

4-1-1977

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Recommended Citation

(1977) "A Statement on the Mission of the Church," *Consensus*: Vol. 3 : Iss. 2 , Article 4.

Available at: <http://scholars.wlu.ca/consensus/vol3/iss2/4>

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JCILR DOCUMENTATION

(Though not formally adopted by the Joint Commission on Inter-Lutheran Relationships, the following was prepared by the theological committee as a basis for discussion by the commission. It is shared for its value in focusing on "The Mission of the Church.")

A STATEMENT ON THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

I. IN MINISTRY TO ITSELF

A. Fellowship

1. Body of Christ

The mission of the Church is to be the living Body of Jesus Christ in the contemporary world. It is an organic "association of faith and of the Holy Spirit in men's hearts" (Ac,Ap VII). Only the Church is called the Body of Christ of which He is the Head and which He creates through baptism, loves and cherishes, renews, consecrates and governs (Ephesians 1:22,23; 5:25-29; Acts 20:28). Like branches on the vine, the Church cannot separate itself from Christ and still be His living Body (John 15:5).

It is of the very nature of the Church that all the members of Christ's Body are in service to one another. It is for the good of *all* member (1 Corinthians 12:7) and for the equipment of the saints (Ephesians 4:12) that God the Holy Spirit provides to *each* member his particular gifts, also called forms of ministry or ministries and "energizings" (1 Corinthians 12:4-6). Thus through baptism into the one Body of Christ, each member is served not only by his own gifts but also by the gifts of all other members (1 Corinthians 12:12ff).

It is clear, therefore, that a Church sensitive to the guidance of the Spirit of Christ, its Head, will seek to encourage among its members the full divinely intended expression of each of His gifts of service. It will be as careful to avoid the grotesque aberrations that result from failing to affirm the full complement of the Spirit's gifts in all their diversity (1 Corinthians 12:19) as it is concerned to combat the intrusion of error and evil (Matthew 18:15ff., 1 Corinthians 6, *et al.*). It will acknowledge that God is at work throughout His Church and it will

wish to remain in close enough association with other Christian communities to allow for a full interplay of the gifts of the Spirit wherever they may occur in His universal Body. It will recognize that failure to do this can produce a monstrosity (1 Corinthians 12:19).

But the Church guided by the Spirit and the Word also recognizes that some of His gifts contribute more to the common good and are more basic than are others for the equipping of the saints (1 Corinthians 12:28-31; 14:1b-5). This recognition can be achieved without despising any of the Spirit's gifts only as the love of Christ finds expression in the Church (1 Corinthians 12:31b-14:1a). Such gifts of service as "tongues," "interpretations," "miracle working," and "healing" occur only in the list of the Spirit's gifts recorded in 1 Corinthians 12, not in Romans 12 or Ephesians 4, and only with the caution that the "higher" gifts be accorded priority over them if they are to be exercised at all.

The "higher" gifts of apostleship, prophecy and teaching all centre on what is constitutive of the Church, namely, the proclamation of the Gospel in its purity and the proper administration of the sacraments (1 Corinthians 12:28, 31 and AC VII). On these, as on the living Bread come down from heaven, the Church is nourished and invigorated (John 6:53-58,63). Without them there is no life, no Body, no Church.

It is through the ordained ministry that the Church in our day continues to provide the basic apostolic ministry to each community of faith within which the other special ministries of each member may profitably be exercised (AC V). The role of the "apostles" and its extension through other Church officials in the later writings of the New Testament are definitive of the role of the ordained clergy in the Church today.

Luke reports (Luke 6:13) that our Lord Himself designated the Twelve as "apostles," but the early Church did not confine this designation solely to the Twelve (Acts 14:4,14; Galatians 1:19). For the early Church an "apostle" was someone who was fully authorized by Christ and at the same time fully certified by the Church to preserve and proclaim the Gospel accurately. Christ's authorization was, for example, essential to Paul's case for his apostleship (Galatians 1:15-17), and the early Christian community was eager to leave the designation of Judas' successor to God Himself (Acts 1:24-26; cf. also 1 Corinthians 11:23). And yet one was not an apostle apart from the Church's specific certification (Acts 13:2f., 8:14-17; Galatians 2:9). A study of the later writings of the New Testament reveals that the offices of "elder," "deacon" and "bishop" all came to have these same two requirements, although at different levels within the Church. It is significant, however, that "apostle" is the only word used in the lists of the gifts of the Spirit found in 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4 to designate the particular ministry of preserving and proclaiming the Gospel authoritatively on behalf of Christ and His Church. In this constitutive sense the specific gift of ministry committed to elders, deacons and bishops in the early Church can be called their apostleship or apostolate. In the exercise of this apostolic function we see them serving the Church both as missionaries (Matthew 28:19f; Acts 9:15; 1 Corinthians 9:5; 11 Corinthians 11:12-15 which indicates how critical the proper authorization of the Church was for travelling apostles, cf. also Didache 11:3-5) and as pastors (John

21:15ff; Acts 20:17-35 in which Paul both exercises his pastoral function and transfers it to the “elders” (vs. 17) whom he also calls “bishops” appointed by the Holy Spirit for the flock (vs. 28)) It was only within the context of their constitutive ministry that the other ministries could legitimately flourish. The faithful proclamation and preservation of the Gospel were committed to the apostolic ministry alone, never to the other ministries whose proper function was to give full expression to the Gospel in the community. This corresponds to the respective roles of ordained and lay ministries in the Church today. Of course, the ordained minister may, like Paul (1 Corinthians 14:18, Acts 28:8, *et al.*), exercise other ministries as well.

As growth and health are of the essence for living bodies through the complementary functioning of the various members, so the Body of Christ is to be built up through the various ministries of its members (Ephesians 4:11-12). It is to be nourished through spiritual milk to grow up to salvation (1 Peter 2:2) and through spiritual meat for maturity (Hebrews 5:13, 6:1; 1 Corinthians 3:2), so that every member works smoothly in harmony with the others (Ephesians 4:15f).

It is vital to the proper understanding of the Church as the Body of Christ to grasp the fact that His Body is fully and responsibly present at whatever level the members assemble to exercise their apostolic and special ministries, from the local congregation (Romans 16:5, Colossians 4:15, Revelation 1:11, Philemon 2, Matthew 18:20, 1 Corinthians 16:19, *et al.*) to the regional or metropolitan assembly (Acts 9:31, Colossians 4:16, 1 Corinthians 16:19, 1:2 which indicates that when reference is made to the Church of God in a particular city it is thought of as an entity consisting of a number of “house-churches”) to the universal Church (Matthew 16:18, Ephesians 1:22f, 5:23-32, Revelation 19:7f). The structures of the Church ought to reflect this basic fact and enable its achievement at every level in ways appropriate to its nature and responsibility at that level. This is true not only of denominational structures, where internal polity can assure such achievement within one body, but also of inter-denominational structures since the Scriptures everywhere speak of the Church, not merely of a church. The scriptural concept of the Church as the Body of Christ compels us to face the issue of our relations with other confessional families.

2. Household of God

The communion (*Koinwvia*) of God’s people is richly described throughout Scripture in the metaphor of the Church as the Family of God (Ephesians 2:11-22). Here the action of God’s love is understood as reversing the alienating influence of sin (Genesis 4:7ff) by winning us to faith in Christ (John 3:16) and gathering us back into His Family again (1 John 3:16). Receiving and accepting the love of God our Father through the heart of Christ our Brother (Hebrews 2:17f), each member now stands in the closest kinship with the others (Matthew 23:8), whom he now learns to serve in love just as he himself has been served (John 13:14, 34), so that the world may know that God sent Christ (John 17:23). Through the quality of the divine love within His Family, God

draws people toward His Family, regenerates them through His Word and Holy Baptism (Matthew 28:19-20) and incorporates them into His holy Family (Romans 6:1-4).

Because of human pride and sin and the antagonism of the world and Satan which constantly threaten to disrupt the communion of God's Family, the Church is called upon to guard its fellowship and so maintain the Spirit's gift of unity (Matthew 18:15-22; Ephesians 4:1-6; 1 John 3:13-14). This means that in addition to letting God's Word and Sacraments nourish, upbuild and correct its life in Christ, it must also be prepared to deal both with factious and divisive spirits (Titus 3:10,11; 1 Corinthians 1:10-11, 3:3-4, 5:9-13) and with those whose continued presence in the fellowship threatens to destroy it (Matthew 18:17; 2 John 9-11; 1 Corinthians 5:3-5; *et al.*). In such cases it must seek to apply the correction of the Law and the healing forgiveness of the Gospel so that God is glorified by the Church with a united mind and mouth (Romans 15:5-6).

B. Worship

1. *The Word of God*

The New Testament, especially the Acts of the Apostles, permits us to discern three vital settings within which the early Jerusalem congregation encountered the Word of God for the nourishment of its corporate life in Christ. All three are readily distinguishable in Acts 2:42-47. These Christians attended the hours of prayer of the temple together day by day, they received the instruction of the apostles in the manner to which they had been accustomed in their synagogue worship, and they had fellowship and broke bread in their homes. The pervading influence of all three of these settings for encountering the Word of God is immediately apparent in the life of the Church as it spread beyond Jerusalem and is still vital for the nourishing of God's people today.

Our church year and our formal liturgical worship are in many respects direct descendants of the worship patterns which centred on the temple in Jerusalem and in the local synagogues. To them we owe the rhythm and balance that characterize our formal worship and continually re-enact for us the great events of salvation history.

Both within our liturgical worship and alongside it, the apostolic ordained ministry exercises its proclaiming and teaching function in the manner of the Jewish synagogue in order to guide the saints in their ministry to one another and to prepare them for their ministry to the world (Ephesians 4:12). The Family of God gathered in worship is called upon to edify the whole Body (1 Corinthians 14:17, 26-33) and is encouraged to effect this through the public reading of Scriptures and preaching (1 Timothy 4:13), by praying for one another and for all people (1 Timothy 2:1-3), by instructing and admonishing one another and by lifting grateful hearts in song (Colossians 3:16-17; Ephesians 5:19). The Spirit of God works in the Word proclaimed and taught to

slay and to make alive, to create and sustain saving faith and healing fellowship (Romans 10:14-17 in context).

2. *The Sacraments*

Just as Holy Baptism is the means whereby God declares to us His saving love and incorporates us into His Family (see above), so Holy Communion is His means of sustaining, strengthening and renewing us in His Family.

It is notable that the Lord of the Church has specifically commanded His people "Do this," namely, His command to eat His Body and drink His Blood in His Holy Supper (1 Corinthians 11:25-26). In the bread and wine received with this word Christ Himself is present (FC SD VII) conveying to the communicants either what He has won for us by His life, His death and His resurrection -- conviction and forgiveness of sin, eternal life and salvation (LC V) -- or the judgement that comes from profaning our Lord's Body and Blood by eating and drinking unworthily (1 Cor. 11:27-32). In the midst of this age we receive and celebrate Christ's victory over evil and proclaim it through the sacrament until He returns in triumph. Through our participation in response to His command He works mightily to renew and sustain saving faith through the power of His death and resurrection and to unify His Family through the outpouring of His forgiveness and love into our midst (1 Corinthians 10:17, 12:17-34; cf. Luther's sermon of 1519 entitled: "On the Most Venerable Sacrament of the Holy True Body of Christ and on the Brotherhoods," *WAii*, 742 ff; esp. 749, 7). In receiving from their Lord the living offering of His Body and His Blood, the members are equipped for their mission of "spiritual worship" in which they present their bodies with all their gifts as living offerings to God who transforms them constantly toward conformity to His will (Romans 12:1-3).

II. *IN MINISTRY TO THE WORLD*

As the Church lives in ministry to itself it is already in ministry to the world, for its love and fellowship in the Lord are a proclamation of the Gospel and a witness of salvation to the unbelieving world (John 17:23; James 2:14-17). This fellowship transcends every barrier of race, status or sex (Galatians 3:26-28; James 2:2-7) and makes all one in Christ. The result is that the Church's ministry to the world becomes in every way an extension of the ministry rendered by its Lord (Mark 10:42-45; cf. Mark 1:32-34 with 6:7-13 and Matthew 10:1, etc.). By speaking clearly, by serving effectively and by creating signs the Church of Christ carries forward His saving mission. The reign of God is revealed on earth in visible and tangible form (Matthew 10:7-15) and the world is confronted with the divinely initiated crises that either evoke faith or provoke rejection. This confrontation was first aimed solely at "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 10:6, 15:24), but our Lord subsequently mandated His Church to confront all nations with the reign of God active in its proclamation of Law and Gospel and its life-style of serving love and the creating of signs (Matthew 28:18-20, 24:14, 26:13; Mark 16:15-20; Luke 13:29, 24:46-49; John

4:35-38, 42, 14:10-13, 20:21-23, 31; Acts 1:8 *et al.*). Thus Christ has given to His Church both the task and the means to do what He did among men simply because He is its risen Lord and lives and rules in its midst. And what He did was to manifest the rule of heaven on earth so that men were called to see beyond their passing illusions to God's lasting truth and could thereby be transformed into children of the Kingdom of God.

The Scriptures know no limits to the arenas within which this confrontation can occur. Individual acts of verbal witness (Acts 8:26-40, 16:25-34, etc.) and mercy (Matthew 10:42, 5:42, 25:35ff) and uncommon service (Matthew 5:40f) rendered alike to friends, to foes and to the indifferent (Matthew 5:45-47; Luke 10:25-37), acts of communal concern for the distressed (Acts 4:34, 6:1; 1 Timothy 5:3-5, 9, 16; James 1:27), and acts of courageous confrontation between the sinful structures of this age and the structures of the age to come (Luke 19:1-10; Acts 4:5-22, 5:27-39, 7:1-60; Mark 13:9-11; John 16:7-11(!); Acts 25:11(!), 26:24-32, *et al.*) all constitute appropriate settings for the Church to bear its witness to the rule of God and His judgement and saving grace.

Furthermore, the Lord of the Church binds us to acknowledge and support all who are seeking to render an authentic service to mankind whether individually (Luke 10:25-37; Mark 12:28-34) or through the established structures of society (Romans 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:13-17). Such acknowledgement, far from implying a blanket approval of everything for which such persons and structures stand, serves as much to reveal what is wrong as to affirm what is right in their stance and practice. It is equally clear that the Church is called upon to withhold such support when concern for justice, mercy and truth is eclipsed by lust for power and the practice of oppression (Revelation 18, Matthew 23).