

# For the Life of the World

## Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne

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November 2008, Volume Twelve, Number Four



### **The Gospel, Lutheran Missions, and the Paradox of the Far East**

By Rev. Dr. Daniel N. Harmelink

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### **The Struggle of Lutheran Identity in Africa**

By Rev. Dr. Timothy C. J. Quill

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### **Faith through God's Mercy**

By Deaconess Grace V. Rao



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In every culture, the problem of human beings is still the same and the answer is also the same. We are sinners before God, bottomlessly sinful and entirely powerless to please Him. That is the same with Japanese as with Germans. But our Lord Jesus has answered for our sins on Calvary. Not only that, but He bestows on us that forgiveness that He accomplished on the cross in such a way that we are not left in doubt as He baptizes us, absolves us, and puts on our tongues His body and blood. The same Gospel is for us whether we are Germans or Japanese!

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Through God’s forgiveness, we experience the love of creation, the love of redemption, and the love of sanctification. Further, through His grace, our faith is generated and sustained, and those acts of mercy allow us to continue fulfilling His command.

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*For the Life of the World* is published quarterly by Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 6600 North Clinton Street, Fort Wayne, Indiana 46825. No portion of this publication may be reproduced without the written consent of the publisher of *For the Life of the World*. Copyright 2008. Printed in the United States. Postage paid at Huntington, Indiana. *For the Life of the World* is mailed to all pastors and congregations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod in the United States and Canada and to anyone interested in the work of Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana.

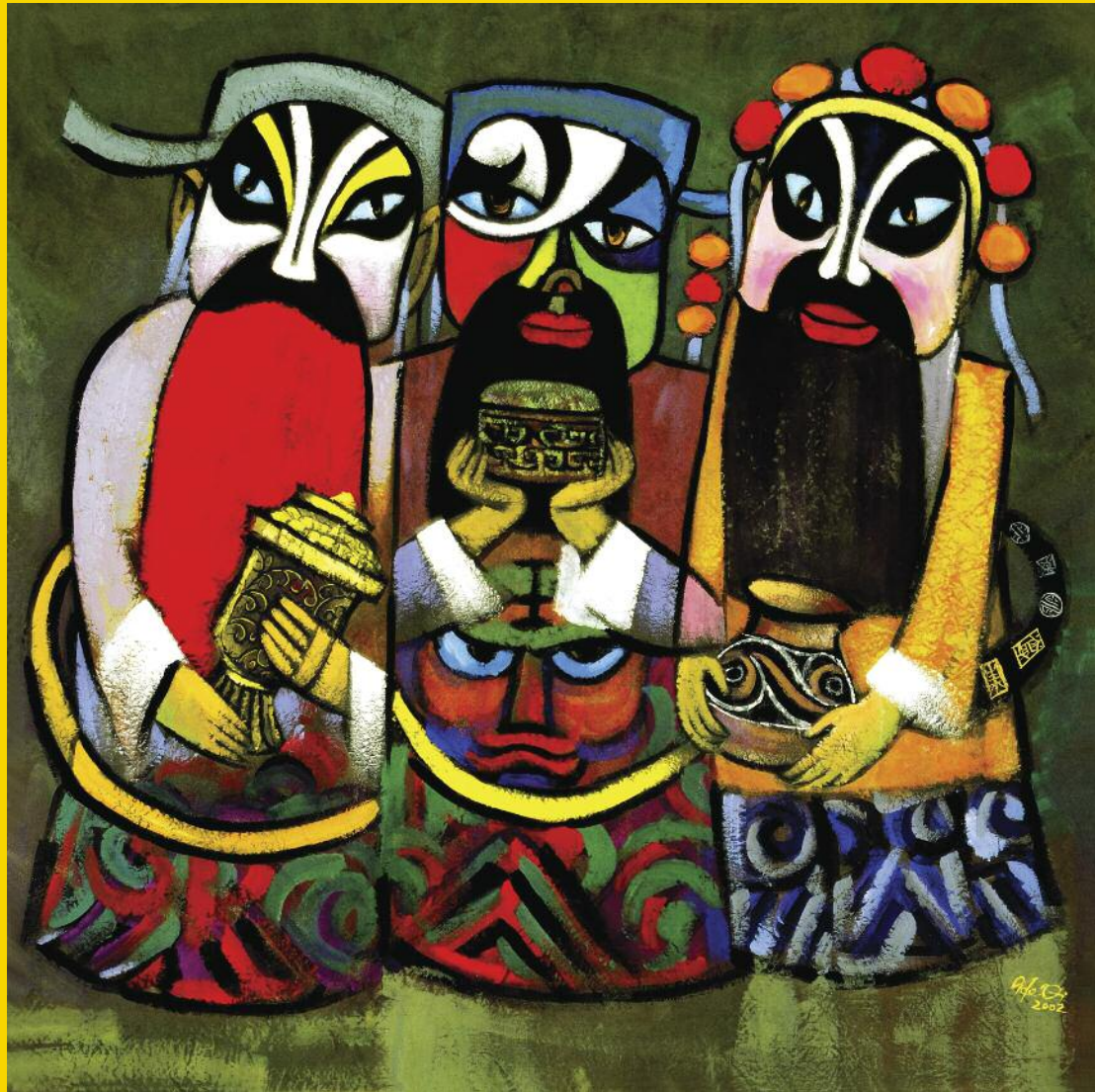
The **Gospel,**  
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**Far East**

By Rev. Dr. Daniel N. Harmelink

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"The Adoration of the Magi" by Dr. He Qi ([www.heqigallery.com](http://www.heqigallery.com))



For many Lutheran Christians, the Far East continues to be the *far* east. Even with the eyes of the world on Beijing this summer, the enigma of Asia remains: an ancient tea house next to a vending machine that receives payment through a cell phone, a cutting edge technological school on the bank of a timeless river, a bullet train speeding by ancient Mount Fuji. It is the *ever*-changing and the *never*-changing. This continues to be both the lure of Asia and the paradox of a diverse sea of humanity that lives out its various languages and cultures with the modern increasingly juxtaposed with the ancient.

And the intriguing history of Asia becomes even more intriguing when we consider the course the Christian Gospel has taken through the continent of Asia. From the time that The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod considered the training of Japanese theological students and the sending of missionaries to India, Missouri has been actively engaged in the reckless broadcasting of the Gospel seed upon Asian soil, in sharing Christ’s timeless treasures with the peoples of the Asian continent, with peoples who are relatively unacquainted with Martin Luther or the languages and cultures of the Lutherlands of Europe.

While many have secretly wondered if the Lutheran Church has anything distinctive to offer cultures and peoples who seem to live such a different life and embrace such a different understanding of the world and the human place in it, Lutheran Christians have plenty not only to pray about but to share as the Word of God continues to be spread through the Scriptures, the Small Catechism, and the rich legacy entrusted to Christ’s own.

While living in Japan, I was shocked to hear about Christian missionaries from the West wearing brown-tinted contacts over their blue eyes and having surgery on their eyelids in order to blend in and be more “effective”

with the Asian communities they wished to evangelize.

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**The strength of Lutheran missions must continue to be faith in the abundant grace of God as He comes to all peoples and cultures and languages through His eternal Word.**

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The strength of missions in the Lutheran Church is not to be found in the uncompromising human dedication of its missionaries that allows them to empty themselves of their own culture in order to become Asian and evangelize peoples of Japan or China or Cambodia from the inside. The strength of Lutheran missions must continue to be faith in the abundant grace of God as He comes to all peoples and cultures and languages through His eternal Word.

That’s the witness of Scripture and—for what it’s worth—that’s my conclusion after mistakenly believing while living in Japan that if I could only become a little more Japanese, more Japanese people would embrace the Gospel and receive Christian Baptism and the gift of salvation.

No, we are called to affirm what Christ is already doing through His Word in the continent of Asia and to use the good and gracious gifts given to the Church that further the call given to the prophets and apostles, to Luther and all who follow in their train: simply to be the beggar telling other beggars where true spiritual food is to be found, namely, in the Word of Christ and the means by which He connects us with His saving work upon the cross.

Despite appearances, discouraging experiences, numbers, and projections, the true,

unadulterated, uncompromised Word of God must continue to be proclaimed in Asia, in faithful translations of Holy Scripture, the Lutheran Confessions, and other resources that reflect clearly the universal plight of the human race (whether living in Europe or Asia or Africa or Mars) and God’s merciful solution for it in Christ Jesus.

And to the question, “Can I be Christian and still be Asian?” we simply affirm the proclamation of the Bible: the paradox of living in the world but not of the world, living in a specific culture and language and people, yet confessing “one Lord, one faith, one birth,” being made a people from every race and tribe and language by the Son of God and Mary’s Son, who took upon Himself the sin of an entire rebel race.

Pray for the peoples of Asia—and pray that Christ would continue to use us and the gifts He has graciously given—as He furthers His redeeming work in Asia through His Word and Spirit and Church. 🏰

*Rev. Dr. Daniel N. Harmelink taught English language and western culture with the YMCA while living in Japan as well as graduate courses at Asian theological universities and has written on Christian missions and Shinto, the indigenous religion of Japan.*

