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How steeled are we to confess the faith, knowing that times of hostility toward those who hold to a clear, biblical confession are rapidly approaching?

# WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO MISSOURI?

by Randall L. Golter

**T**HE REV. BART DAY wanted me to have immediate reflections on the afternoon papers, not knowing what they were ahead of time, and thus, the following are a few thoughts scribbled notes just crafted in your midst while we all were listening. Therefore, they are admittedly somewhat scattered and unprocessed. These might be added to your own processing, study, in the days ongoing.

First, I am thankful for this gathering, an intentional gathering with a joyful focus on the conversion of sinners, all sinners, everyone everywhere. Such narrowed attentiveness, of course, is the Lord's too, as exhibited in His ongoing creation and preservation of humanity, even as the Day of Judgment remains a future, near moment. He Himself, the One who remains the crucified, is not done with the distribution of His gifts.

Dr. Sundberg's remarks on the immense decline of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America are significant, even though we all knew it to be so. Of course, we lament for them, for their loss of biblical truth. For we hear the Lord's words that only the truth sets one free (John 8:32). If truth is lost, so is the freeing of sinners from the bondage of sin and unbelief.

But what about us? What will happen to Missouri? How steeled are we to hold and confess — with the rapidly coming times of hostility toward those who hold to a clear, biblical confession?

But if we cower in fear, the defeat is already a reality. It reminds me of a question I asked Dr. Darius Pekunas at the International Lutheran Council conference

in Palanga, Lithuania, this past August. I queried, "What should Missouri do with the apparent coming persecution?" Before you hear the answer, you must understand that Dr. Pekunas wrote a book on the persecution of the Lithuanian Lutheran Church from 1946-1956, when the KGB agents paid parishioners to give false testimony against their pastors. The pastors then were interrogated and expelled to Siberia, with most losing their lives there. Then, taxes were raised on the churches so high that they had to close. The Communists had in mind the extermination of the Germans; the devil, the extermination of the Church.

Headed our way may very well be the cleansing and purifying by the Lord Himself, so that the idols fabricated every day by the church are exposed and she remains useful for His purpose of making Christians.

In response to the question, he pondered only a brief moment and said, "Preach the Gospel; administer the Sacraments." Simple yet profoundly true. And even more so, for these words exhibit a clear and explicit trust where God Himself bestows His salvific, operative works to the sinner. Justification remains God's work as He does this through His means of grace. The

Church is where Christ is, where He presently works through His Word and the Sacraments. Where the Word and the Sacraments are, there is the Church.

This is not to say, of course, that the Church is the source of the mission. Christ is. The Church is His instrument through which He does all His work (LC II, 61-62). The Church — pastors and lay people, each with in their vocation — is how God works His mission.

Dr. Collver's helpful proposal to set forth a form of metrics toward emerging or present partner churches makes me wonder if the same metrics might be used — and agreed to — by the partner churches toward

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. What might our church partners write to measure Missouri's life as church? What dangers are present for a church body that is more mature, that is, in terms of age over and against many church partners (not all) but perhaps not necessarily so in life together or witness or mercy? Spiritual myopia is not overcome or even possible by some internal optical assessment. Outside forces may be the Lord's intended way to make Missouri most useful for Him.

Headed our way may very well be the cleansing and purifying by the Lord Himself, so that the idols fabricated every day by the church are exposed and she remains useful for His purpose of making Christians. As the multitude of delightful opportunities present themselves

to be co-workers with other churches, it appears to me that repentance is needed now. Deference with deep humility to other church partners and emerging churches and placing their needs ahead of our own, is needed now more than ever. Even as we attempt to be careful, faithful, yet frugally liberal with His resources, the present reality is that we may need church partners more than they need us, not fiscally, of course, but for strength to be and act as His church in mission. They may need to pray us through

these coming times even as He works His mission here and through the partner churches globally. Of course, Jesus is praying His Church through these present and coming times as He always has.

The shift, though, is happening. Embrace it by faith. In other words, how is it, Missouri, when you're the minimal partner at the table? You better get used to it.

Even as we attempt to be careful, faithful, yet frugally liberal with His resources, the present reality is that we may need church partners more than they need us, not fiscally, of course, but for strength to be and act as His church in mission.

One more thought here: With this emerging paradigm now, what is needed most from our church partners is for them to be stalwarts of the faith, even as they need that of us. They teach and live the faith, as we imitate by faith. The catechism, as Dr. Arand reminded us, may become even more so the most important missionary book — next to the Scriptures — for the present day mission. It orients life

around, from and in the Gospel, the preached and given Christ who remains crucified. There we go again: the Gospel, oral and sacramental. Missionaries — pastors and laity, the Church — are armed with the Gospel so that the heathen may praise the Lord.

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