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THE CONTEXT AND MISSION OF CANADIAN LUTHERANISM

Roger W. Nostbakken

In asserting the place and mission of the church in our nation at this point in our history, it is difficult to avoid the twin traps of generalization and parochialism. As a Lutheran Church in Canada, we need a regional, national and international perspective. Yet we need to have an acute sense of our local, congregational and even personal responsibilities as well. Furthermore, we need to demonstrate a commitment to the Lutheran traditions which nourish us all and yet show a strong commitment to the wider community and to the nation and world in which we live.

Lutherans, historically, have had a tendency to be preoccupied with the past. As a consequence, adjustment to change has often been just that, an adjustment. Yet the church ought to be not a conservative bulwark against the hostile forces of change, but itself an agent of change; indeed, not only of change but reconciliation, renewal and justice in the world. In addressing issues and setting forth opportunities, it is important that this be done in a way which both reflects and challenges your understanding of the church's mission. We are here, after all, because we are committed to try and carry forth Christ's mission *in this world*. We are *witnesses* to Jesus Christ; we are *heralds* of the Gospel; we are *ambassadors* of the church; we are *servants* of those to whom we seek to minister; we are *partners* and *co-workers* with one another; we are *representatives* of our Brother and Lord, Jesus Christ. We call

ourselves Christians but we live in this world. We must then seek with our best intelligence to *understand* the world in which we live. We are called to love and minister to its people. We are, in Luther's words, to be little Christs to others.

THE CONTEXT OF THE CHURCH'S MISSION

The church is the body of Christ, the embodiment of the family of God. Its principal mission, therefore, is to *be* Christ in the world. It is important, however, that we know and understand the context of this mission. How can we describe the context of the church's mission of evangelism, reconciliation and renewal? In what kind of world are we trying to be Christian? What kinds of needs surround us? How do the values of our society impinge on us as Christians and on the institution we call the church? We cannot possibly *be* what we are *called* to be unless we have some perception of our context. Several observations suggest themselves.

Ours is an age of skepticism and failed idealism.

Much of the temper of our society is that of skepticism and failed idealism. The 50's was a decade of heady optimism following the conclusion of World War II. That optimism was fostered both by rapid growth in our churches and a burgeoning growth of technology and material prosperity. The advent of Sputnik seemed to signal an unlimited future for human advancement. The 60's, however, with its wave of wars, political assassinations, civil rights confrontations and decline in church growth, shocked us back into a more realistic sense of our fallibility. The 70's have seen the rapid erosion of all idealism as the heroes of the 60's have had their clay feet exposed, and many have been toppled from their positions of power. Persons, movements, technology have all failed us and left in their wake large vacuums into which are now sweeping powerful forces of despair, facism and reaction. Three specific areas of failed idealism could be mentioned.

1. *Politically.* Richard Nixon, Willy Brandt and the Shah of Iran are all in certain ways symbols of the political era of the 70's; they represent reasons why there is now such profound distrust of politicians and the political process. We have been lied to so often, and so sincerely, that we now tend not to believe anyone. These days the best and most honest of politicians are regarded with a skepticism bordering on cynicism. The inability of any government — Western or Eastern — to stem the tide of inflation or to redress the frightful imbalance of rich and poor produces a mood approaching despair and suggests a reaching towards totalitarian measures which can *force* solutions on people. There is much to be uneasy about in the political climate in the world today. As a church we exist and serve in that uneasy climate.

2. *Technologically.* We are all very much aware of the failure of the technological dream. Actually our technology has not failed us, for it is surely a marvel; but our *use* of technology is on the point of destroying us. We have mass transportation, marvels in communication, and miracles in computerization; but we are also committing global suicide. Industrial pollution may have reached irreversible proportions.

The Harrisburg incident symbolizes our tendency to destroy ourselves in the process of saving ourselves. Our mastery of technology has produced weapons now sufficient to annihilate the human race many times over. It is almost as if we have created monsters for our service which now have taken control of us. As a church we function in this atmosphere of apprehension.

3. *Sociologically.* The liberal humanist dream which underlies most of the social sciences has also failed us and contributed to the prevailing mood of skepticism. The discipline of psychiatry has been seriously discredited because of its consistent failure to produce useful therapy so that it is now difficult to find anyone who has faith in it any more. Psychologists freely admit their studies have actually revealed little about the nature of man, and even less about how to treat his psychological ills. M.D.'s are no longer the white-hatted heroes we once thought they were.

Our children, nurtured as they are on the deliberate deceits of the advertising world and exposed to the patronising deceits of governments, are surely among the most sophisticated and cynical people the world has ever known. Talk to any twelve year old child and you won't find one who believes what he/she sees on television or hears in a political speech. Our emerging generation is conditioned to expect deceit and as a consequence shows an appalling cynicism about our social structures.

This context of failed promises, deliberate deceit and shattered idealism is very much the context of our time. This is also a part of the context in which the church is called to live with integrity and to proclaim the Truth.

An Age of Egocentricity

1. *The "Me" Generation.* There is another way of viewing our times. From the perspective of how the individual sees oneself in relation to others; this can be called an age of egocentricity. If the 1950's was, as we suggested, a decade of optimism and the 1960's one of flawed idealism, then the early 1970's are what Thomas Wolfe has aptly called the "Me Generation". What has taken place is a steady diminishing of the world view, a steady narrowing of perspective. Marshall MacLuhan's Global Village idea is simply another slick slogan. Incongruously, in an age of excellent travel and communication, we find ourselves increasingly looking in on ourselves and isolated from others. In the 1950's we worried about our responsibility in the world. In the 1960's we worried about our responsibility in our nation. In the 1970's the circle has tightened to regional, racial, ethnic, sexual and personal self-interest.

Some of this, of course, has been both necessary and salutary. We need a national identity; we need racial respect; we need the riches of ethnic traditions; we need deliverance from sexual stereotypes and male chauvinism. But we get carried away into devastating forms of parochialism. Nowhere is this better illustrated than the advertising slogans: "You deserve the best"; "After all, I think I am worth it"; "You deserve a break today". The mass appeals to self-indulgence, the absence of notions of sacrifice, make John F. Kennedy's 1960 inaugural appeal to Americans to put their country's needs ahead of their own, sound as remote and outdated as Marie Antoinette.

2. *The myth of self-fulfillment.* The aspect of this myth which has most directly affected the church has been the influence of the human potentials movement. Under the guidance of such psychological gurus as Carl Rogers, Abraham Maslow

and Fritz Perls even the church turned its attention to “self-fulfillment” through sensitivity training and other such programs. Again there was, in this movement, much that was good in its affirmation of the person and in the correction of a self-punishing scrupulosity. In its latter stages under the impetus of such developments as assertiveness training, E.S.T. and Robert Ringers’ “You are Number 1” philosophy, however, this movement has virtually institutionalized selfishness. A current hit, quite beautifully sung by Neil Diamond/Barbra Streisand is a perfect example of the inherent destructiveness of excessive self-interest. She complains because she doesn’t get flowers any more. He pouts because she doesn’t meet him at the door. Each blames the other for the broken relationship. It is a kind of whining modern parable of the disintegration of the family because of the undisciplined assertion of self-interest.

Where is the gospel of servanthood? Where is *agape*? Where is self-denial? We have only begun to reap the social consequences of children bereft of their rights and a sense of security by parents demanding their own. Society itself becomes segmented, regionalized and self-protective. The issue of “human rights” becomes subordinated to “my rights”. Self-interest dictates that my right to petroleum and the preservation of my life style takes precedence over native rights or cultural respect, or a more equitable distribution of wealth in the world.

An Age of Religious Pluralism and Secular Religion

Another significant aspect of our present milieu is that ours is an era of many religious groups, all frightened of the future and all promising some kind of salvation in a doomed world. It is what we might call an age of religious pluralism and apocalypticism.

1. *The rise of autonomous sects.* The last decade has seen an alarming increase in the emergence of new sects having little direct connection with the historic development of the church. Especially in Europe, but also in North America, such non-Christian sects as the Unification Church; the Church of Scientology; Hare Krishna and Transcendental Meditation have made large inroads among disenchanting but idealistic youth. While our own youth work in the churches has been hesitant at best, the sects have grown vigorously. There is no doubt the Jonestown incident discredits such sects and the principle of charismatic leadership. However the fact remains that the uncertainties and fears of many people make them vulnerable to the legalistic appeal of disciplined, committed and persuasive religious groups. These sects touch a raw nerve — the profound need for direction, personal care and a place to commit one’s loyalty. They appeal to the selfishness in us, but they also draw on the idealism of youth who are looking for meaningful ways to live out their lives. Such groups present a distinct challenge to the institutional churches.

2. *Secular Religion.* Genesis 1: 26-27 tells us we are created in the divine image. This means, among other things, that there is in us a striving to rise beyond our finiteness, a reaching up towards God, an instinct to worship and service. We want to and need to believe in something beyond ourselves. While we all have a basic egocentricity, there is also that in us which needs to find expression in worship, work and service which takes us beyond ourselves and our own interests.

For some people the church frustrates rather than liberates this instinct for upward

striving. Some people find the church such a stuffy, self-preserving institution that they must turn elsewhere to find fulfillment. Others find the church to be largely irrelevant to life. Sitting in a pew, one is often struck by the singular insulation from reality of many pastors. Sermons sometimes seem like exercises in religious jargon. The principal concern often seems to be with keeping the program going at all costs. For these and other reasons many people find an outlet for their instinct to serve in other ways, through service clubs, social clubs, ethnic societies and so forth. There is not necessarily any conflict here. It just seems ironic that for many the outlet for the impetus of the divine image in us often finds expression outside the church rather than in it. Our problem is not secularism. Our problem is rather failure to adequately respond to man's religious needs.

In Eastern Europe the church is challenged by the state which constructs secular ceremonies to correspond to ecclesiastical rites (e.g., *Jugendwiehe* vs. confirmation). We face the reality of well intentioned and highly motivated people finding religious meaning in secular organizations. It is not that the church is too secular. It is rather that the secular becomes an alternate form of religion.

3. *Ecclesiastic isolation.* We face the temptation to ecclesiastic or religious isolationism. We had better be sensitive to what ordinary people are experiencing and know what they are feeling. The day is over when the pastor can go about his holy business and not be a functioning part of the community in which he lives. The church does not stand over against the world, it is *in* the world, a part of it — as Christians we share the life of the communities in which we live. As Christians we are not intrinsically smarter, or better or more righteous than others. We share the same kinds of problems and personal ambiguities as everyone else. The difference is that the Christian faces life with a different perspective and a different set of loyalties. That perspective and those loyalties are bound up with belief in and commitment to serve Jesus Christ. But this is a view of life and an orientation to be expressed in this world. It is not a style to be lived in isolation from others.

In a congregation I once served some couples who were very active in a service club were confronted by another couple who suggested they either drop the service club or leave the church. But the ones in the service club had it right. They took their Christian values and perspectives into their community involvements. There is a quality of freedom here we need to practice in the church — a realization that we are called not to be judges of the world but rather a part of it and its communities. In this we are to carry with us our Christian values and to bear cheerful witness to our faith. We are invited to enter into conversation with all persons and all disciplines about the perplexing questions which face us all.

Jesus Himself was equally at home in the synagogue, the temple, the market-place, among the fishing boats, in His father's shop, at the side of the leper or in the homes of the wealthy. God created this world and called it good. We are called into every part of it and into all parts of human society.

NEEDS CONFRONTING THE CHURCH TODAY

The analysis given so far has been a rather sweeping set of generalizations about

the context of our existence as a church. It would be very easy to share in a widely prevailing sense of gloom and pessimism about the prospects of human society. Malcolm Muggeridge, for example, has become a powerful advocate of a point of view which says in effect, Western civilization is in such an advanced state of decay it must be abandoned to its apocalyptic demise. There is a strong impetus here to an ascetic withdrawal from the world and the rather self-righteous relegation of our society to the garbage can of history. But that is not the perspective of Jesus Christ. That is not the mandate He left for His church. Ours is a mandate of mission and service.. As Jesus served the poor, the downtrodden, the outcasts, the despairing, the blind, the despised, the rich; as He confronted the self-righteous and called His disciples to service, so are we called in *this* world in the 20th century. What then are some specific needs challenging us as Lutherans in Canada today? I want to suggest three.

The need for re-evangelization

One of the most interesting and provocative challenges coming to North American and European churches (the seat of traditional Lutheranism) at the Sixth Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation in Dar es Salaam in 1977, came from our sister churches in Africa and Asia. It was an appeal for “re-evangelization” of our nominal Christians. The need is evident. In our country about 85% of people profess faith in God; yet less than 30% have any kind of *active* membership in Christian churches. Within our Lutheran constituency, growth is virtually at a standstill. We have grown substantially in our property holdings (up 15 million); a small amount in indebtedness (up one million); significantly in local expenditures (up 2½ million) and marginally in benevolence giving (up ½ million). However, our Sunday School enrollment is down by 3½ thousand; our baptized and confirmed membership is up only by 1,500 and 3,000 respectively. Even so we are doing better than the churches in Europe.

The fact is, however, these figures mean a virtual no-growth situation. We face the challenge of preaching, teaching and evangelizing in a milieu of apathy, skepticism, alienation and fragmentation. The context we have earlier described very much shapes the task of our church. We are not to minister theoretically, but actually to people who are disillusioned and frightened and lonely. This is not to suggest we become preoccupied with growth statistics. There is a dangerous trap there. But we must take the task of evangelism seriously. Evangelism does not mean an aggressive membership campaign. It means being agents of reconciliation, *announcers* of forgiveness and hope in Jesus Christ; *demonstrators* of justice; *protestors* of injustice; *helpers* of the weak, the sick, the blind, the poor, the dying; *supporters* of the oppressed; *visitors* to the imprisoned; *providers* for the starving and the homeless — all in the name of Jesus. This is the true nature of evangelism. It may not be dramatic, but it approximates Jesus’ own ministry. Our churches need to re-examine the meaning of evangelism.

The Challenge of Fundamentalism and Neo-conservatism

In our church we are also facing the challenge of fundamentalism and neo-con-

servatism as these appear in their several forms. There is actually a world wide resurgence of fundamentalism. The most startling example, of course, has been the rise of Islamic fundamentalism symbolized by the events in Iran. (This corresponds to world wide movements to the right politically and religiously.) There is inherent in this world-wide phenomenon a conviction that world events have gone too far too fast and an underlying desire to return to a more stable, predictable and controllable set of values. There is also present here a feeling that the past was somehow better; there is a kind of nostalgic longing for a simpler, less complex, less pressurized life style.

In North America the resurgent fundamentalism has expressed itself in a number of ways, some of which affect us directly, others indirectly. A most significant example has been the developments of recent years in the Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod. That struggle, of course, affects all North American Lutheranism. The aggressive and polemical pamphleteering by Lutherans Alert in the A.L.C. and E.L.C.C. is a further example. The most recent consequence of that movement has been the establishment of a quasi-seminary in the Pacific Northwest, U.S., and the suspension of an A.L.C. congregation for calling a graduate of that institution.

In the background of these developments is the burgeoning “born-again movement” in the U.S. with the inevitable incursion of its essentially anabaptist theological perspectives into our own congregations. The most evident characteristics of this resurgence are the revival of Biblical fundamentalism; individualism in ethics and ecclesiology and a basically triumphalist view of the church. Adherents preach against the social political involvement of the churches; yet at the same time advocate support for conservative politicians and follow a hard line on capital punishment, and the liberation movements in Africa and South America. The incipient legalism, individualism and isolationism of this mood presents a challenge to our churches.

Another aspect of this is a phenomenon unique to North America, namely what has been called the “electronic Church”, i.e., television and radio evangelism. Obviously not all such evangelists can be put into one category. Billy Graham stands in a class by himself. The Lutheran Hour is also a program of outstanding value. However in recent years we have been besieged by a type of television evangelism which is basically anti-ecclesiastical in its appeal and reduces worship to the level of spectatorship at a television spectacular.

The basic appeal of such evangelists lies in their promises of healing, financial success and freedom from care. Some of it is subtle; some of it blatant. Against a backdrop of fountains and beautiful greenery or in the plush seats of large auditoriums, these evangelists project a powerful image of success, beauty and wealth. The implication is inescapable — “accept Christ and this is all yours too”. Without financial accountability and in many cases not subject to income tax, millions of dollars are drawn from the listeners. It is a twentieth century version of Tetzels sale of indulgences. It challenges us and it needs to be challenged. Lest we be tempted to follow suit, we need to consider our own theology of mission and outreach.

The Challenge of Human Rights and Social Justice

The questions of human rights and social and economic justice continue to press

themselves upon our society and consequently upon our church. Far from being matters only for the politicians and governments to wrestle with, these issues touch indirectly, at least, the lives of all of us. We have Lutheran brothers and sisters all over the world whose daily lives are affected by the sensitive relation of church and state, and whose situation is bettered only through the intervention by churches elsewhere in the world. Much could be said about this.

Let me indicate the challenge these situations present to us. Perhaps the best example for Canadians is the current Northern Native Rights campaign. This campaign involves a series of negotiations respecting aboriginal rights, the development of the North and the legal and human rights of Inuit, Indian and Metis. The constitutional and legal issues are complex, beyond the competence of most of us to decide. The position of Project North seems wise in this regard as it sees itself as a facilitator of a process of negotiation rather than advancing a particular position. What is clear however is that the churches have a moral responsibility to ensure that justice is done. In the past the church has too often been a perhaps unwitting agent of colonialism and paternalism. At this point we must recognize that racial prejudice is endemic to all people and is a significant factor in the attitude of southern Canadians to Indian, Metis and for that matter, other non-white groups in our society.

Canadians have, in the past, reacted with a certain smugness and a self-satisfaction to the exposure of racism in the U.S., South Africa and elsewhere. The emergence of the "Indian problem" in our southern cities and now the direct appeal from Northern natives, exposes our own latent racism and presents a challenge from which we cannot turn aside. The churches will have to reflect on how best we can be agents of reconciliation and spokes-people for justice. Simplistic categorizations will not be useful. We may well take as a theme, "But let judgment run down as waters and righteousness as a mighty stream." (Amos 5:24).

OPPORTUNITIES FOR MISSION TODAY

To this point I have tried to suggest the context of our existence as a church today; secondly, to indicate more precisely some immediate needs confronting us. Now I should like to say something about some opportunities for mission which seem particularly significant.

Time to reassert our basic Biblical and confessional Lutheran theology

Next year Lutherans the world over will celebrate the 400th anniversary of the Book of Concord and the 450th celebration of the Augsburg Confession. Far from being simply a celebration of the past, the events should provide for us some useful theological guidelines for a renewed sense of what it is to be the church in the 20th century. Three themes of Lutheran theology need re-emphasis in our current context.

1. *Our theology of Grace.* One of the greatest contributions of the Reformation

was the recovery of a theology of grace. As expressed in the writings of Luther, this was a message delivering man from the chains of self-salvation to stand in freedom in the presence of God. The gospel of grace does not make us perfect persons. It does, however, remind us that we inhibited, fallible, short-sighted, racist, selfish people are accepted by God *as we are*. We don't have to be healed, or happy, or emotionally mature, or theologically sound, or ethically blameless to be Christians. We who are sinners are, in Luther's words, saints at the same time. This tremendous message of grace can surely fall like refreshing rain on a society turned in on itself in an orgy of self-promotion, legalism, self-satisfaction and fear. What a tremendous opportunity presents itself to us today in this regard.

2. *Our theology of Word and Sacrament.* Secondly, we can be thankful for and reassert our theology of Word and Sacrament. One of Luther's great contributions to theology was his theology of the Incarnation, i.e., the re-emphasis that God presents Himself to us in the concrete, understandable and finite form of the historic Jesus of Nazareth. God, said Luther, brings His infinite power and presence to us in finite forms. He comes to us in a way understandable to us all, in a way which suits our situation. God is not a mysterious "other" known in strange revelations or talked to by a spiritual elite; He comes directly, tangibly, concretely to us where we are. The words of scripture are, therefore, a written form of God's word. Through those stories, historical accounts, and descriptions of Jesus' life and ministry, God now speaks to us. God has chosen the familiar form of the written Word as a way to speak to us. More than that, He presents Himself to us in the ordinary stuff of life in the Sacraments. Through the medium of baptismal water God speaks His cleansing and accepting Word even to infants. In the elements of bread and wine Jesus Christ is concretely present among us, assuring us of His power and forgiveness, reminding us that He is with us, calling us to His service. Through such ordinary means God speaks.

In the midst of a North American fundamentalism which has an almost magical view of how God works among us, we have a tremendous opportunity to reaffirm this down-to-earth fundamental Biblical and Lutheran theology of God's presence and action. Jesus Christ is not far distant at the right hand of God; as Luther said, the right hand of God is everywhere. Christ is present among us here in Word, Sacrament and the fellowship of His people (cf. Smalcald Articles IV). The Holy Spirit is not at the disposal of a spiritual elite. He is not called in to heal or to help at someone's whim. Rather the Spirit of God is everywhere, always calling us to repentance and service, always pointing us to Jesus Christ, always present with us.

We have a tremendous opportunity now to recover and use our theology of the means of grace. We are constantly tempted to minimize a sacramental theology when surrounded by the pressures of a fundamentalist view of God's action. The incipient enthusiasm of fundamentalism, however, eventually enslaves the person; it turns our eyes upon ourselves and our feelings and our strength rather than the grace of God. Our sacramental theology is one of our greatest treasures and should be the basis of our mission outreach — i.e. a word of grace in a graceless world.

3. *Our theology of the Church.* We have now also a tremendous opportunity to redevelop Luther's theology of the church. For him the church was basically the people of God, the community or congregation of believers. He never cared for the

institutional word “church” (*Kirke*) but preferred the term “*Gemeinde*” or congregation, as expressive of the church’s true nature. In this sense “church” has no geographical or parish boundaries but is the gathering of those who are the called family of God, the baptized. The church is thus fundamentally a fellowship, a communion called together by the Holy Spirit and enlightened by Him. The external marks or signs of the church are Word and Sacrament for these are the means through which the Spirit gathers people in Christ’s name. It is the Word then which identifies the community as the people of God — the Word present as Scripture and Sacrament.

The institutional form of the church is simply that form which can best help the church in its serving the Gospel (Augsburg Confession VII). The Twentieth century has witnessed a lot of Lutheran concern about the *form* of the church. The Scandinavian countries are currently locked in debates about the viability of a state-church concept. Asian and African churches are now in the process of finding the best institutional form for their culture and traditions, in some cases quite different from our own. In North America considerable revamping of our structures has taken place and now directly concerns us in Canada in our merger discussions. Obviously we need structures, obviously we need to plan with care.

However, the form of our structures must adequately and freely serve the functions of our *being* as a people, a family of God. In North America we tend to be much influenced by pragmatism and as a result our ecclesiastical institutions gravitate in the direction of corporate business structures with management models of operation. We have presidents, vice-presidents, secretaries, executives, upper level and middle level management. We operate with PPB budget systems and even have computerized data retrieval systems so we can match up pastors and parishes or pull out people for special assignments. This is not necessarily bad and therefore to be rejected. We are after all a part of our own society. However it is necessary that above all we *be* the church, no matter how efficient or inefficient our form. The personal, pastoral and community aspects need to be served, not submerged, by our structures.

It is my personal opinion that, borrowing from corporation management models, we have placed far too much emphasis on individualized leadership and have put overwhelming burdens on our church executives. The consequence is sometimes evident in early deaths, break-down of health, and even family problems. Recently an article in a Norwegian church paper caught my eye. It reported the appointment of a new executive in the Norwegian church to the position of director of their Church Council. In announcing his acceptance, the new executive made a rather remarkable statement. “I have no intention”, he said, “of being a weekend father, carrying a briefcase of worries and having a perpetually bad conscience.” He indicated he would give a priority to his wife and four children and still try to do justice to his responsibilities. That statement reflects a more healthy sense of the church as a community, a family, in which care for one another and other persons is primary, and in which we do not artificially inflate the importance of position.

By our tremendous stress on the principle of leadership, we tend to underestimate and even undermine the strength of the priesthood of believers. The strength of the church is in her Lord who is confessed and served by the whole family. Leadership is important but the charismatic style of leadership, so loved by

North Americans, not only imposes unrealistic demands on those elected to high positions; it invites ordinary persons to expect less of themselves than they ought. We have uniquely now in Canada the opportunity to strive for different models both of church structure and leadership which may better let the church be the church, a caring, healing, reconciling, nurturing and reaching-out community of believers.

4. *Our theology of worship.* Within the context of North American religious pluralism, the assumption the Lutheran church is liturgical has generally been taken for granted. As a matter of fact, however, until recent years relatively little attention was paid to liturgy or to the nature of corporate worship. For many Lutherans, especially those under the influence of pietism or their Protestant fundamentalist neighbors, the liturgy was an adiaphoron. What was really important was preaching and a more or less regular, if infrequent, celebration of the Lord's Supper. Augsburg Confession VII was commonly invoked as confessional warrant for the assigning of liturgy to the status of handmaiden to the pastor's imagination. It was commonplace for pastors to subtract from the "order of service", to introduce innovations or simply to improvise. The result was what Herbert Lindeman has called "liturgical chaos". This was reflected in nondescript church architecture, a high degree of subjectivism and romanticism in church music and a general sterility in the liturgy itself. Since the service was sermon-centred, pastors strove very hard to make the liturgy an appropriate setting for their homiletical performances. Many regarded the Sunday worship, therefore, as a kind of religious entertainment with the pastor in the principal role and the choir as supporting cast.

Obviously a fundamental problem was a failure to understand the nature of worship as corporate, the action of the Christian community. Television evangelism in North America has unfortunately re-enforced the view that worship is primarily a spectacle engaged in by professionals and watched by the masses who participate only at the invitation and under the direction of the clergy. The theological poverty of such an attitude towards worship and liturgy is understandable in view of the fact that, until recently in most Lutheran seminaries in North America, "liturgics" has been a kind of poor cousin to other classes. Systematic theology has traditionally tended to overlook worship and has failed to present the relationship between liturgy and theology. Liturgy has indeed been regarded as the concern of certain specialists, but little effort has been made to understand the interrelatedness of liturgy and theology. At many seminaries students who have tried to pursue this relationship have been regarded as liturgical cranks who were interested only in esoterica.

The introduction of a new Lutheran Book of Worship in North America symbolizes an attempt to recover a more integrated understanding of the relationship of worship and theology. It is also a means whereby a conscious effort is made to emphasize and celebrate the continuity of Christian worship through all ages and across cultural and linguistic barriers. The introduction to the Lutheran Book of Worship tactfully describes the rather bewildering variety of past practice with the euphemism "variegated heritage". It does, however, emphasize the conviction that there is a tradition of worship universal in its scope, going back to the early church and reaffirmed during the Reformation. Furthermore, there is an underlying assumption that the basic theology of the church is expressed through the liturgy.

Such a reintegration of theology and worship is a fundamental need. Our new Lutheran Book of Worship will become a major source of renewal for the church. It will help us better integrate our theology and our worship.

The Opportunity of Lutheran Merger

A major opportunity standing before us in Canada, of course, is the promise of Lutheran merger. I personally put the highest possible priority on this development. Although our efforts towards a three-way merger have been frustrated, the steps towards a two-way merger, with other congregations invited to come along, must surely proceed steadily and with due haste. Here we have something to demonstrate to our own nation. In a country which is threatened by the break-up of Confederation and the pressures of regionalism, the church has a prophetic unifying role to play. This is not to suggest that church merger should be motivated by political concerns. Rather a demonstration of the basic unity of the church becomes at this point in our history an important witness to God's power to reconcile different styles, perceptions, cultures and traditions into a family community.

It is time that Canadian Lutherans assumed their own identity and took their rightful place in world Lutheranism. There is a kind of parochialism and jingoistic nationalism we need to avoid here. That is no motivation for merger. However, there is also a sense in which we shall never be responsible partners with brothers and sisters elsewhere in the world until we stand on our own. My recent experiences in the Lutheran World Federation convince me more than ever of the rightness and timeliness of our projected merger. Many of the smaller Lutheran churches have a strong sense of identity with us as a minority church in a large land. We stand in the shadow of a friendly giant (to the south). We do not have the resources of the large Lutheran churches in the world. We sometimes feel submerged by the sheer size of some of our sister churches. We have sometimes been hesitant to assume opportunities for service, mission and leadership. However, increasingly now we have been developing a greater maturity and independence which gives us opportunity for the interdependent relations of world Lutheranism. As an independent Lutheran Church in Canada we will be able to bear a united witness, join ourselves in united work and exercise a uniting influence in our nation. This will also enable us to participate more fully in the challenges of our own North American Lutheranism. The time has indeed come to set a time table for merger. With good will, we will be able to achieve it.

CONCLUSION

We face a very bright future as Lutherans in Canada. We are on the brink of coming into our own. We have broken most of the old ethnic, linguistic and cultural moulds. More than that, we have shown a commitment to the whole range of the church's mission. Let us now join in praying and working for the continued extension of God's kingdom through the Lutheran Church in Canada.