

A Lutheran Theology of Evangelism, Some Theses

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It a common misconception that "Lutherans don't do Evangelism". This is not true. What is true is that when Lutheran go about the business of evangelism, they often abandon their Lutheran doctrine. These theses are an attempt to begin with our Lutheran theology and paint a picture of what Evangelism is and is not. Your feed back is welcome. -*Pastor WolfmueLLer*

1. The Scriptures rightly understood give all glory to God and all comfort to terrified consciences. False doctrine does the opposite, either taking glory from God or comfort from the conscience, or both.
2. Natural man is blind, dead, and an enemy of God (Anthropology, Original Sin), and therefore cannot cooperate with God in conversion. It must be stated plainly that the will of man plays no part in conversion. Therefore all attempts to induce an emotional response for God (and other such revival shenanigans) will be carefully avoided. Never would an unbeliever be told that he must "accept Jesus" or "receive Him" or "open his heart" or "pray a prayer." Such things are impossible. Any discussion of evangelism that speaks or implies man's cooperation takes glory from God and robs consciences of comfort.
3. Moreover, natural man is hostile to God (Original Sin again). Therefore the Lutheran church expects persecution of the Lord's Word and His people.
4. God alone redeems, justifies and converts sinful man (Monergism). Because conversion is God's work, we should pay attention to how He does it (rather than making stuff up).
5. The Holy Spirit creates faith (Sanctification in the broad sense, the Third Article of the Creed). The Lutheran Church therefore lives in the confidence of faith, knowing that the coming of the Lord's kingdom depends not on her own efforts, but on the free work of the Holy Spirit. The evangelism efforts of the Lord's church begin with prayer to God who desires all to be saved, and trusts that He hears and answers this prayer.
6. And more, the Holy Spirit creates faith "when and where it pleases Him", not when it pleases us. This means, among other things, that it is impossible to judge mission faithfulness through numbers.
7. The Holy Spirit uses means to convert man (what we often call "the means of grace", but what our confessions call "the means of the Spirit"). The means of the Spirit is the word of God, through which He shows our sin (Law) and promises forgiveness (Gospel). There are no other means of the Spirit, there are therefore no other means of evangelism.
8. Correspondingly, repentance embraces two parts: contrition and faith. Both contrition and faith are the works of the Holy Spirit, meaning that man is passive in this work of the Holy Spirit. ("Repent" is a command kept only by the work of the Holy Spirit.) The distinction between law and Gospel is at the heart of everything the church does, says, etc. We can judge mission faithfulness on the Gospel rightly preached and the sacrament rightly administered. Any wrongly divided law and Gospel is not properly the work of Evangelism.
9. Furthermore, the proper distinction between law and Gospel is a personal and individual distinction. As Luther taught us, the Law is for the proud and puffed-up, the Gospel for the despairing. This means that evangelism cannot be programmatic or scripted, but that the conversation between the church and the unbeliever will include listening and an attempt to discern the condition of the person to apply the proper word of God at the proper time.
10. Even furthermore, this means that "Evangelism Training" will be nothing more than continued study and meditation on the proper distinction between law and Gospel.

11. The Word of God, being the means of the Holy Spirit in creating faith in the heart of sinful man, is effective. It is a false and dangerous tendency to treat the Word of God as mere information that only has benefit when accepted and acted upon (as is the case with American Evangelicalism). The Gospel is the authoritative declaration of sins forgiven (Absolution). In fact, the central act of Evangelism is not asking the unbeliever to come to Jesus, but rather, in the name of Jesus, forgiving their sins. Evangelism is the Church speaking the Absolution to the World.
12. Through the Sacraments, as through the Word, the Holy Spirit creates and sustains faith. The Lutheran Church therefore recognizes the central role of baptism in the evangelism of the world. It is impossible to talk about evangelism Biblically without speaking about the Lord's gift of baptism.
13. The means of grace are resistible. Therefore the Church expects rejection. Furthermore, the Lutheran church resists the temptation to look for "more efficient means" of evangelism, as if we could find something less resistible than the divinely appointed means.
14. A Christian is still a sinner in need of the Lord's mercy. Therefore the church, knowing her own sin and the superabundant grace of God, gladly welcomes sinners into her midst to hear of the Lord's love and mercy. A church/congregation without this hospitality has lost her first love.