking on Galilean flesh, becoming a member of the Jewish

³³ *Ibid.* p. 212.

race, speaking in a Galilean dialect, growing up in a Jewish home, following Jewish customs, keeping the law of the covenant, and walking around with fishermen friends. All of these seem as though they should be sources of division or tension. Instead of embracing the tension, Jesus engages the Samaritan woman in conversation. Who better to bridge the divide of history and now, to teach us how to properly assess and bridge the tension in order to have spiritual, soul-seeking, gospel-sharing conversations?

II. Understanding Our Role as Gospel Heralds

With all the different ways respondents account for and relate to the tension, divide, or contention between Christians and non-Christians, what is the proper role of WELS Christians here on earth? Where should be our focus? What should we do? How ought we to relate and contend with the world, culture, and people around us?

In simplest terms, we can understand our role as a dual citizenship in the two kingdoms of heaven and earth. A concise way to introduce it is through Professor Brug's introduction in his paper addressing the doctrine of the two kingdoms:

Christians are citizens of two kingdoms, one a heavenly spiritual kingdom, and the other an earthly political kingdom. Because of this dual citizenship a Christian has dual obligations and loyalties.

A Christian's primary responsibility is his citizenship in the kingdom of God. Although he was born as an alien and foreigner to God's kingdom, the Christian has become a fellow citizen of the saints through faith in Christ Jesus (Eph. 2:19-22). Because he has received the gift of citizenship in the kingdom of God, he has now become an alien and foreigner on the earth, who is eager to reach his homeland in heaven (Phil. 3:20; Heb. 11:13-16; 13:14). As citizens of God's holy nation, as his own special people, we are to abstain from the lusts of the world which have become foreign to us. We are now to devote ourselves to the honor and glory of our King (1 Peter 1:1, 2:9-12; 4:2) Our first priority in life is to serve our King through faithful worship, stewardship and evangelism. We are eagerly awaiting his return and praying that his kingdom will soon come in all its glory.

But in the meantime, we find that we are still living in the world as citizens of an earthly community. Although we are citizens of heaven who are fed by the Bread of Life, we still need such necessities of earthly life as food and clothing (Mt. 6:32-33). We still have regular business and social contacts with the people of this world (1 Cor. 5:10-11). But in spite of our continued contact with the things of this world, we are not attached to them, nor do we desire to cling to them (1 Cor. 7:29-31, Rom. 12:2, 1 John 2:15-17; John 17).

Whenever we speak the whole truth of God's Word and live according to it, it will be obvious to the people of this world that we are foreigners, who don't fit in here. Whenever this contrast between our values and their values becomes clear, we will be hated strangers, just as Abel, Noah, Lot, and the early Christians were (1 John 3:11-13; 2 Timothy 3:12). Indeed, when the world is very comfortable with our presence, we may need to ask if we are hiding our light and blending in too readily. "Woe unto you when all men speak well of you for that is how their fathers treated the false prophets." (Luke 6:26)

But even when they are hated by the world, the citizens of God's kingdom are not to withdraw from the world. Our King has sent us into this world as his ambassadors. We are here on a mission from him.³⁴

³⁴ John Brug. *The Lutheran Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms: Current Problems*
<http://www.wlssays.net/files/BrugTwoKingdoms.pdf>. 1.

The tools that God gave each of his kingdoms to wield are also very different. To his earthly kingdom he gave the sword. Paul speaks of this sword when he writes about the government, “He does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God’s servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the evildoer” (Ro13:4). The language we use as citizens of the earthly kingdom is reason rather than gospel because the language of the gospel is foolishness to those who do not believe (1 Co 1:18). As disciples of Jesus, our reason is shaped by and under the sword of the greater kingdom. Both the language and sword of the heavenly kingdom is the gospel. The gospel is the sword with the real power to change hearts for eternity, not just shape outward morality temporally as does the sword entrusted to the state.

Many responses on the part of the Christian displayed misunderstandings of our dual citizenship. Very few—Seminary student or otherwise—made clear reference to the two kingdoms in their response which could be indicative that many are not cognizant of the doctrine of two kingdoms. Rather, there is a whole lot of language that commingles the two kingdoms and citizenship roles. This is most evident in the frequent responses that account for the religious tension between Christians and non-Christians in political and outwardly moral terms. The Lutheran confessors warned against this in the Augsburg Confession,

Consequently, the powers of church and civil government must not be mixed. The power of the church possesses its own command to preach the gospel and administer the sacraments. It should not usurp the other’s duty.³⁵

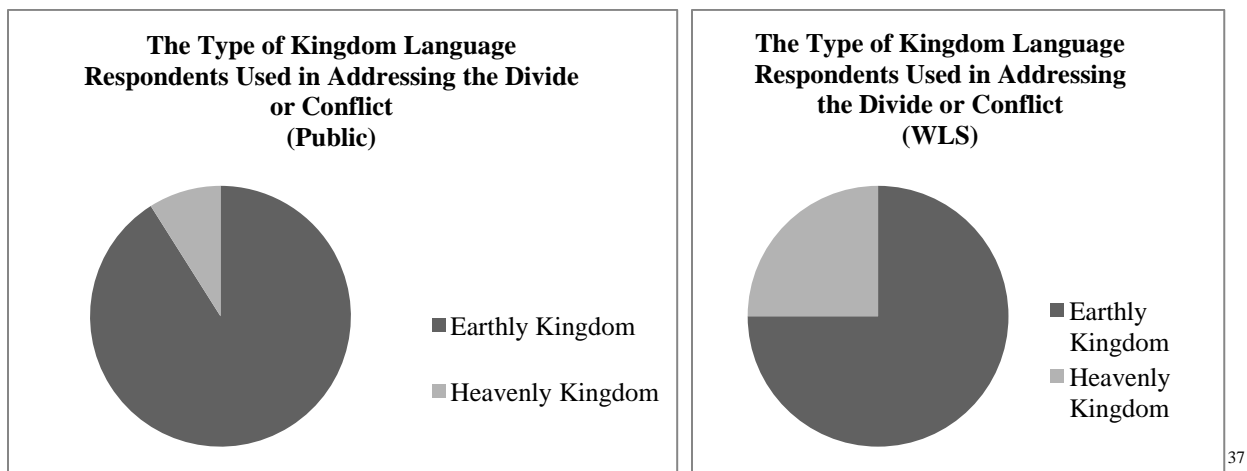
To address the questions raised surrounding our dual citizenship, and the improper commingling of the two kingdoms, could occupy a senior thesis itself. I would encourage the reader to pursue some additional reading in the bibliographical sources concerning church and state because some of the tension Christians perceive could be better understood as they grow in their biblical understanding of the relationship of our roles as citizens of the two kingdoms.

This paper focuses on our citizenship in the heavenly kingdom with its gospel sword based on our highest calling and commission in Matthew 28:19 to “go and make disciples.” Ronald Roth wrote concerning this responsibility of disciple making, “Clearly the making of disciples is not an event in peoples’ lives. Rather it is a process. I am a disciple when I am living

³⁵ Robert Kolb, Timothy J. Wengert, and Charles P. Arand, "The Augsburg Confession--Latin Text--Article XXVIII: The Church's Power," in *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 95.

with Jesus and for Jesus, learning from him and reaching out to others because of him.”³⁶ To make disciples also requires being a disciple.

How are we doing in this role of being disciples that make disciples through the means of grace? It seems we struggle to focus on this higher citizenship and highest calling. Breaking down the terminology people use in assessing the tension or divide between Christians and non-Christians provides insights into how Christians often relate to the world and people around them. Based on the survey, it appears that most Christians have some degree of misunderstandings, forgetfulness, or neglect of their chief role to be disciples and disciple-makers in this world. One of the principal misunderstandings in terms of the two kingdoms seems to be the confusion, or misplaced trust, that the sword of the gospel needs the help of the swords of the earthly kingdom to derive its power or for legitimacy. The gospel is no less powerful when it is not at the center of politics, society, and culture. God has never promised it rightful place in the center of this sinful world. Based on the surveys, it appears that when most WELS members consider and identify the conflict, they define and provide evidence that focuses on this world and the temporal rather than Christ and the eternal.



Again, to be fair, it is not necessarily wrong to speak of the tension in temporal terms. In our walk as disciples, growing in our knowledge and love of Christ, it is important to not get caught up in sin and avoid sinful proclivities in order that we do not lose our way. This means there will be inevitable temporal tensions between Christians and non-Christians. Yet the above

³⁶ Ronald D. Roth, *All Christians Are Workers in the Great Commission*, Presented at District Convention of the Western Wisconsin District, Northwestern College, Watertown, Wisconsin, June 9, 10, 1980, 1.

³⁷ See responses for question 1.

graphs indicate that the focus is generally misplaced because the tension is so overwhelmingly described in earthly, temporal terms.

The fact so few referenced Christ or the gospel as a source of division is alarming. Included in the above graphs are the responses of the non-Christians, which may seem strange. They are included because I would like point out that not a single non-Christian made any reference to Christ or the gospel message as a source of division or tension. Christ was never mentioned as reason why non-Christians feel a division between themselves and Christians. I understand some of that could be the cultural influence of the nice guy, historical Jesus caricature that is prevalent. Even so, what this means is the one that Simeon predicted would “cause the rising and falling of many in Israel” (Lk2:34) or the cross that Paul said, “would be the stumbling block for the Jews and nonsense to the gentiles” (1 Co 1:23) are not primarily credited as being primary causes of tension and division between Christians and non-Christians. This is remarkable because despite the notion of the fictional popular Jesus, the real Christ and cross of the Bible are no less offensive in twenty-first century America than they were two millennia ago. The non-Christians’ omission of Christ as the source of tension or division unfortunately reflects that our identity to most outsiders is not found in the stumbling block of Christ or his cross, but in the various things against which we stand.

Even though similar political and moral concerns were prevalent in the first century Roman world, it was not primarily the message against homosexuality, sexual impropriety, greed, pride, idolatry, drunkenness, or any other immorality that Jesus and Paul warned would divide and cause persecution. It was the message of Christ. It was not the content of the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5) that was the occasion for many to desert Jesus, but rather when he claimed to be God and Messiah (Jn 6:60-70).³⁸ It was not Paul’s harsh words concerning sin that riled up the Jews against him, but the message of Jesus as Lord (Ac18:5-17). Of course, part of the offensiveness of Christ and the cross is the reluctance to accept sin as sin, but addressing sins is not the end goal. The purpose of showing someone their sin is to ultimately point to the one who defeated sin.

When dealing with unbelievers it is proper to call sin a sin which can and will cause tension and division in itself. Consequently, we may not even reach the opportunity to share the

³⁸ Actually the crowds were “amazed” and Jesus gained a large crowd after the “Sermon on the Mount.” See Mt 7:28-8:1.

gospel. Nevertheless, the intent and goal must always be to point to Christ. In terms of our heavenly citizenship, if the purpose in pointing out sin is not to point to Christ then there is no reason or purpose to identify the sins of an unbeliever. Instead, it would be wiser to take the guidance of Paul when he rhetorically asks, “What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church?” (1 Co 5: 12).

If, as Christians, our identity is found in Christ over and above any other role we may have in this earthly kingdom, then our highest calling is in being and making disciples. We make disciples not by means of the law or the resources of this earthly kingdom, but through the sword of the heavenly kingdom—the gospel. When we have forgotten, neglected, overlooked, or ignored our identity as disciples of Jesus and our calling to make disciples, then we need to repent for not taking Jesus’ command seriously. The Great Commission is also then an ongoing disciple-making process on our own hearts as we find continual comfort in the forgiveness of sins found in the gospel entrusted to us to hold and to share. Praise be to God we still have that gospel message. That will be the focus of the next section.

A Pause beside a Well

In Jesus we see someone who never forgot, neglected, overlooked, or ignored his role on earth. He has not forgotten it as he meets the woman at the well either. As he meets a sinner, as he opens himself up to criticism for talking to a woman—a sexually promiscuous woman at that—as he ignores the advice that Jews should not associate with Samaritans unless they have to; Jesus rejects all the common pitfalls that could stall this conversation. He does not reduce the dialogue to a narrow focus upon the temporal, earthly tensions. Jesus never loses sight of his role of saving this world, and here, saving this soul. He asks for a drink of water, he confronts the woman on her sinful lifestyle, he addresses the customs of Jewish and Samaritan locations for worship, but his focus and purpose never wavers. It is on the eternal and spiritual rather than merely the temporal and earthly. He offers water “welling up to eternal life” (Jn. 6:14). He finds nourishment in food not of this world (6:32). He points out the woman’s most intimate sins, not for sake of argument or competition, but only so he can point her to himself, her Savior. In this instance, the message of Jesus was not a cause for division, but the rising of many Samaritan souls to believe in Jesus and be saved.

III. Appreciating the Treasure Entrusted to Us

Rather than appreciating the gospel we retain, when considering the present and future states of Christianity in America, there is considerable pessimism on the part of WELS Christians. The following sentiments all are responses pulled from the survey: “The road ahead is bumpy.” “The state of the church is in grave danger.” “The acceptance of worldly ways has seemingly reached a new low.” “Slowly but surely our society is accepting sin as common and acceptable.” “[The Church is] in the decline, and thus worries me.” “If you look at what this country was founded on and where it currently is - no prayer in school, same sex marriages - where can this country go but to hell in a hand-basket?” “Generation by generation people are falling further away.” “Would I want my children to grow up in this country? What will life be like raising children in such an anti-Christian country?” “The world is becoming more and more wicked as time goes on.” “By turning our collective back on God, why should He continue to bless our country?” “We’re losing our religion.” “I am afraid of the direction our country is headed.” “This is an interesting time we live in, and the landscape of Christianity will look scarily different when we retire in 40 years.”³⁹ There are many more examples I could draw from, but you get the idea!

Pastors and leaders express similar concerns as they wonder if perhaps America is in the waning raindrops of the gospel shower as Luther describes, “For you should know that God’s Word and grace is like a passing shower of rain which does not return where it has once been.”⁴⁰ It would be overly simplistic and disingenuous to the concerned Lutherans to say that their concern is unwarranted. Looking at our churches, the culture, and the people around us, there are legitimate reasons for concern. Also, observing the history of the geographical path of the gospel message, it is evident that it has resembled a passing rain shower passing from place to place.

In our awareness of the concerns, however, we must not forget or become complacent in the blessings we do retain. That is really the point of Martin Luther’s rain shower analogy. Maybe it is the most misapplied Martin Luther cliché because Luther was not prophesying, but focusing on the present. In the immediate context, he is observing the unprecedented blessing

³⁹ All responses in the Survey question 2.

⁴⁰ Luther, M. (1999). *Vol. 45: Luther's works, vol. 45 : The Christian in Society II* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.) Philadelphia: Fortress Press. 352.

that “Germany has never before heard so much of God’s Word as it is hearing today.”⁴¹ He warns the people not to “let it just slip by without thanks and honor,” but instead to “seize it and hold it fast, whoever can; for lazy hands are bound to have a lean year.”⁴²

It is possible that these are the waning days of enjoying the gospel shower in the United States or the Wisconsin Synod. Luther’s Works Volume 45 does not determine such. Our own complacency with the gospel is what determines how long we are blessed with this gift. Let us take the real heart of Luther’s message and apply it to ourselves by seizing and holding fast the gift of the gospel entrusted to us.

Those pessimistic quotes that began this section are nothing new in the life of the church or even the world at large. Respondent 37 in the public interviews made the insightful comment quoting the rock band Wilco, “come on children, you’re acting like children, every generation thinks it’s the end of the world.”⁴³ Luther puts it this way, “This is how the human heart customarily complains whenever it experiences the ingratitude of the world: “Things are worse than they used to be.” ...[on the contrary] the evil in the world is always the same. See to it, then, that you have a peaceful and tranquil heart and that you do not get angry when you see this evil.”⁴⁴

If Luther cannot convince us, maybe a lesbian feminist unbeliever can, “I always wondered why somebody doesn’t do something about that. Then I realized I was somebody.”⁴⁵ It is easy to look around us, see sin, and become dismayed, but we cannot forget that we have the most powerful sword of all that not always brings division, but also brings unity to Christ, transforming and changing lives for all eternity. Because we still have the gospel, because we are somebody, and because there are those who desperately need it, we want to do something! Lily Tomlin did not have the gospel in mind, but Paul did when he wrote to the Romans, “That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are at Rome. I am not ashamed of the

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.* 353.

⁴³ Respondent 37. Non WLS Survey. Question2.

⁴⁴ Luther, M. (1999). *Luther's works, vol. 15: Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Last Words of David, 2 Samuel 23:1-7* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.) (Ec 7:10). Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House. 10.

⁴⁵ I could not find the direct source of where this quote initially comes from, but it is widely credited to Lily Tomlin.

gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile” (Ro 1:15-16).

Based on the pessimism of numerous responses, it seems that many, unfortunately, have the assumption that it is more difficult for unbelievers to come to faith today. Is that the case? Reading through the book of Ecclesiastes or reading about the sins Paul was dealing with in his day shows that there is nothing new under the sun in terms of sin and unbelief. Dead in sin is dead in sin—there are no varying degrees of death (Eph 2:1,5).

In terms of God’s faithfulness in bringing people to faith the question could be asked in this way, “Is the gospel message less effective today in bringing people to faith?” We need only return to Romans 1:16 for the answer. As long as God is still behind his word, which he promises he is, the gospel retains its power. Scripture clearly tells us, “no one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit” (1 Co 12:3). Does the Holy Spirit benefit from having a central place in society—whether it is in the form of majority in numbers, legislation, media, education—to do his work? God still entrusts to us a proper understanding of the means of grace. Are the means of grace any less effective? Do they need the help of being propped up by culture and society? Certainly not since their power is derived from our God; and the “instruments” are his very words.

In the Wisconsin Lutheran Synod, *sola scriptura* still is our foundation and norm. We are uniquely privileged to administer Baptism and the Lord’s Supper with the proper understanding grounded in God’s Word that they offer free forgiveness, creating and strengthening faith. Is the Holy Spirit any weaker if the Deo-centric worldview is marginalized in America? Has the Holy Spirit’s power become weaker? Of course not! The Holy Spirit gives spiritual life to the spiritually dead (Ro 8:2 and Eph 2:4,5). As long as God is still the power behind the word, the gospel message that we hold in these jars of clay is no less effective.

In the Wisconsin Synod the motto right now is “Christ’s Love, Our Calling.” The motto is a fitting focus on the gift entrusted to us, and the privilege we have to share it. We take Luther’s advice by praising and thanking God that our synod still holds to the *fides* of Scripture rediscovered in the Reformation. We praise God that he has entrusted to us the truth. We thank God that he has given us a seminary to teach the truth and share the truth for 150 years; leading generations to drink deeply from the water of life. It is unprecedented, and a gift of God that he has worked in so many generations thankful hearts that have not become complacent with the

responsibility of having the gift of the gospel. Focusing on the fact that we still have the truth and that we are still under the Great Commission, are more accurate barometers of the status of Christianity in America than what we may see in society around us.

In appreciation of these blessings, we need not look around us in fear or pessimism. God is still God. Jesus is still on his throne. God never needed nor desired nor benefitted from the sword of the state or pop culture or public opinion. God works with a much more powerful sword—the sword of the gospel. He has entrusted this weapon (and shield) to mortal humans. What a privilege to be involved in God’s plan of bringing people to faith. Let us live lives worthy of the calling we have received (Eph 4:1).

A pause beside a well

As he talks with the Samaritan woman, Jesus is not ashamed of the gospel. He is the gospel! (Jn 4: 26). He likens the gospel to “living water” and says that “whoever drinks from it will never go thirsty.” The gospel has power that changes hearts and lives. It changes the Samaritan woman’s heart. The Samaritan woman, initially, was so ashamed that she went to the well in the heat of the day likely to avoid interaction. Now, forgetting her water jugs, she goes directly into the town of Sychar to share the gospel that was just been entrusted to her, planted in her own heart. Even though the townspeople are hearing the message from a known adulterer, the power of the gospel creates faith in hearts. “We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world” (Jn 4:42). The same powerful living water Jesus offered to the Samaritans, he gives to us. It gives us forgiveness and changes our hearts. Not only does he give us living water to change our hearts, but he calls on us to share the living water to change other hearts.⁴⁶

IV. Identifying Negative Influences of the World in our Work as Gospel Heralds

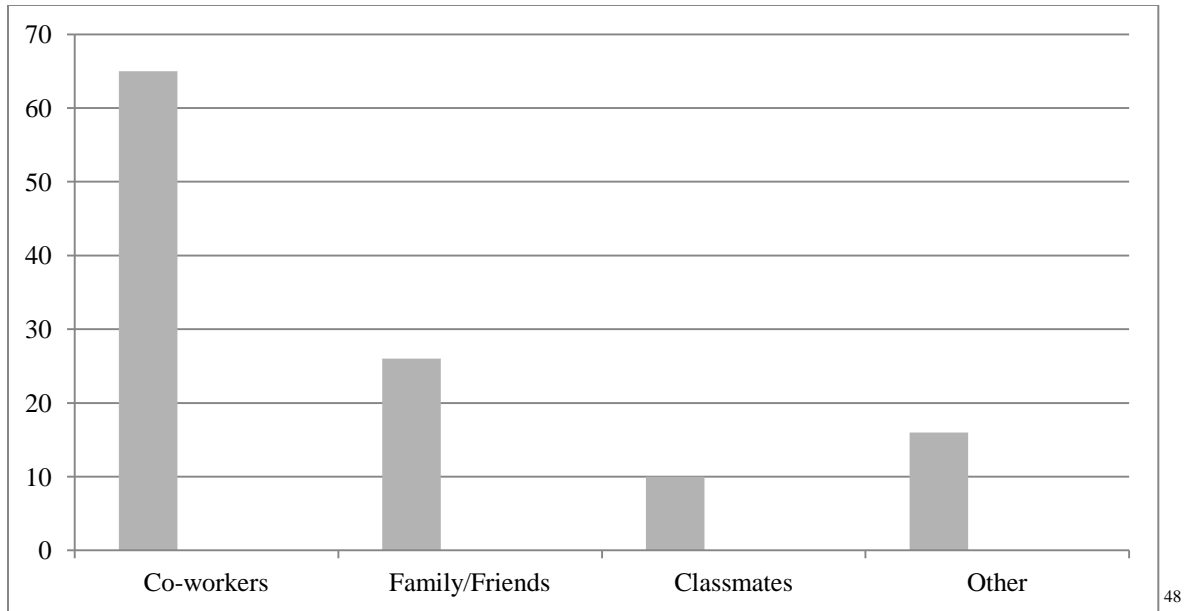
Out of the necessity to clear some of the fog that gets in the way of seeing our role as gospel heralds, we have addressed some of the negative influences, particularly by focusing on the expectation many have of the gospel requiring a central place in society for legitimacy, as well as the expectation for an improper union of church and state influence by our American

⁴⁶ This also shows the importance of our personal devotional life. It is difficult to see or be motivated to carry out our highest calling as gospel heralds when we are not going to the living water regularly ourselves.

culture. The subject of this section again deserves multiple volumes. The title is really the job of every pastor and Christian as we practice exegesis not only on the Word, but also on ourselves to preach specific law and gospel on our own hearts. Allow the title of the section to be a cursory reminder that as much as we may see the blemishes of society around us, we too are products of our own time and culture, and, therefore, we must remain ever vigilant and mindful of how the devil will use our own cultural sinful blind spots to inhibit our role as gospel heralds.⁴⁷ I would once again point the reader to the bibliography to gain more insights into ways our culture can negatively affect our role as gospel heralds. The evangelical authors in this area ask some great questions, while their answers and solutions can be lacking. For sake of brevity here too, I will focus on the apparent examples within the survey responses of the negative influences that our cultural immersion has had on our role as gospel heralds.

Sometimes in the disgust and disbelief of sin promoted in our culture, we can overlook the subtle negative influences of the cultural norms that have crept into our lives and have disrupted our work in our Great Commission calling. We return to the most striking quantitative conclusion of the survey with a new wrinkle to introduce. Most people do not share their beliefs or worldviews even though they are in daily contact with those whom do not share those same beliefs, even though they have opportunities to share them, even though they claim to be comfortable with sharing their beliefs, and even though they are concerned about the tension or divide between themselves and those who do not share their beliefs. This becomes even more fascinating, now, we examine the type of relationships people do have with those they do not hold similar beliefs or worldviews. The responses reveal that most do not have in mind passing, superficial, daily interactions with unbelieving individuals such as the bank teller or grocery bagger, but the respondents have in mind relationships of a much more personal and intimate variety—family, friends, and especially co-workers. The following graph illustrates the combined survey responses for question three concerning the types of relationship noted with someone of differing beliefs or worldviews on a daily basis.

⁴⁷ The frontline of the battle remains on our own hearts, not on those Satan already holds prisoner.



What is interesting here is that even though most people have close relationships with those who do not share their beliefs, these individuals or relationships were rarely specifically cited as sources of tension between Christians and non-Christians.⁴⁸ Once again, this makes sense when we see how few actively seek to share their faith. There are certainly climates or cultures within the various family, school, and work dynamics that heavily contribute to people not sharing their beliefs. The most common reason for not sharing beliefs, faith, worldview or values, was a stated aversion to conflict and confrontation which may show the effect of the cultural climate of tolerance interfering with sharing the gospel. Without knowing or understanding the specific dynamics within the relationships, I cannot provide many insights beyond that this is really a rather sad commentary on the nature of the relationships and depth of dialogue considering these could or should be some of the closest of relationships and taking the Great Commission seriously is the most loving thing anyone can offer. Then again, it is understandable considering the stakes of getting hurt are that much higher (Mt 10:35).

In addition to the contributing factors of culture mentioned in the previous sections, I propose that cultural negative influences of biblical illiteracy, pluralism, and some negative WELS cultural influences, all tend to be contributing factors that inhibit WELS members from

⁴⁸ Responses from combined Non WLS Survey and WLS Survey question 3. Notice the total number exceeds those who answered “yes” because a significant portion of respondents had multiple types of relationships with individuals who do not share their beliefs.

⁴⁹ See responses to questions 1 and 2.

fully embracing their role as gospel heralds. That conclusion is based on the responses of questions 3,4,5, and 6. Without a doubt, there are a myriad of other contributing factors or deeper insights that good anthropologists could identify were they to look at the responses.

In reaching out to the lost we will likely notice the lack of biblical literacy today. That is not only a problem outside of the church, but in the church as well. Here is what the ideal attitude might look like among members,

Scripture says to always be prepared to give a reason for the hope that you have. I immerse myself daily in devotions and attend bible study often to keep this preparation alive. I can say that through these practices, I know just how much my life has been dreadfully imperfect! Lord, have mercy! At the same time, I know that my faith in Jesus is the only thing that matters and the only thing that works because He is the "Perfect" for me! God, be praised! Indeed, there will always be risks in this life but the best risks are the ones we take in faith. We must live by faith and trust that good things will happen - even in the midst of all the bad. I think of all the heroes of faith in Scripture and am inspired to step out in faith the way they did. Regardless of the possible bad things that can result, there's an eternal good that will come of it!⁵⁰

This response is the ideal, but regrettably not the norm. Closer to the norm, people say they are uncomfortable doing so because, “[their] knowledge base is lacking.”⁵¹ Among the responses there was regularly an inferiority complex where people felt their biblical literacy did not seem sufficient or in proportion to being able to articulate their beliefs with those who did not share them. Biblical illiteracy and lack of understanding are big concerns. What is even more disconcerting is the inconsistency in that many consider their biblical knowledge of the gospel sufficient to call themselves Christians, but consider it insufficient when it comes to sharing this knowledge with an unbeliever.

As far as biblical illiteracy, I too, must confess that it becomes easy not to feel the need to retain Bible passages and knowledge when I know I can outsource my brain to Logos and Google to recall any information I may need. For the excuse of insufficient Biblical knowledge or fear of confrontation we ought to repent and apply 1 Peter 3:15-16, “But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.”

While there are many aspects of postmodernism that can subtly and negatively inhibit our role as gospel heralds, the one I found most apparent in the survey was religious pluralism.

⁵⁰ Respondent 41. Non WLS Survey. Question 4.

⁵¹ Respondent 22. Non WLS Survey. Question 4.

Pluralism describes the attitude that it is perfectly alright to have co-existing religious beliefs that are incompatible such as the idea that Hinduism and Christianity both lead to heaven. Rather than pluralists, we are exclusivists because we maintain that salvation is found exclusively in Christ as “the way, the truth, and the life” (Jn 14:6). I do not assume that any of us would ever deny that, but the survey illustrates that we are often guilty of pluralism by omission. As some evangelicals have put it, we too often find our faith “privately engaging, but socially irrelevant.”⁵² Outside of church, it seems like we forget our identity by not taking the Great Commission seriously by sharing the gospel entrusted to us with those near and dear. This is nothing new under the sun either, as James dealt with this among the very first Christian churches in the world. He likened his members to looking in a mirror, but then forgetting what they look like when they are not staring at their own reflection (Jas 1:23). Even the influence of the brave new world of postmodernism is nothing but an old recycled trick of the evil one.

Finally, as members of an old synod with a long history in the United States, it would be a bit foolish to assume that there are no negative, long-established cultural norms that interfere with the motto, “Christ’s Love. Our Calling.” We may be blind to some pitfalls, blinded by our own biases and insensitivities, but one respondent attempted to articulate what (s)he views as a potential problem within our synod,

Learning to share what you believe in a loving yet firm manner takes practice. I feel that our church body does a wonderful job of laying out the law and the gospel. I also feel that we say we are going to share the good news! We need to do a better job of helping people know how to do that. Each of us is different with different gifts of the Spirit. Maybe we need to look at how each person can share the gospel through the gift that God has given to them.⁵³

I believe this assessment bears merit. God be praised that we can expect to hear law and gospel every time we enter a WELS congregation. Yet, preparing people to share law and gospel on an individual basis is an area we can improve based on the survey. One of the non-Christians taking the survey put it this way, “I feel like mainstream Christianity has become more insular and views non-Christians as outsiders.”⁵⁴ That sounds like a pretty fair assessment and some pointed law for it coming from the mouth of someone who said (s)he was an unbeliever. Based on the survey responses we do have a tendency to be insular rather than taking advantage of the

⁵² I came across this quote a couple times in my reading of Evangelical authors, but I could not relocate the source for this phrase.

⁵³ Respondent 41. Non WLS Survey. Question 4.

⁵⁴ Respondent 16. Non WLS Survey. Question 1.

opportunities to embrace the Great Commission. Instead of carrying out the command of being “in the world, but not of the world” (Ro 12:2 & Ro 13), we can have this backwards tendency to invert that motto into “being of the world, but not in the world.”

Maybe some of this is a reflection of us as WELS leaders. We are generally comfortable exercising exegesis on the biblical languages, and dividing law and gospel properly in a message prepared for a mass of people, but maybe this knowledge and ability tends to be lacking when it comes to the exegesis of the individual. To achieve this requires personal relationships and attentive listening rather than speaking.

My own folly in this regard is reflected in my survey questions as the questions focus on the need to actively speak rather than listen. Furthermore, WELS members who responded to the survey show that they too concentrate on the “what am I going to say?!” and the confrontation and concerns that would inevitably ensue on account of their words rather than listening and properly pointed questions and responses.

To be sure, we cannot carry out the Great Commission without words on our part, but we cannot apply the proper words—the specific law and gospel—from Scripture to an individual without first listening. To apply direct law and gospel to individual hearts we need not only be good exegetes by listening to God’s Word but by listening to an individual. It took this response from an anonymous Seminary brother to show me my foolish thinking and point me to the light,

At first, it's difficult to get over an initial inclination to "solve" or "get at the core" or "fix" a person's beliefs. Equally important (perhaps more!) is to listen, to share, to hear, to respect, to love ---- and this is not the same as "politically correct TOLERANCE." It becomes a more comfortable thing to talk religion when I am able to "forget self" and consider my role in God's family and kingdom. -- simply said. Hard to practice this "state of mind."⁵⁵

In order to begin to have this “state of mind” we need to see all people through the lens of our Great Commission calling as having a deep need for the Savior.

A pause beside a well

Jesus saw the Samaritan woman living in sin and shame as having a deep need for her Savior. Jesus had the advantage of knowing her whole life’s story and all her thoughts to know exactly the specific law and gospel she needed. Upon hearing the message and receiving the gospel, we see a great example of this new convert embracing her role to share the gospel. She did not give the excuse that her knowledge was lacking even though she had just come to faith.

⁵⁵ Respondent 2. WLS Survey. Question 4.

She did not go to her house and avoid people for fear of losing the message. Instead, she ran into town and shared the good news with those she was too ashamed to even see only minutes ago. The forgiveness found in Christ had already changed her life and the way she viewed the people and the world around her.

V. Embracing the Aspects of the Culture around Us that Assist in Our Role as Gospel Herald

In the survey, American society seemed often to be excessively demonized. We assessed this pessimism in the previous sections. It is time to build upon the case for optimism and confidence in being 21st century disciples of the Great Commission. This is an understandably different time in America as Christianity does seem to be increasingly marginalized, but that does not change our role or attitude as Christians. Even if that is the case, there are blessings in marginalization and secularization as well. Only God knows the true extent of those blessings as he governs this world for the benefit of the reaping of his harvest.

If secularization of the United States is taking place,⁵⁶ it can actually be a healthy thing for the church. In a secularized culture where Christians stick out like sore thumbs, the opportunities to share beliefs come much more effortlessly. Secularization and animosity towards Christians can serve as a purge for the church as well. Hypocrites stop being hypocrites when the church no longer enjoys the luxury of a central position in society. Craig Van Gelder urges,

We need to adjust this self-concept of the church [needing a central place in society] to one that is able to accept a minority status and face cultural indifference. We will need to shake off the remaining vestiges of a Christendom perspective that expects the world to take the church seriously, refocusing our attention to how we should now seek out the world.⁵⁷

The Great Commission is no less in effect in 21st century America. Christ is no less our Savior and his word is no less powerful. America is different from the time of the generations before us, but it is also important to remember that we are not the generations before us either. We are not the products of the first century Roman world or Reformation-era Germany. Rather, we are products of our own culture and time in the perfect position to be exegetes of the people

⁵⁶ While many consider secularization of America a foregone conclusion, the idea of secularization is refuted somewhat in Putnam's and Campbell's book "American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites."

⁵⁷ George R. Hunsberger and Craig Van. Gelder, *Church between Gospel & Culture* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1996), 43.

and culture around us in ways that the Apostle Paul or Martin Luther would not even be able to do if they were transported to the present.

Our day, settings, and contexts provide no fewer inroads to share the gospel than any previous time. I will make the argument that we have opportunities like never before. God has placed us with our Great Commission calling in one the most technologically advanced, economically advanced, and globalized country in the world.

Looking at technology, there are certainly some negative repercussions, but the unthinkable potential technology has in assisting us in the sharing of the gospel cannot be ignored, or likely underestimated. Thanks to technology, the Bible has been translated into more languages than any other age. Scripture is in more hands, and even the biblical languages are accessible for people with modest language skill thanks to programs like Logos. As the technological, social networks grow, we have increasing opportunities to engage people, build relationships, and share the good news with minimal monetary expenses.

Even with the economy in a downward pointing arrow, God has placed us in easily one of the richest, upwardly mobile countries of the world. With the blessing of monetary resources, we are privileged to be able to participate in the carrying out of Great Commission as a corporate church even where language, abilities, time, personality, and energy might limit us individually.

The world, in large part because of technology, is getting smaller. Globalization is very real. Not only can technology easily allow us to communicate with people all over the world, but America's privileged status still attracts people from all over the world who do not know about Jesus into our communities. The world missions are coming to us!⁵⁸

When we are willing to engage the peoples around us, and are willing to listen to their stories, we find ourselves placed in the perfect position to be gospel heralds to individuals whom are in need of the Savior. For as much as people say America is becoming a secular society, when we have our eyes and ears open we do not need to strain too hard to find opportunities to share the good news of Jesus. As much as people have tried to ignore them, natural knowledge and the conscience are still active. Even in what we so often view as our opposition, the media

⁵⁸ The feasibility and opportunities for world travel assist us in understanding and reaching out to the diverse cultures within our own borders as well.

and the arts, we can see Grammy award winners,⁵⁹ news programs,⁶⁰ and actors⁶¹ publically wrestling over the big questions of life. Here too, we have many inroads and opportunities with people heavily immersed in pop culture to share the answers to the big questions over origin of life, good and evil, death, meaning of life, and the afterlife. The popularity of apologists such as Timothy Keller and Ravi Zacharias shows that dialogues that engage and stimulate the natural knowledge are still possible even in a so called post-Christian era.

There are unique inroad opportunities our culture provides for bringing the gospel to the lost of our generation. We focused on the negative aspects of it already, but now notice the high value that our generation puts on relationships. In this culture of tolerance people are keenly aware of hurtful relationships. Fortunately, one of the ways the Bible presents the shocking story of our salvation is in relationship language. The language of the Bible in this supposedly Biblically illiterate culture remains relevant. This simply serves to illustrate the many opportunities to be gospel heralds that may be right under our nose.

A pause beside a well

The disciples just did not get it. Why would Jesus put himself in such a compromising situation? All they wanted was for him to eat something quickly so they could get out of this God-forsaken town. They did not see people who should follow their Jesus, but people who are forever lost, horrible sinners who did not deserve their time or energy. Jesus saw something very different. He saw a harvest. Thousands upon thousands of lost sinners whom needed to know the messiah had arrived for them. They came and “because of his words many more became believers” (Jn 4:41).

After spending a few days in Sychar perhaps the disciples realized that Jesus was for all people and that they were to be his agents in sharing the message of forgiveness. If they did not come to this realization then, the Holy Spirit certainly brought the Eleven to this realization after

⁵⁹ While many of the lyrics are offensive to Christians, the popular musicians, and 2014 Grammy winners, “Vampire Weekend” and “Kendrick Lamar” both focused on existential, spiritual questions in their respective albums from the past year.

⁶⁰ As misguided as it may have been, CNN recently featured a debate between a creationist and evolutionist.

⁶¹ After the recent death of Philip Seymour Hoffman, many of his friends in acting commented on the sad fact that he died so young.

Pentecost. Equipped with the Holy Spirit and the Word, they realized that God provides his elect with endless opportunities to share his powerful Word with the people living in darkness. He gives us the same opportunities, and he does not ask us to do something for which he has not equipped us. He calls on us to be his agents to use his powerful Word that no less calls people “out of darkness and into his marvelous light” (1 Pt 2:9).

VI. Rejoicing in our Great Commission Calling, Work, and Harvest

Currently, there are more lost souls in America than ever. That is something that saddens us, gives us urgency, and causes us to pray, because if they do not come to faith in Jesus, they will spend eternity in hell. Paul tells us, “How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?” (Ro. 10:14). That is our job. We are the workers of the Great Commission. It is not the only hat we wear, not the only work that God has given us, but it is our central and primary work, whether it is supporting the corporate church in this task or as individuals.

With this high calling central in our individual lives, and of our church body, we view the world around us in a far more optimistic and confident light. Instead of despair, lament, anger, or contention, we see the Lord’s harvest fields. What do we see when we look at and consider lost of our Sychar? When we look at our co-workers, our friends, neighbors, and family members who do not believe in Jesus as their Savior? When we consider the present condition of American society? My prayer for myself and all of us is that God’s Word continually leads us to repentance for shirking our Great Commission call and that he reshapes us to view these individuals and contexts not as nuisances or to be feared, but as the contexts where our God has placed us to serve in order to lead the individuals who he has placed in front of us to the waters of everlasting life. We boast with Paul, “I am not ashamed of the gospel, it is the power of God for the salvation of all people” (Ro 1:15-16).

God could have entrusted that message to his holy angels, but instead, he gives this powerful sword to you and me. When we share it, it will cause the rising and falling of people who hear it. Some, like the Samaritan woman, will gladly hear, learn, and share it. Others, even our own colleagues, friends, and family may argue against us, reject us, and persecute us for it, just as many of the Jews and Jesus’ own brothers and sister did to him. That too is a reason to

rejoice because God uses such trials only to draw us further into his Word to bring us closer to him. Unlike us, God always has an eternal perspective with our eternal best in mind. We pray for the same perspective and urgency in these last days before our Savior comes again in all his glory to say to each one of his ambassadors, “Well done my good and faithful servant” (Mt 25:1).

Conclusion

O wonder!
How many goodly creatures are there here!
How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world,
That has such people in't.⁶²

Some of that irony is lost now. Yes, Shakespeare and Solomon are right, there truly is nothing new under the sun. The year 2014 suggests 2014 just as much as it might suggest 2013, 2007, 1965, 60 AD, or 900 BC. The depravity of humankind is just as apparent as ever. We face the same sins that have always been common to humanity. We face some of the same inhibitions that get in the way of our calling as gospel heralds. And yet this is a brave new world for us. We did not experience the things under the sun during Solomon’s lifetime, Paul’s lifetime, or Martin Luther’s lifetime. Right now is our time under the sun. This is our only time—a short time—to experience the things under the sun, and in that sense they are new to us. We would solely focus on our short time on this earth, if the Son, had not called us to follow him not just now, but showed us there is a new world where we will spend all eternity. Continually reshaped and refocused by the gospel we do see a new world. This is not it. We have been given a long term perspective. We have eternity in heaven waiting for us where God promises that he will truly “make all things new” (Rev 21:5) and where there will only be “goodly creatures” and “beauteous mankind”⁶³ covered in the robes of Christ’s righteousness. This short time under the sun is the time of grace God has given us to work in his harvest fields as his Great Commission workers. Through the power of Jesus, we will bravely, confidently, and joyfully carry out that calling.

⁶²William Shakespeare. *The Tempest*. Vol. XLVI, Part 5. Scene I. Lines 197-200.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

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Appendix: The Survey

Overview

The following survey was intended to help shed light on this preliminary thesis: There seems to be a perceived divide growing between WELS Lutherans and non-Christians who are of similar cultural background with similar economic achievement and stability. What is causing this tension, how is it getting in the way of sharing the gospel, and how can we get past the tension and share the gospel with blood-bought souls? The greatest barrier may not be found in them, but in us.

The survey questions and information gathering method were intended to be more qualitative and anecdotal in nature rather than quantitative, and I do not make any claim that this is highly scientific. Also, they were intentionally rather open and ambiguous so as both Christians and non-Christians could answer and to leave as much room for independent thought and interpretation on the part of the interviewee.

Some of the general goals or purposes behind the survey questions were:

1. To verify whether many Christians did feel as though there is a tension between their non-Christian neighbors and vice versa
2. Closely tied to the above—to get a general idea of the attitudes toward one another
3. To gauge how people, particularly WELS Christians, feel about the present and future condition of Christianity in America
4. To gather some sort of idea of how people account for their stated sentiments and attitudes
5. To gauge attitudes toward religious dialogues among and between Christians and non-Christians
6. To discover both positives and also negatives in attitudes and interactions (i.e. biases, assumptions, and misunderstandings on part especially of Christians)

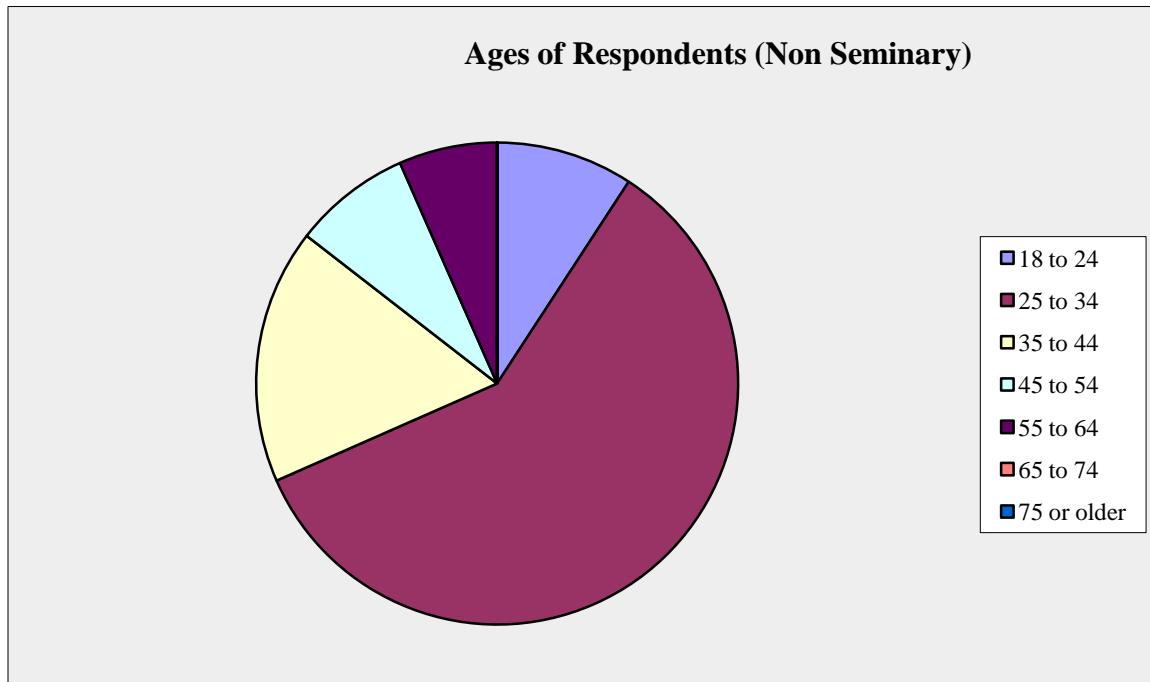
The survey shows that, for many, the perceived tension or divide is something that is very real for both Christians and those of other religious beliefs, and it's something that many think about often. How people accounted and responded to the tension ranged across the board, but there were some common themes which this paper will seek to address.

I thank all those who took the time to be interviewed or took the survey from the bottom of my heart. Your insights proved invaluable to me personally, even if your comments and concerns did not make this paper. There is only so much that can be addressed in this weighty topic!

The recipients of the survey were predominantly Caucasian middle to upper class Americans. The live interviews were conducted in two neighborhoods in Germantown, WI; and in the coffee/tea shops and streets of Farwell Avenue and Brady Street of Milwaukee. These areas were chosen for their range in demographics within the stated ethno-racial-economic group. The Farwell and Brady Street area in Milwaukee is an artisan area with a predominantly

socially and politically liberal populace while the neighborhoods in Germantown tended to be more socially and politically conservative. Several interviews were also conducted at the Golda Meir Library on the UW-Milwaukee campus.

The non-face-to-face surveys were sent out to many non-called workers in the WELS through e-mail and Facebook. A high school classmate attending graduate school at Columbia University who is within the LGBTQ community in New York City also sent the survey out to some of his acquaintances within the community. The age demographic broke down as so:



18 to 24: 7
25 to 34: 45
35 to 44: 13
45 to 54: 6
55 to 64: 5
No Answer: 12
Seminarians: 23

Survey Summaries

Q1—Yes or No: There is a divide or tension between Christians and non-Christians in the United States.

Non WLS: Yes—75; No—14 Maybe—1

Notes: To generalize, the following were some the most common reasons for “yes.” Politics (the other side forcing their “agenda”); cultural/lifestyle/morality tensions; intolerance; feelings of victimization by other side; the divide of Christians going to heaven and unbelievers going to hell. Some who answered “no” said the tension isn’t strong enough—there should be more (based on responses they identified themselves as Christians), others said “no” due to diversity/tolerance of beliefs in their community

WLS: Yes—20; No—3

Notes: Generally, not surprisingly, WLS students identified the tension/divide in spiritual terms much more so than politically; like the above, morality was often cited; unlike the above answers, very few of WLS students spoke in terms of personal relationships between Christians and non-Christians, rather they generally listed differences between Christians and non-Christians... seems that they generally took the ambiguous question a bit differently than those who are not WLS students

Q2—Yes or No: The state/condition of religion in the United States concerns me.

Non WLS: Yes—66; No—20; Not sure—1

Notes: Surprisingly, no Christians explicitly mentioned sharing the gospel or relationship with Jesus in their responses, although could be implicit in some of responses; rather the concern was generally in terms of politics and outward morality again; Also, many responses had a tone of feeling victimized again; Those who said “no” often either expressed a lack of personal interest in religion on their part, freedom is prevalent still, or “religion/spirituality” is still thriving.

WLS: Yes—19; No—4

Notes: Unlike above, reasons for “yes” here were more so explicitly stated spiritual concerns. Generally not much optimism in the future of the gospel in America at large. Those who said “no” cited Jesus is in control, and that often times seem like the contemporary time is the worst.

Q3—Yes or No: There are people I am in contact with on a daily basis that do not share my beliefs or worldview.

Non WLS: Yes—76; No—10; Sometimes—2

WLS: Yes—16; No—6; Sometimes—1

Notes: For both groups, work is overwhelmingly the place where people run into those who do not share their beliefs or worldview.

Q4—Yes or No: I feel comfortable talking “religion” with those who do not share my beliefs or worldview.

Non WLS: Yes—58; No—16; Sometimes/Depends/Not sure—14

WLS: Yes—20; No—3

Notes: Instead of “talking” I should have probably asked about “listening.” Most focused on the “what I have to say” aspect of conversation, although a couple noted the importance of listening. Being afraid/not afraid of contention was often stated. Knowledge base, or lack there of, was also noted by many as a reason to talk or not talk about “religion.” Some referred to the need to be open-minded and a love to share different beliefs. While most replied, “yes,” this was often qualified in the response as depending on the right context and audience.

Q5—Yes or No: I actively seek opportunities to share my beliefs/worldviews.

Non WLS: Yes—23; No—60; Depends/Sometimes—4

WLS: Yes—10; No—11; Sometimes/Depends—2

Notes: The disparity between Q4 and Q5 is interesting. Many note or at least imply the faith is a personal. Many saw this as an obnoxious and potentially contentious thing to do so and getting into people’s personal “business”. Some admitted they are afraid to do this. Others had issues with the “actively seek” aspect of the question, but willingly take an opportunity when presented

Q6—Yes or No: Society, time, and circumstances provide me many opportunities to share my beliefs, values, or ideals.

Non WLS: Yes—55; No—28; Sometimes—3

WLS: Yes—13; No—10

Notes: Some noted societal norms today as hindering religious dialogue, or saw this sort of dialogue as negative, but many took a very positive spin and stated that opportunities abound for these types of discussions.

Individual Responses by Question

Q1—Yes or No: There is a divide or tension between Christians and non-Christians in the United States.

Individual responses with comments verbatim:

1. Yes; ideological beliefs, superiority 11/14/2013
2. No, I do not think there is a divide. However, I do think that Christians and non-Christians seem to self-segregate a bit (i.e. with marriage). 11/9/2013
3. yes you see it in the papers every day. 11/8/2013

4. Yes there is a divide. Besides the obvious that people who aren't Christians don't believe in Jesus as their Savior, it seems that Satan is taking hold of these hearts to fight against Christianity and all it stands for. Though government and church are separate, social agenda's "rights" are slowly edging out right from wrong according to God's Word. Sometimes it's difficult not to get discouraged to see what my grandchildren will deal with. My prayer is That God will keep them close to him. 11/8/2013
5. Yes, to some degree, there is a divide between Christians and non-Christians in the sense that the values of the two "groups" may differ. And because there are differences in thought, it can lead to a lower connection. 11/7/2013
6. Yes. "Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name." (1 Peter 4:12-16, NIV; <http://biblia.com/bible/niv2011/1Pe4.12-16>) 11/7/2013
7. No, the divide is between fundamentalists in every religion. 11/7/2013
8. yes - some people feel very strongly about religion, as it guides their actions and principles. For some, there is no compromising their religious beliefs, which may cause a rift between said group and those who's beliefs do not parallel said group. 11/7/2013
9. Yes. I think there are extremes on both sides which makes it harder to meet in the middle. Moreover, I think some Christians are not accepting of other religions or are hypocrites about helping people. 11/7/2013
10. Yes, leaders of the Christian movement continually try to permeate the public sphere, ignoring the constitutional freedom from religion. 11/7/2013
11. Yes. 11/7/2013
12. No. 11/6/2013
13. Yes. I think both parties alternately dismiss and feel persecuted by one another. 11/6/2013
14. Yes - as a non-Christian I feel excluded from the holiday festivities. 11/6/2013
15. No. I've grown up in a diverse community and have never sensed a divide between Christians and non-Christians. 11/6/2013
16. Yes. I feel like mainstream Christianity has become more insular and views non-Cs as outsiders. 11/6/2013
17. yes 11/6/2013
18. yes, through politics 11/6/2013
19. Yes. Philosophically, politically, etc., are very obvious in stance and opinion. 11/6/2013
20. Yes. Ideologically, there is a huge divide. However, the media portrays this divide as different than it really is. In our daily lives, Christians and non-Christians work together, are friends, and live together. 11/5/2013
21. Yes. World is messed up. 10/26/2013
22. No. I just don't talk about it 10/26/2013

23. Yes. Due to ignorance 10/26/2013
24. Yes. Due to politics 10/26/2013
25. Yes. On both sides. Christians not living faith. Misunderstandings. Generalizations. Don't get to know the individuals. 10/26/2013
26. No. 10/26/2013
27. No. Not talked about. 10/25/2013
28. Yes. Indifference/intolerance 10/25/2013
29. Yes. Theological based, Christians seen as judgmental, Christians don't know how to share faith
30. 10/25/2013
31. Yes. Cultural tensions, heavily political 10/25/2013
32. Yes. There is. Christianity is polarizing and for those who practice it, it holds them accountable. And as is pretty obvious throughout the country, from top to bottom, we live in a society where personal accountability is largely disregarded. 10/21/2013
33. YES - there is a different focus and a different motive for all that we do. While we all may have similar earthly goals, our reasons for doing are (should be) different. 10/18/2013
34. Yes. Overall I think yes 10/18/2013
35. Yes... Christians see America's culture as rejecting and attacking Christian faith while non-Christians see America's culture as attacking their views and pressuring everyone to believe 10/15/2013
36. Yes. Christians have a higher moral compass. 10/15/2013
37. yes, non believers tempt a lot more 10/15/2013
38. Yes. We are in an age in which being religious, and specifically Christian is viewed as being negative. Christians are people that judge other people. 10/14/2013
39. Yes. I believe we have God to rely on when we have times of trouble. Non Christians do not have that same connection. 10/14/2013
40. Yes-Christians and non-christians are divided on several levels. Many Christians that have grown up sheltered in a Christian household simply cannot seem to relate to non-Christians. This hinders spreading of the gospel because many Christians cannot meet non-Christians where they are at. This divide cannot be bridged without mutual understanding. 10/14/2013
41. Yes. some will go to heaven and some will go to hell:) 10/14/2013
42. Yes. Firstly, there is a divide that exists beyond earthly boundaries in that Christians are citizens of heaven through Christ and non-Christians are not and despite the visible appearance of it, the gravity of the condition exists. Secondly, in America it would seem that non-Christians are being accepted/encouraged while Christians are met with resistance/discouragement in the way holidays, curriculum, mission statements and employment policies/benefits are written and applied in modern times so as to show

tolerance for sin and intolerance of faith in Christ. Thirdly, though I've not tallied it, I would find it safe to say that the media promotes those who live non-Christian lifestyles via commercials, shows, movies, news, and documentaries as they hold the larger quantity of air time. Shows may depict folks who have Christian values but they are done so in a way that undermines, scorns, or judges confessional Christians for a lack of love, wisdom, or courage but promotes the more liberal Christians for their tolerance or acceptance of ungodly lifestyles. 10/14/2013

43. Religiously, yes. Christians believe in Jesus as their Savior from sin. Socially, no. Some people call themselves "Christians" but do not adhere to the Bible (i.e. they accept homosexuality/premarital sex/drinking too much/etc). 10/14/2013
44. Yes. Being Christian is instantly viewed at as being closed-minded, anti-choice/rights/whatever. You are instantly labeled and in a negative way. How dare anyone believe anything other than accept homosexuality, for example. If you are against these issues, your voice is deemed that of a bigot and is completely ignored, if not singled out to be made fun of. 10/14/2013
45. Within my little WELS world, I feel there is a divide. I think some Christians fear that non-Christians will pull them away from their faith if they spend time together! 10/14/2013
46. yes 10/14/2013
47. No--I think the divide is not large enough. Americans and their desire for "tolerance" of anything (coexist) brings people together rather than divides them. I wish the divide was larger, but I fear it is not. 10/14/2013
48. Yes. Politically, there is a divide when it comes to current matters (abortion, gay marriage, assisted suicide and a few others). 10/14/2013
49. yes - I see it all the time; however, it's very apparent at work. It's evident in how people think, what they say and do, and how they treat each other. 10/14/2013
50. Yes, I believe so. It seems to me that non think that Christians think they are better than everyone else. 10/14/2013
51. Yes; certain sects of Christianity are viewed as extremely backwards (like the WELS, mainly because of the views on women's participation in the church), while atheists and agnostics are seen as forward-thinking visionaries. (Kind of ironic isn't it?) 10/13/2013
52. Yes. The president currently puts a lot of emphasis on Muslim faith. 10/13/2013
53. Yes - The divide was always there everyone just did their own thing....that is what is great about America. How, it was forced into the main stream when 9/11 happened....probably for several reasons - being made an issue by the Terrorists themselves and by the Media. 10/13/2013
54. Not sure. on the fence with this one not sure if there is or isnt 10/13/2013
55. Yes. Non-Christians do not believe in Jesus and will therefore not be in heaven. :(10/13/2013
56. Yes. in my age range I think christians and non christians mostly get along with no rifts. I think a larger divide is between regular church going christians, non regular christians and non christians, and I see this divide mainly on saturday nights and sundays with thier choice and priorities of activities. 10/13/2013
57. Yes, Non-Christians seems to be more outspoken and have a loud voice that goes against what we believe in. 10/13/2013

58. I'm going to say no due to the fact that in my little world with the unbelievers I experience I do not feel a divide. There are some difference but I do not feel a division of basic lifestyles. 10/13/2013
59. Yes. There is a divide as in..they believe certain things. When you are a Christian, your values are guided by your beliefs which might affect how you feel with things that happen at work, in personal matters, or in political matters. You might feel differently if you are a non-Christian. 10/13/2013
60. yes, they have different life goals and this causes them to live their lives differently 10/13/2013
61. Yes you can see it in many different ways whether its through politics or pro-choice/pro-life 10/13/2013
62. Yes - with Christians being the perceived majority it is ok to bash or make fun of - not pc for any other religion. 10/13/2013
63. Yes. In some ways, nonChristians . On the other hand, there are times when nonChristians are more kind than Christians; ironically and unknowingly behavior that is more Christlike. 10/13/2013
64. Not as much as there should be. Too many people believe they can surround themselves with sin yet be strong enough to not give in. 10/13/2013
65. Yes. It it the focus of out lives. 10/13/2013
66. Yes. 1) Non-Christians often seem to think Christians are forcing their beliefs on them. 2) Christian beliefs are an easy target for the media. 10/13/2013
67. yes, safe old issues 10/13/2013
68. Yes. Many non-Christians judge Christians by the few examples that stand out in the media or the occasional encounter with people that have a "holier-than-thou" attitude. 10/13/2013
69. No, it seems like in my daily life people just try to get along with anyone no matter what your preference is. I don't feel like there is any seperation noticeable between the two. 10/13/2013
70. Yes. Christians, for the most part, are trying to hold on to family values instilled by our parents, the church and the Bible. 10/13/2013
71. Yes, HUGE moral differences 10/13/2013
72. Yes. Simple politics proves that. Example the subtraction of God from the pledge. 10/13/2013
73. Yes, I think the nonchristians in this country continue to move further and further away from the main Christian beliefs. Just look how popular the tv show modern family has become and how we persecute those who don't side with the gays. 10/13/2013
74. No- I feel this is a grey area, however. Christians and non-Christians interact and form relationships everyday, but outlooks on life and afterlife are obviously very different. Thus, Christians are drawn to other Christians. 10/13/2013
75. I would say yes to an extent however it really depends on your definition of christian. Many conservative Christians I believe are looked down on by other non Christians. In the same way some Christians believe they are above others 10/13/2013
76. Yes, Jesus is not in the hearts of Americans 10/13/2013
77. Yes. I feel that the mood is definitely shifting in this country to be more divided. Christians are already being persecuted for voicing their beliefs about homosexuality in a way that I feel will soon be prosecuted as a criminal offense, for example. 10/13/2013

78. Yes. I think Christians are looked down upon by non Christians in America. 10/13/2013
79. yes, Devout Christians are becoming more and more set apart out of fear of secular society. 10/13/2013
80. Yes 10/13/2013
81. Yes 10/13/2013
82. Yes 10/13/2013
83. No 10/13/2013
84. Yes. Politics have aided in this division, in my opinion. 10/13/2013
85. Yes. On a human to human level, no I do not believe there is a divide. However, on an organizational level, especially politics, there is a huge gap largely forced by Christians. 10/13/2013
86. 10/13/2013
87. Yes, both sides can be unfairly critical of the other without even trying to understand their differences 10/13/2013
88. Yes. Religion plays into how people prioritize issues and moral issues take precedence. 10/13/2013
89. Of course there is, it goes beyond the church into politics, Christians believe the government should follow the church's lead, and non-Christians feel that the government and church should be separate 10/13/2013
90. No. 10/13/2013

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary student responses:

1. Yes. It's becoming more polarized and politically tied. 10/24/2013
2. YES However, the divide does not seem militant or aggressively drawn between "battle lines" as much as it is apathetic. In a broad stroke, the divide seems to resemble an unattractive, humongous opaque WALL of disinterest. The initial reaction to this divide is essentially, "It's complicated. I'd rather not get bogged down by a discussion concerning 'Christianity or not'" And if or when a discussion takes place, it can take on a sharp tone of dissension or will feature an awkward contrast of presuppositions/world views. 10/15/2013
3. Yes, Christians are trying to speak up for what God's Word says but find clear push back from non-Christians. 10/14/2013
4. Yes. There will always be a divide between those that believe and those that don't. However, it is more difficult to see this until a moral issue such a homosexuality arises and then the division is very visible. 10/14/2013
5. Yes. Christians live for Jesus. Non-Christians do not. 10/14/2013
6. Yes. Some people very passionately believe that America is a Christian nation and others in the same way believe the opposite. 10/14/2013
7. yes, issues such as gay marriage and abortion are huge dividers as non-Christians don't understand our stance. Also, many Christians tend to come off as hate-mongers rather than rebuking out of love 10/14/2013
8. Yes. If it's interfaith, the divide lies in theological presuppositions. If it's Theist-Nontheist, the divide lies in antisupernaturalism. 10/14/2013
9. Yes, many times it is passive, which makes it hard to detect, but there will always be a divide because Christians and non-Christians will not do some things together, for example (we hope) getting drunk, visiting strip clubs, supporting abortion, supporting gay marriage. Also, it seems there is a trend to more active division between Christians and non-Christians. Also, important to distinguish between those who are confessional

- Christians and those who are not because those who are "Christian" but accept non-Biblical doctrines will agree more with non-Christians. 10/14/2013
10. Yes. I believe that confessional Christianity is looked down on in America these days. I think that most Americans think Christians are hating and bigoted. 10/14/2013
 11. Yes, we live very differently in sex, language use, alcohol use, and viewpoints on politics. This is especially so in the college years to middle aged adult. 10/14/2013
 12. No, we are thoroughly mingled with non-Christians through work, old friends, and sometimes even family. When I am at work or with unbelieving friends I certainly do not see or feel a divide. 10/13/2013
 13. Yes. Christians and non-Christians often have extremely different views on social issues. When these differences are explored, Christians and non-Christians find themselves on two different sides of the divide. 10/13/2013
 14. Yes. Because they know they are different and that freaks the crap outta them. Neither can get past that in a lot of situations. They blame the other or avoid the other because neither can humble themselves to relate to the other. 10/13/2013
 15. Yes There is a divide between Christians and non-Christians everywhere. Silly question. 10/13/2013
 16. yes 10/13/2013
 17. No, The "divide" is more like a sliding rule. Some of the "traditional" differences between religious and non-religious have been smoothed over--e.g. gay marriages. 10/13/2013
 18. Yes but scripture points to that with the contrast between the children of God and the children of Satan. 10/13/2013
 19. No. Societally-speaking, there is little difference between them in average income, social standing, position in jobs, and the like. Divides on the basis of morals or politics are usually dealt with on an "agree to disagree" basis. 10/13/2013
 20. Yes, perspective and motivation are just two...perspective in that the non-Christian view is based on the "here and now" while the Christian has their eyes fixed on heaven even while earthly troubles and trials arise. As far as motivation is concerned, there is a huge difference in why people do the things they do, which is not to say that Christians always do things with the proper motivation, nor that non-Christians never do, but as a generality Christians are motivated by love and non-Christians by law. 10/13/2013
 21. Yes 10/13/2013
 22. Yes, the reason is because of a confusion of tolerance. People today see tolerance as meaning "You have to accept and agree with my beliefs." Whereas it really means "I can accept you have different beliefs, but I don't have to agree with them." This as you can see causes a problem as non-christians accuse Christians of being intolerant in today's modern world, which funny enough makes them intolerant by their own definition. Of course too the Devil spurs on this divide by appealing to mankind's sinful nature and making sin look good. 10/13/2013
 23. Yes, there is a big difference in worldview and answers to the "big questions" in life. 10/13/2013

Q2—Yes or No: The state/condition of religion in the United States concerns me.
Individual responses with comments verbatim:

1. Yes; the lack of it in some people's lives; intolerance 11/14/2013
2. No, I do not think generally religion is too extreme in America. At times, I do think people quote their religion as justification for things which is sometimes alarming, but I generally do not find it to be a huge problem. 11/9/2013
3. yes. i think a alot of people are getting away from it, especially the younger generation 11/8/2013
4. Yes. As I said above, the new religion is now a social religion. Secularism and humanism are becoming religions. These are more important to the majority of our society as "self" becomes more important than your neighbor. Isn't "as long as what you do doesn't hurt me" a selfish way to live? We are not looking out for those who are losing their focus on Christ and His truth. The road ahead is bumpy. Surely glad that Christ is still in control. 11/8/2013
5. No. I think everyone has a right to believe in whatever religion, as long as they don't use it to solely judge a person. 11/7/2013
6. Yes - We are all - for a time - chained to the sin of Adam. This has been, is, and will continue to be the root cause of all human rebellion. Today we are no different from the wayward sheep led by Moses, admonished by Jeremiah, loved by The Messiah, and finally sought out by his command (Matthew 28:19). During these days of the End Times, we struggle with the same crippling effects of our sinful flesh, the evil of this place, and the power of the accuser. If we are not concerned (that is, on guard) - if we are secure in the faith, faithfulness, and doctrine of our synod - at that point, all may already be lost!?! Therefore, we pray - while it is still Today! Amen! 11/7/2013
7. Yes, the lack of understanding and intolerance is very worrisome. The outspoken are the extremes however they are not the norm. 11/7/2013
8. No - I am not a terribly religious person 11/7/2013
9. Yes - I think religion is too prevalent in government affairs - marriage equality being one of those major issues. 11/7/2013
10. Yes, again, Christians continue to encroach on individual freedoms from religion. 11/7/2013
11. Yes. 11/7/2013
12. Yes - only in that I am concerned that people use it to justify laws that impose their moral code onto people that do not share that moral code via legislation and government (ex. anti-choice laws, anti-LGBTQ laws, etc.) 11/6/2013
13. No. I think religion in the USA is something that has persisted since before the founding of the republic. It has served a crucial role in social reforms (temperance, slavery, segregation, etc). It has occasionally been a source for intolerance and division. Regardless, it's a crucial part of our social fabric and hence I am always concerned with the state of religion in America. 11/6/2013
14. Yes, Antisemitism still exists. 11/6/2013
15. No. People are generally very welcoming regardless of background more often than not). 11/6/2013
16. I think religion is just another interest group that has pros and cons. 11/6/2013
17. yes. 11/6/2013
18. yes especially with gay marriage passing 11/6/2013
19. Not sure. Religious people, statistically, are probably just religious by name only - not in practice. 11/6/2013

20. Yes. People believe that there are multiple ways to heaven and therefore it doesn't matter if you are Christian, just living a good life, Jewish, or hindu. It is hard for people to see why they need Jesus if everything leads to heaven 11/5/2013
21. Yes. Concerned about the children 10/26/2013
22. Yes. More and more activities are keep people away from it. 10/26/2013
23. Yes. Forgotten about. 10/26/2013
24. No. 10/26/2013
25. No. For God to worry about. 10/26/2013
26. No. I do my own thing. 10/26/2013
27. No. 10/25/2013
28. No. There are no holy wars or people trying to convert the world. 10/25/2013
29. Yes. Christians looked at as old-fashioned by secular. Lack of compassion. 10/25/2013
30. No. Spirituality is here to stay and growing. 10/25/2013
31. No. You say "religion" and I think that there are a lot of religions doing well—even non-religion has a loud voice sometimes (from people who kind of treat it as their "religion"). They're bound to their unbelief and by definition, religion—religare—means "to bind." So, no. I think that religion is out there plenty. But does it concern me that Christianity has kind of become a popular punch line in America? Yes. That part concerns me. Because we fear God less and prefer to laugh at Him more. 10/21/2013
32. YES - The idea of "religion" has been watered down to mean whatever suits the needs of an individual or group. Believe anything, allow anyone to believe anything . . . but if you are conservative or Bible fearing in a way that might be contrary to another - you are highly discouraged. 10/18/2013
33. yes, I think people often say they are religious but they may not even know what that means. They may have grown up religious, but now live a lifestyle that is sinful and not feel like they have to apologize for the way they are. And then there are those who are purposely unreligious and feel like those who are religious are hateful towards those who don't share the same beliefs. 10/18/2013
34. Yes... mainstream religion is constantly evolving, and the state and perception of mainstream religions influences the assumptions others make about my faith 10/15/2013
35. Yes. 10/15/2013
36. yes the relationship with God is more important 10/15/2013
37. Some what. Yes, I guess. But, to quote Wilco, "every generation thinks it's the end." Mostly just depressed from the behavior that I observe daily at work. Food stamps. 10/14/2013 1
38. Yes. So many people are without hope and reason for being in life. I see so many people who have health concerns - who seem to have no reason or want to live. 10/14/2013
39. Yes-America no longer sees itself as a Christian nation. In fact, it's seen as close-minded and arrogant to even suggest such a thing. It is a common theme that your salvation lies within yourself and that morality is defined only by you...and a couple long held traditions (which even now are being eroded). Christianity itself is being watered down to a pop culture sound bite with no law and no Christ-centered gospel. 10/14/2013
40. No. Perhaps it should. I don't (for better or worse) think about it often but focus more on my own issues in front of me. 10/14/2013
41. Yes. I was able to attend the Iowa Renewal Project this last summer and many of the presenters spoke of how our founding fathers all subscribed to the principles set forth in

Scripture and used them for the basis of our constitution. The government, educational institutions, banks, businesses and medical providers were initially created to be useful tools for the benefit of families in their pursuit of happiness as free Christians. Since the 1960s, however, these tools we established for the use of Christian living have now become the dictators over families with ungodly demands. The American family unit has been shattered by divorce, abortion, same-sex relationships, and an overall lack of Christ-centered living. danger The pursuit of happiness has become a pursuit of hedonism and God has been written out of the picture. Many larger religions have responded in such a way as to show love or tolerance for the hedonistic trends and their efforts have undermined the truth of God's Word. 10/14/2013

42. Yes. The Bible, and its doctrines, are not considered valid guidelines for living. People are living in (and promoting) blatant sins (see answer to #2). Almost more scary, though, is the way Americans take Christ, and His forgiveness, out of the religious picture -- and replace it with "What can I do to be a better/more moral person?" 10/14/2013
43. Yes. I have no idea what the numbers of churching people are these days in America compared to the past, but the acceptance of worldly ways has seemingly reached a new low. I'm sure every generation has this same thought... "kids these days" ...but the acceptance of vulgarity and un-christian living through media has made society an overly accepting one, going along with your first question that if you are against it, you are clearly a fool. 10/14/2013
44. Yes. I fear that many Americans do not feel the need for "formal religion". Apathy seems to be a prevailing attitude. 10/14/2013
45. yes 10/14/2013
46. Yes. There is more blending. There is a more relaxed attitude toward religion. 10/14/2013
47. Yes. Slowly but surely our society is accepting sin as common and acceptable. 10/14/2013
48. Yes 10/14/2013
49. Yes, It seems there are more and more people turning away from the church and many of the ones that are there, seem to treat it as a club or hobby. 10/14/2013
50. Yes. It's in the decline, and thus worries me. 10/13/2013
51. Yes. We are not allowed to pray in public, say the pledge in public etc...Or it is at least frowned upon. 10/13/2013
52. Yes - If you look at what this country was founded on and where it currently is - no prayer in school, same sex marriages - where can this country go but to hell in a handbasket? 10/13/2013
53. Yes, everyone should be able to have there own believes with out being judged by others but in some cases when religion means a life of a person when its medical and there believes come ino play that is one I have a hard time with 10/13/2013
54. Yes! "God wants all people to be saved." 10/13/2013
55. Yes. It seems as though we are/have been going through the same time period the people of the world went through before the flood. People are slowly falling away from God. Generation by generation people are falling further away. "What do we need God for?" 10/13/2013
56. Yes, I often think, would I want my children to grow up in this country? What will life be like raising children in such an anti-Christian country. 10/13/2013

57. Not at this time. I am not a mother yet, I am assuming my opinion will change once I become one. I am confident in my relationship with God and the person I am. I was blessed with parents who helped to build my foundation. When I am given the responsibility of building that foundation for my children, the world is going to be ten times scarier. 10/13/2013
58. Yes. It is always a concern when there are so many people that are unchurched, or don't go often. Again, without God in their life, they have a different view of the world, different values, and maybe react towards things differently. This is reflected in the way our country votes on matters, or the politicians they vote in. So overall the state of religion concerns me. 10/13/2013
59. Yes, the world is becoming more and more wicked as time goes on 10/13/2013
60. Yes in recent years society has had a new sense of what is right and wrong 10/13/2013
61. No - it's an up and down process like anything else. There's always bad guys and good guys. This country was founded on Christian values but the bottom line is freedom of religion. 10/13/2013
62. Yes. The first judgement is against the Christian. 10/13/2013
63. Yes. Laws are changing from religious based to doing what feels good. The sinful nature wants sinful things 10/13/2013
64. Yes. As a Christian I want all to believe and declining church attendance has me concerned. 10/13/2013
65. Yes. By turning our collective back on God, why should He continue to bless our country? 10/13/2013
66. yes, we are like the children of Israel, throwing away a gift 10/13/2013
67. No. We have freedom to worship and spread the Word. 10/13/2013
68. No. No one can truly define the correct or perfect religion so how can anyone know what's real. 10/13/2013
69. Yes. I am extremely worried about raising my child in a country where religious values and family values seem to be on the rapid decline. 10/13/2013
70. Yes, we're losing our religion 10/13/2013
71. Yes. The morals and ethics of American people prove that. A lot of Americans are watching and doing things that go directly against God's word. 10/13/2013
72. Yes. 10/13/2013
73. Yes- 10/13/2013
74. Yes, I believe that all should be saved and come to the knowledge of Christ. I also fear that if we continue down the path we are on presently my freedom of religion may be challenged to an extent. 10/13/2013
75. Yes, I am afraid of the direction our country is headed. 10/13/2013
76. Yes. On one hand, we'll see Christians need to join together and rely even more on God and quit being "lukewarm". As the economy worsens and our great nation slides into decline, our mission is ever more urgent to "go and make disciples of all nations!" 10/13/2013
77. yes. I am fearful for those who are nonbelievers. The lack of religion is evident when you turn on the news. 10/13/2013
78. yes. Postmodern society teaches people to find their own truth. 10/13/2013
79. Yes 10/13/2013
80. Yes 10/13/2013

81. No 10/13/2013
 82. No 10/13/2013
 83. Yes. Christians are becoming afraid to share their faith, and persecution in public spaces, such as social media sites, is becoming more prevalent. 10/13/2013
 84. No. America is still, by far, the most religious Western country in the world. 10/13/2013
 85. Yes, I think religion is becoming to social, to feel good. All gospel, no law. Don't give me a vaccination and tell me it's a miracle and the greatest thing ever but then never tell me WHY I need it. Also the extremist groups in any religion paint us all in a bad light. 10/13/2013
 86. Yes. Religion seems to be gaining in prominence in the political system compared to history. It scares me when politicians make decisions solely on their own religious thought process. 10/13/2013
 87. Yes, we are a Godless cesspool of iniquity 10/13/2013
 88. Yes. 10/13/2013
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Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary student responses:

1. Yes. Increasing moral decay. 10/24/2013
2. YES America resembles more an irreligious mess of individual preferences that includes a small, dark streak of post-modernistic ideals/thinking. I'm not saying that America was "founded" upon the one true God, but even since the Baby Boomer generation ... it seems like America has lost even a faint trace of religious "discipline," certainly its religious unity, in the best of scenarios. I think that a "small filing cabinet" of clashing religions is actually BETTER than an apathetic maelstrom of so-called spirituality. Of course, it feels like I can't PERSONALLY do anything to change the religious scene in the United States. Yet the erosion of "strict religion" in America is obvious, nonetheless. 10/15/2013
3. Yes, Americans are apathetic and don't see a need to have a good relationship with God since no immediate threats are near. Once someone's life is bleak then they have time for God. 10/14/2013
4. Yes. Americans do not see the temptations and falls in a society of plenty and freedoms. 10/14/2013
5. Yes. God wants all people to be saved. 10/14/2013
6. Yes. I believe the gospel is leaving America, similar to how it "left" Israel and Europe. 10/14/2013
7. No, we still have amazing religious freedom moreso than most countries. 10/14/2013
8. Yes. Few Christian institutions teach real apologetics. Some treat apologetics not as a defense, but as an attack method. And many Christian institutions do not take seriously the contrarian position taken against them. 10/14/2013
9. Yes, many are not confessional and do not use the Bible, but rather use tradition or go on the word of others instead of reading the Bible for themselves. 10/14/2013
10. Yes. I think Americans worship themselves more than anything. They are materialistic and hedonistic. 10/14/2013
11. Yes. Many are not christian and if they are they are weak and do not believe the right things 10/14/2013
12. Yes, it truly does and at times makes me feel slightly hopeless. More and more as the years go on people view religion as an antiquated crutch. The respect for God, His Word, and His workers is sadly absent in this world. Our beautiful Gospel message which ought to be "good new of great joy" is seen as bigotry and ignorance. 10/13/2013

13. Yes. I am concerned with America's state of religion because America's national view is headed in the direction of complete tolerance of all religions and discrimination of those who believe only one religion is the right one. 10/13/2013
14. Yes. This country is in trouble in so many ways. The church shall never perish, but the church in America will. 10/13/2013
15. No Jesus says not to worry. 10/13/2013
16. no 10/13/2013
17. Yes. As a person who wants to spread the gospel, I have a general concern for all. However, I believe that Christians are going to have a troubles spreading the word without harassment because of the gay marriage issue. 10/13/2013
18. As a man of God I would have to say yes. If God desires all men to be saved and the angels rejoice when even one sinner repents how can I not imitate my creator. 10/13/2013
19. Yes. As a Christian, I fear for the souls who live in the sin so prevalent and acceptable/demanded in our current society. I also believe that if there were some more social pressure to be religious in lifestyle (although it would come with a different set of problems), fewer morally-questionable issues would be dealt with in inhumane fashions. 10/13/2013
20. Yes - In that there is a nominal Christianity that exists, and since this contingency makes up a majority of so-called "Christians" in America, they are the perception that non-Christians have when they hear the name Christian...and that is undermining the essential qualities of Christianity (justification by grace through faith, assurance of salvation, joy in trials, etc) The freedom of religion (which is a wonderful blessing we experience) is becoming a curse that leads to lax Christianity having never experienced any kind of religious struggle in our "anything goes" societal atmosphere (or if any "persecution" has occurred, the worst of it is "so and so made fun of my beliefs today" or "they won't come to my church because they think we're old fashioned and unintelligent"...hardly the human candles of the early church or the torture chambers of the Inquisition) 10/13/2013
21. Yes 10/13/2013
22. Yes. I am concerned because religion in America has become a free for all, where you do what you want, when you want. A retired Sem Professor told me America's future demise is because the churches have stopped preaching the true Word of God. 10/13/2013
23. No, we often think things have never been worse, but I think if we lived at any other time in history, we would think the same thing. Many sinful aspects of society get forgotten in history. 10/13/2013

Q3—Yes or No: There are people I am in contact with on a daily basis that do not share my beliefs or worldview.

Individual responses with comments verbatim:

1. Yes; work, friendships 11/14/2013
2. Yes, at school regularly. 11/9/2013
3. yes work. had to talk with them 11/8/2013
4. Not at this point, but I have worked with unbelievers in the past. I worked with 30 other women in a customer service capacity at a giftware company. 11/8/2013

5. Yes, I have best friends who don't share my beliefs and as long as we agree to disagree, it is okay. 11/7/2013
6. Yes: Everywhere. (Work, in the car beside my own - e.g. the person with the "There is no god." sticker on their bumper, etc., etc.) 11/7/2013
7. Yes, in school I am frequently in contact with people who are much more religiously observant or conservative than I am. 11/7/2013
8. Yes - in all settings. 11/7/2013
9. Yes. Every single day I'm in class with Christians, Jews, Hindus, etc. and they're all my friends. 11/7/2013
10. Yes, all the time. 11/7/2013
11. Yes 11/7/2013
12. Yes. Everyday. Everywhere. 11/6/2013
13. Yes. Classrooms, workplace, family dinner table. 11/6/2013
14. Yes/No. My friends/coworkers do not share the exact same religious beliefs as I do, but we share a lot of commonalities. 11/6/2013
15. Yes. School. 11/6/2013
16. Yes. At work and those who I spend time with socially. 11/6/2013
17. yes. everyday settings, running errands, working out, business appointments. 11/6/2013
18. yes, during charity events 11/6/2013
19. Not really. Circles are predominantly from my church. 11/6/2013
20. yes. work, social friends, boyfriend. Living where I do, it is more likely to meet non-christians than practicing christians. 11/5/2013
21. No. 10/26/2013
22. Yes. Work, but not many discussions. 10/26/2013
23. Yes. work. 10/26/2013
24. Yes. 10/26/2013
25. Yes. Neighborhood and work. 10/26/2013
26. Yes. Work—every day 10/26/2013
27. Yes. At church and Facebook 10/26/2013
28. Yes. UW-Milwaukee, friends 10/26/2013
29. Yes. 10/26/2013
30. Yes. Friends on the political left 10/26/2013
31. Yes. Well, my girlfriend isn't doesn't exactly share my beliefs but we're working on that. Most of the people whom I've met in the past 5-7 years are pretty okay with not having anything to do with God. So, I would say that in most of my settings I am in contact with many people who do not share my faith. 10/21/2013
32. No, sadly I would not say on a daily basis. 10/18/2013
33. yes, workplace, social settings (bars) 10/18/2013
34. Yes, the office 10/15/2013
35. Yes. Work 10/15/2013
36. yes, work 10/15/2013
37. Yes. Everywhere that isn't my house. 10/14/2013
38. yes. I work in a hospital where my fellow coworkers and also the patients I care for do not always share my beliefs. 10/14/2013

39. Yes-Many people at work do not share my Lutheran or even Christian beliefs. Being a nurse, there are many patients that I come into contact with that share different beliefs from my own. 10/14/2013
40. Yes. Baseball team, bars 10/14/2013
41. Maybe not daily, but often. The settings are my neighborhood, grocery store, medical offices, banks or schools. 10/14/2013
42. Yes. In our local moms' club and community organizations -- in person and through FB. 10/14/2013
43. Yes. I work in a non-christian setting and I have no idea who believes what. 10/14/2013
44. Not any longer. When I was working, I did though. 10/14/2013
45. yes, mostly at work 10/14/2013
46. No 10/14/2013
47. Yes. Work. 10/14/2013
48. Yes - Mainly work. 10/14/2013
49. Yes, Work mostly. I don't get out much. 10/14/2013
50. Yes, a few of my close friends, and a lot of people around my (public) college campus. 10/13/2013
51. Yes. I have a friend that is agnostic. 10/13/2013
52. No. I am blessed in the fact that my co-workers share in my beliefs. 10/13/2013
53. yes that is life in general...i know lots of people through out my life that I have meet in different places through my work and travels have meet through my work more and somethimes at events on military bases 10/13/2013
54. Not on a daily basis. 10/13/2013
55. Yes. Seeming as though alot of the talking about religion is not looked highly upon(ie. At the workplace, at school), I do not necessarily know everyone's true beliefs. But I will go on to say that not all the people I'm associated with share the same morals I have. 10/13/2013
56. No 10/13/2013
57. Yes; Friends; coworkers and in - laws 10/13/2013
58. Yes. I work with people that either are unchurched, or are members that don't go on a regular basis. 10/13/2013
59. No 10/13/2013
60. Yes in a restaurant or a grocery store 10/13/2013
61. Yes - work. 10/13/2013
62. Yes. Through many activities. What better way to reflect Christ's love than to those that don't know Him. 10/13/2013
63. Social media. 10/13/2013
64. yes. Work and social activities. 10/13/2013
65. Probably. I have a few new co-workers. 10/13/2013
66. yes, my neighborhood all around me 10/13/2013
67. Yes. A dear coworker is unchurched. 10/13/2013
68. Yes, bars, dinner and or lunch dates, coffee outings. 10/13/2013
69. Yes. In my public school. 10/13/2013
70. Yes....sort of, they go to our church and yet believe that homosexuality should be defended 10/13/2013
71. Yes. Work. Day to day errands. Some family life. 10/13/2013

72. Yes, normally at work. There are a lot of atheists in the science field I work in
10/13/2013
 73. Yes- Work 10/13/2013
 74. Yes, work, facebook, twitter 10/13/2013
 75. Yes at work. 10/13/2013
 76. Yes. Work, mostly. 10/13/2013
 77. yes. Some of my college friends are not wels which is ironic cause I went to WLC.
10/13/2013
 78. yes. employers, people at stores, 10/13/2013
 79. No 10/13/2013
 80. Yes,family and work 10/13/2013
 81. Yes, at work 10/13/2013
 82. Yes 10/13/2013
 83. Yes. In my office, I would say less than half are Christians at all. 10/13/2013
 84. Yes. I contact these people through work, friendships, even family settings. 10/13/2013
 85. Yes, work and recreational activities. 10/13/2013
 86. Yes. Friends, classmates, colleagues, at stores and restaurants I attend, my neighbors.
10/13/2013
 87. Yes, work, I work for a university system. Nuff said, ok enough explaining already, do
you want me to take this survey or not. too much explaining, more answering,
10/13/2013
 88. Yes. 10/13/2013
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Wisconsin Luther Seminary Responses:

1. Yes. Work, extended family. 10/24/2013
2. YES At work, at the gas station (I presume an unshared belief in many cases), on the
highway (road rage!), in public restrooms, at the grocery store, in the immediate area of
town around Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary... perhaps even on campus
(maintenance/custodial staff)! Contact with these people (those who don't share my
beliefs) is inevitable. 10/15/2013
3. Yes, My workplace is the most common place I have conversations with them.
10/14/2013
4. Yes. I have relations and friends that do not share my beliefs. I can only keep working to
show them that what god says in the Bible is the truth and needs to be followed as best as
we can. 10/14/2013
5. No. I unfortunately do not have that pleasure these days. 10/14/2013
6. No. I do meet some people at my job, but that is not every day. 10/14/2013
7. Yes, mainly at work 10/14/2013
8. Yes. Primarily via several different internet communities. 10/14/2013
9. Yes, family, people at work, close friends, so work, home, hanging out. 10/14/2013
10. Yes. At work I come into contact with people who are not Christians. 10/14/2013
11. Yes. Maybe, I am not sure. I go to WLC sometimes 10/14/2013
12. yes, through my job. also my extended family is "spiritual" but certainly not christian.
10/13/2013
13. Yes, at work. 10/13/2013

14. Yes. Work mostly. 10/13/2013
15. No 10/13/2013
16. yes 10/13/2013
17. Not really when I am at school, but in the summer when I am working in the cheese factory, I have daily contact with people who don't share my beliefs. 10/13/2013
18. No I am in a Christian institution every day and watching teenage kids going to a Lutheran High school. 10/13/2013
19. Yes. Work, mostly. 10/13/2013
20. No, unfortunately in my personal sheltered Seminary setting I don't see or converse with people who don't share my beliefs (and shame on me for not going out of my way to shepherd lost souls!) 10/13/2013
21. Yes 10/13/2013
22. Not doing the school year. 10/13/2013
23. Yes, at work. 10/13/2013

Q4—Yes or No: I feel comfortable talking “religion” with those who do not share my beliefs or worldview.

Individual responses with comments verbatim:

1. Yes; I always believe there is room to grow/learn regarding others' beliefs and relate 11/14/2013
2. No. I tend to find religion to be a very personal thing, and I don't feel the need to put my beliefs on other people. 11/9/2013
3. no. i feel uncomfortable because i dont like to argue about it 11/8/2013
4. Most of the time I feel comfortable. Learning to share what you believe in a loving yet firm manner takes practice. I feel that our church body does a wonderful job of laying out the law and the gospel. I also feel That we say, going share the good news! We need to do a better job of helping people know how to do that. Each of us is different, but different gifts of the Spirit. Maybe we need to look at how each person can share the gospel through the gift that God has given to them. 11/8/2013
5. Yes. I'm fairly agnostic and an opening to sharing my view 11/7/2013
6. Yes. Our loving and gracious God and Father or our Lord, The Christ, Jesus is most certainly patient and desires all to be saved; however, every human life has it's own, pre-determined and immutable "Time of Grace", and when this time has expired, there is no hope. 11/7/2013
7. Yes, I have grown up divided between two religious worlds and am comfortable negotiating with those sensitivities. 11/7/2013
8. yes - I consider myself a pretty open person. I do not have a problem discussing adverse opinions with others 11/7/2013
9. Yes - I feel comfortable talking about religion with people who do not share my religion. However, as a non-practicing Christian I feel uncomfortable talking about religion with active Christians. 11/7/2013

10. Yes, I feel an obligation to promote my own agnostic, free-thinking beliefs because religion is too often used to excuse irresponsibility and deference. 11/7/2013
11. No 11/7/2013
12. Yes. 11/6/2013
13. Yes. It gives me perspective into an important part of other people's worldview. 11/6/2013
14. Yes - if I know them well enough... 11/6/2013
15. Yes. I am very accepting of other backgrounds and am always interested in learning more. Thus, I feel comfortable sharing my own religion. 11/6/2013
16. It depends on whether I feel like the others are open to the discussion. Those that are very religious often seem to have little tolerance for others. 11/6/2013
17. no. if I am approached and asked specifically about what I believe, I will share what I believe. 11/6/2013
18. yes, I talk about how God leads my life 11/6/2013
19. Not really. Hard to gauge people in these terms. Some fanatics could make it more challenging. 11/6/2013
20. Sometimes. It depends on the situation and the religion that people are. For example, some feel very angry that christianity is an "exclusive" religion where there is only one way to heaven. Sometimes I feel that I almost need to apologize for that. 11/5/2013
21. No. 10/26/2013
22. Yes. Knowledge base lacking. My personality 10/26/2013
23. Yes. Part of who I am. 10/26/2013
24. Yes. 10/26/2013
25. Yes. 10/26/2013
26. Yes. 10/26/2013
27. Yes. 10/25/2013
28. Yes. 10/25/2013
29. Yes. Not a big deal if the don't agree with me. 10/25/2013
30. Yes. In a cordial, healthy way. 10/25/2013
31. Yes. I do. Not sure there's a specific reason why I do. I guess I just figure Christianity has more to offer than not. And if you have a gift, why wouldn't you share it with people you know and care about? 10/21/2013
32. This is definitely an area in which my level of sanctification has grown. As I get older, have more life experiences, and grow in faith, I feel more and more comfortable sharing my faith and "talking 'religion'". 10/18/2013
33. NO - Do feel comfortable..not really. But that does not mean that I do not talk "religion" with those who don't share my beliefs. 10/18/2013
34. No, some of my coworkers are overly vocal about their views and would attack any suggestion of another's opinion/belief. They will not listen and would complicate the work environment. Others I can and have talked to about beliefs. 10/15/2013
35. No ...it's a subject that gets emotional results. 10/15/2013
36. yes I can express my feelings easily 10/15/2013
37. It depends on the context. 10/14/2013
38. yes when it is the appropriate venue. Because of my job it is bit appropriate to share my beliefs with my patients unless they ask or it is a life altering situation where there is a

- moment in which I can talk freely about religion. I wish I was braver when it comes to talking about religion with my coworkers. 10/14/2013
39. Yes-I find it very interesting to talk about my beliefs with Christians and non-Christians alike. I usually have much more civil and interesting conversations with individuals whose beliefs are completely different from my own than I do with those who share a similar yet different view of Christianity. 10/14/2013
 40. Yes. I'm confident in myself as a Christian. In the past especially in my younger and dumber days I would have said no. Part of the maturation process perhaps? 10/14/2013
 41. Yes. Scripture says to always be prepared to give a reason for the hope that you have. I immerse myself daily in devotions and attend bible study often to keep this preparation alive. I can say that through these practices, I know just how much my life has been dreadfully imperfect! Lord, have mercy! At the same time, I know that my faith in Jesus is the only thing that matters and the only thing that works because He is the "Perfect" for me! God, be praised! Indeed, there will always be risks in this life but the best risks are the ones we take in faith. We must live by faith and trust that good things will happen - even in the midst of all the bad. I think of all the heroes of faith in Scripture and am inspired to step out in faith the way they did. Regardless of the possible bad things that can result, there's an eternal good that will come of it! 10/14/2013
 42. Yes. When you have Scripture to back you up, and the Holy Spirit to give you the words to say, it's a lot less intimidating! 10/14/2013
 43. Yes. Although I don't blurt it out to everyone from the question above, I have no problem telling someone I'm taking a long lunch today because it's Advent and I'm going to Wednesday church at noon, for example. The work setting I'm in is pretty hands off, so no one really pushes the issue, so to speak, and asks what church or what I believe, but I have no problem with people knowing I have beliefs. 10/14/2013
 44. Sometimes. I will admit that I am fearful to share with SOME people. 10/14/2013
 45. sometimes, depends on the situation 10/14/2013
 46. No I wish I did feel more comfortable but sadly I do not. For example my neighbors all know that my husband and I both work for the church, that should already make me more comfortable since they already know that, but it doesn't. 10/14/2013
 47. Yes. I'm confident in what I believe and I'm comfortable sharing those beliefs with others. 10/14/2013
 48. No 10/14/2013
 49. No, I don't feel that I can debate it with out getting frustrated. Don't want to set a bad example for other Christians. 10/14/2013
 50. Yes. I am always prepared to give a reason for the hope that I have. 10/13/2013
 51. Not always....not if the other person is confrontational. 10/13/2013
 52. Yes. I'm comfortable sharing my beliefs/worldviews. I don't force my beliefs on anyone and appreciate the same from others. Agree to disagree. 10/13/2013
 53. yes i can talk with people that may have different beliefs then me thats just how life is..doesnt mean that I'm right or they are its what we see things different 10/13/2013
 54. Yes. To an extent. It always takes some bravery and the Holy Spirit when going more in depth. 10/13/2013
 55. It depends on the person, how well i know them, and the situation and/or setting. Is it an area I can improve on? Yes 10/13/2013
 56. Yes, as long as it does not become a hostile environment. 10/13/2013

57. Yes; I'm not always sure if I know the right things to say but confident that the Holy Spirit will work through me. 10/13/2013
 58. I don't mind talking about it, but it depends on how receptive they are to listen. Knowing my coworkers for a couple years, I think they know I am willing to talk about it, but they have to be interested too. 10/13/2013
 59. Yes, I am an open person and religion is the heart of my life 10/13/2013
 60. Yeah kind of if I am really close with that person its easy if I am not that close not so much 10/13/2013
 61. Yes - I am non-confrontational. It's about discussing differences and learning from each other. 10/13/2013
 62. Yes and no. 10/13/2013
 63. Yes. Open minded people make that easier to do 10/13/2013
 64. Yes and no. I feel comfortable when I know them a little more, but sometimes I can talk to strangers. 10/13/2013
 65. No. Have never felt comfortable discussing, religion, politics, etc in public. 10/13/2013
 66. it always depends on how comfortable I am in that situation 10/13/2013
 67. Yes, when there is an appropriate opening to such a conversation. I would not bring it up without context. 10/13/2013
 68. No, I don't have all the answers and don't know what I believe myself. 10/13/2013
 69. Yes. I have less issues now openly discussing my religion then I did when I was younger. 10/13/2013
 70. Yes, what better way to understand our friends even if they don't agree exactly 10/13/2013
 71. Yes. I don't not push my religion on people, but talk openly. 10/13/2013
 72. Yes. We've had lots of conversations at work and I know the people well enough. We don't necessarily try to debate our religious sides but more talk about them because the other person is curious. 10/13/2013
 73. Yes 10/13/2013
 74. Yes in the right setting. I am comfortable with it but I do not do it as often as I should. 10/13/2013
 75. Not always.10/13/2013
 76. Sometimes yes but I usually kick myself later for not saying more! 10/13/2013
 77. no because if they prod me or question me and my beliefs I don't think I can adequately defend myself. 10/13/2013
 78. yes, but they have to initiate it. I am bad at bridging the topic. 10/13/2013
 79. Yes 10/13/2013
 80. Yes 10/13/2013
 81. Yes but I don't feel it's necessary to share my beliefs unless asked. 10/13/2013
 82. Yes 10/13/2013
 83. Yes, the basics at least. 10/13/2013
 84. Yes. Obviously a hot button issue, but when spoken with understanding and openness, its not too hard to discuss. 10/13/2013
 85. Yes, even if we disagree the conversation may help both of us understand the others position better. 10/13/2013
 86. Yes. It's through engagement that you can share your beliefs with others. 10/13/2013
 87. Yes. 10/13/2013
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Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Responses:

1. Yes. All people need to know about Jesus. 10/24/2013
2. YES - in general. I am more comfortable than I have been in my young past. It becomes habit to "acknowledge" a different belief/worldview than my own. For example, I spoke with a 17-year old Muslim young man in Queens, NY this past summer. At first, it's difficult to get over an initial inclination to "solve" or "get at the core" or "fix" a person's beliefs. Equally important (perhaps more!) is to listen, to share, to hear, to respect, to love ---- and this is not the same as "politically correct TOLERANCE." It becomes a more comfortable thing to talk religion when I am able to "forget self" and consider my role in God's family and kingdom. -- simply said. Hard to practice this "state of mind." 10/15/2013
3. Yes, I hope a conversation will turn to religion at some point. If my goal is to bring people to Jesus, I need to try as best I can to help others think about their relationship with him. 10/14/2013
4. Yes. More so every day - see 3. 10/14/2013
5. Yes. It allows me to be a witness to those who don't know Jesus. Also, it helps me to better hone my thoughts about Jesus. 10/14/2013
6. No. I simply have not had a lot of experience doing it and I am not very good at it. People usually walk away confused from our conversations. 10/14/2013
7. Yes, but I wait until they ask, I don't "ram it down their throats" 10/14/2013
8. Yes. Having studied apologetics of several Christian denominations, I feel confident in my beliefs. I'm also unafraid of conceding courtesy to even those beliefs that are blatantly contrary to mine. 10/14/2013
9. Yes, I find that I can back up my responses with the Bible, rather than just say what someone else said. 10/14/2013
10. Yes. Because God asks me to be a witness. 10/14/2013
11. Yes. to a certain extent that can be good, at the same time, when it comes to serious, deep things, and some can't move past the other parts, it could hinder learning 10/14/2013
12. Yes, I suppose i do. But as i sort of said before, whenever i share my faith, i get the, "oh, that's really cool you believe that, but your obviously wrong." I know God's word is effective, he promises it will be, but unfortunately i have not seen the immediate effects of God's word. it is usually passive aggressively thrown back in my face as an old book. But i know it is so much more than that... so i definitely witness but often feel discouraged afterwards. 10/13/2013
13. Yes. While I continue to have discomfort talking to people about religion, when opportunities arise I am able to defend my beliefs and talk knowledgeably about them. I also hope to share God's Word with them and let the gospel work. 10/13/2013
14. Yes. I have nothing to fear. An eternity in hell for them is way more scary than some personal inconvenience or reputation lost for me. 10/13/2013
15. In general, yes. I know that what I believe is right, so when the topic comes up I'm glad to share the truth. 10/13/2013
16. yes 10/13/2013
17. Unfortunately, I generally keep the relationships superficial and do not broach religious topics enough. 10/13/2013

18. Yes, I served in the military so I am use to having people being hostile toward me because of my beliefs. 10/13/2013
19. Yes. I have learned not to seek to correct unless they would perceive my advice positively. I want to use my communications not to slam the light in their face, but to let them know where I stand, be respectful but firm in my own convictions, and hopefully sow seeds that God will one day turn into a harvest of souls. 10/13/2013
20. Yes, at least to a degree...the good thing about the religious freedom we experience is that I have no fear of being put in jail (maybe of being put down, though), however my 'discomfort' comes especially when my worldview differs so severely that I struggle to communicate clearly: So my discomfort is my fear that I will miscommunicate a clear truth of Scripture with unclear communication. 10/13/2013
21. Yes 10/13/2013
22. Yes. I enjoy talking to people, and to hear what they have to say and how they think is very useful in ministering to them. Sometimes our different view points lead to arguments, but that is okay, at least we are communicating and I have opportunities to get the gospel message in our conversation. Also you would be surprised how many people don't truly understand our religion, they only believe what they've heard from TV and magazines. 10/13/2013
23. No, I need to get better at it. I think often I don't have the time to get into a discussion. 10/13/2013

Q5—Yes or No: I actively seek opportunities to share my beliefs/worldviews.

Individual responses with comments verbatim:

1. Yes; to understand more of the world and its people 11/14/2013
2. No. I would like to keep my beliefs to myself. 11/9/2013
3. no. no reason 11/8/2013
4. Yes! I am a WELS singer-songwriter and actively call pastors and schools to find opportunity to share the word in song. I love to encourage women and children especially having been a Christian day school teacher at one time. There are also weak Christians within our church body, and we need to build them up too so that they will feel confident to share their faith with the people around them. 11/8/2013
5. No. For some people, these are personal subjects or subjects they feel very deeply about. So unless it is brought up, I do not seek opportunities to share it. 11/7/2013
6. At times, but not in keeping with the immeasurable opportunities He provides for us each day. I pray for boldness, a sense of urgency, and a zealous heart for the work of The LORD! Amen. 11/7/2013
7. Yes, I think it is important for people to hear different perspectives. 11/7/2013
8. No - I pretty much abide by a don't ask don't tell policy. If people want to hear my opinion they will ask for it. otherwise, i do not actively seek religious discussions. 11/7/2013
9. No 11/7/2013

10. Yes, I feel an obligation to promote my own agnostic, free-thinking beliefs because religion is too often used to excuse irresponsibility and deference. Religious views should also be countered with reason. 11/7/2013
11. No 11/7/2013
12. No. 11/6/2013
13. Yes. Rather I'm trying to be upfront and more communicative of my beliefs and assertive when others express something I disagree with. 11/6/2013
14. No. 11/6/2013
15. No. If I'm not asked or if it doesn't fit into a discussion, I don't go out of my way to share my beliefs. 11/6/2013
16. No. I don't mind moderating discussions on the topic between others, but generally find the discussions to have end states that are more divisive than cohesive. 11/6/2013
17. no (see answer to #5) plus:I feel that 'attract don't attack' regarding to sharing my faith/beliefs/worldview is better received.. 11/6/2013
18. yes through volunteer work 11/6/2013
19. No. Not actively. Hopefully I take advantage as they present themselves though. 11/6/2013
20. No. I try to live my life. Being the only Christian usually in social settings makes me feel more comfortable showing my faith in my actions. This has led to discussions more so than me bringing up Christ to them. 11/5/2013
21. No. 10/26/2013
22. No. 10/26/2013
23. Somewhat. 10/26/2013
24. No. 10/26/2013
25. Yes. 10/26/2013
26. No. 10/26/2013
27. No. 10/25/2013
28. No. 10/25/2013
29. Yes. 10/25/2013
30. No. Like to stay out of politics. 10/25/2013
31. No. I think that comes across as obnoxious and usually forced. I usually reserve those conversations for one on one time (sometimes at bars, but those conversations rarely go anywhere so I try to avoid them). 10/21/2013
32. When an opportunity presents itself, I pray for strength to take advantage. I do not actively seek these opportunities in my daily life. 10/18/2013
33. yes - I wouldn't say I throw it into people's faces but I do try to make a conscious effort to introduce myself to new people that I meet (at my workplace or in my apartment building) and somehow try to bring up the comfort and peace of knowing Jesus 10/18/2013
34. Yes, if the opportunity comes or can be made in an effective way I will 10/15/2013
35. No. 10/15/2013
36. no stay with my work and church people 10/15/2013
37. No. I usually wait for someone to give me the right opportunity. 10/14/2013
38. yes. when the timing is appropriate in my work and my outside life. I do not share as much as I should or could. 10/14/2013

39. No-Probably not as much as I should. I do share my worldview quite freely, which is rooted in my beliefs, but I feel there are opportunities to share my beliefs that I do not take. 10/14/2013
40. No. It's easy not to. 10/14/2013
41. Yes. Some would say I have the opportunity because I married a Pastor. But I would say (and so would he and my daughters), that I married a Pastor so I could have the opportunity. 10/14/2013
42. No, not with people I know will not agree with me. I am not good about this one, unfortunately. I like to avoid confrontation. 10/14/2013
43. Shamefully, I do not as much as I should. I try to "let my light shine" at all times though. 10/14/2013
44. mostly no 10/14/2013
45. No...I should more. 10/14/2013
46. Yes. As stated in the last answer, I'm confident in what I believe and so I'm not scared to do so. Most situations I have in life offer an opportunity of some sort to share my faith. 10/14/2013
47. No 10/14/2013
48. No, I am not a confrontational person. There are so many different beliefs and so many people that just don't want to hear about it, I keep my opinion to myself. 10/14/2013
49. No... I guess this is an area that I haven't put in much effort. I try my best when presented with an opportunity, but going out of my way isn't my strong-suit. 10/13/2013
50. No. Only if it comes up 10/13/2013
51. No. Actively seek opportunities? Would not say that, unless we are talking about how incompetent Obama is - I am quite vocal on that issue. 10/13/2013
52. no not really 10/13/2013
53. No. Not as "actively" as I should, for sure. 10/13/2013
54. Sadly not actively. 10/13/2013
55. I always have high-hopes for myself, but usually fall short or chicken out. 10/13/2013
56. Yes; I would't say actively but I rarely pass up the opportunity. 10/13/2013
57. I guess overall I try to be open with how I believe. However, it depends on the situation, and whether it's the right place to have a lot of controversy, etc. 10/13/2013
58. Yes, I canvass and do evangelizing work every year 10/13/2013
59. No don't have time 10/13/2013
60. No but I will discuss if brought up 10/13/2013
61. Yes. 10/13/2013
62. Not as much as I should although I don't shy away from opportunities 10/13/2013
63. no as I am shy, but I actively support those which can do it for me on my behalf. 10/13/2013
64. No, unless it's with a like-minded group. 10/13/2013
65. not nearly enough 10/13/2013
66. Not actively, but I look for the opening. 10/13/2013
67. No, I don't want to be one of those people. 10/13/2013
68. Yes, I take opportunities to talk with my friends about my faith. I do think I could do a better job about openly living my religion. 10/13/2013
69. Yes, I am called to witness 10/13/2013
70. Yes. If people are searching for answers and a comfort, I will share. 10/13/2013

71. Maybe? Most definitely not as much as I should but if the subject comes up I try to make an effort to share my beliefs. 10/13/2013
72. No 10/13/2013
73. No, or only occasionally. As mentioned above I don't do it as much as I should. 10/13/2013
74. No it doesn't always seem like the right time or place 10/13/2013 7:34 PM
75. No. Not a huge fan of conflict. 10/13/2013 7
76. yes..everyday at work I get to share my beliefs and am so thankful for that great opportunity. 10/13/2013
77. no. In today's age, I think people will just believe what they will. Why would my beliefs change theirs. 10/13/2013
78. No 10/13/2013
79. No 10/13/2013
80. No 10/13/2013
81. Yes 10/13/2013
82. No. I need to do a better job at this. Rather, I try to live as an example. 10/13/2013
83. Lean towards no. I'm open with who I am and what I believe, however I don't usually discuss it unless someone is interested/wants to know. 10/13/2013
84. Not as much as I should 10/13/2013
85. Yes. It's the best way to increase learning and share your beliefs. 10/13/2013
86. NO 10/13/2013
87. Yes. 10/13/2103

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Responses

1. Yes. I'm sometimes a little shy. But someone's gotta tell them. Why not me? 10/24/2013
2. NO - in general. It is easier/more convenient/more frequently on my mind to make small talk ... to make self look respectable or presentable... to not offend anyone at whatever the "sacrifice." My slowness to ACTIVELY SEEK OPPORTUNITIES reflects more a sinfully hesitant choice to remain quiet, instead of an absolute fear to face persecution... My opportunities at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary are limited ... or at least, as it seems to me. Many of my classmates and professors exactly share my worldview, so it's easy to fall into a sort of routine. 10/15/2013
3. Yes, My job requires me to tell others what I do, what I believe, lots of people who don't share my beliefs overhear the things I say. They aren't actively involved in the conversation but they hear me. This allows for future conversations. 10/14/2013
4. Yes. 3 above and I try more to get other conversations turned to God's word. 10/14/2013
5. Yes. I try to preach as often as possible at congregations in the Midwest as part of my seminary training. 10/14/2013
6. No. I have grown up with a mentality that religion is a private matter and we should not talk about it. I am working to overcome it, but old habits die hard. 10/14/2013
7. Yes, once again I wait till the appropriate time. 10/14/2013
8. No. I don't often *actively* share. When the subject is brought up, I'm delighted to defend and share and evangelize. 10/14/2013

9. Yes, one thing I do is try to get a relationship going with bank tellers, I try to work in the fact that I am studying at Seminary and then get into what they do/don't do for church. 10/14/2013
10. No. I do not seek these opportunities often enough 10/14/2013
11. No, I wish i did, but at this time, I haven't unless I am specifically going out to do that on like a trip or a canvassing day. 10/14/2013
12. Yes, i try to bring it up in conversations if it fits in appropriately. I feel like a lot of people are interested in it, but not affected by it. It is sort of how i am interested in different religions and philosophies, I enjoy hearing about them but i will by no means change my beliefs because i KNOW that my beliefs are legitimate, just as they know there beliefs are "legitimate" 10/13/2013
13. No. While I try to share my beliefs/worldview when opportunities arise, I can not say that I actively seek these encounters. 10/13/2013
14. Yes. I like to bring up the fact that I go to a seminary in order to get people to talk about their church experience. That usually leads in well. 10/13/2013
15. I guess It depends on the situation. A big part of being a Christian is simply not joining in with immorality. 10/13/2013
16. yes 10/13/2013
17. I am now looking for opportunities to share my faith "cold-call" after seeing excellent examples from Professor Sorum. 10/13/2013
18. No, I desire to do this but between school and taking care of 8 kids I am not able to get out of the house to do that. 10/13/2013
19. No. I do not believe myself to be in a situation to press my beliefs on people. I do not shelter myself from such situations, but I am still uncomfortable sharing my faith in an un-prompted manner. 10/13/2013
20. No, and again this is on me, but I don't go out of my way to make Christ known...I make the excuse that I'm so busy with my Seminary career, but when I compare that with the insurmountable task of taking Christ to the ends of the earth I am falling terrifyingly short of Christ's calling. 10/13/2013
21. Yes 10/13/2013
22. I'd say no, I tend to wait for the opportunities to come to me. This may be because of my setting right now at school, I know during the Summer where I work people know I'm a Christian and that alone leads into conversations that give me an opportunity to share my beliefs. 10/13/2013
23. No, I need to do a better job at that. 10/13/2013

Q6—Yes or No: My daily settings (society, time, daily circumstances) provide many opportunities to share my beliefs/worldviews.

Individual responses with comments verbatim:

1. No; there is always time for those who want it. 11/14/2013
2. No. Religion is one of those "don't talk about it" topics. 11/9/2013
3. yes. there is always time to share. 11/8/2013

4. Yes, we live our faith on a daily basis. By living our faith we show Christ to all of those around us -even without saying a word. I feel one of my most important roles is to be an encourager of my own family. It all starts there. Growing a Christ centered family is the key to a Christian society. Thank you Nathan for the opportunity to respond to your thesis project. God bless you and your intent to serve him. May he give you the confidence and joy that you need to be a servant to his people. 11/8/2013
5. No 11/7/2013
6. Absolutely. Every day is a new and urgent gift from our God - a gift we must share with anyone and everyone, according to His command and will. I pray He uses us effectively, as he gathers His Elect to Him. Amen. 11/7/2013
7. Yes, I live in a very tolerant, educated and culturally diverse society that is open and interested in hearing people with different views and experiences. 11/7/2013
8. yes - there are avenues to actively pursue religious conversations. I simply do not seek them out. 11/7/2013
9. I guess. I don't have strong opinions on this. 11/7/2013
10. I don't wait for opportunities. Neither do Christians. 11/7/2013
11. No 11/7/2013
12. Yes. 11/6/2013
13. Yes. America is one of the few countries in the world you can share your opinion without worrying about violent repercussions. 11/6/2013
14. No. 11/6/2013
15. Yes. 11/6/2013
16. Yes; however, I personally prefer a more religious neutral environment and do not enjoy it when people use every opportunity to tie things back to religion (when it is not appropriate to do so). All things in moderation in my opinion and universal tolerance for others are key ideas that connect us and make the world a better place for everyone. 11/6/2013
17. not many opportunities, but some. 11/6/2013
18. yes opportunities are everywhere 11/6/2013
19. Not so much. See earlier answer on circles. 11/6/2013
20. yes. I am surrounded by non-christians, many of whom are searching for answers 11/5/2013
21. No. 10/26/2013
22. Yes. But I don't do it. 10/26/2013
23. No. Less and less. 10/26/2013
24. No. 10/26/2013
25. Yes. It's who I am...I need to share my story. 10/26/2013
26. Yes. 10/26/2013
27. No. 10/25/2013
28. No. Don't talk religion or politics 10/25/2013
29. Yes. 10/25/2013
30. Yes. Especially with the internet. 10/25/2013
31. Yes. I'm pretty social and find myself in conversations where God eventually, at some point, comes up. So, if appropriate, I'll talk about my faith. Maybe it's just because I haven't met a lot of Christians lately that I have more opportunities to share the word. Some people (my friends) hang out with other Christians quite a bit and when I do, my

- Christian friends and I don't talk about our faith a whole lot—because it's something that's just assumed. It's like we're all standing around in a room trying to give pepper shakers to each other but everyone already has a pepper shaker. Not that that's not important, because it's great to be in a community of believers (much more comforting than being around groups of people who reject what we believe) but it's different for every person and especially for those who leave the WELS womb. 10/21/2013
32. Yes, however most of these opportunities are in the midst of other like-minded Christians. While I have had opportunities in the past - working in public schools, 4 years on a public/liberal college campus - I don't feel like I have nearly that many opportunities today. 10/18/2013
 33. yes - to all three. Society: My generation (millenials) have an attitude of "whatever" or "go with the flow". This is a prime opportunity to interject and share my beliefs to provide a path to Jesus. Time: While I admit that I often push back my time I spend with Jesus (prayer, devotion, etc.), I still have more than enough time to focus on Him and find others who need to hear His Word. Circumstances: God puts so many opportunities in my face to share with others. It is up to me whether I take advantage 10/18/2013
 34. Yes, I always try to live my faith and reflect it with my words/wording 10/15/2013
 35. Yes 10/15/2013
 36. yes we do have the freedom if we so choose. 10/15/2013
 37. Yes. God gives me all of the opportunities that I could ask for. Anyone can make up any excuse at any time that they want to make things convenient for themselves. 10/14/2013
 38. yes. as exhibited in my name previous answers, society, time and circumstance all influence me in sharing my beliefs, values and ideals. I hope to become better at this as I grow as a Christian. 10/14/2013
 39. Yes-I have a social job caring for patients in a hospital. I can get to know my charges and their families on a personal level. While there are times where it is not appropriate to share my beliefs with them, more often than not it's a door that they open where I am then welcomed to share with them what I believe. 10/14/2013
 40. No. I'm answering the question in the idea that the many people I often speak and meet with share the same belief as me. I do often talk with them about my beliefs. 10/14/2013
 41. Yes and No. It really can't be planned and despite how much control society, time and circumstances seem to have, our Lord determines our steps. If anything stops me from sharing it would be three other triggers - the devil, the world, and my own sinful flesh. If I can resist the temptation to stay silent, then the people, the place, and the time are all relative. If I surrender to the Holy Spirit and let Him do His work through me, opportunities can happen anytime, anywhere, and with anyone despite me, despite the world, and despite the devil! 10/14/2013
 42. Yes. There are so many issues that people can talk about these days about which Scripture gives us a good answer. The news is full of events, raising children requires strength from God, etc. Do I always make use of every opportunity? No. I am guilty of not doing that! I do think that our vocation plays a huge role in sharing God's Word with others, though. We need to develop some sort of relationship with others before we bombard them with our beliefs. This helps them to trust and respect whatever we have to say. The vocation of mother or father is a really easy example of this -- our children should be the primary people that we share our beliefs, values, and ideals with. 10/14/2013

43. No, because I spend little time with people outside my faith family. 10/14/2013
44. no 10/14/2013
45. Yes....I do have opportunities...some I miss....some I take advantage of. Lesbian couple across the street has a baby....perfect opportunity?? 10/14/2013
46. Yes. Every situation in life offers either a choice (right vs. wrong) something that affects our hearts (sickness, death, new birth, etc...) or a time for reflection (something horrible just happened, or something good just happened). These opportunities are perfect for reminding people that God is in control and our actions should reflect that. 10/14/2013
47. Yes 10/14/2013
48. No, at least not at this time in my life. I work from home and don't get out much. 10/14/2013
49. Yes; There are tons of people around campus that I could attempt to evangelize with the help of the holy spirit, but I have not. 10/13/2013
50. No. I am a stay at home mom and rarely go anywhere;) 10/13/2013
51. No. I have a relative small circle outside of my WELS world. 10/13/2013
52. no... I would say that I do not have the time or am out enough that I would be doing this 10/13/2013
53. Yes. 10/13/2013
54. I am actively involved in church so my scheduling around church does come up in conversation. I am never ashamed of my involvement and try to just lead and witness by example. 10/13/2013
55. No 10/13/2013
56. Yes; I can recall numerous opportunities throughout my life. 10/13/2013
57. I suppose that there are a lot more opportunities than I think about that would allow me to share my beliefs or values. Nobody is perfect. However, I should be more open to being aware of different opportunities where God can use me. 10/13/2013
58. Yes, there have been many instances in which I am able to speak to people about my beliefs 10/13/2013
59. Yes there are a lot of places you run into people that don't share your beliefs 10/13/2013
60. No - I work with a relatively small group and most other people I socialize with do share the same beliefs. 10/13/2013
61. Yes.opportunities are all around. Plant the seed so the Holy Spirit can make it grow. 10/13/2013
62. I feel like no. But I am sure I am oblivious to some opportunities 10/13/2013
63. yes and it happens in different ways, like the examples we lead, activities we participate in, how we speak of others and more 10/13/2013
64. No, not many opportunities at this time. 10/13/2013
65. yes, unbelief all around me 10/13/2013
66. Yes. I am an educator and people respect me. I can express my strengths as a reflection of my faith. 10/13/2013
67. Yes, its everywhere but you can choose to what extent to talk about it. I choose not to discuss but will listen and respect the values of others. 10/13/2013
68. Yes, there are opportunities daily to share my beliefs. 10/13/2013
69. Yes, BC the idea of values, morals, etc., are shrinking daily in our society 10/13/2013
70. No. Society in General is getting more and more tough to witness. 10/13/2013

71. Yes, especially in this social media age. It's funny looking back at all the public school friends I had as a kid and how it back then it really seemed that they weren't much into religion, but now that everyone updates their statuses it's nest to see how religious some of them were all along.... 10/13/2013
72. Yes 10/13/2013
73. No, I do not believe I am presented nearly as many opportunities however there is opportunity to create more. 10/13/2013
74. No, same as 6 10/13/2013
75. Yes. I just don't always take advantage if those opportunities. In the workplace, it can be awkward. I do try to use social media as much as possible to make my views known, though! 10/13/2013
76. Yes. I can live my life as a Christian should. My actions can be my light that shines. 10/13/2013
77. yes. political issues, social issues allow christians to share truths from the Bible. 10/13/2013
78. Yes 10/13/2013
79. No 10/13/2013
80. No 10/13/2013
81. Yes 10/13/2013
82. Yes, however, I don't take advantage of them enough. 10/13/2013
83. Yes. No one can stop you from sharing your beliefs in America. Its a matter of choice, prioritization, and desire. 10/13/2013
84. No 10/13/2013
85. Yes. We have great debate in the country. 10/13/2013
86. Yes, God provides examples, not society. For future reference, don't design such a poor survey, make more yes/no responses. Qualitative evidence goes further in a thesis paper. 10/13/2013
87. No 10/13/2013

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Responses:

1. Yes. There a lost souls all around us. 10/24/2013
2. YES. This is the easiest YES/NO statement of the bunch, I feel. Look at creation. Look at suffering. Look at family differences. Look at the beautiful sunset. Look at the groups or organizations I choose to join or refuse participation. Look at my prayer life or lack thereof. Look at the mega-church. Look at the church that's stood there like it has for the last 100 years. Look at the abandoned church. Look at so many gifts, talents, or abilities of God's crown of creation. THERE IS MUCH TO TALK ABOUT. 10/15/2013
3. Yes, Conversations about the problems all around and the problems within our lives can lead to opportunities about beliefs, values, and ideals. 10/14/2013
4. Yes. Its a big field out there. 10/14/2013
5. Yes. I share my beliefs with fellow Christians everyday. I also share my beliefs with unbelievers, especially when I know that they are unbelievers. 10/14/2013

6. Yes. I run into people I've never met before all the time. I simply need to work on starting relationships with strangers more. 10/14/2013
7. Yes, 10/14/2013
8. No. Secularist Humanism stigmatizes religious discussion as something irreconcilably unattainable in public forum, and almost rude for private discussion. It ought not be so! 10/14/2013
9. Yes, we have so many opportunities, but we have to see them and take advantage of them! 10/14/2013
10. Yes. There are always enough opportunities. 10/14/2013
11. No. Society is set so that people don't have to share beliefs especially christian ones, so we work around it anyways 10/14/2013
12. No, i feel as if it is just the opposite. I can say any thing under the sun and it will be held up as something to be respected (outside of my christian beliefs). i can say the murder of babies through abortions is okay and over half the country would agree with me and think i was a forward thinking man, and someone who truly cares about women's rights and their bodies and their happiness. but the second i say, "hey, maybe you should wait until you're married to have sex..." I am suddenly an old fashioned fool who should probably get with the times, after all women have the right to express their sexuality! This is an interesting time we live in, and the landscape of Christianity will look scarily different when we retire in 40 years. good luck on your paper 10/13/2013
13. No. Society is fast. A conversation about my beliefs, values, and ideals takes time. 10/13/2013
14. Yes. God's always giving me chances. I just need to take them. 10/13/2013
15. No I'm at the Seminary most of my time. 10/13/2013
16. yes 10/13/2013
17. As a Seminary student who works in a Lutheran school, I don't have as many day to day opportunities to share my beliefs. Time is always short. 10/13/2013
18. No, for the same reason as #5. 10/13/2013
19. No. Not many. Some, but not, as I can experience, many. 10/13/2013
20. Yes, perhaps I will find a time when I will be in a setting where this daily interaction comes whether or not I seek it, but the simple fact of the matter is that until I shift my perspective and actually make an effort to seek these opportunities, I will never make full or frequent use of those chances that God has provided. 10/13/2013
21. No 10/13/2013
22. Yes. As I mentioned above work is a great opportunity to share my beliefs. If you act and behave like a Christian people will ask about it. They will want to know why you act the way you do. Why you don't cuss and swear, why you aren't ogling the cute girl walking by, by nature man is curious that is something we should use to our advantage. 10/13/2013
23. No, it seems that I often don't have time or when I do have time I don't meet many people. 10/13/2013

