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Introduction: Where would we be today without the boldness of our predecessors. What if Luther had stood up at the Diet in Worms and said: "Here I stand, at the moment that is. But then again I could be wrong"? Modern Lutherans are less accustomed to bold statements. Here are some bold statements you probably have not heard in your church (compliments of Eugene Kruse as they appeared in Christian News).

1. Hey! It's my turn to sit in the front pew.
2. I was so enthralled I never noticed your sermon went 25 minutes overtime.
3. Personally I find witnessing more enjoyable than golf.
4. I've decided to give our church the \$500 a month I used to send to TV evangelists.
5. I volunteer to be the permanent teacher for the junior high Sunday school class.
6. I love it when we sing hymns I've never heard before!
7. Since we're all here, let's start the service early.
8. Pastor, we'd like to send you to this Bible seminar in the Bahamas.
9. Nothing inspires me and strengthens my commitment like our annual stewardship campaign!

On a more serious note we ask: may we be so bold (as those we have been hearing about)? "Yes" is the answer. "Because we are Lutheran" is the reason. We sometimes forget how special the message is that we hear, or proclaim, weekly in Word and Sacrament ministry: namely, that God searches for us and seeks to save us. From Eden's "Adam, wo bist Du?" to the Christ's, "*The Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost*" (Lk 19:10) the Holy Scriptures reveal the actions of a loving heavenly Father calling wayward children home. This ancient, but still today new and novel point of view among the great isms of any age, is what Luther rediscovered. This is what we continue to confess with our stubborn insistence upon maintaining all three Reformation sola's: fide, gratia, Scriptura (faith, grace, Scripture).

Herman A. Preus and Edmund Smits, eds. point out in *The Doctrine of Man in Classical Lutheran Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg 1962):

Among all the creatures on earth man has the unique privilege to be moved not only by biological needs and instincts, but also by ideas and doctrines. ... Far from being willing to allow the

teaching of the right doctrine to assume a secondary role, Martin Luther as the leader of the Reformation emphasized its importance in the strongest possible terms. "Doctrine is heaven, life is earth," he writes. "One little point of doctrine is of more value than heaven and earth; and therefore we cannot allow the least jot of it to be corrupted. But we can very well disregard offenses and lapses of life" (WA 40/2,p52). For Luther every human life, even that of a believer, inevitably includes some confusion, error, and sin. Where then can we find the true light which is able to guide our way to heaven? Only in the pure doctrine, answers Luther. (p.ix-x)

Orthodoxy arises out of the passionate zeal of the church to find the true insights and to express them in scrupulously correct statements; the sacred treasures of the church must be safeguarded with loving care and preserved inviolate.

... as Luther indicates ... "When we are speaking about godliness and ungodliness we are not speaking about manners, but about convictions which are the fountainheads of the moral life. The man who is orthodox concerning God cannot help but do good works and be good in his life. Even if he falls seven times a day, he rise again just as many times. But the ungodly fall to the ground and do not rise again" (WA 5, 28).

Martin Luther affirmed ... The Holy Spirit is not a sceptic; he does not come with vague conjecture, but writes in our hearts assertions which are stronger than any experience, yea, than life itself (WA 18, 605).

Therefore WE PRAY,

"And now, Lord, ... grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word" (Acts 4:29)

BECAUSE the need is now (The Leadership Situation Facing American Congregations; An Alban Institute Special Report, September 2001)

Most of the major Christian and Jewish denominations are experiencing or soon will face a

shortage of clergy to meet current congregational demands, primarily due to retirements. (p5)

But aging clergy is only part of the problem. Other factors include:

- 1) The greying of the ministerium. The people who choose to follow retirees will often have shorter pastoral careers due to later age of entry in the profession (Second career men).
- 2) A smaller percentage of seminary students entering parish ministry (about 50% instead of the previous 80-90%)
- 3) An increasing number of clergy leaving ordained ministry through leaves of absence (CRM), resignation, removal. For example, within 5 years of ordination almost 20% leave the ministry in the Presbyterian church; 60% (3 out of 5) in the Roman Catholic church.

All this creates a dearth of young leaders. On the other hand there are increasing complaints about a decline in quality (training and commitment) of those who do enter the ministry.

In the LCMS, a study conducted by researchers Alan C. Klaas and Cheryl D. Klaas reports that 15% of congregational leadership positions are vacant, that unless trends change 24% will be without pastors by 2007, and the shortage will increase even more dramatically through 2017. (p11)

Recruitment is complicated by what they call "a harsh and intolerant spirit poisoning the infrastructure." They found that:

- 30% loved their work and were effective role models for others considering the ministry
- 30% were deeply ambivalent, noting positive aspects but expressing modest despair at systemic issues
- 20% were in advanced stages of burnout; in depression and despair
- 20% "well on their way to burnout"

Contributing factors indicated were:

1. people beating on each other
2. mismatch of congregations and pastors
3. the difficulty getting help to pastors
4. poor support for clergy wives and children
5. low income
6. grossly unreasonable expectations
7. fighting and sick congregations
8. congregations where a few members dominated the vast majority

Troubling findings among the survivors included:

1. 80% believe pastoral ministry has negatively affected their families
2. 75% reported a significant stress-related crisis at

least once in their ministries

3. 50% felt unable to meet the demands of the job
4. 90% felt inadequately trained to cope with ministry demands
5. 70% have a lower self-image than when they began their professions
6. 50% had considered leaving the ministry within the three months prior to the survey

Is there a need to be bold? Yes! May we be so bold? Yes!
How dare we be so bold? Because we have I) a bold mandate, II) a bold mission, III) a bold membership

I) A bold mandate: Boldness is part of a confessional Lutheran heritage

In Robert Kolb's, *Confessing the Faith* (CPH 1991) we discover that:

Christians have been confessing their faith for centuries. The Apostle Paul stood before the Roman governors Felix and Festus and before King Agrippa. As he did so, he confessed his faith (Acts 24-26). Paul may have had in mind the example of Christ Himself, who confessed who He was before the high priest Caiaphas (Matt. 26:62-68). When the early Christians refused to take the Roman empire's pledge of allegiance, which included worship of the emperor, they confessed their faith and followed the examples of Christ and Paul. Often they testified by giving their life, and thus they earned the title "martyr". Paul himself argued that Christians naturally confess their faith, for the confession flows from the lips of those who are saved (Rom 10:10). (p13)

Confessing the faith is simply a part of following Christ and a vital part of the Christian life (p9) ... Faith produces confession and must express itself, for trust in God always displays itself in word and deed Acts 3:20, Rom 10:9-15). **Christian confession of faith is always dependent on, initiated by, and a response to the Word of God**, arising out of God's pledge of Himself to those who are baptized. Confession is a response of thanks and praise to God's faithfulness. Public voicing of the faith in confession produces and elicits faith, and it can also become the norm of faith, as it guides other believers in their own expression of their faith. Confession is literally "from faith and for faith" whenever the dynamic power of God's Good News is restated in human words (Rom 1:16-17). Rationalistic philosophizing loses its absolute dominance when faith asserts itself in confession Since God the Holy spirit elicits human confession of His Word, the process of expressing the faith in actual fact

stands under His control, not under the control of the creature (1 Cor 12:3). (p17)

Confession is based on the living Word:

Human language, as the "living voice of the Gospel," in Luther's words, conveys the actual power of God into the human situation (Rom 1:16). For Luther the church and God's people live under the power of the Word. Georg Heckel summarized Luther's view: "The church is founded on the Gospel, on the living voice of the Gospel, on the 'oral shout,' of Jesus Christ (WA 40,II,37;411,1). Where this living Word of God is on the move, there is life, salvation and blessing. The Gospel is a living voice, the Word of God is a life-giving word" (p21)

Luther firmly believed that the Word of God always brings Christ into contact with human lives.

Despite the shortcomings and sins of those who interpret Scripture, Luther insisted that the Bible's message must be proclaimed to all the saints. For the power of the Word to condemn and to restore--to kill our sinful nature and to make us new people alive in Christ--is conveyed only when the Word is proclaimed. This means that God's people must continuously confess and teach the faith. For confessing the faith means interpreting and applying the Scriptures to contemporary life. (p22)

Nowhere is Luther's zeal for public confession clearer than in his debate with Erasmus. Erasmus believed that great truths are more or less accessible to all; Luther believed that only the Word of God can reveal the truth of God to people because we are all shrouded in sin. Erasmus believed that the presence of Christ and the Holy Spirit preserve the church from grievous error; Luther believed that Satan is always at work causing believers to err and that error must always be confronted with bold confession. Luther's position was clear:

It is not the mark of a Christian mind to take no delight in assertions; on the contrary, a man must delight in assertions or he will be no Christian. And by assertion ... I mean a constant adhering, affirming, confessing, maintaining and an invincible persevering...Nothing is better known or more common among Christians than assertion. Take away assertions and you take away Christianity. (p25-6)

Confessing in religious controversy produced the Lutheran Confessions / Book of Concord

Public confessions: 1) made a public presentation of Luther's ideas, 2) provided an explanation or defense before the political authorities (In the Latin of the day protestatio meant testimony not protest) 3) confronted

alternate proposals for reform. Many opponents followed the biblicistic, moralistic, anti-clerical, anti-sacramental and often millennialistic models of sects from the Middle Ages. 4) defined a basis on which princes committed to Lutheranism might ally with one another for a defense of their common faith while under the threat of the emperor's edict.

It all went back to Augsburg, Kolb concludes. Throughout the 16th century, Luther's students and heirs looked back to Augsburg as the key to their confession of faith. Luther often shared his appraisal:

At last, our teaching and faith come forth into the light through our confession, so that in a very brief time, by order of the emperor, it was sent to every king and prince. There were many bold men at the [imperial] court, whose enthusiasm for that teaching caught ablaze like tinder. Thus our confession and defense were set forth with greatest glory. And their confutation grovelled in the shadows (43).

Georg Spalatin (1484-1545), Luther's long-time friend, former personal secretary to Elector Frederick the Wise, then pastor at Altenburg, displayed typical enthusiasm of diet participants. He called the Augsburg Confession:

the most significant act that has ever taken place on earth. For on the afternoon [of the day after the festival of Saint John the Baptist] my gracious lord, the elector of Saxony [and the other princes and municipal representatives who joined him] gave public confession of their faith and of the whole Christian teaching which they permitted to be proclaimed in their princedoms, lands, and cities. They had it read in German with a fine, cheerful Christian spirit, not just in front of all the electors, princes, estates, bishops, and councillors who were present, but also in front of the Roman Imperial Majesty himself and his brother (44).

The courage of the confessing princes was recognized throughout the 16th century. Spalatin focused on the virtues of Elector John of Saxony. He contrasted the upright behaviour of John and his Evangelical colleagues with the conniving and bloodthirsty baiting of the Roman Catholic princes at the diet. In his chapter on the Augsburg Confession Johann Mathesius (Historien, 1576) suggested that under the papacy a prince could be saved only if he died in the crib. He said that those princes who had joyously confessed their faith at Augsburg had taken their places in the series of pious princes stretching from David and Hezekiah ... through Constantine, Charlemagne, and Ludwig of Bavaria down to Elector Frederick the Wise.

Of Georg of Brandenburg and Philip of Hesse Wigand (Historia 1568) noted:

God, who in His endless mercy raises up martyrs

for His truth, gave strength to their hearts through the Holy spirit, so that they might hold fast to the truth which they acknowledged through a fearless confession, not permitting themselves to be diverted from their confession either by the fears and terrors of the damned nor the enticement of rewards. For this blessing all saints should praise and honour God.

Selnecker praised Elector John's reply when threatened and told to forbid evangelical preaching. He stated "without reserve in public" that he would rather be driven from his lands than forbid the preaching of the Gospel. Margrave Georg of Brandenburg exclaimed that he would rather kneel before the emperor and let his head be cut off than abandon the Gospel (57).

The earliest reports of the confrontation at Augsburg describe it as a clash between God and Satan, good and evil, truth and falsehood. Selnecker emphasised the dire threat by citing one Roman Catholic prince:

The Lutherans have submitted a confession written in ink. If I were emperor, I would love to give them a confutation written with rubrics, that is, one which would be in their blood.

He compared Melancthon to Jonah and Daniel when confronted by the papal legate Campeggio:

Saint Philip stood as if in the midst of lions, wolves, and bears which could tear him into little bits and pieces, but he had a superabundance of splendid courage in his slight frame, and he answered boldly, "We comm it ourselves and our cause to God, our Lord." (55)

The Augsburg Confession also rejected false teaching that deceives and leads astray. The clear rejection of sacramentarian and Anabaptist views was an essential part of the claim to be catholic--in the tradition of the church fathers. Mathesius noted that "the steadfast confessors and representatives of the truth of Jesus Christ" defended the Gospel by "refuting the antichristian teaching which is full of lies, heresy, idolatry, death, and bloodshed" (54).

In answer to the question, "What does it mean to be Lutheran?" Herman Sasse in a 1934 German publication with that title (*Was heisst lutherisch?*, reprinted by CPH in 1966 with the title *Here We Stand*) explained that confession is "a fruit of the Reformation of Martin Luther who once recalled Christendom to a renewed search for true doctrine, for the truth of the Gospel." (vii). This is not an intellectualization of the Christian faith:

When the Reformation demanded that the Gospel be taught in its purity, the phrase "pure teaching," or "pure doctrine," was intended to mean far more than correct theological theory. "Doctrine" and "teaching" have the same meaning in the writings of Luther and in the Lutheran Confessions as they

have in the New Testament: to teach is to present to the people the saving message of the Gospel. So the Reformation also used the words "confess" and "confession" in the same way as the New Testament: a confession is the response of the church ("We have believed and know that Thou art the holy One of God") to the revelation. Just as we cannot "teach," so we cannot "confess," "but in the Holy Spirit" (I Cor 12:3). Nor did the Reformation ever forget that the same word is used in the New Testament for the confession of faith, the confession of sin, and the worship of God. At bottom, for the Lutheran Church a confession is nothing else than the great "We praise Thee, O God: we acknowledge Thee to be the Lord" of a pardoned sinner. And when the church rejects the errors of ancient and modern times "with common consent" in the great "we believe, teach, and confess" of the Lutheran Confessions, this concern for pure doctrine is nothing else than the concern which Paul and John manifested when they warned their congregations against distortions of the evangelical proclamation, against gospels which were no longer the Gospel. (vii and viii)

The struggle in Germany over confessions at this time, arose, Sasse noted, because "During the last two centuries Protestant Christianity gradually forgot what the Reformation had emphasized: the profound seriousness of truth. Today once again all Christendom is being compelled to return to a renewed consideration of the truth" (viii). The reason for it, he explained was the increased contact with world religions, increased secularism (he calls it paganism) of civilization, and philosophies laying claim to absoluteness. All these factors at his time--as they do for us now--compel the "churches of Christendom to give an account, both to themselves and to the world, of what they 'believe, teach and confess'" (viii) and to respond to the challenge: How can the existence of confessional churches be justified? Confessional loyalty is frequently branded "sectarian mindedness." Of the men of the Age of Orthodoxy, often accused of uncharitableness in their mutual condemnations, Sasse notes that they excelled our age in at least one respect.

They knew one thing which the modern man does not know, and does not care to know. They knew that as individuals and as nations, we literally live by the truth and literally die by falsehood. Hence they never shared the cold scepticism and wearied resignation of modern relativism, which holds that there are only relative truths, no absolute truths, and that it consequently does not pay to wrestle for the truth. Nor, with a bold "will to

believe" did they have to satisfy themselves with half truth or penultimate truth in order to have some ground on which to stand. Their quest after truth, their struggling for the truth, was conditioned moreover, by the conviction that there is One who is the Truth is person, One who said to the truth-seekers of all the ages, "Everyone that is of the truth heareth My voice," (Jn 18:37), One who promised His Church on earth that His Holy Spirit would guide it into all the truth. It is from this point of view that the mighty struggle of the Reformation Age, the battling of the rising confessional churches for the pure doctrine of divine truth, must be understood. (89)

Our Lutheran boldness relates to our distinctive understanding of (cf. Preus-Smits, xiiiff.)

1) **inspiration of Scripture** - If anything is fundamental for Lutheran orthodoxy it is the authority of Scripture. The seventeenth century did not invent the teaching of verbal inspiration. When the first apostolic Fathers called the Scriptures "Logia" they meant "divinely-inspired sayings." Martin Luther restored reverence for this book of books as the one divine source of truth. The church should not fabricate new ideas and dogmas but proclaim those which have been imparted by the Holy Spirit.

2) **faith and reason** - Luther insists upon a "dialectical" union (one of unequal opposites). Faith is the undisputed leader, but reason follows. Orthodoxy is persuaded that there is an ultimate harmony between faith and right reasoning even though on occasion a theologian may be forced to admit that he is unable to reconcile certain theological statements. Our theology can only be "ectypal" a reflection of God's revelation within the limited human mind.

3) **church and traditions** - Torgau Articles (1530 forerunner to Augsburg) stressed Acts 5:29, "We ought to obey God rather than men" for their theme was that the abuses in the church (celibacy, one kind in Sacrament, mass, compulsory confession) were introduced by human authority, whereas the reforms put into effect by the Lutherans were based on God's word. There were other matters also. "What we maintain about adiaphora in ceremonies has been said above: if they do not promote doctrine but are viewed as works through which sin is taken away, then such worship is unrighteous and contrary to the Gospel" (Kolb-Nestingen, Sources and Contexts of the Book of Concord, Fortress 2001, p. 104). Of singing in German it was said: "Since

ceremonies are supposed to support doctrine ... through such exercises the people should learn something. As Paul teaches in 1 Corinthians 14 [5, 19], in the church we ought not to speak or sing anything that is unclear. Nevertheless, we do not make a law of this ... (104).

4) **theology for practical life** (i.e. vocation, cf. Veith, *Spirituality of the Cross*, CPH)

Boldness produces, and results from:

- conviction
- confession
- the need for clarity "Did you mean," Josh McDowell asks in *Evidence that demands a verdict*, "that Jesus did not die but passed out then later revived and wrapped in pounds of bandages hopped over to the tomb entry and nudged this 2 ton rock out of the way, then raced down the road to catch up with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus?)

OR, as H.Richard Niebuhr characterized modern Protestantism in America, asked, are we to believe that: "A God without wrath brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross" ? (Br 16)

II. A bold mandate leads us to a **bold mission**. What is our theology of missions that permits, even encourages, boldness? How do prayer and witnessing fit in with our God-does-it-all theology?

The need for modern confessions, clear statements of faith in era of new tolerance (LaHaye), continues. To this we have been called:

Ephesians 2:10

2 Corinthians 5

2 Cor 4:7 - "earthen vessels" clay pots, cf Jer 18 & 19

Re. our mission: Only by maintaining the truth can Christianity be the salt of the earth, the light of the world. And a church, as God's chosen vehicle for the transmission of His Gospel, should provide among other things, a supportive atmosphere for those in quest of answers to the ultimate questions. It should provide the possibility for discovering truth. Francis Schaeffer writes (*The Church Before the Watching World*, 67): "We not only believe in the existence of truth, but we believe we have the truth--a truth that has content and can be verbalized (and then can be lived)."

In No Other Gospel: Christianity among the World's Religions (Fortress 1992), Carl E. Braaten emphasizes that the church must persistently ask: What in the world should the church be doing that the world cannot do for itself? (11). His answer?

Finally, the only unique thing that Christianity has to offer the world is its witness to Christ; and by Christ we do not mean some anonymous Christ

principle but the concrete reality and historical person of Jesus as the Christ. When Raimundo Panikkar writes that Christ has other names-- Rama, Krishna, Isvara, Purusha, Tathagata, and the like--we must disagree mightily. (78)

Which Jesus? Certainly not any old kind. The long history of Christology has been zigzagging between two popular but inaccurate approaches. What both have in common is that His meaning is defined by our experience, our self-understanding, our moral idealism, our world view, our philosophical system. He is different from us in essence but only by degree. Braaten calls one the Ebionite Jesus and the other, the Docetic Christ. In the first one, Jesus is pictured as a great moral teacher and proclamation centres on his life and teachings. Jesus is a rabbi and a prophet and maybe a mystic, but in the end he is a man, like Confucius or Mohammed. At best he can be a model for our morality, piety, life-style or whatever we admire about him. The Docetic Christ would call Jesus the Logos because the divine power that is present in all living things and accounts for their movement, structure and meaning, is present in him in such a way that makes him the ideal Christ. The ideal Christ does not coincide with the historical Jesus. It is the Logos that saves and this Logos is universally reflected in all religions. Jesus bears witness to this Logos. We can even speak of an incarnation, but not in a categorically unique way. (85f)

Christianity lives and moves and has its being within the universal stream of religion. Other religions are at best a preparation for the Gospel. "Gustaf Wingren puts it: That everyone should be saved is not an assertion that has any biblical support. But it is something one can certainly pray for..." (Br 80)

Religious pluralism places God and not Christ at the centre of the universe of faiths. This theocentric view sees Christ as an obstacle to meaningful dialogue with other religions. "Christ divides, God unites! So Christians are urged to speak more of God, less of Christ..." (Br 21). There is a place for Jesus, not as the incarnation of God but as the incarnation of theocentric piety and fidelity. There is no Good Friday and no Easter Sunday. The God of glory in the theocentric view of Calvin's American heirs would not assume the form of a crucified Jew from Nazareth. Once again a philosophical presupposition, in this case the maxim that the finite cannot encompass the infinite (*finitum non capax infiniti*) prevents one from seeing the Christ of Scriptures, true God and true man. (Br 20f)

The christological predicament is reflected most frequently in controversy over the Lord's Supper. Arius (against whose teachings the Nicene Creed was formulated) asked: How can the Logos

be God, since he sleeps like a man, and weeps and suffers?" The Calvinist question is similar: "How can the Logos, being infinite, be limited by its union with the flesh?" (Br 27)

Boldness is an integral part of the message and mission entrusted to us. What God has entrusted to us can turn the world upside down and our thinking inside out.

In all boldness we proclaim a radical revelation because "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself" We cannot do it since "all have sinned..." (R 3:23) so he did it for us (J 3:16)

- Compare this with competing messages:

- 1) The New Age is Lying to You (Eldon Winkler, CPH)
- 2) Feminism's hidden agenda (from Bill Stanfel's paper, p.4):

Naomi Goldenberg, a psychologist of religion, declares that God is going to change--women are going to bring an end to God. If enough women claimed to represent His authority in the pulpit and synagogue, God would begin to look like His female officials. Naturally, they could not use the Bible since it would no longer be found relevant, let alone inspiring. New gods will be born. Even though, in her view, the old religious labels like Christian or Jew may remain, many feminists speak of building new religions in the future. Goldenberg actually admits to finding this line of thought satisfying. She liked the idea of being part of a movement that would "watch Him go." She also realizes that these changes are not minor alterations in Jewish and Christian doctrine. These are major departures with major impact. The feminist movement in Western culture is engaged in the execution of Christ and Yahweh, yet few now working for sexual equality grasp the extent of their heresy.

- 3) The New Tolerance is intolerant

A review of The New Tolerance by Josh McDowell and Bob Hostetler (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House, 1998) indicates that "tolerance" no longer means what it used to and any perception of intolerance may bring criticism, court cases or job dismissal.

- a. The trouble with "tolerance"

The same words no longer mean the same thing:

--Loving and accepting people the way they are means each has the right to live and believe as he pleases.

--All beliefs are equal and all truth is relative. We decide our own personal right and wrong and

leave everyone else alone.

--To be truly tolerant you must give your approval, endorsement and sincere support to all beliefs and behaviours. Anything less is bigotry.

--Multicultural education means helping students to respect and accept the values, beliefs and attitudes of other people, no matter what they are.

The new ethic requires approval, endorsement and full participation in the others' attitudes and activities. (ex. "gay day" p. 27)

b. There is no room for Christianity; it is perceived as intolerant.

A nine-year old's response to "What do you do when you are afraid?" was "pray." This was deemed inappropriate (p.32).

Since "Who I am = What I do" there is no room for "Love the sinner but hate the sin." If you do not approve of a person's lifestyle, you do not love the person. No negative judgments about other points of view are permitted.

Tolerance requires the rejection of all dogmatism and absolutism.

--the truth claims and commands of the Bible are too narrow

--Jesus's claim to be "the way, the truth, and the life" and "No one comes to the Father except through me" (J 14:6) is intolerably narrow and exclusionary.

--any teaching on "sin" (or sins) is an intolerable assertion because it suggests that all beliefs, behaviours and lifestyles are not equal.

--all mission activity, even approaching someone with the Gospel is unacceptable, even evil, because it implies another's beliefs are inferior to your own.

Therefore: There is no true God. There are no true standards.

c. Implications (p. 53ff).

--Mentioning the name of Jesus in a graduation prayer could get you six-months in jail.

--Opinions = truths

--Violence may be a virtue

--Justice is established by volume, not values

--The only conviction is: "there is no truth worth defending."

--Faith is private; keep it out of public view.

--One person can obstruct the rights of the majority (p.61).

--Any advocacy for human rights in another culture are absurd.

--Emotion displaces reason. Style displaces substance.

--Nature is equal. There is no basis for saying that human beings are any more important than endangered insects or mountain forests.

--Extremes become the rule, not the exception.

d. Tactics of tolerance

--it is possible to believe impossibilities (p. 71)

--non-agreement is phobia

--nonconformity is hate

--conviction is fanaticism

--creeds are discriminatory

--selective segregation is justice

--no right to think or proclaim something as "true"

e. A Christian response

--typical responses don't work

--compromise is inappropriate

--it is essential to distinguish between the person and what he does

Love as Christ loved you:

--each is created in the image of God

--each is one for whom Christ died

4) Islam is not innocuous

Please remember that "there is no other gospel"

- Gal 1:8 "even if an angel from heaven..." (Moran of Mormons) cf 2 Cor 11:4

- 2 Cor 1:20 "For no matter how many promises God has made, they are 'Yes' in Christ"

Absoluteness is a predicate of Christianity. Both the Old and the New Testament assert this. The Israelites were told: "So acknowledge today and take to heart that the lord is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is no other" (Deut 4:39). Acts 4:12 states: "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved."

When Martin Luther called Christianity the true and only religion, he was merely passing on what virtually all Christians took for granted. Jesus himself made such an absolute claim: "I am the way, and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (J 14:6). (Brt 29)

The idea of Christianity as the absolute religion was challenged by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing in his famous fable of the three rings. It goes like this: In ancient times it was the custom for the father to give his favourite son a ring for his inheritance. The ring possessed a kind of magic power to make the one who owned it loved by God and humanity. A certain father has three sons whom he loves equally. In order to hurt none of them he has two perfect imitations of the true ring made. Before the father dies he gives each son his blessing along with one of the rings.

Each of the three sons thinks he has the true ring and considers the others false. The three sons go to the wise judge Nathan, who becomes the spokesman for the superior counsel of Lessing himself and the new philosophy of the Enlightenment. All three rings may be false, but there is no way to tell; so Nathan offers this wise counsel: "Let each think his own is without doubt the real ring and trust that, in the long run, in a thousand thousand years, it will establish itself by the "proof of the spirit and power." Meanwhile, each son should show forth "gentleness, a heart-felt tolerance, good works and deep submission to God's will." (Brt 30)

Lessing would argue that all religions may be equally true and equally false, but the proof lies millions of years away. Anyway the point of religion is to inculcate piety and morality, which all religions are able to do for their adherents. We can substantiate no claims about the absoluteness of Christianity and its superiority to other religions because: "Accidental historical truths can never become proofs for necessary truths of reason." In the end Lessing can only offer one hope, acquired only through an experience of the heart. (Brt 30) Hegel went on to propose with his dialectic approach that the absolute has a history and that true identity of the absolute is discovered through varying dynamic elements of history. The nineteenth century produced conflicting responses to the question of absolute religion. Orthodox supranaturalism secured its position with the doctrine of the inspiration and infallibility of Scripture. The absolute is thus defined by dogma and need not be tested by any historical critical method. Neo-Pietism postulated an immediate relation to the absolute by personal religious experience. The relativities of history neither help nor hinder such subjective inwardness. A third position taken was that of theological liberalism which intended to give history its full due and to live with the implications. The result was a historicism that relativized all religions, including Christianity. (Brt 31)

That there can be anything true and absolute seems out of step with today's post-modern pluralism. Allan Bloom, in his *The Closing of the American Mind*, laments that "There is one thing a professor can be absolutely certain of: almost every student entering the university believes, or says he believes that truth is relative.... The relativity of truth is not a theoretical insight but a moral postulate, the condition of a free society, or so they see it. Relativism is necessary to openness, and this is the virtue... (Brt 17-18). Theologians have generally responded in one of three ways: 1) A focus on identity calls for faithfulness to Scripture as revelation and authority, to traditional creeds, dogmas and practices. 2) Those concerned about intelligibility reassess the claims of Christianity and try to fit their concept of it into the contemporary paradigm of values and beliefs, even though they disagree among

themselves. 3) The third type of theology is chiefly concerned with social applicability. Here we find various liberationist proposals that embrace an assortment of special-interest groups: black, feminist, Third World politics, gay and lesbian activists. (Brt 18f). Sharon D. Welch represents the feminist theology of liberation when she writes that "The fundamental crisis in Christian theology concerns the reality referent...Paul, Aquinas, Luther and Tillich assume that faith refers to something real, an experience of ultimacy that is in some way actual and present, an ultimacy that limits and shapes the nature of theological inquiry. We modern academic theologians no longer have the surety of such a referent." Her critique of the more usual types of liberation theology addresses their unquestioned assumption about the reality of God...In Welch's theology the referent is not God but liberating praxis, not the noun but the verb, with human beings the subject of the acting: "That is the language here is true not because it corresponds with something in the divine nature but because it leads to actual liberation in history" (Brt 23)

We have more than enough proofs for the truth of Christianity (McDowell, Chapman, F. Schaeffer, C.S. Lewis, Paul Maier)

Paul Little points out in Know Why you believe that as Paul made clear to the Romans, people have more than enough knowledge from creation to know that there is a God (R 1:20), but they rebelled against him, "they exchanged the truth about God for a lie" (1:25) and "*did not see fit to acknowledge God*" (1:28). **The moral issue always overshadows the intellectual issue in Christianity. It is not that man cannot believe--it is that he will not believe.** Jesus pointed the Pharisees to this as the root of the problem: "You refuse to come to me" (J 5:40). He makes it clear that moral commitment resolves the intellectual problems: "*If any man's will is to do his will, he shall know whether this teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority*" (J 7:17). Few are as honest as the student who agreed that despite receiving satisfactory answers to all of his questions he would not become a Christians because, he explained, "Frankly, it would mess up the way I am living."

The question is often asked, "If Christianity is rational and true, why is it that most educated people do not believe it?" The answer is simple. They do not believe it for the same very same reason that most uneducated people do not believe it. They do not want to believe it. It is not a matter of brain power, for there are outstanding Christians in every field of the arts and sciences. It is primarily a matter of the will. (4)

What are the implications of Little's observations (or as we love to say, What does this mean?): satisfied customers are more convincing than satisfactory answers.

At a Seminary we sometimes become convinced that ordinary people (the kind God must really love because he made so many of them, Robert Preus once observed) are interested in intellectual theology. In reality, the people in the pews--as most of you here already know--are much more interested in a theology that can be seen, one that is observed by our living it. (Cf. Lessons from a tavern and Lucy cartoons)

On the other hand, boldness without theological training is dangerous. The world has too often witnessed the tragedy that takes place when someone forceful, dynamic, personable and charismatic misguides.

Cross-cultural communication brings its own natural barriers. (In essence we are all in cross-cultural ministry because everyone we encounter lives and moves in a sub-culture. That is why, for example, some commercials make absolutely no sense to baby-boomers; they are not the target audience. Or, for the same reason, we rarely understand what our children are talking about and how little they seem to care for values that were always so important for us, or why aging parents annoy us by being preoccupied with things we find unimportant, or why men rarely grasp what it is really like to live in the emotionally charged atmosphere of the average female mind, or why musicians feel frustrated that money can always be found for sports, or sports programmes in schools, but fine arts, especially music, is the first thing cut, etc. etc. A class-mate of mine grew up on the back-stretch and travelled with the annual migration from race track to race track across the US. Somewhere along the line he decided to enter the ministry and to establish a ministry there. That is a sub-culture you and I cannot easily enter; we have neither acquaintances nor familiarity with the challenges. Little did I realize thirty years ago when I decided to study in Germany just to increase my knowledge of the language for theological studies and have an interesting learning experience that this would be the beginning of an ongoing ministry in bi-lingual congregations and an abiding concern for what is going on in European Christianity. Dr. Len Harms made the same observation about entering another culture that Helmut Thielicke did about studying theology: Be advised, once you start either, you will never be the same again. Your world view, and your perception of values, will change. So look around you. No doubt you will quickly discover we are constantly attempting to cross cultural, or sub-cultural, barriers. Perhaps a simple solution is to stop thinking we live in a Christian country and everyone knows where the church is should this wish to come. This is what I call the-church-at-the-bottom-of-the-hill approach in evangelism. It should be no surprise that this method is no more successful than it would be for a fruit farmer who decided to erect his barn at the bottom of the hill so that the fruit would in its own good time fall off

the tress and roll into the barn!

Conclusion: Although much of Christian theology today seems to be teetering on the brink of suicidal confusion, we may proclaim the Gospel **with great boldness..that all may know His name**. As contemporary heirs of the Reformation we want to make clear what we believe about the uniqueness and universality of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We are Christian believers. We do not enter the dialogue with other religions with empty hearts and vacant minds. We stand in the Lutheran confessional tradition--heirs of a bold mandate--and we hold certain truths to be solidly based on divine revelation attested by Holy Scripture. All Christians who are faithful to God's revelation in Christ will subscribe to these four dogmatic propositions:

- 1) Jesus Christ is the personal event in whom God's final revelation has already occurred, so that we do not "wait for another" (Matt 11:3).
- 2) Faith in Jesus as the Christ means real personal participation in God's eschatological salvation.
- 3) The church is the community of believers who must proclaim Jesus of Nazareth as the sole Saviour of humankind until God's kingdom arrives in its final glory.
- 4) God's will is that all shall be saved ("and come unto a knowledge of the truth" - 1 Tim 2:4) and that the whole creation, now in a struggle for life, will at last reach its fulfilling future in the reign of God through Christ Jesus our Lord. (Brt 2-3)

III. A bold membership

Can Lutherans be bold? You bet. Attend any annual voters' meeting if you require proof. But what about other kinds of boldness? We do not need another programme but a people passionate about the Christ and about all those who do not yet know about him that they "may know His name."

- A. through Word and Sacrament God is in our midst
 - a foretaste of heaven (Rev. 20, Eph 1:14 - "a sample")
 - "taste and see that the Lord is good"
 - "where two or three are gathered in my name..."
 - Gottesdienst - God serves us
- B. How can we keep silent?
 - being German the right way (yes, there is such a thing): not fanatical but faithful

- 2 Peter 3:15

Conclusion: If lack of boldness stems from insecurity, than we of all people on this planet have no excuse, because:

- We have the prophetic word made more sure (2 Peter 1:19)
- We are "more than conquerors through him who loved us" (Rom. 8)

A conquest is a one-time event and a conqueror is someone who once fought and won some contest or struggle. We Christians are more than conquerors: we are repeatedly and continually achieving victory through Him who once became a man, once suffered, once died, and who rose again from the dead, just once--but that once was sufficient to win us a victory for all time and for eternity.

When we believe in the Lord our God we are established forever. Jesus proclaimed this in word (John 11:25-26) and in deed (Matt 28:1-7).

Jesus's resurrection from the dead is a preview of the life and victory that will be ours through faith. Our victory, like Jesus's kingdom is "not of this world." Our victory is that we are delivered from the world and all its corrupting influences, all its pains and problems. Our victory is that we are delivered from the flesh, that is from our own lusts and appetites and selfish desires and ambitions. Our victory is that we are delivered from the curse of the law, which only can judge and condemn us. Our victory is that we are delivered from the power of the devil; he can still influence us but he cannot conquer us because he himself has already been conquered by Christ. Being freed from the curse of sin and death we stand free, in faith, to serve our God.

To be "in mission" may mean reshaping the church. Has this been done before? "Yes". Read Acts again. The Apostles were to devote themselves to unique tasks: prayer and the word (Lutheran apostles might have insisted that the Holy Spirit say "Word and Sacrament ministry" but He did not). The point really is to let spiritual leaders focus on spiritual things and minister to spiritual needs. This will involve interaction with members because we are all spiritual beings with spiritual needs. This will involve more time talking about the promises, which frequently needs to take place away from the pulpit and the pews, and less time simply on the premises, running bulletins, sharpening pencils, etc.

We may learn lessons for our North American outreach from the mission field. In his Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues (p. 173-175) Paul Hiebert illustrates the importance of leadership styles with the difference between the banyan and the banana tree.

"Nothing grows under a banyan tree." This South Indian proverb speaks of leadership styles. The banyan is a great tree. It spreads its branches, drops air-roots, develops secondary trunks and covers the land. A full-grown banyan may cover over an acre. Birds, animals, and humans find shelter under its shade. But nothing grows under its dense foliage, and when it dies, the ground beneath it lies barren and scorched.

The banana tree is the opposite. Six months after it sprouts, small shoots appear around it. At twelve months a second circle of shoots appears

beside the first, which are now six months old. At eighteen months the main trunk bears bananas, which nourish birds, animals, and humans, and then it dies. But the offspring are now full grown, and in six months they too bear fruit and die. The cycles continue unbroken as new sprouts emerge every six months, grow, give birth to more sprouts, bear fruit and die.

Many leaders are like banyan trees. They have great ministries, but when they pass from the scene, there are no leaders to step into their shoes because they have trained followers, not leaders. It is gratifying to train followers. They are an appreciative audience who make us feel important. They imitate our ways. They do not challenge our thinking or go beyond our teaching. It is easy to train followers. We decide what they should learn and how they should learn it. We encourage them to raise questions and we give the answers. We teach them to follow and to guess our minds.

There is an immediate success in training followers. We can mobilize many to build our program. This approach is also efficient. It takes time to train leaders, and to allow them to learn by making mistakes. But the success of follower development is short-range--when we depart, we leave sheep but no shepherds.

As husbands or wives, and as parents, it is easy to treat spouses and children as followers--to demand that they obey us, and think and behave as we do. As ministers it is easy to train our parishioners to be followers--to make them dependent upon professional leadership to carry out the ministries of the church. As missionaries it is easy to treat native converts as followers. We need not take the chance of entrusting them with authority as long as we are around, and we can make certain they carry on the work in the same ways we do. Such a leadership style creates dependent people and kills leadership potential. Such spouses, children, parishioners and natives never grow up. To do so they must rebel against us.

Training leaders is less rewarding for our egos. We must teach people to think and decide on their own, to challenge our beliefs, and to argue with our decisions. When they take over they will go beyond us, and take credit for their own growth and accomplishments.

Training leaders is more difficult. We must value their input and encourage a critique of what we say. We must grade them, not on how much they

agree with us, but on how well they think. We do not ask them to guess our minds, and we avoid putting them down, even when their initial responses are naive and simplistic. We focus on problems they must solve, rather than on fixed bodies of information.

Training leaders is less efficient in the short run because it takes time and effort that could be spent on completing more immediate tasks. Decisions must be negotiated, plans constantly changed, and schedules and goals adjusted. But it is more efficient in the long run. Our reward comes when we find ourselves surrounded by young leaders who are discovering their own new abilities, assuming new responsibilities, and daring to take over and go beyond where we have reached.

Spouses who encourage their husbands or wives to be leaders develop family styles of mutual submission. Parents who build their children as leaders begin early to teach them to think; they relate to their children as to young adults. Pastors who teach their laity to be leaders encourage Bible studies and lay initiatives in the ministries of the church. Missionaries who train nationals as

leaders give them responsibilities early and support their decision. All must allow budding leaders the greatest privilege they allow themselves, the right to make mistakes.

Training leaders, however, is not enough. Too often we train leaders who, in turn, train followers. We teach them to think ideas, but not to build humans. They learn to use people to build programs, not programs to build people.

It is hardest of all to help young leaders to catch the vision of training leaders and to pass that vision on, but this is essential for a successful family, church, and mission.

Paul writes, "And the things that you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others" (2 Tim. 2:2)

As we remember our bold mission, based on our bold mandate, we as bold members may also say with the inspired writer: *In Christ we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of Him* (Eph 3:12, cf. 1 John 4:17, Heb 10:19)