

Table of Contents

SERMON: A SONG OF JOY BY MICHAEL KUMM.....	2
LUTHER'S TRUTHS: THEN AND NOW BY ROBERT KOLB.....	5
REFORMATION IN NEW LANDS AND TONGUES BY LAWRENCE R. RAST, JR.....	16
THE MESSAGE OF THE REFORMATION BY MATTHEW C. HARRISON.....	23
REFORMATION JUBILEES: IS THERE CAUSE FOR CELEBRATION IN 2017? BY WERNER KLÄN	26
DECLINE IN AMERICAN LUTHERANISM: A STUDY BY JAMES ARNE NESTIGEN	44
THE LUTHERAN REFORMATION'S CONTINUING IMPORTANCE FOR THE CHURCH TODAY: CELEBRATING THE REFORMATION RIGHTLY — REPENTANCE — AN AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE BY JOSEPH OCHOLA OMOLO.....	52
THE REFORMATION AND ASIA: ANOTHER BATTLEGROUND OF CONFESSION AND LITURGY BY NAOMICHI MASAKI.....	62
EUROPE: DEFLECTION FROM THE CONFESSIONAL BASE AND NEW SIGNS OF ITS VITALITY BY DARIUS PETKUNAS	67
REFORMATION TRUTH IN THE GLOBAL CHURCH: LATIN AMERICA BY RICARDO RIETH	72
THE LUTHERAN REFORMATION AND THE NORTH AMERICAN INHERITANCE BY GERHARD BODE.....	76
FROM REPENTANCE TO REJOICING BY ALBERT B. COLLVER III	80
ENDURING HOPE: THE WEST AND BEYOND BY ROLAND GUSTAFASSON	85
CELEBRATING THE REFORMATION RIGHTLY: REMEMBRANCE, REPENTANCE AND REJOICING BY JOSEPH MAKALA.....	88
LUTHERAN WITNESS IN TURKEY BY VILLE TYPPÖ	91
THE LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AFRICA: THIRTY YEARS OF GROWTH BY MIKE RODEWALD.....	95
BOOK REVIEW AND COMMENTARY: <i>THE FORGOTTEN WAYS— REACTIVATING THE MISSIONAL CHURCH</i> BY ALAN HIRSCH AND <i>THE PERMANENT REVOLUTION: APOSTOLIC IMAGINATION AND PRACTICE FOR THE 21ST CENTURY CHURCH</i> BY ALAN HIRSCH AND TIM CATCHIM BY ALBERT B. COLLVER III	105

© 2015 The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.
Reproduction of a single article or column for parish
use only does not require permission of *The Journal
of Lutheran Mission*. Such reproductions, however,
should credit *The Journal of Lutheran Mission* as the
source. Cover images are not reproducible without
permission. Also, photos and images credited to
sources outside the LCMS are not to be copied.

Editorial office:
1333 S. Kirkwood Road,
St. Louis, MO 63122-7294,
314-996-1202

Published by The Lutheran Church—
Missouri Synod.

Please direct queries to
journaloflutheranmission@lcms.org.

This journal may also
be found at
www.lcms.org/journaloflutheranmission.

Member: Associated Church Press Evangelical Press Association (ISSN 2334-1998)
A periodical of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod's Offices of National and International Mission.



THE LUTHERAN REFORMATION'S CONTINUING IMPORTANCE FOR THE CHURCH TODAY: CELEBRATING THE REFORMATION RIGHTLY — REPENTANCE — AN AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE

by Joseph Ochola Omolo

Does the theology of the Lutheran Church today still differ from all other churches' theologies because she is the Church of the pure Word and unadulterated Sacraments? Has the Lutheran Church today ignored her symbols, or does she hold fast to them as a norm and standard of her entire life? These and other questions will lay the foundation upon which we shall evaluate our missionary methods in the twenty-first century, particularly in Africa.

Introduction

THE LUTHERAN REFORMATION that took place in the sixteenth century remains relevant for the mission of the Church of Christ in all decades due to its clear articulations of the Christian doctrines. By and large, God used His servant Martin Luther to correct the abuses that had invaded the Roman Catholic Church during medieval period. Unlike other earlier reformation attempts, Dr. Luther's Reformation was unique in that it was more concerned with the *doctrine of the Church* rather than with the *moral life* of the individuals. Although Luther sought to also reform various abuses of morals in the Roman Catholic Church, at the heart of his work Luther became more articulate with sound biblical teaching. During a discussion in one his table talks, Dr. Luther asserted:

Doctrine and life are to be distinguished. Life is as bad among us as among the papists. Hence we do not fight and damn them because of their bad lives. Wyclif and Hus, who fought over the moral quality of life, failed to understand this ... When the Word of God, remains pure, even if the quality of life fails us, life is placed in a position to be what it ought to be. That is why everything hinges on the purity of the Word. I have succeeded only if I have taught correctly.¹

Looking into our theme for this conference, and attempting to bring the Lutheran theology into the con-

text, African context in this particular case, the following questions will direct our presentation: (1) Does the theology of the Lutheran Church today still *differ* from all other churches' theologies because she is the Church of the pure Word and unadulterated Sacraments? (2) Has the Lutheran Church today *ignored* her symbols, or does she hold fast to them as a norm and standard of her entire life? (3) Is the Lutheran Church as represented in this conference, prepared to *repent* of her failure to adhere faithfully to the pure Gospel and all of its articles and to return both to confess faithfully and to continue in study of this confessional treasure bequeathed to us?

Without Luther's Reformation, there would have been no clear articulation of salvation, for the Gospel would have remained largely hidden.

These and other questions will lay the foundation upon which we shall evaluate our missionary methods in the twenty-first century, particularly in Africa.

1: The African concept of sin in relation to Lutheran Reformation theology for the mission of the Church in Africa in the twenty-first century

Does the Lutheran Church today still *differ* from all other churches because she is the church of the pure Word and unadulterated Sacraments? Positively put, this question rightly presupposes that at her inception the Lutheran Church differed with other churches due to her clear articulations of the pure Word and unadulterated Sacraments. In terms of doctrine and practice, apparently the Lutheran Church stands unique due to her proper doctrinal expressions. In other words, right theology leads to right missiology. But, the big question for us here in this conference is this: Has the Lutheran Church, the Church

¹ WA TR 1:624; LW 54:110. Quoted by Dr. Richard P. Bucher: <http://www.orthodox.org/html/whatwas.html>,

of pure Gospel and unadulterated Sacraments, lived up to the expectations of her Confessions?

The Lutheran Confessions stipulate that Dr. Luther's conviction was rightly guided by God's relationship to his creation — especially how a *righteous* God could relate to and save a *sinful human being*. That struggle led Martin Luther to discover the main teaching of God's Word — that man is declared righteous (*justified*) by faith in the cross of Jesus Christ. Luther discovered that it is *not* human righteousness (human works, efforts or obeying God's laws) that saves him. Rather it is Christ's *righteousness* that saves; for God is pleased only with Christ, His Son (Matt. 3:17). At the heart of Luther's Reformation was the rediscovery of the Gospel that saves a poor miserable sinner. This Gospel is stocked in the Scripture, for it is only this Gospel that can reform the Church. Does Lutheran Reformation theology continue to be important and relevant for the mission of the Church today, especially when we celebrate the Lutheran Reformation in the twenty-first century? How would an African understand that God is *righteous* and that the *human being is sinful* and thus needs *salvation*? In other words, how does an African understand sin? What is sin and what are the causes and the consequences of sin to the individual or a society at large?

Sin, justification and reconciliation in the African context: Are they just words?

By and large, Lutheran Reformation theology still differs with other churches and offers a unique approach to missiology due to its clear and accurate articulation of biblical doctrine, especially the doctrine of justification. The doctrine of justification cannot properly be conceived without proper understanding of the nature of God and the essence of sin when dealing with the relationship between God and man. This is why it is necessary to briefly present the traditional African concept of sin as a base for contextual reflection before briefly highlighting Luther's teaching on justification from an anthropological perspective.

Sin in the African context

Comparatively, the study of sin as a doctrine in African Traditional Religion (ATR) has not been undertaken extensively. As observed by Awolalu, it is justifiable that ATR scholars have not systematically done a thorough

study on the subject of sin.² Awolalu points out that sin (as a subject) has been briefly referred to in various literature, suggesting that these few references may easily mislead researchers to biased conclusions, particularly while comparing the biblical and the African traditional religious concepts of sin.³

In 1964, Sawyerr made a great contribution to African religious studies by publishing an article on the African traditional concept of sin and forgiveness.⁴ Interestingly, Sawyerr's research lead him to conclude that hardly ever is there a single term for sin in African languages that would correspond exactly to the biblical concept of sin. This makes it hard to draw any general conclusions when it comes to the point of comparing the Jewish and African concepts of sin.⁵ How does ATR describe sin?

A renowned ATR scholar, John Mbiti, has developed a profound and clear definition and concept of sin, expanding its essence and aspect to embrace its determinative, cosmological function and its relational aspect within the ATR society.⁶ He points out that the concept of sin in African society guides and controls individuals to comply and maintain their positions. According to Mbiti, sin is determined by any behavior that goes against the rules laid down by a community. The behavioral rules guide how people in a society relate to one another and keep their positional boundaries. In a communal society, life is in order when everyone knows and controls their positions properly and respectfully.⁷ What then is sin in ATR society?

² Omosade J. Awolalu, "Sin and its Removal in African Traditional Religion," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 44: 2 (2001): 275–287.

³ *Ibid.*, 276. Apart from the inspired Word of God (the Old Testament which God gave to the Jews), it is undeniable that the Jews of the first century A.D. shared some aspects of worldview with followers of ATR (i.e., honor and shame cultural components). Nevertheless, it is overstating to strongly conclude, as Awolalu does, that "Africans are as conscious of sin as the Jews of the Old Testament" (Awolalu, "Sin and its Removal"). Such a statement gives the implication that ATR has a special revelation like that of the Old Testament (OT). The OT account is unique and cannot be compared with any worldly religious beliefs, for it is a special revelation from God. What some comparative religious scholars fail to notice is the nature of a Jew living at the time of the OT as an ordinary human being, who apart from the OT Scriptures is just an ordinary religious person. The OT is a forensic revelation from God to the Jews with a special purpose — salvation.

⁴ Harry Sawyerr, "Sin and Forgiveness in Africa," *Frontier* 7 (September 1964): 60–63.

⁵ See: John Mbiti, "Peace and Reconciliation," 16–32; and Awolalu, "Sin and its Removal," 276–278.

⁶ John Mbiti, "African Concept of Sin," *Frontier* 7 (August 1964): 182–184.

⁷ *Ibid.*

Awolalu defines the ATR's concept of sin in relation to the existence of man in a society. He expresses that, according to African mentality, man is the center of creation, standing between the deities and the society, and is created for the purpose of maintaining the moral standards of the society. Awolalu remarks:

In African communities, there are sanctions recognized as the approved standard of social and religious conduct on the part of the individual in the society and of the community as a whole. A breach of, or failure to adhere to the sanctions is sin and this incurs the displeasure of the deity and his functionaries. Sin is, therefore, doing that which is contrary to the will of the directions of the deity. It includes any immoral behavior, ritual mistakes, any offences against god or man, breach of covenant, breaking of taboos and doing anything regarded as abominable and polluting To disregard god, the divinities and the ancestral spirits is to commit sin. Likewise to disregard the norms and taboos of the society is to commit sin.⁸

Traditionally, people believe that ancestral spirits control the moral standards or codes as they guide the community. To rebel against the laws guiding moral standards in a community is to rebel against the community, which is comprised of the living individuals, the dead ancestors and those who are yet to be born. Such rebellion causes sin and is severely punishable.

In an African society, people explain a crisis that befalls an individual or a group in relation to an act that was committed or omitted. It is generally maintained that nothing bad befalls a person without a cause and effect. Awolalu observes that the sin committed destroys relationships not only within the society, but also between god and man, and between man and spirits.⁹ When sin occurs among the people, it takes away honor and brings disgrace and shame. Sin committed contaminates, pollutes and brings fear and shame to the person who commits it. Evans-Pritchard contends that sin in a man changes his

spiritual status, making him unclean and thus unacceptable within the society — not only among the living, but also in the world of spirits.¹⁰ This is the real state of shame. Shame torments a person and makes a person worthless — a state that is equivalent to death. It is in this status that an individual or group needs ritualistic cleansing. In ATR, ritualistic cleansing deals with sin and provides a remedy for the polluted person. How does ATR deal with sin and its effects?

In the African community, sin is explained as the cause of evil in a society. This causes people to engage in hatred, quarrels, fighting, illness and war in a society. In some circumstances, sin will manifest itself through sickness, psychological disturbances or other forms of misfortune. This causes people to begin tracing the effect of sin back to its cause so that they may deal with it. The cause might be attributed either to witchcraft or to a breach of behavior

(e.g., breaking a taboo, ignoring a totem, etc). In order to treat such a person, an intermediary is needed, who not only intercedes for the transgressor but also performs the rituals necessary for the treatment. This explains why mission to Africa should take very seriously the study of the concept *and* the act of reconciliation when dealing with the issue of contextualization in African context.

Luther's anthropological aspect in the doctrine of justification/reconciliation

While for Luther, the doctrine of justification is theocentric and Christocentric, there is — in and within this doctrine — an anthropological aspect. The anthropological nature of Luther's theology of justification is found in his famous expression *simul iustus et peccator* (simultaneously righteous and sinful). This wonderful and unique description of a Christian explains the truth in humanity. According to this expression, the righteousness a person has after being justified is not his or her own, but the righteousness of Christ. This eventually provides the basis for forensic justification or external justification. In other words, while the justified sinner receives the righteousness of God from outside, namely from Christ,

When we celebrate the Reformation, we are celebrating this rediscovery of the Gospel that we believe, teach and confess; we are celebrating our salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, our Lord.

⁸ Awolalu, "Sin and its Removal," 279.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Evans-Pritchard in Awolalu, "Sin and its Removal," 279.

this person at the same time remains a human being as was created — a sinner. The person is, in the real sense, righteous — and at the same time a sinner. That is why a Christian needs the preaching of Law and Gospel. In the state of *simul iustus et peccator*, the justified sinful person enjoys the ultimate relationship with God, while at the same time the justified person is a sinner who needs the forgiveness of his sins. In this state, a justified person enjoys a personal relationship with the triune God who forgives and justifies for the sake of Christ. He is not only a forgiven sinner, but also has been made heir to that which God has prepared for His beloved children in heaven. The work done by justification is more evident in the Lutheran teaching of *simul iustus et peccator*. This is unique in the Lutheran theology, and this is why Lutheran theology differs from other theologies.

Justification and reconciliation: Are they just words?

Although the Reformers and the Lutheran Confessions employ the terms reconciliation and justification interchangeably, these terms actually portray differing contextual realities. That is, justification portrays a legal context in which punishment due a sinner is dealt with and forgiven, and the culprit is pronounced innocent because another person has suffered the penalty. On the other hand, reconciliation is connected more to the relational context, whereby a ritualistic sacrifice is offered and sins are forgiven. Now the person/people happily live together, eat together and drink together as they live a new life. In the relational state, the warring individuals start a new life together, eating together, sharing the gift of life together.¹¹ These people, therefore, become members of one household — the communion of saints. This is what happens when a Christian is baptized and given a new life to begin feeding at the Lord's Table.

Having said this, it has to be made clear here that there is no reconciliation without justification. Reconciliation

is possible because justification has taken place.¹² While the two terminologies (words) are not one and the same (contextually), they are connected and intertwined as far as their base, foundation and effect are concerned. They are not just words! They are legalities of God's action to his beloved creation. The problem is that when one hears the word *reconciliation*, what comes quickly into one's mind is the man-to-man relationship. Overduin is correct in remarking:

One of the major problems for us Christians is the understanding of the meaning of the doctrine of reconciliation. Human relationships have become almost all important at the expense of man's relationship with his God Reconciliation in terms of humanistic thinking leaves no room for Luther's *homo theologicus*.¹³

In the state of *simul iustus et peccator*, the justified sinful person enjoys the ultimate relationship with God, while at the same time the justified person is a sinner who needs the forgiveness of his sins. In this state, a justified person enjoys a personal relationship with the triune God who forgives and justifies for the sake of Christ.

In Luther's theology, man's relationship is based on that which God has established in justification through the death of his Son on the cross. The Lutheran theology of reconciliation therefore grounds human relationships on the work of God, which then explains human relational responsibility in society. God has established it, has given it to His people and has commissioned them to take and proclaim it to others for the sake of their relationship with Him and with their neighbor. Luther's theology of justification/reconciliation stands in contrast to the medieval theology of merit. He felt that the theology of merit robs God of His honor and gives it to the

human being. This is exactly what is embedded in the ATR's concept and ritualistic practice of sin.

The Lutheran Church is the church of the pure Word and unadulterated Sacraments.

Back to our initial question in this section: Does the Lutheran Church today still differ from all other churches because she is the Church of the pure Word and unadulterated Sacraments? This is a question of great necessity

¹¹ For more information of just words, see Jacob A. O. Preus, *Just Words: Understanding the Fullness of the Gospel* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2000), 137–143.

¹² Schlink, *Theology of the Lutheran Confessions*, 83.

¹³ Daniel A. Overduin, "Reconciliation: Proclamation of New Reality," in *Theologia Crucis*, ed. Henry P. Hamann (Adelaide, Australia: Lutheran Publishing House, 1975), 121.

and demands a strict accounting. As the Lutheran Church has come to the beginning of the twenty-first century, we see especially in Europe and North America a liberalizing tendency, as the desire to be a player on the stage of global Christianity often moves the Church to positions that just a decade or two ago would have been unthinkable. Now the unthinkable and unbiblical has become commonplace. Even within the more orthodox churches in America and Europe, there is an ongoing struggle to remain faithful. One brief example will suffice. Here is a direct quotation from our brother in Christ, Rev. Dr. Matthew Harrison, the president (bishop) of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. His words offer clarity in this dilemma without getting into personalities:

When a public teacher on the roster (*means a public teacher of the Church*) of Synod (*The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod*) can without consequence publicly advocate the ordination of women (even participate vested in the installation of an ELCA clergy person), homosexuality, the errancy of the Bible, the historical-critical method, open communion, communion with the Reformed, evolution, and more, then the public confession of the Synod is meaningless. I am

saying that if my Synod does not change its inability to call such a person to repentance and remove such a teacher where there is no repentance, then we are liars and our confession is meaningless. I do not want to belong to such a synod, much less lead it. I have no intention of walking away from my vocation. I shall rather use it and, by the grace of God, use all the energy I have to call this Synod to fidelity to correct this situation.¹⁴

Satan, of course, will use every tool to lead the Church to ruin. He has and will continue to attack the Church that confesses the Gospel in its truth and purity. This was true in the time of Elijah in the Old Testament, in the time of Paul and the apostles in the New Testament and in the times of Luther, and still is true in our day as well. While in many parts of Europe and America some people would

not want to call sin by its name, in Africa and other parts of the world, some people and religious groups would want to deal with sin in a more traditional way to avoid the grips and real essence of sin and its consequences in human lives.

What shall we say to our own age and our culture? Many do not care about the true Gospel at all; many even in the churches represented here may look only to their own rewards or the rewards of men. Sad to say, many in developing nations relying on the support of Western nations quite often find themselves in such a confessional dilemma. Even among Lutherans who desire to be faithful, the temptation to compromise just a little on biblical teachings so that the funding continues to flow is at the

least challenging, and at the worst apostasy. I remember that the archbishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya, Dr. Walter Obare, was expelled from the Lutheran World Federation's (LWF) council as its theological advisor simply because he did not accept compromising the Gospel so that his church body could get and enjoy privileges from the LWF. For the developing nations, standing strong against Western churches' abuses comes with some consequences. Praise be to God if some younger churches

from the developing countries would be estranged due to their doctrinal stand! That is what Lutheranism means; we can then sing with Luther in his wonderful hymn of *The Mighty Fortress*.

2: Theology in context

Has the Lutheran Church today *ignored* her symbols, or does she hold fast to them as a norm and standard of her entire life? This question is equally important, especially when we prepare to celebrate the five hundred years since Lutheran Reformation took place. When we talk about Reformation theology for today's Church's mission, we intrinsically and or extrinsically talk about the Lutheran Confessions' relevance to us today, particularly in Africa. The development of diverse theologies, so to speak, in the twenty-first century is coupled with a lot of challenging ideologies and practices, both locally and internationally, that need to critically be examined.

In the African context, the challenge begins with the

Time and again, in the mission of the apostles, godless culture was transformed ... by the good news that God justifies the ungodly by His grace alone through faith alone for the sake of the atonement of Christ alone.

¹⁴ Witness, Mercy, Life Together. <http://wmltblog.org/>. Italicized bracketed terms are offered for clarification and are not part of the original text.

enculturation of the Roman Catholic Church as a mission paradigm; it then moves to the *health and wealth* theology of the Pentecostal churches as a missionary model on the one hand. On the other hand we find the sporadic *syncretistic teachings* of sects and cults in the African Initiated Churches (AICs). Still another big challenge, which cannot be left unchallenged, is the influence of Islam. All of these religious groups pose a real and great challenge to Christianity in Africa, despite the fact that Christianity is rapidly growing in the southern part of the world. Before getting back to our question in this section, let me briefly present some of these religious groups which not only cause serious challenges to African Christianity, but also seriously jeopardize the future of Christianity in Africa.

Inculturation¹⁵ theology and theological education

With Africa's long history and acquaintance with the traditional religiosities, Africans are open and ready to receive the Gospel. It is claimed that Roman Catholics have been very successful in many parts of Africa due to their ritualistic type of worship and their teachings on the doctrine of saints. As indicated in the first section of this paper, the ritualistic practices and worship and the doctrine of ancestral/saints have several affinities with the African religio-cultural rituals, coupled with the veneration of ancestors in the African traditional religious beliefs and rituals.

While Protestants have used the term “contextualization” as a model for bringing theology into the context, the Roman Catholics have opted to use the term *enculturation/acculturation* for the same. For the Roman Catholic, “*enculturation/inculturation* is the logical consequence of effective evangelization.” They strongly maintain that “[t]he Good News of Jesus Christ is not addressed to the iso-

lated individuals, but to people for whom culture is part of the human phenomenon.” With this kind of evangelistic model in practice, the Roman Catholics view culture as the starting point from which the effective evangelization starts. While they have the *Text* (Scripture), the *Context* (Culture) becomes the starting point in which culture (the context) dialogues with the text of Scripture. In such a scenario, both the text and the context stay at the same level while doing evangelism, as neither judges the other. This becomes the cause of syncretism.

Sects and cults

In Africa today, the spread of sects and cults is alarming. With the expansion of Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Legio Maria, Akorino¹⁶ and other religious groups, such movements are increasingly gaining strongholds across many parts in Africa. Many reasons can be given as to how and why these sects/cults emerge. While some may split because they lack some fulfilment on their spiritual needs, as Ogutu¹⁷ observes, others may opt to start their churches after being disciplined or defrocked by their mainline churches. Still others will split due to leadership struggles. Oddly

enough, the majority of those leading sects/cults in Africa have very limited theological education. Several African self-proclaimed prophets mingle elements of Christianity with African Traditional religiosities and claim the leadership of these sects. Disappointingly enough, such prophets gather significant number of followers whom they mislead. Because of their lack of proper theological education is coupled with distorted Christian ethics, their teachings are misleading — others more dangerous — even to the point of misleading their followers willingly to

When we are turned by our gracious God to repentance for our failures to adhere faithfully and confess the pure Gospel and all its articles, then God will continue to shower His mercy and grace upon such repentant sinners.

¹⁵ “The term ‘inculturation’ was first coined by Joseph Masson in 1962. It was used by Pedro Arrupe during the 1977 Synod of Roman Catholic Bishops and was the subject of a letter which he addressed to the Society of Jesus in 1978. It was first adopted officially by John Paul II in the synodal document *Catechesi Tradendae* of 1979, and has since entered into theological currency. It is a term popular with African Christian theologians who see African Theology as the foremost instance of inculturation and a means to combat cultural alienation in the African Church.” African Traditional Religion and Inculturation, written and posted by Aylward Shorter in <http://www.crvp.org/book/Series02/II-10/CH2.htm>.

¹⁶ Although many AIC accept the use of modern medicines, schools, education and even modern technology, the Akorino Church and other AICs preach against such things. While some of these sects/cults originate in Africa, others come from outside, namely Europe, America and Asia.

¹⁷ “There's a feeling of being shut out” in the mainstream church, says Ogutu Agnes Masitsa, who attended a Catholic Church before she moved to Nairobi in 1988. One Kenyan movement, called Thaa, preaches a “back to Africa” idea that aims to keep “white” ideas out of Africa. “Christianity has never helped us or our countrymen,” says Maina Karanja, a 77-year-old doctor. “All that it has done is taken our culture backwards.” Posted by MSNBC News, March 28, 2000, by Stefan Lovgren (Cult Education Institute).

take death as part of their commitment to their religion. Stefan Lovgren observes:

Hundreds of members of the small sect, The Movement of the Restoration of the Ten Commandments of God, including 78 children, died in a fire in a church in Kanungu, 220 miles southwest of the capital, Kampala Two cult leaders, Joseph Kibwetere, a defrocked Catholic priest, and Cleodonia Mwerinde, a former prostitute, may have fled before the fire as the cult grew increasingly divided after the world did not end Dec. 31, as church leaders had predicted.¹⁸

Healing rituals form the major part of the spiritual life of many sects/cults. Scholars have pointed out some similarities between the African traditional healing system¹⁹ and the healing practiced by many African Initiated Churches (AIC).²⁰ The so-called “healing ministry” attracts many people, especially in the developing countries because of the economic difficulties and widespread health problems. In the AICs, fighting demonic spirits is a common phenomenon; the worship is not complete until the demon is exorcised. This type of ‘spiritual warfare’ worship grounds its power around a “self-proclaimed prophet” or the sect’s or cult’s leader. In times of crisis (deaths, burial rituals, prolonged diseases, disasters caused by natural calamities, etc.) people, even the so called “Christians,” would go to such prophets/leaders seeking answers, prayers or healing, etc., from them.

The Lutheran mission in Africa should not under-rate such sects and or cultic movements. How should the Lutheran Church in Africa seriously address such situations? To the African Church leaders and seminary professors gathered here today, what steps are we collectively or individually taking to address such challenges? Three or four years ago, I remember we had a provocative conference in Ghana where we discussed some of such challenges. A follow up meeting is needed again and the papers presented should be published and some of those papers used in our seminaries.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ John V. Taylor, *The Primal Vision* (Elva, Scotland: Robert Canigham & Sons Ltd., 1963). According to Taylor, classroom religion refers to the practice by which religious belief is only practiced in the church or within the bounds of the missionary’s reach.

²⁰ Bengt Sundkler, *Christian Ministry in Africa* (London: SCM Press, 1960), 14. Anssi Simojoki, “The Ministry of the Church and the Call of Mission: Africa Reflection,” in *The Office of the Ministry*, ed. John R. Fehrmann and Daniel Preus (Crestwood, MO: Luther Academy, 1996).

Islam

As it was during the sixteenth century Reformation period, the spread of Islam “is perhaps the most serious” threat in Africa today. All of Northern Africa, West Africa, Central Africa and the East Coast of Africa have been dominated by Muslims. Where Muslims dominate, violence becomes the order of the day. In Kenya today some Christian pastors have been ruthlessly killed, churches burned down and all sorts of violence experienced. The most threatening situation is that Muslims are moving even to the inter-lands in East Africa, building mosques and schools and offering scholarships as they gain more converts. At the same time Muslim merchants are financing huge projects, as many of the petrol stations owned by Muslims all across Africa. Pastor Richard Bucher rightly observes: “It is most alarming to see Muslim “missionaries” intentionally at work in Africa, building mosques in remote villages and openly proselytizing in public places.” How can the Lutheran mission in Africa challenge the spread of Islam in Africa? How do we incorporate such challenges into our seminary programs? As seminary leaders and church leaders, how do we continue equipping parish pastors, evangelists and deaconesses, even the Church elders and Christians at large, in the local congregations, on how to deal with such challenges?

3: The Lutheran Church is a catechetical church.

As confessional Lutherans, it is time to go back to our Confessions to collectively and individually start thinking and acting rightly. It is so disappointing to see some major church bodies, Christian organizations and some wealthy individuals, etc., seriously working so hard to convince younger growing churches to accept the ordination of women; others are working hard to spread lies about some younger church leadership, thinking that they have right answers for such churches, thinking that they must teach those churches how to lead their churches rightly. Sadly enough, other major churches in the West, church institutions and some individual congregations work so hard with their monies, sponsoring individual splinter groups, empowering them to split the churches in Africa. In reality the Christian Church needs to concentrate on the Great Commission, walking with each other towards maintaining our treasured heritage by evangelizing the un-evangelized and pastoring the established churches. Evidently the Lutheran Confessions are rich enough to enrich and equip confessional Lutheran churches in Africa to deal with all such challenging religious groups

in proper catechetical classes. Properly speaking, Islam is not a peaceful religion as the Muslims themselves tend to sometimes claim. Their target is to conquer all of Africa, if not the whole world, at this decade.

In doing Lutheran Missiology in Africa in the twenty-first century, one needs to take seriously into consideration the functional cultural elements in that particular culture. However, in this process, the confessional Lutheran mission has to carefully guard itself against what Gene Veith calls, “a merely cultural religion,” that which has been fueled by “accommodationists,” “synthesists” and “separatists,” who tend to down-play the transcendental aspect of religion at the expense of divinizing culture.²¹ In other words, what is needed is not acculturation/enculturation, or health and wealth promises or contextual accommodationism models, but a true preaching of the Law and Gospel, coupled with proper administration of unadulterated Sacraments of our Lord Jesus Christ. For where the Gospel of Christ is taught in its truth and purity, and people are rooted and grounded in Christ, there the saints grow in the culture of Christ’s love and render services of mercy to their neighbors. This actually happened in the pagan cultures of Greece and Rome of the early Church, as well as to the nomism of Saul of Tarsus and to those who had perverted the promise of the Old Testament and made of it a means for self-justification before God.

Time and again, in the mission of the apostles, godless culture was transformed — not by cultural accommodation, or inculturational practices or promising a utopian world, a world free of problems of health and wealth — but by the good news that God justifies the ungodly by His grace alone through faith alone for the sake of the atonement of Christ alone.

Is the Lutheran Church still a catechetical church as Luther intended it to be?

When looking closely at our second question, I am much reminded that in many ways we are living in a time that the Church has seen before. Many a time Lutherans may give the appearance of a great lake. Not only are Lutheran Christians beset by corruption imposed upon them such as has been seen in the pollution of the Kavirondo Gulf near my home in Kisumu at Lake Victoria, but the Confessing Church often times is ignorant of her own confession. I am reasonably certain that your experience

with seminary students mirrors my own, in that students come to the seminary ignorant of the laymen’s Bible, *Luther’s Small Catechism*. The rich and deep well that is the Lutheran Confession is often abandoned for more modern theological faiths (pop theologies) that appear wide and vast but are, in reality, only an inch deep. Such shallow faith cannot sustain in times of crisis or temptation, nor answer the questions posed by this age. Is this because we have ignored our Confessional heritage?

Perhaps we are in a period of time not unlike 1525–1527, when Martin Luther and others were involved in parish visitations. Listen again to Dr. Luther:

The deplorable, miserable condition that I discovered recently when I, too, was a visitor, has forced and urged me to prepare this catechism, or Christian doctrine, in this small, plain, simple form. ²Mercy! Dear God, what great misery I beheld! The common person, especially in the villages, has no knowledge whatever of Christian doctrine. And unfortunately, many pastors are completely unable and unqualified to teach. ³This is so much so, that one is ashamed to speak of it. Yet, everyone says that they are Christians, have been baptized, and receive the holy Sacraments, even though they cannot even recite the Lord’s Prayer or the Creed or the Ten Commandments.²²

It is time to ask serious questions of all Lutheran teachers and Lutheran pastors in Africa: Have we been faithful from the smallest parish through to seminary training and beyond? Have the leaders of the Lutheran Church faithfully carried out their vocations to supervise the teaching of those whom they oversee? Or has it been just too easy to go along to get along? After all, no one wants to be a leader of a declining church.

Today we are reminded that the confessing Church is always the repenting Church and the catechetical Church. For where there is repentance, there is forgiveness, and where there is forgiveness administered and admonished through the Holy Sacraments, the gates of heaven are opened. Such a Church continues in a catechetical ocean. That is the confessing Lutheran Church we seek to have in Africa, especially in this twenty-first century.

Is the Lutheran Church, as represented in this conference, prepared this day to repent of her failures to adhere faithfully to the pure Gospel and all its articles, and to return both to confess faithfully and continue steadfastly

²¹ In Angus J. L. Menuge, ed. *Christ and Culture in Dialogue* (St. Louis: Concordia Academic Press, 1999), 18.

²² P. T. McCain, ed., *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2005), 313.

in study of this Confession — a treasure bequeathed to us? When we are turned by our gracious God to repentance for our failures to adhere faithfully and confess the pure Gospel and all its articles, then God will continue to shower His mercy and grace upon such repentant sinners. Only in the certainty of His mercy and grace toward sinners alone, can you place your hope, your faith and your confidence toward the future. Such Spirit-created faith in the pure Gospel and the blessed Sacraments will move each of us to proclaim Christ joyfully. Such faith in Christ will move repentant sinners to confess Christ joyfully. The pure Gospel will create and sustain such faith that joyfully continues to encourage the teachers of this faith to be again and again grounded in this apostolic and confessional treasure we call the Lutheran Confessions.

This pure Gospel will enlighten pastors and teachers of the faith to catechize the Church in this Gospel teaching that is so clearly given to the Church in the Small Catechism of Dr. Luther. Then faithfully armed with the Gospel rightly taught and confessed, the Lutheran Church will, by the grace of God alone, continue to nurture the faith of the next generation. When the confessing Church is firmly grounded in the pure Gospel, the Sacraments will be administered in a manner that is in harmony with that Gospel.

Finally, in response to the theme of this conference and the theme of this day, namely, “Repentance,” allow me to conclude with this extensive quote from G. Friedrich Bente, in his preface to *The Concordia Triglotta*, first published almost one hundred years ago, in 1921:

The Lutheran Church differs from all other churches in being essentially the Church of the pure Word and unadulterated Sacraments. Not the great number of her adherents, not her organizations, not her charitable and other institutions, not her beautiful customs and liturgical forms, and so forth, but the precious truths confessed by her symbols in perfect agreement with the Holy Scriptures constitute the true beauty and rich treasures of our Church, as well as the never-failing source of her vitality and power. Wherever the Lutheran Church ignored her symbols or rejected all or some of them, there she always fell an easy prey to her enemies. But wherever she held fast to her God-given crown, esteemed and studied her Confessions, and actually made them a norm and standard of her entire life and practice, there the Lutheran Church flourished and confounded all her enemies.

Accordingly, if Lutherans truly love their Church, and desire and seek her welfare, they must be faithful to her Confessions and constantly be on their guard lest anyone rob her of her treasure.²³

This quotation speaks to all Lutherans who without reservation continue to stand in the teaching of the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions in our day and in whatever culture, continent or clime they may belong. It is so evident that the Lutheran Reformation, and in particular the Lutheran Confessions, remain relevant at all times to all cultures, challenging all that the changing cultures or any religious ideology or practice may bring forth. Without Luther’s Reformation, there would have been no clear articulation of salvation, for the Gospel would have remained largely hidden. When we celebrate the Reformation, we are celebrating this rediscovery of the Gospel that we believe, teach and confess; we are celebrating our salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ our Lord. This is why we confidently speak of the relevance of the Lutheran Reformation, even in Africa today.

The Right Reverend Joseph Ochola Omolo is rector of Neema Lutheran College and bishop of Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya, Lake Diocese.

References Consulted and Cited

Awolalu, Omosade J. “Sin and its Removal in African Traditional Religion.” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 44: 2 (2001): 275–287.

Barrett, David. *Schism and Renewal in Africa: An Analysis of Six Thousand Contemporary Religious Movements* (Nairobi, Kenya: Oxford University Press, 1968).

Mbiti, John. “Peace and Reconciliation in African Religion and Christianity,” *Dialogue & Alliance* 7 (Spring–Summer 1993):17–32.

_____. “Hearts Cannot be Lent: In Search of Peace and Reconciliation in African Traditional Society,” *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 20:1 (1999):1–12.

²³ *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions*, xxiii–xxiv. Such is the object also of this Jubilee Edition, the *Triglot Concordia* (Triglot is to be understood as three languages: German, Latin and English). F. Bente Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Mo., July 4, 1921.

McCain, P. T., ed. (2005). *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2005.

Menuge, Angus J. L., ed. *Christ and Culture in Dialogue*. St. Louis: Concordia Academic Press, 1999.

Omolo, Joseph Ochola. *Reconciliation in an African Context*. Nairobi: Uzima Publishing House, 2008.

_____. "Suffering, Persecution and Martyrdom as a Mark of the Church: How Has This Affected Theological Education? A Practical Perspective from Africa." *Journal of Lutheran Mission* (Sept. 30, 2014).

Osborne, Kenan. *Reconciliation and Justification: The Sacrament and its Theology*. New York: Paulist Press, 1990.

Preus, Jacob A. O. *Just Words: Understanding the Fullness of the Gospel*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2000.

Sawyerr, Harry. "Sin and Forgiveness in Africa," *Frontier* 7 (September 1964):60–63

Shorter, Aylward. "African Traditional Religion and Inculturation." At <http://www.crvp.org/book/Series02/II-10/CH2.htm>

Simojoki, Anssi. "The Ministry of the Church and the Call of Mission: Africa Reflection." *The Office of the Ministry*. ed. John R. Fehrmann and Daniel Preus. Crestwood, MO: Luther Academy, 1996.

Simojoki, Anssi. "The 'Other Gospel' of Neo-Pentecostalism in East Africa." *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 66:3. (2002): 269.

Sundkler, Bengt. *Christian Ministry in Africa*. London: SCM Press, 1960.

Sundkler, Bengt. *Christian Ministry in Africa*. London: SCM Press, 1960.

Taylor, V. John. *The Primal Vision*. Elva, Scotland: Robert Canigham & Sons Ltd., 1963.

Witness, Mercy, Life Together. <http://wmltblog.org/>.