

# Our Kind of People

An essay at the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Martin Luther's birth

[Fox River Valley Conference, Northern Wisconsin District, January 25, 1983]

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*This essay is a personal reflection upon the topic I chose, in this anniversary year of the birth of Martin Luther. The topic was suggested by three figures that came to my attention this summer. The first was a passing reference in a book on the papacy and the international Catholic Church, that for the first time since the Reformation Lutherans in Germany are outnumbered by Roman Catholics. The second figure appeared in a review of the World Christian Encyclopedia: "the biggest distinct category of Protestants today does not consist of the traditional Reformation groups, such as the Lutherans, but the Pentecostals—at 51 million strong..." The third figure appeared in the Northwestern Lutheran report of "A Profile of WELS Lutherans;" in this report the members of our Synod were described as a very homogenous group, 90% with a Northern European background, only 3% divorced or separated, well-educated, middle-income, Mid-West orientated, rural and suburban. These figures got me thinking and looking... and the fruit of the labor is this essay. May our Lord bless its message.*

## I. The Changing Christian Church

The twentieth century has brought with it many changes, in the arts, in science, in technology, morality, the waging of war, and in the Christian Church. To look back to old listings of world Christianity in the nineteenth century is to see a very localized, European centered, ethnic religion. This applied not only to Lutheranism, but also to the other Reformation churches and to the church of Rome.

Since 1900 there has been phenomenal change in the extent and territory and growth and composition of the universal church. "During the twentieth century... Christianity has become the most extensive and universal religion in history. There are today Christians and organized Christian churches in every inhabited country on earth."<sup>1</sup> Every day 107,200 new Christians are born worldwide, while 43,200 other Christians die.<sup>2</sup> New denominations and church bodies are forming, to a current total of 20,780 distinct groupings.<sup>3</sup> Many of these newer-bodies: have taken up Christianity with a zeal and determination unmatched by church bodies of the traditional Christian areas. And this growth in Christian numbers is not taking place in the traditional Christian homeland areas; but in the Third World. Whereas in 1900, Christians were 88.7% white, by 1980 they are only 50.5% white, and by 2000 the Christian community will be only 40% white.<sup>4</sup> And while the third world is becoming more and more Christian, what of the traditional Christian areas? "In Europe and North America, net defections from Christianity—converts to other religions or to irreligion— ...every year, some 2,765,000 church attendees...cease to be practicing Christians within the twelve month period, an average loss of 7,600 every day."<sup>5</sup> According to Barrett, in the *World Christian Encyclopedia*, such countries as Thailand and Indonesia and Saudi Arabia (!) have a current annual growth rate of 4% for Christianity, whereas the United States has a negligible (0%-1%) growth rate and much of Europe has a minus growth.<sup>6</sup> The Christian church is on the march, but it is not in the areas of the world long considered Christian, but in the new areas of our mission expansion. The centers of Christianity today are no longer Rome and London and Berlin and Milwaukee, but Seoul and Nairobi and Singapore and Lima.

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<sup>1</sup> *World Christian Encyclopedia*, page 3.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, page 7.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, page 3.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, page 9.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, page 7.

<sup>6</sup> Recent Lutheran World Federation figures released for 1982 show static or declining figures for Lutheranism in Europe, North America, and other ethnic areas, but a growth rate of 5% annually in Asia and 11% annually in Africa. (*Christian News*, January 17, 1983, page 3)

And yet, in spite of such growth resulting in Barrett's figures of 1,432,686,000 Christians in the world at the beginning of the 1980's, yet because of world population increases, though 34.4% of the world was Christian in 1900, this has been reduced to 32.8% in 1980. "On the one hand the twentieth century has seen a marked decline in the number of Christianity's committed adherents in proportion to the world. But on the other hand, the impact and influence of those adherents on the world has expanded phenomenally."<sup>7</sup>

## II. The Lutheran Role

And where is Lutheranism in the midst of all this change and expansion? How is it doing in the old world, the new world, the third world in the twentieth century? Lutheranism is in retreat, in decline. To be sure, in decline theologically, with the inroads of liberal theology (how Lutheran are many Lutherans?); to be sure, in decline in member participation, especially in Europe (one of the Scandinavian churches recently lamented having a quarter million unbaptized members); but also in decline in rank and impact in the wider picture of world Christianity.

This brings up the interesting question, just how many Lutherans are there in the world today? Lutheran World Federation figures routinely list about 70 million Lutherans for the world. Barrett, in contrast, in the *World Christian Encyclopedia* lists some 42 million Lutherans in 1980. Barrett reaches this much lower figure by lopping off the union churches of Germany (Lutheran/Reformed mixture) to leave only the "pure" Lutherans.

World Lutheranism is growing (LWF says by a half percent from 1981 to 1982), but it is by no means growing as fast as the world population increases, nor is it having a major impact upon those areas of the world where other Christian church bodies are having high response at present. Of the world Lutherans (upon dividing the Lutheran church bodies having over 100,000 members into two categories, those with an ethnic, Reformation era membership—European churches and colony churches such as those in Brazil and Australia and the United States—and those with a non-European background) one finds that for every ten ethnic Lutherans, there is only one non-ethnic Lutheran, much the same proportion as for Christianity in general in the year 1900. Most of this work among those with a non-European background has been carried out only in the last hundred years. Its results can sometimes be ephemeral. The large Malagasy (Madagascar) Lutheran church of some half million members recently abandoned the name "Lutheran" to join a federated Protestant church combining Anglican, Reformed, and Lutheran,<sup>8</sup> reducing non-ethnic Lutheranism by about 8%. Other Lutheran churches in the third world may soon follow such an ecumenical path (in India and Indonesia), leaving a still smaller representation of Lutheranism in those areas of the world where Christianity has been having its twentieth century growth.

With such non-European ethnic mission work struggling to play catch-up to other Christian bodies in our world, and with the European homeland Lutheran churches in decline under the various ungodly movements of our day, what of Lutheranism in our country? Surely here, in the United States, there is growth. Growth, yes...but growth in decline. These figures relate US Lutheran population with the total population of our country (for the figures 1900 and previous, I had to extrapolate the communicant figures into total Lutheran "souls," using a 3:4 ratio):

1860	Lutherans	were	1.2%	of	the	US	population
1880	"	"	1.8%	"	"	"	"
1900	"	"	2.9%	"	"	"	"
1920	"	"	3.5%	"	"	"	"
1930	"	"	3.6%	"	"	"	"
1960	"	"	4.6%	"	"	"	"
1970	"	"	4.4%	"	"	"	"
1980	"	"	3.9%	"	"	"	"

<sup>7</sup> *World Christian Encyclopedia*, page 19.

<sup>8</sup> *Christianity Today*, November 12, 1982.

During the periods of Lutheran immigration and during the period of the normal continued growth of the immigrant population there was good growth. But in recent years that growth halted and reversed as the American population began to include more and more people from non-European areas and as the Lutheran churches began to find fewer and fewer of “our kind of people.”

And what of Wisconsin Synod Lutheranism? Though we boast that we still continue to grow as a Synod, even while other Lutheran churches lose ground, in truth we are likewise losing ground. Again we compare WELS membership to US population totals:

1867	WELS	members	were	1.2%	of	the	US	population	(estimate)
1896	“	“	“	1.8%	“	“	“	“	(estimate)
1940	“	“	“	2.9%	“	“	“	“	
1950	“	“	“	3.5%	“	“	“	“	
1960	“	“	“	3.6%	“	“	“	“	
1970	“	“	“	4.6%	“	“	“	“	
1980	“	“	“	4.4%	“	“	“	“	

Like the other Lutheran bodies, we are finding that our problem is running out of “our kind of people” and no real reversal of that problem in sight.

### III. Our Kind of People

One can easily trace the Lutheran movement in the sixteenth century, influencing here and there, as in the Netherlands and France and England, but firmly establishing itself only in definite areas of Europe: Scandinavia and Germany, the Baltic States and Alsace-Lorraine, among Germanic peoples in Hungary and Romania and Czechoslovakia. After 450 years of Lutheran history, as we have noted earlier, 90% of world Lutheranism is still centered among those very same people, whether they still live in Europe or if they are in the daughter emigrant groups in the many countries to which they have dispersed.

This ethnic concentration is clearly seen in our own Synod. One hundred years after the great emigrations of the nineteenth century we still find 89% of WELS members are of the old ethnic background (82% German, 7% Scandinavian), with another 10% of other European background, and only 1% of our membership from a non-European background.<sup>9</sup> Of our teachers and pastors, a solid 94% come from the German background.<sup>10</sup> Clearly, ethnic background has a lot to do with being a WELS member, and just as clearly, ethnic background has a lot to do with becoming a WELS member. When asked why they joined WELS congregations, our members gave the following reasons: 81% were raised Lutheran (75% men, 85% women), 15% enter through marriage (19% men, 11% women), which indicates that 95% of our church membership belongs because of heritage and family ties and only 5% joined our fellowship for other reasons.<sup>11</sup> We have this reality, that we operate with a certain base, our ethnic, northern-European membership, and though our church does grow, it does so primarily by feeding off that base and by the assimilation of others into it through family ties. Clearly we are dealing with a certain kind of people in our Synod (and in Lutheranism generally), with “our kind of people.”

What are “our kind of people” like? For us, it’s like asking, what are northern Europeans (Germans) like. There are definite characteristics for any ethnic or national group, and Germanic peoples are no exception. What do we start with? Industry and thrift, reflected in our Synod’s economic makeup, solid middle class, white and blue color worker, suburban and rural. Or a life centered in the family, reflected in only a 3% divorced/separated figure. How about the reserved, formal, stern, inward-turned, authoritarian, judgmental character of the German. The list could go on, but the point is made. Our membership shares a way of life that is homogenous, a view of life that is consistent, a culture that one enters by birth or marriage and to which one adheres throughout his life.

<sup>9</sup> *A Profile of WELS Lutherans*, page 30.

<sup>10</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, page 50.

An ethnic character is also reflected in the religious expression of the Lutheran Church. Those who came from Germany and founded a church also brought with them the attitudes of the German church. Such attitudes find expression in the giving attitudes of many members (church dues and fair shares), in the devotion to language and culture that long afflicted all American Lutheranism, in the concern with cultus (in spite of Augsburg VII) exemplified in the fierce debates over Bible translations and hymnals and catechisms which many other church bodies would find incomprehensible, but especially in the worship service as the focus of the life of the church.<sup>12</sup>

One could distinguish two types of churches, the “folk” church and the “saints” church. In the folk church, the pattern of state churches, the population is generally considered to be part of the church, and the bond, the glue that holds it all together is the shared worship experience, the cultus of hymnbook and catechism and sermon and sacrament. In the saints church, made up of those who profess the same beliefs, the bond is the shared religious community, the nurturing and supporting of one another in the faith. Our synod hovers between the two. Like the saints church we emphasize (through careful instruction and church discipline) the need for a pure church, but on the other hand we have not developed the kind of caring community that is open to the outsider in our congregation or that nurtures the fellow Christian. We do not rank our churches as warm or cold, but only by the varying degrees of “how cold.” On the other hand, like the folk church, the bond that holds many of our members is family tie, family heritage, and community standards rather than the personal conviction that one desires to be only faithful Lutheran, and like the folk church, the focus of church life is the worship service and the institutions needed to sustain such worship in style.

If one can plug into this worship focus in our congregations and can do without the sustaining Christian community, he will do well as one of us. But if he needs more, he won’t get it in our midst and will go elsewhere. I have often noted that if an adult confirmand is surrounded by a solid WELS family into which he has married, he has little difficulty in remaining part of the church; but if he does not have a personal bond to the congregation members, then after the confirmation and left to his own devices by a congregation that does not feel responsibility towards him, he often wanders and gives up his newly won faith.

We do have a Lutheran culture, a culture foreign to most Americans, and there is an awful lot one has to swallow if he is coming from the outside and intends to become one of “our kind of people.” One does not merely become a member of the congregation, confessing the same faith, but he also must imbibe the same kind of religious cultus and lifestyle of the members. For many in our country this is a great obstacle. They may be turned off by the German work ethic, the goal orientation and drive that pervades our members and congregations, for they have a different attitude towards the priorities and pace of life. They may be turned off by our uptightness, our reserve, our formality, and look elsewhere for warmth and exuberance in Christian expression. They may not be comfortable with our authoritarian posture. They may not meet the social or educational or economic standards of our congregations (is there a WELS or a Lutheran storefront ghetto church?)<sup>13</sup> They don’t fit in, and they know it and do not bother to come.

And we as well know those who do not fit in. And we do ask the question, “Will they fit in? Will they be good (conforming and dependable) church members?” rather than seeing them in their spiritual needs and reaching to them. What would we do with the Chinese laborers among whom Harders (?) preached in Arizona in the 1920’s? How can we reach Spanish Americans or migrant workers or street corner down-and-outers, women’s libbers and abortionists, UW intellectuals and the divorced and gay and hedonist and pothead? We know we can’t, and we don’t even try. They’re not “our kind of people.” Would we start a mission in Baton Rouge without a nucleus of “our kind of people” to give it a start, or in Quebec City or San Francisco or New

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<sup>12</sup> In the survey that is the basis of *A Profile of WELS Lutherans*, respondents were asked to rank their choices (from a list of fifteen) of the most important aspects of their church. The three overwhelming top choices were Sunday worship, communion, Christian education of children. At the bottom of the list of choices were fellowship (16%), recreational (11%), social concerns (6%), personal sharing (4%), and evangelism (1%—“bringing in new members,” a separate choice, was ranked fifth at 46%). pp. 78-84, *A Profile*.

<sup>13</sup> One LCA writer comments regarding inner city churches: “LCA churches are there partly by default: that is where Germans and Scandinavians *once* lived, and there are far more failures than success stories in making Sankt Johannes Kirche serve blacks or Hispanics.” Reumann, *The Church Emerging*, page 264.

York City? Or is not our home mission program, though expressing concern for the unchurched, still mostly a matter of reaching “our kind of people?” The membership gains by affirmation of faith outnumber adult confirmations by a two to one margin in our home mission fields.

And the problem we are facing (not our Synod only, but all American Lutheranism) is that we are running out of “our kind of people.” The northern-European ethnics are declining in number in our country, absolutely and proportionately. We see shrinking family sizes and declining birth rates. We see family ties meaning less and less in determining the church membership of the young, a lesser willingness to say “I am a Lutheran and will always be, no matter whom I marry or where I may move.” Those who hold to the values and life styles of their European forebears are shrinking in numbers as many of the young pursue alternative life styles, as they divorce and become gay and espouse women’s lib and the other temptations of our age. They are less impressed with doctrine, or with a “thus says the Lord,” for other voices are just as meaningful to them. They find out about other church bodies and are willing to pursue what interests them, no matter the doctrinal cost.

The same people just aren’t out there anymore, as they were even ten or twenty years ago, and this will surely reflect upon our own outreach. We can share the Gospel with them (and this we do well!), but to keep them in our churches is another matter. We do face a challenge—and what will we do with it?

#### **IV. Facing the Challenge to Grow**

We have sought to demonstrate, the problem is not primarily a doctrine that turns people from us. Our doctrine is our treasure, not our burden!<sup>14</sup> Rather it is the cultural aspects of our Germanic heritage that create the major barriers to others. An LCA writer points to the problem:

Blacks and Hispanic-Americans came into the LCA in numbers significant enough to demand attention for the mission of the church...they brought with them secular and religious backgrounds that do not flow out of northern Europe nor out of Luther’s Reformation. We have largely assumed that they will become indigenized to the background of the dominant segment of Lutherans. There is here a situation unfolding that is reminiscent of the struggle between Peter and Paul over circumcision. Is Lutheranism, specifically Lutheranism in North America, to be equated with a heritage from Luther’s Reformation and northern Europe?<sup>15</sup>

What does it mean to be a Lutheran? What is Lutheranism? Is it a name, a title, a badge? Is it our catechism and our confessional documents? Is it our church service with its forms and liturgy and hymnal? Is it the northern European cultural heritage of “our kind of people?” What is it to be Lutheran?

This is no easy question. World missionaries continually face the question, what to transmit (from Reformation Germany via the US) to those of a different culture and a different heritage. What is essential, and what is cultural to being a Lutheran Christian?

We remember that it was not Luther’s intention to start a new church body but rather to be a reform movement within the church of his time. He sought to restore the Gospel from the veiling and accretions of the Middle Ages, to restore “salvation free by faith in thee.” This was Lutheranism’s message then, the reason for its being. And this still is the unique contribution of confessional Lutheranism. Justification by faith is proclaimed in many Protestant bodies. Scripture alone is the password of many denominations. But justification by grace, the objective justification of this world of sinners, and the ensuing assurance of salvation since this is God’s act and God’s gift, this is the unique contribution of Lutheranism, the focus of our being.

When we have an opportunity to share this message, it is indeed a time of rejoicing by those who have heard it for the first time, a time of rejoicing I remember from nearly every adult instruction class. Said one man, a former Catholic, “if the Catholics heard and understood this, they would become Lutheran on the spot.”

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<sup>14</sup> Churches much more rigorous and demanding than ours do have great success in attracting people, though primarily because they accompany their demands with a caring community.

<sup>15</sup> Reumann, *The Church Emerging*, page 175.

Another pastor reported from his experiences with Baptists that they too shared this reaction, if people but knew the gift the Bible really proclaims. The joy of the message, its assurance, the Christian confidence—this is our responsibility to proclaim to our world, this unique heart and core of our preaching and teaching. In one church body after another, the Gospel is veiled, but among us it shines brightly and powerfully. But it is a doctrine to share, not a doctrine to hide behind.

Too often our Lutheran heritage has been a wall to shield and protect us from the contagion and contamination of those who inhabit the other corners of Christendom. From our secure bastions of “pure doctrine” we survey the rest of the Christian world more with disgust than with pity, more with self-righteousness than with gratitude, more with a polemical defense of our treasure than a loving sharing of our gift, more with a separatist spirit than with any feeling of responsibility towards those in varying degrees of darkness. After all, they are not “our kind of people!”

J.P. Koehler, like a prophet without honor in his time, often spoke of the danger of the narrow, the sectarian spirit, meaning his words for the Wisconsin Synod of his day. In his *History of the Wisconsin Synod* he describes what he means:

...sectarianism is an air, in the outward manner, that betrays a false mentality, the inward and outward attitude of having things cut-and-dried, which gives one the sense of self-sufficiency and superiority, and the group so imbued an exclusive character among its fellows. ...it leads to a patronizing manner, both in opposition to and in fellowship with others.<sup>16</sup>

In his pedantic and obtuse paper, “Gesetzlich Wesen Unter Uns,” he attempts to further his assessment of the Synod’s sectarian mentality, its isolation and closedness and its refusal to spread its light abroad but to shelter it under a bushel for “our kind of people.”

He speaks of the “noisy self-satisfied to-do about *pure doctrine*.”<sup>17</sup> “Legalism obtrudes itself here in the form of harping on orthodoxy... Hereby is meant the insistence on the ‘right faith’ where the emphasis has shifted from ‘faith’ to ‘right.’ ...This noisy ado about orthodoxy flourishes on *petty parochialism* which is opposed to the *ecumenical spirit*” ((the awareness that we are but part of the larger church)).<sup>18</sup> “It goes without saying that the gospel must be kept pure; for without the truth of the gospel, without a true appreciation of the gospel, one cannot have faith, one cannot come to faith. But to keep the gospel pure is not of immediate interest to the heralding of the gospel, that is of secondary interest. Evangelical proclamation primarily aims for faith.”<sup>19</sup> He thereupon warns against the legalistic spirit of intellectualism (the form, not the content; the words, not the living)<sup>20</sup> and the lack of ecumenical spirit (“a heart for the whole household of God, for the other sheep, not a part of the immediate fold”<sup>21</sup>). This true ecumenical spirit “consists in my *rejoicing* that another...has come to faith in the Lord Jesus... To this I will give expression by emphasizing those things that unite us in faith and not open up with reproach and criticism on those things that still divided us.”<sup>22</sup> “What is meant here is the *party spirit* ...when our doctrinal discussions are carried on in such a tone that we are out to show the other: *you* are wrong, your position is *incorrect*, ours is *correct*...”<sup>23</sup> “This very same thing occurs in sermons, articles

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<sup>16</sup> Koehler, *History of the Wisconsin Synod*, page 251.

<sup>17</sup> Koehler, “Gesetzlich Wesen Unter Uns,” page 3.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, page 9.

<sup>19</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>20</sup> I am reminded that in all my years of Christian schooling, all twenty years, there was much attention given to grades, papers, skills, but none given to personal piety and the soul’s life. Nor has there been much discussion or sharing on this matter during my 11½ years as a pastor. Heart?...or Form?

<sup>21</sup> Koehler, “Gesetzlich Wesen Unter Uns,” page 14.

<sup>22</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, page 15.

for publication, and other writings. Here belong the constant allusions to one's own synod and its leaders as if there were no other Christians."<sup>24</sup>

With Koehler, I feel that it is important to "rejoin" the wider church if we are to have much chance for leavening the whole with the Reformation Gospel. By rejoining, I do not mean doctrinal change and compromise (our orthodoxy is our strength!) but a changed perception in which we renounce our cultural barriers and our self-imposed isolation and communicate to our members and the wider world that we too are but part of the church,—by God's grace a privileged part, for the light of the Gospel shines brightly among us, but only a part. That light which shines among us is a light to which we would summon one and all, be they "our kind of people" or not. Then others can come to us, not because of (or in spite of) our Lutheranism, but because we are faithful *Christians*, heralds of an uncommonly sweet and comforting Gospel. Let this Gospel become more and more our appeal and our witness, rather than our "purity."

### V. Renewed in Mission

But can we grow beyond ourselves, our cultural heritage, our fence-building, our narrowness? We can, we must, by further developing our proper Biblical and Lutheran sense of mission.

Mission-mindedness ("Go into all the world") has not been one of the characteristics of Lutheranism, either in this country or in Europe, not in the same sense as was characteristic of the Methodists or Moravians, or is of the cults and the Pentecostals and the Baptists. For this lack of mission-mindedness some would point to Luther's personal lack of attention to "heathen" missions (a charge much debated, if it indeed is valid; cf. Peters "Luther's Mission-Mindedness" for an apologetic response); others point to the cold hand of the state church system in Europe; others point to the stultifying Age of Orthodoxy (even Peters admits "we must not enter the land of the Reformation of the seventeenth century with the expectation of witnessing overseas missionary undertakings;"<sup>25</sup> others point to the lack of opportunity (England and Spain and Portugal had colonies in which the "church followed the flag," whereas Germany had no colonies until the later nineteenth century and Scandinavia had no colonies beyond the polar regions); others point to the exclusivistic tendency to think in terms of "our kind of people" and to hide behind culture and language and state subsidy.

To be sure, the sentiment was always there, to follow "our people" wherever they might go, to Australia, to South Africa, to Brazil, to the United States, but for those not of the family, too little attention was given, whether in a Europe weary of religious wars and content with *cuius regio*, or in an America where the heathen "Americans" were neglected by Swede and Dane and German and Norwegian.

The sole bright spot was the unofficial, privately funded mission society movement that in the nineteenth century swept through European Lutheranism, apparently under the influence of English Methodism and the Moravian groups. In that century, twenty-three different German mission societies were sending out workers, not merely to fellow Lutherans, but also to the world's heathen, to India and Indonesia and to the Gold Coast (Ghana, where 100 missionaries died in the first 60 years of the work, eleven in 1895 alone). It was lay work, lay supported, lay funded, lay developed (through pastoral leadership!) that fed this movement, a movement which in time also drew in the American churches (though as the work of the church body, not the mission society) and fueled the whole of Lutheranism's mission outreach in the past 150 years, a movement so striking that it inspired many, if not all, of the efforts of other Protestant church bodies.

For too long our Synod persisted in the mentality of indifference to wider mission work (as opposed to reaching "our kind of people").<sup>26</sup> Whether in home mission work or in world mission work, we have lagged far behind other bodies, and even yet we are weak and hesitant in our efforts and our commitment. Have we not been like old Israel, turned inward upon our kind of people, to congregation and building and educational

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid, page 17.

<sup>25</sup> Peters, "Luther's Practical Mission-Mindedness," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol. 67, 1 (January, 1970), page 47.

<sup>26</sup> cf. Norm Berg, "Home Mission Moods and Modes," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol. 73,4 (October, 1976). Is not some of this reluctance the "darker side" of the Wauwatosa Gospel that Koehler presents in his synod history?

program to develop and keep “our kind of people,” like Jonah reluctant to concede that others out there are dying and lost in their lack of what we so abundantly possess?

Mission zeal in our midst has certainly been growing, but has it been in the right direction? The sending out of missionaries (whether foreign or home) is still *their* mission work. It is not *ours*. They are doing it (as we provide the funds), not us. And here, I think, is the direction in which we need to look, to the mission not of the professionals, not of the clergy, not of the missionaries sanctioned by boards, but to the mission of all of us. Though Luther may not have been clear and vigorous on the need to send out missionaries to the far-off corners of the world, he was certainly clear on this, that *all* are priests of God and that *all* have the right and power and privilege of sharing the precious and sweet Gospel with the heathen who are all around us; no matter where we may live. It is in regaining a *personal* sense of responsibility for the soul of our neighbor that we will be able to move in our congregations beyond “our kind of people” and that we will more vigorously pursue God’s command to “preach the Gospel to all creatures.” In a recent *Quarterly* article, E.H. Wendland quoted this statement:

That which actually makes Christian men and women become genuine missionaries is their arrival at certain unshakeable convictions from the Bible regarding God’s world plan and their Christian responsibility toward the world according to that plan.<sup>27</sup>

As we see the grace of God in making us what we are and the need of others for what we so freely and fully possess, then we can move out beyond the limits of “our kind of people” in a genuine ecumenicity that sees our place in the wider church as heralds of the sweet Gospel in this age and in this place.

God grant that we so learn to grow beyond ourselves.

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<sup>27</sup> E.H. Wendland, “An Evaluation of Current Missiology,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol. 79, 3 (summer, 1982), page 194, quoting from G. Christian Weiss, *The Heart of Missionary Theology*, page 8.



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