

**SCRIPTURAL
MISSION WORK IN
THESE LAST
DAYS - THE
CHRISTIAN'S DUTY
AND PRIVILEGE**

Essay Submitted by Pastor Gavin L Winter

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INTRODUCTION

In an Art Gallery an excellent painting was displayed which symbolizes the Christian. It shows a large cross embedded in a rocky outcrop. Completely surrounding the rocks is a roaring, raging sea. Clutching to this cross, clinging to safety, is a young girl, clothed in pure white. Though the winds roar, the lightning flashes, and the waves pound, the expression on her face shows not a trace of fear or distress. She is calm and at peace.

Yet the picture shows more. While she clings with one arm to the cross, her other arm extends to the foot of the cross where a frail boat has been dashed to pieces by the raging sea. In the midst of the wreckage, a terrified person lifts her face up from the icy waters to the young girl clinging to the cross. The young girl at the cross lifts the other to safety.

What a beautiful picture this is of the true child of God. Having been drawn to safety, and clinging to the cross of Christ in true faith, he does his utmost to rescue others from eternal condemnation by bringing to them the message of the Saviour which draws them to the safety of the cross. With his heart filled with gratitude to his Redeemer, he eagerly places before others the glorious news of Christ, so that others may share in the eternal joys the Lord has prepared for them.

This then, is the true **AIM** of all Scriptural Mission Work, to rescue lost and condemned sinners from Satan's stranglehold and hell's destruction, and to bring them into the safety of the Kingdom of God by the correct preaching of the Word. This was the reason why God sent His only-begotten Son into the world, "to seek and to save the lost" (Luke 19:10). This was the reason why Jesus completed His Work of Redemption, "that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). This was the work of both the prophets of the Old Testament and the Apostles of the New Testament, to reap for the Lord the harvest in His field. This is the duty of all true Christians everywhere, that through the preaching of the Water of Life, the spiritual thirst of hungry souls can be quenched.

But what strange ideas we see in the Visible Church today about "Mission Work." "We must do more mission work", is the great cry of many; but their aims and methods are not those the Lord told us in the Bible. Some desire to gain members for the church through any means possible; others use gimmicks and schemes to entice people into the church. Some think mission work is to improve man's earthly lot; others use compulsion and trickery to gain converts for their beliefs. Using these means, the devil has led many away from Christ and deeper into their sin and misery towards eternal condemnation. How vital it is that we are informed as to the true Scriptural approach to Mission Work.

In view of the fact that we are living in the Last Days, when the Lord is gathering the last of His Elect into the fold, the Christian has an important job to do in assisting the Lord in spreading the message of God's cure for man's spiritual ills. It is therefore not only timely but also of great value for our own faith that we study the topic

SCRIPTURAL MISSION WORK IN THESE LAST DAYS - THE CHRISTIAN'S DUTY AND PRIVILEGE

We shall see three Vital Points

- I. WHAT SCRIPTURAL MISSION WORK INVOLVES;
- II. WHY ALL TRUE CHRISTIANS ARE OBLIGATED TO PERFORM MISSION WORK;
- III. HOW CHRISTIAN MISSION WORK SHOULD TAKE PLACE.

I.

Let us see firstly **WHAT SCRIPTURAL MISSION WORK INVOLVES.**

FALSE IDEAS ABOUT MISSION WORK

A Christian teacher once wrote:

"As a pirate's chief occupation consists in searching for ships that are laden with precious cargo, so Satan's, the hellish pirate's, chief purpose is to pursue Christians because of the precious treasures of their faith." (The Concordia Pulpit, 1936, p.90).

Since the Christian, through true Mission Work, carries the precious jewels of the Crown of the Gospel to lost and condemned souls, Satan works his hardest to destroy the effect of God's Word by corrupting the aims and methods of Mission Work of many churches today.

Mission work, as many Modern Churches teach, does **not consist** in trying to improve the living standards of the poor in this world; in working for peace; or in every possible way trying to make this world a better place in which to live. This has been called **CUPBOARD CHRISTIANITY**, trying to make followers for Christ and members for the church by gifts of food and money. For example, an article occurred in The Lutheran Witness concerning "mission work in Nigeria":

"Not a word did it contain about bringing the saving Word of God to the spiritually dead or starving natives of that country, but rather a detailed presentation of how new vaccines are provided for the people by the 'missionaries' and the church they represent. And this amongst a people who sorely and mainly is in need of owning and enjoying the benefits of Christ's work of redemption." (The Concordia Lutheran, 1985, pp.70-71).

Nor does it consist in simply gaining a large number for the church, in making the church grow and expand. Many ministers today pride themselves in having doubled or trebled the size of their congregations in a few years and count this as a sign of "success". Others think that to have to tear down their old church and build a new and bigger one is a clear sign that their work has God's blessing. Little thought is given to whether those souls are being properly provided for by God's Word.

Others speak a lot about "Bringing the Gospel" to the unconverted. But their gospel is not the true Gospel of the Scriptures. Yes, much is said of Jesus, His life and His suffering and death; often passages of the Scriptures are cited. But this is the social gospel; which says, "Lead a good life like Jesus did and you will get to heaven." Others still may preach the Gospel very sweetly, but it has not been preceded by the **LAW**, the hearers have not as yet been convicted of their sin. Their hearts have not as yet felt the heavy hammer of the Law, and so see no real need for a Saviour. The Gospel is looked on as an **OPEN CHEQUE** to go and sin as much as they please.

Finally, Mission Work does not consist in preaching the **LAW ALONE**. The Law convicts of sin, but it does not preach any sweet message of forgiveness. Therefore, while people may change their lives outwardly because of the Law's threats, there is no change inwardly in their hearts; they are not converted. For some the Law drives them to despair; others think, "Since I can't keep the Law perfectly, I will live as I please."

WHAT IS MISSION WORK?

The word **MISSION** comes from a Latin word which means "to send". God sent His Son into the world on a mission, to **redeem all lost and condemned mankind**. But as the **Catechism** says:

"If we had never been told of these treasures and if they were not given to us, they would profit us nothing, and Christ would have died in vain." (Lutheran Catechism, Drewes, p.145).

This then is the important **work of the Holy Ghost**, to bring faith in the forgiveness of sin, life and salvation into the hearts of sinners, and to keep them in faith in Christ as their Saviour. In order that the Holy Ghost may perform this work, Christ now sends His followers on a **MISSION, to let others know of His completed work of Redemption by proclaiming Christ's Word.**

Thus, **Jesus** Himself teaches us, "As My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you" (John 20:21). And again, "Go ye therefore, and teach (Greek: make disciples of) all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe (Greek: keep strictly) all things whatsoever I have commanded you", (Matt. 28:19-20). The Apostle Paul heard from the Lord's lips what true Mission work is when Christ appeared to him on the road to Damascus and explained his job, "To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive the forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in Me." (Acts 26:18).

WHAT IS THE ONLY TOOL OF MISSION WORK?

With the many advances in Science and education today, many think that the church must also change with the times and no longer needs the methods and teachings of the past. But though the world has changed, the hearts of men by nature have remained the same - sinful and at enmity with God, (Rom. 8:7). Therefore the tool that must be used is that age-old **Message of the Scriptures**, the Word of God. The only means to bring the stubborn sinner back to God is by heeding the words of Scripture: "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the **Word of God**" (Rom. 10:17). The only way that sinful hearts may be changed to hearts filled with love to the Saviour is through Isaiah's call: "To the Law and to the Testimony" (Isaiah 8:20). Whoever neglects or ignores this Water of Life will not only convert no one, but is acting in direct disobedience to their Lord and Saviour.

POWER IN THE WORD

The Apostle Paul writes: "For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ: for it is the **power of God** unto salvation to everyone that believeth" (Rom. 1:16). Yes, wherever the Word of God is read, taught or explained, there the Holy Ghost is also working through that Word in the hearts of the hearers. It is able to convict the most stubborn sinner of his wrong-doing; it is able to bring to his knees the worst criminal steeped in sin. This is the working of the doctrine of the **LAW**. The power of the Holy Ghost is also connected with the **GOSPEL**. This message is able to give comfort to the soul burdened with the greatest of guilt; it is able to cheer the most discouraged heart saddened by the trials and tribulations of this world.

Writes Dr. Luther:

"You must always have the Word of God in your heart, on your lips and in your ears. Where the heart is idle and the Word does not ring out, the devil breaks in and has done damage before we are aware of it. On the other hand, such is the power of the Word if it is seriously contemplated, heard, and used that it is never without fruit. It always awakens new understanding, pleasure, and devotion and purifies the heart and thoughts. For these are not inert or dead but active and living words." (What Luther Says, III, p.1,467).

Concerning the power of the Word, the Lord says: "For the Word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit and of the joints and marrow and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Heb. 10:12). So when the Christian preaches or speaks the Word of God, let him not think that he is

using a dead message which can only have effect through his own speaking abilities, but here is a living powerful Word which, if it is correctly taught, has the Holy Ghost connected with it.

LAW AND GOSPEL RIGHTLY DIVIDED

The two great doctrines of the Bible, **LAW AND GOSPEL** must be taught side by side if the sinner is to be converted to Christ. The apostle Paul commanded Timothy, "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, **rightly dividing the word of truth**" (2 Tim. 2:15). Just as the Jailer at Phillipi first needed to be convicted of his sin before he could appreciate the sweet message of the Gospel, so first the harsh message of **God's Law** is necessary that the sinner realize what a miserable lost and condemned sinner he is. It is pointless pointing a stubborn, hard-hearted sinner to the Gospel, when he genuinely thinks he has no need of a Saviour. But just as this same Jailer was cheered through the glorious message of his Saviour Jesus, so hearts which have been crushed through the Law must then be told of God's great love for mankind, in sending His Son into the world to redeem lost and condemned mankind.

The Christian should remember the importance of these two doctrines when he has opportunity to speak to others concerning the way to salvation.

SANCTIFICATION URGED

Once the sinner through the right application of Law and Gospel has been brought to the faith, the person must be urged to dedicate his life to the Saviour out of love and thankfulness for what the Saviour has done to redeem him. He must be told, "For you to live is Christ." For him to continue in his former sinful life, would be a clear indication that he is still an unbeliever, for the Bible says, "A faith without works is a dead faith." So he must be urged out of gratitude to Christ to endeavour to live his life in complete harmony with the will of Christ. He must then be exhorted to study the pure Word and cling to its teachings in order to remain true to Christ.

THE WORD UNCORRUPTED WITH FALSE DOCTRINE

The first and foremost job of a church body is to see that the Word of God is taught in its truth and purity. If a church is to bring people to the true faith and keep them with Christ their Saviour it is vital that God's Word be taught uncorrupted with error. It is only the pure Word of God that is able to convert the soul; false doctrine, if believed, always leads away from Christ, not to heaven but to hell. If a church tolerates error, then that error acts like a vicious poison, growing until eventually if it is not checked the whole body of doctrine will be corrupted. Also those who believe such error may endanger and eventually lose their faith. So insistent is the Lord that we keep His Word pure, that He says, "He that hath My Word, let him speak My Word faithfully" (Jer. 23:28). He also urges the true Christian Church, "If ye continue in My Word, then are ye My disciples indeed, and ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free." (John 8:31-32). All the commands against false doctrine and false prophets emphasize that we are to retain the pure Word.

Concerning this vital point, Pastor Bryce Winter states:

"For how can a church bring people to the one true faith by proclaiming error? Error is the devil's poison. How can a church keep its people in the one true faith by proclaiming the truth mingled with error? True, in those churches which still proclaim the essentials of the true Christianity but in which are also many dangerous soul-destroying errors, those who in true faith cling to the Saviour will be saved. In His grace and mercy God will see to it. But the larger number will eventually be lost because of the cancerous effects of error as it grows and eventually destroys the true faith. A church that emphasizes Mission Work at the expense of the pure Word, a Church that says: We won't argue and fight about the errors in our midst. As long as you believe in Christ, you can teach what you want to teach, as long as you don't try to stop me from teaching what I want to, such a

church when it comes to doing Mission Work is.... like an army that is attacking the enemy strongholds; but instead of using good, powerful ammunition (pure Word), they use.... ammunition that is of no use (error) so that the enemy kills them, instead of they the enemy. So if we are to do true Christian and Scriptural Mission Work in these last days, our first duty is clear: We must have and retain the Word in its truth and purity.

"It was only after Christ instructed His Apostles and disciples in the pure Word and gave them that special out-pouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost; it was only after they had the pure Word that they could go out and proclaim it. So true Christian and Scriptural Mission Work is the second task of the Church. It is the second task of our Federation: Pure Word then True Mission Work." (Mission Sermon presented at Toowoomba, 28.9.75).

THE WORD ALONE

Sadly there are many churches today who act as though God's Word is not good enough by itself to convert souls, but must be supplemented with devices of man's invention. Thus some use all manner of gimmicks to attract people into the church, including rock music, entertainment, drink and gambling. Others try to make the Word more popular by bringing it down to the level of the gutter, treating it with contempt, or making a joke of Biblical characters and sacred things. Still others think that it is the eloquence of the preacher, the enjoyment gained from the service or the outward impression made by the congregation that is able to convert the soul. Thus many services of many churches have deteriorated into a preaching of the social gospel, explanation of man's wisdom or an entertainment session designed to attract the church-goer back.

To this The Lutheran Witness replies:

"There is but one implement given by God into the hands of man, with which to convert the sinner, and teach him the way of salvation, and this is the **Word**. What the Word fails to accomplish, man, by whatsoever tricks and devices he may attempt it, will certainly fail in; and even what this Word shall accomplish, depends solely and entirely upon the good and gracious will of Him whose Spirit operates thereby. There was never yet a sinner converted to God except through the operation of the Spirit of God in the Word; nor then, except in consequence of the express decree and will of God that that particular conversion should be accomplished. The conversion of the sinner depends solely upon the gracious pleasure of God, who effects the same in His own good time; but always and only through the medium of the Word....

"If every Christian Missionary - and all ministers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ are such - would remember that in preaching the recorded Word, he is wielding a weapon in no degree less than the omnipotent Word of Creation, which by its 'Let there be', brought forth a universe out of nothing; if they would remember that the conversion of the sinner is accomplished by no less a power than the omnipotent power of God operating through the Word; yea, if that recorded Word, which is omnipotent, were proclaimed from as many pulpits as would be termed Christian, would not the very arches of heaven re-echo with angelic shouts of joy, at the conversion of the multitudes, for the Word never returns void." (The Lutheran Witness, 1896, p.170).

INSTRUCTION IN WORD IMPORTANT

How vital it is, as well, that those who have been brought to faith in Christ, be given a thorough instruction in the teachings of God's Word before they are accepted into membership. Since God's Word is the only means that can keep them with Christ, they must be solidly grounded in its vital truths in order to remain true to the Saviour and avoid the devil's clutches.

That church which allows Christians to become members with only little knowledge of the Christian Religion are ensuring their own downfall. This mistake was made by the Christian Church shortly after the end of the persecution. Many were allowed to become members with only a basic knowledge of the essentials of Christianity. Water was poured into wine. Sadly they brought with them many false teachings from their former lives. This was one of the contributing causes to the many battles that had to be fought against the errors of Arius and others. The devil finds an easy prey those who know little of the Scriptures, and finds their minds a playground for his evil work. It is absolutely necessary, if we, the ELCR, are to remain true to God's Word, that we keep up the solid instruction of the children and also adults in the Confirmation Class. Such adults should also give an indication of their knowledge before the elders of the congregation. They must be prepared to accept everything that God's Word teaches in doctrine and practice, and in the way we understand it. If this is done before membership, we are assured, as far as we can judge, that they are united with us in God's Word.

What a sad mistake is made by many who put a great emphasis on Mission Work, and even lead many to God's Word, but then either allow them to go back to a false teaching church where they quickly are led away from the Word, or do not give them a solid basis in the Scriptures and find that they soon drift back to their former ways.

Let us never make this mistake, which could not only begin the downfall of our church, but also the loss of many souls from the Saviour.

II.

In the second place, let us ask ourselves the question: **WHY ARE ALL TRUE CHRISTIANS OBLIGATED TO PERFORM SCRIPTURAL MISSION WORK?**

To win souls for Christ is both the greatest privilege and the most sacred duty of every one who has himself found pardon in the blood of Christ his Saviour.

The Church of today sorely needs men and women who are not fearful to stand up and make public confession of their faith before others. So often Christians are tempted through embarrassment or plain lack of love to the Saviour to keep quiet concerning their beliefs and say nothing about the marvelous things their Lord has done for them. Just as a dog barks for joy when he meets his master after a long parting, so the Christian who really appreciates his Saviour's blessings cannot but desire to share with others the message of the Scriptures.

CHRIST'S COMMAND

The Christian is moved, first and foremost, by the **COMMAND** of his Lord. Concerning this, Jesus prayed to His heavenly Father: "As Thou hast sent Me into the world, even so have I also sent them (His disciples) into the world" (John 17:18). A little later we hear of this very command of Jesus to His disciples, but through the disciples to all Christians: "As My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you" (John 20:21). "Feed My lambs.... Feed My sheep." He commanded Peter (John 21:15, 17). The great Gospel Commission is recorded in Matt. 28:19: "Go ye therefore and teach (Greek: make disciples of) all nations." Again He commanded them: "Preach the Gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). Finally the Christian is told: "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: And be ready always to given an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear" (1 Peter 3:15).

These commands of the Lord refer to every Christian, everyone whom God has rescued from the power of Satan and brought into the Kingdom of God. Some foolishly think, "Mission Work is the Pastor's job. He should be doing everything. We can sit back and do nothing." What an unscriptural and sinful attitude this is. All believers without exception are to proclaim Christ's Word in the way Christ wants them to and as He gives them opportunity. Of course this Call is not the same as the Divine Call given by the congregation to its pastor, which has its particular

responsibilities. Since all Christians, according to Scripture are spiritual priests, they are all obligated to spread the pure Word. In Isaiah 40:9 we read: "O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength." The words "Zion" and "Jerusalem", refer to the Christian Church, the Invisible Church, composed only of true Christians. Therefore all believers have the sacred responsibility to bring the good tidings of salvation to men.

A FRUIT OF FAITH

True Christians are obligated to speak of God's Word because it is a **FRUIT OF THE FAITH** which is in their hearts. If we truly believe that Christ has rescued us from the power of sin, death and the devil, if we truly appreciate that He has saved us from such a terrible eternity in hell, Christians will see it as **their privilege and sacred duty to** proclaim the saving truths of Christ Crucified to other souls burdened down by their sin. Yes, we will dedicate our lives to do all that we can through confession and example to rescue lost and condemned sinners from the brink of their eternal doom. If we are not prepared to do this then the question must be asked, "Do we really have the true faith?" For the Bible says: "Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead" James 2:17.

Yes, our Saviour has done so much for us out of His great love for our souls. Should we not be moved with thankfulness to do our utmost to assist other souls on the pathway to eternal life? As Peter and John told the Sanhedrin when they were captured and brought before them for preaching God's Word: "We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20), that is, the things concerning Christ and His resurrection. Jesus said in Matt. 12:34: "Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaketh."

In fact after the Christian's conversion, his whole **PURPOSE IN LIFE** is to lead a Christian Life out of love to the Saviour. This is done in order that others may be led to the Saviour, and that the Christian may glorify and honour the Name of the Lord. So let us ask ourselves the question, "What am I doing to serve my Saviour, and to help my neighbour?" The greatest service a Christian can give to the Saviour is to cling to and confess the pure Word in order that souls, loved by the Saviour, may be saved. The greatest help the Christian can give to his neighbour is the spiritual assistance of the Holy Ghost through the Word bringing him to Christ.

That is why Dr. Luther says:

"The greatest work that follows from faith is that with my mouth I confess Christ, sealing that confession with my blood, and if it is so to be laying down my life for it. Not that God needs this work. But I am to do it that my faith may thereby be proved and known; that others may likewise be brought to believe."

And again:

"The noblest and greatest work and the most important service we can perform for God on earth is bringing other people, and especially those who are entrusted to us, to the knowledge of God by the Holy Gospel." (What Luther Says, II, p.958).

THE WORD - THE ONLY MEANS TO BE SAVED

God has provided that the only way for people to be saved is through **the Word**. He could have chosen some other way, but this is the means he has decided to use. The Lord therefore has commanded us to "preach the Gospel", in order that the Means of Grace may be brought to unconverted souls. If the elect are to be brought into Christ's fold and they are to believe in Christ, then it is vital that they **HEAR** the Word. For how can they be brought to faith in Christ, if they do not first hear the Word. "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." (Rom. 10:17). A person cannot be brought to faith outside of the Word of God, as St. Paul says: "How shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard?" (Rom. 10:14).

It is only when the last of God's elect are brought into the fold that the end will come. That is why the Lord says: "This Gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come", Matt. 24:14. But meanwhile, we are His instruments in bringing God's Word to others. Since Judgement Day is not far off, we should make haste, for God's return will soon bring true Mission Work to an end. Let us heed the words of the angels to the Disciples after they had witnessed the Ascension of their Saviour: "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven", (Acts 1:11). Therefore let us be like those of whom the Lord spoke when He said: "Blessed are those servants, whom the Lord when He cometh shall find watching" (Luke 12:37).

LOVE FOR SOULS

The Christian whose own precious soul has been brought back from the power of Satan through the blood of Jesus, has a **GREAT LOVE FOR OTHER SOULS, BY NATURE LOST AND CONDEMNED**. The Christian realizes that Christ is "the propitiation (Greek: ransom payment) for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:2). This will fill the Christian with a zeal and enthusiasm to let others know of the ransom payment that Christ has made for them.

Suppose we saw a blind man walking towards a cliff face, about to fall over the edge to his destruction; love for our neighbour's bodily welfare would compel us quickly to call out and warn him of the danger. There are many souls spiritually blind by nature, who are walking to the edge of life, about to fall over to their eternal destruction. How much more vital is it that Christians call out to them and warn them of the great spiritual dangers which they face, especially their eternal destruction, if they do not repent.

Dr. Luther says:

"It is a Christian heart's desire and delight to see many people come to the grace of God, and with them to render praise and thanksgiving to God. For such a desire mightily awakens the spirit of prayer and supplication. A Christian man cannot help feeling concern for all people and praying and sighing for them, that the Name of God be hallowed and His Kingdom come, and that the lies of Satan be everywhere put to shame and his rule over the poor souls be checked and destroyed." (The Australian Lutheran, 1921, p.151).

May we all be filled with such a love for our neighbour and a zeal for God's Word which moves us to do our utmost for the Lord while we have opportunity in this world. May our spirit be the same as that of **St. Paul** who said: "though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more.... I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some" (1 Cor. 9:19-22).

MISSION WORK IN THESE LAST DAYS DIFFICULT

But let us not foolishly imagine, as some falsely teach, that the whole world, or even the great majority will be converted. Rather, in these last days, exactly the opposite is true. Christ says: "Many be called, but few chosen", Matt. 20:16. And again, "when the Son of Man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8). In these last days, the elect consist of a few here and there. We cannot expect the great numbers to be converted to Christ as occurred on Pentecost Sunday. The spirit of the times today is one of apostasy from the Scriptures, rebellion against God's Word, lukewarmness and even hatred towards Christ. The evil of our present day is similar to that in the day of Noah which caused God to destroy the world through the flood. As a result, many would rather turn their backs on God than accept Him in true faith. Many prefer the ways of Satan than the ways of Christ. There are only relatively few who truly sorrow over their sins, open their hearts to their Lord and Saviour and accept Him in true faith.

Nevertheless the Christian would also be taking a sinful attitude by saying, "It is no point, then, doing any Mission Work because of the evil of the times. It will do no good and is a waste of time." He would be ignoring Christ's clear command, as well as placing His own salvation in jeopardy by disobeying Christ. We are simply to perform our duty of spreading God's Word, and leave it up to the Lord to bless our labours. As **St. Paul** pointed out: "I have planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase" (1 Cor. 3:6). Nor should we become discouraged if our humble efforts do not at first seem to bear fruit. Let us leave the matter in God's hands and trust simply in His promise: "My Word shall not return to Me void" (Isaiah 55:11).

EXAMPLES FROM THE BIBLE

The Christian has many wonderful and inspiring examples from the Bible of those who have witnessed concerning their Saviour.

The greatest of these was **Jesus Himself**, who went about preaching and teaching during His three year ministry. Of the **Shepherds**, we learn: "when they had seen it they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this Child" (Luke 2:17). Of **Anna**, the Bible says: "And she.... spake of Him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem" (Luke 2:38). **John the Baptist** was a great preacher of righteousness, who pointed to Christ and said: "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). **Philip** was filled with excitement when he said: "We have found him, of whom Moses in the Law, and the Prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of Joseph.... Come and see" (John 1:45-46). The **Samaritan Woman** was eager to tell others of Jesus: "Come see a Man, which told me all things that I ever did: is this not the Christ?" (John 4:29). **Peter and John** spent their whole lives as fishers of men, for they said: "We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20). Finally the great Apostle **Paul** summarized his message with the words: "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am the chief" (1 Tim. 1:15).

Let these faithful confessors of the Saviour encourage us to follow their examples in confessing God's Word.

How many examples there are from faithful Christians over the centuries. Let the following suffice.

A blind Indian who had become a Christian went to a missionary and said, "I want a bell, a hymnbook, and a God-book." When asked why he wished these things he said, "I live far away in a heathen village. If I can show the books to my friends, they will perhaps believe what I tell them they contain, and I will ring the bell for them to listen to me."

He went away, and after some time the message came from his village asking for a missionary. The blind Christian was dead, but as long as he lived - a year and a half from the time of his visit - he kept tally of the Sundays, and when they came he would go through the village, ringing his bell and singing his hymns and telling the story of Jesus as best he could. Some of his hearers believed, and they wished to know more of the Saviour. (The Australian Lutheran, 1919, p.80).

Finally we look at the third point of our study:

III.

HOW SHOULD CHRISTIAN MISSION WORK TAKE PLACE?

Here we will particularly examine the question as it relates to the ELCR.

PROSELYTIZING FORBIDDEN

By PROSELYTIZING is meant trying to win members from other Christian denominations. Those who are not just nominally but actual and active members of another congregation, be it heterodox or orthodox, are not to be targets for Christian Mission work.

This is commonly called sheep-stealing. Such persons are active members of another congregation and belong to the flock of another pastor. Since it is the responsibility of this man to care for the souls of his members, to actively seek to gain those souls for our own congregation, would involve us in what is forbidden by the Bible: "Let none of you suffer.... as a busybody in other men's matters." **Dr. Beck** translates this well, "one who meddles in the affairs of others" (1 Peter 4:15). Certainly, if members of a heterodox congregation come to us, take an interest in God's Word, ask questions and wish to learn more, and of their own accord express dissatisfaction with their present church and wish to take steps to learn more about and eventually join our church, there the matter is different. Here we are to answer the questions, welcome and encourage them and do everything possible to encourage them to cling to the teachings of God's Word. But we are not actively to solicit the sheep of another shepherd in order to gain numbers for our own church.

In Luther's lectures on Galatians, he said:

"It is not lawful for me to forsake my assigned station as a preacher or to go to another city where I have no call, and to preach there.... I have no right to do this even if I hear that false doctrine is being taught and that souls are being seduced and condemned which I could rescue from error and condemnation by my sound doctrine. But I should commit the matter to God, who in His time will find the opportunity to call ministers lawfully and to give the Word. For He is the Lord of the harvest who will send labourers into His harvest; our task is to pray. ('Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into His harvest field'. Matt. 9:38). (Taken from Proselytizing, Essay by Rev. Wayne L. Fischer).

No, the targets for true Christian Mission work are the unconverted, the unchurched (including those who are not active members of a church denomination, but are merely nominal members) and the heathen (including anyone who belongs to a non-Christian sect or religion). Also we as Christians have a responsibility to every fellow Christian who is about to slide back into ungodliness, every brother in the faith who has a problem which might weaken his faith. Here also is an opportunity for personal missionary service.

FOREIGN AND HOME MISSIONS

By a FOREIGN MISSION is meant the setting up of a Mission Station or the sending of Missionaries by a church body to other countries to proclaim the Word of God, the way to salvation to them. In the time of the Apostles, missionaries, e.g. St. Paul, were sent to many countries to proclaim the message of Christ. The Church after the time of the persecutions was able to send missionaries to many parts of Europe and Asia. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, missionaries were sent to the Americas, Africa and India. The Missouri Synod supported missionaries in China, India, Africa and South America. The former ELCA helped to support missionaries amongst the natives of Papua New Guinea and the Aborigines of Central Australia.

By HOME MISSIONS is meant the sending of mission pastors to establish mission congregations in our own country. Particularly in areas where the orthodox Lutheran Church is not represented, much good can be done for the Lord's cause.

Unfortunately, our ELCR does not have the resources, nor the finances, nor man power to send out specially trained missionaries overseas or to home mission fields. Possibly in the future with the training of more pastors, the appointment of a home missionary could become feasible.

But at the moment with our two pastors serving five congregations, particularly with the scattered nature of our church and much time spent in travelling, it is beyond our capability.

However, there are still many areas where we can serve the Lord by bringing God's Word to others.

IN THE HOME

Above all others, the sphere in which all Christians should be active in proclaiming the Word of God is their own HOME. Neglecting to do this he neglects the foremost duty of parenthood, commanded by the Lord in Eph. 6:4: "Ye fathers, bring up your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." The Saviour commanded that we feed His lambs, as well as His sheep, and the Apostles regularly in the Bible addressed themselves to the young. The members of our congregations too must be active, especially among the young.

Concerning this point, Pastor Bryce Winter states:

"There should be no home in the Federation where the **family devotion** is not held daily. It is a great shame if everything but God's Word is read in the Christian Home. Also, there should not be a home in our ELCR where personal private devotion is not held. How can you face these last days if you do not build up your Christian knowledge and faith? How can you overcome Satan's terrible temptations with as little of the Sword of the Spirit as possible? How can you fulfill God's command to 'Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature', if you are not thoroughly grounded in the pure Word? **As the home, so the church.** If each member in every home is thoroughly instructed in the pure Word, what a powerful, strong church we will have. True unity will reign. Satan will then find our Federation a **difficult nut to crack.**

"Let me, then, urge you all, especially you parents: See to it that the pure Word reigns supreme in your homes, that it is read, studied and learnt far above anything else. See to it that your children are instructed in it. They will need it. Don't let them down! If you want your children in heaven, do everything you can to see to it that in the home they are thoroughly grounded in the pure Word or they will be lost....

"So writes Dr. Luther:

'If the Christian Church is to be a power, it must certainly begin with the children; then it will become strong. I certainly should like to see parents instruct their children even while they are still in the cradle.'

"Again he directly states:

'Every father owes this to his family, that he rear and teach his children, or at least provide for such training; in his home the father is the pastor, or bishop of his household and he has the divine command to watch what they learn; for God holds him responsible for them!'

"Dear friends, if anyone should ask you, 'Where is the mission work of the ELCR?' do please answer among other things, 'First and foremost it is our children. They are the future of our Church. If our Church is to retain the pure Word, we must teach it to them. If they are to be saved in these Last Days, we cannot teach them enough of the Word'. Anyone who refuses to take the spiritual instruction of his children seriously is worse than a heathen." (Taken from a Mission Sermon, preached at Toowoomba, 28-9-75).

Also in our homes, at times, arise opportunities with visitors, relatives or friends who are not true Christians. Many would try to hide their Christianity, like the lumber worker who once

proudly boasted, "I have worked amongst my friends for years and not once did they suspect I was a Christian." This is not something to be proud about, but rather to be quite ashamed of.

Here one is reminded of the following story:

"Two men.... were partners in business. The one was a church member and the other was not. They had been in business together for many years. One Sunday morning they happened to meet. The church-member was on his way to church, and the other was on his way to the golf-links. Said Mr. Golfer to Mr. Church-member: 'John, when are you going to give up this hypocrisy?' 'Hypocrisy? What do you mean?' was the answer. 'Why', said Mr. Golfer, 'your whole church going is hypocrisy. According to your religion, I am on the way to hell. You know that, but all these years you never said a word about it. You never warned me. You never urged me to change my way of life. You just let me go. That is why I think you are a hypocrite. You don't believe your religion.'" (Concordia Theological Monthly, 1937, p.410).

Is this man a picture of our lives?

Rather let us heed the Scriptures, "Whosoever therefore shall confess Me before men, him will I confess also before My Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny Me before men, him will I also deny before My Father which is in heaven." (Matt. 10:32-33).

When others arrive at your homes don't forget to have your family devotions as you normally do. If they ask you about it, or otherwise the conversation is able to be directed onto spiritual things, you have nothing to be ashamed of. Feel happy to speak to them and show them the necessity of the true Christian religion; that they can die any time, that as many as die without Christ are lost and dead in their sins and will eternally perish. Point out to them that it is your wish too that they be saved. Speak of the Law, then the Gospel, tactfully but firmly.

One way suggested by Pastor Kleinig, is to ask them: "What is your idea of eternity?" Depending on their response, you can then ask, "What do you believe about it and how do you expect to get there?" This will give you an opportunity either to learn whether they know the way to salvation, or to explain to them what the Bible teaches if they do not.

You may be treated with mockery and scorn; they may laugh at you; you may even lose them as your friends. That is the cross that true Christians must patiently bear. But God's Word will not return void. Whether you succeed or not is not in your hands, but in the Lord's, who works in and through His Word. We are to leave the results up to Him. Even though we may not see any outward sign that they have listened to what was said, there is always the chance that they will remember our words later on at a crucial moment in their lives. Perhaps they may come up to us on Judgement Day and thank us for what we said, which led them to the Saviour and brought them to Christ's right hand.

Yes, let us heed the words of 1 Peter 2:12, "Having your conversation (Greek: manner of life) honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation."

FRIENDS AND ASSOCIATES AT WORK, LEISURE OR DAILY CONTACT

If a man is a genuine Christian, his greatest influence on others is where he lives and works. It is here that he spends most of his time. If his Christian life is a genuine one and he does not hide his love for God's Word, others will soon see that there is something different about him. There is nothing more tragic when a person says he is a Christian and speaks on all other matters, but is very reluctant to speak on the one matter which should be most important to him in life, his Saviour, when he is asked. But if we "let our light shine before men", this will soon open up opportunities for us to speak concerning God's Word.

The one may ask us why we go to church of a Sunday and do not join them in their sinful activities. The other may ask us why we don't drink to excess, use bad language, join in sinful dancing or wear indecent fashions. Some may be interested in our position on different moral issues like abortion, mercy killing, prostitution, gambling or homosexuality. Others may be quite surprised at our diligence and honesty in the work place. Whenever such a chance arises, let us do our best to speak to them God's Word as we know it. If we find it hard to put our thoughts into words, there are many little tracts or photocopied articles that can be passed on to them which will be of great benefit. By passing these out and then asking about it at a later date an opportunity may be opened up to take things further at a later time.

Please make use of **STEADFAST**, our church paper. It is a fine church paper with many doctrinal articles dealing with vital issues which face the Christian from day to day. Ask others, especially those of a Lutheran background whether they wish to receive a copy or regularly subscribe to it. The ELCR has always looked upon **STEADFAST** as a mission opportunity as well as for indoctrination of our members, and for this reason has never charged anything for the paper itself; only for the cost of postage when received by mail.

Never feel afraid to invite people to our Church Services. If they express an interest, invite them to meet with our Pastor. The Pastor is always more than happy to make them feel welcome and answer any questions they may have. If they can be brought under the influence of God's Word, there we are giving the Holy Ghost an opportunity to work in their hearts. At least we have fulfilled our part in trying to bring them to the Saviour.

1 Peter 3:15 is a fine summary of the sincere Christian's attitude towards those who express an interest in his faith, "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear."

If we put our trust in the Lord and keep our Christianity as sharp as possible, God will not only give to us the courage and strength, but also the words to state to others the message of Jesus.

How vital it is therefore that we diligently study the Scriptures, learn Bible passages and hymn verses, as well as knowing the Bible stories thoroughly, so that we are not found ignorant when they approach us about our faith.

WHEN CHOOSING A LIFE'S PARTNER

Since many of our young people will not be able to find their life's partner from within our Church, here is one area of Mission work which is vital for the future of our church.

Our young people should first of all see whether they can find a life's partner in their own church. On the other hand, it often happens that one of our members finds quite a decent and respectable person who either belongs to another church or goes to no church at all. An attachment is made, and they start to look upon one another as being more than friends.

How vital it is that such a couple be united together in God's Word in any future marriage. The wisest thing is to see that matters of church are sorted out before any binding commitment has been made. Then if the other party is not interested in our Church, and they are not united in God's Word, no binding commitment has been made and each can go their own way. Otherwise the orthodox Lutheran party may enter a MIXED MARRIAGE which has many dangers and difficulties connected with it.

The best way to approach matters is to point out that you are a church-goer, the church you belong to and that God's Word means a great deal to you. Then show your interest by inviting them to join in with your home devotions, church services or other church gatherings (e.g. Luther Society). Tell them of your desire to be united in matters of God's Word and, your love

for their soul and your desire that they be saved. If they say, "No, we are not interested", surely that is a clear indication from God that that is not the one for you.

But if they show an interest, the next thing is to tell them that to get to know our church more, we have the custom of inviting such ones to take a course of instruction. Thereby they can make the judgment as to whether they believe our church teaches in accordance with God's Word or not. It is at this stage that they should be invited to meet with our pastor so that he has an opportunity to explain matters further to them.

By this stage their interest or otherwise should be a fairly good indication as to how it is proceeding. If through God's Word, that person is brought to Christ, not only will the orthodox Lutheran now have a Christian and God-loving future partner; but also the pleasure of seeing a soul brought to the Saviour Jesus through his confession and Christian example.

[Pastor Kleinig gives some fine advice on this in his Comments on the Sixth Commandment on the Confirmation Tapes].

ON A CONGREGATION LEVEL

Though we are limited here because of the smaller and scattered nature of our congregations, yet there are many opportunities here that can be used to pass on the message of Christ.

All of us should be eager to invite others along to our church to share God's Word with us. Since we realize how precious is this blessing that God has given us, what a wonderful opportunity this is to let others hear this valuable message. Particularly on special occasions, such as a Confirmation, Marriage or Funeral, Christmas or Easter Service the pastor presents a message which clearly explains the way to salvation. Here is a chance for such who may not have heard of God's Word, to be brought in contact with the Scriptures. As well, if we know of parents whose children do not have any Sunday School instruction, invite them to send their children to our Sunday School that they can hear of the sinner's plight and Christ's love for lost mankind. Even the offer to pick up children and take them to Church and Sunday School is a wonderful opportunity to bring souls to Christ. Also mention to others who express an interest that our pastor is happy to visit them and explain God's Word to them. Care should be taken, though, that our pastor does not intrude into the affairs of another minister.

The congregation can tell others of its message through press releases regarding important events. Here especially is an opportunity for free advertising for the congregation since expense is often a factor which is prohibitive. Also beneficial are **Newspaper advertisements** about significant happenings in the congregation or presenting a message on some doctrinal issue (e.g. Law and Gospel, the Inspiration of the Bible). **Tracts** can be distributed by members on an individual or congregational basis dealing with the same matters. It would be good for congregations to have a **tract board** at the entrance to their church, with a supply of a variety of tracts available for visitors to take on different subjects.

Concerning the matter of visiting people in the neighbourhood of the church, this also is a way of introducing people to our Church. To pass on a Scriptural tract or message, extend an invitation to Church or Sunday School or to enquire concerning their church membership or otherwise, will occasionally result in interest that can be followed up by the pastor. But a number of warnings should be taken note of. In the **first place**, experience has shown this method of mission work at times to bear little real fruit. Much time and effort can be exerted for very little return. Our pastors generally find that they themselves do not have the time with the demand placed on them by their pastoral work, to put time into this area. In the **second place**, it can also be very demanding on the person involved if he is challenged concerning Orthodox Lutheran teaching. If he is not properly experienced and prepared, he may find that he has jumped into water far above his head, in other words, his knowledge may not be great enough in order to defend his faith. Therefore it is unwise to send the inexperienced or immature into this sort of work, but rather someone who has the gifts and abilities to handle it. An excellent

way of approach is to employ a **lay-worker** with the necessary gifts to work with the pastor in a designated area for a period of time. This, of course, would involve quite a deal of expense, as well as time and effort on the part of the members of the congregation.

Even by **making visitors welcome at our Services** is a part of Christian Mission Work. We should make it our business to go up to them, express a word of welcome and take an interest in them, who they are and what they do. Such things may not convert, but they encourage the person to come again. This brings them under the influence of the Word which then can work on their hearts. People are sinning grievously when they act in a way which offends visitors, who then may say, "Well, if they are going to be rude to me, I am not going to come again." If it is our fault that the person never comes into contact with the pure Word again and is lost, then the Lord says, "His blood will I require of thy hand." (Ezek. 3:18).

Please do not think that you are incapable of helping the Lord's cause through true Mission work. We all have been taught the basics of Christianity. We have learnt essential Scripture passages which back up these teachings. We have learnt **Luther's Small Catechism** which explains the Chief Parts of Christian Doctrine. If we do not know these things, or have forgotten them, is there something lacking in our private study of the Bible? Lest we be overcome with the fear, "How will I know what to say?" let us be comforted through the promise of God: "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me", (Phil. 4:13). If we have put God's Word first, He will give to us the words in the right moment to confess our faith.

CONCLUSION

From the Scriptures we learn that true Mission Work will not be easy in these last days. We can never expect great numbers to turn to Christ but often success will be little. Often an orthodox Lutheran church body has trouble even holding its own, let alone gathering more members. But if we are true Christians we will realize our duty. We will not through discouragement lay down the Sword of the Spirit. We must never stop fighting the battles of the Lord. The danger is that we ourselves will become indifferent and lax to our Saviour. We must be awakened and aroused to extra effort in serving our Saviour. The Day of Judgement is not far away. It will be a day of glory for all those who have clung to Christ. Let us hasten the Last Day by doing all that we can to be God's instruments in proclaiming the Word so that the elect are brought into Christ's fold.

Let us be encouraged by the promise of the Lord: "And they that be wise (Luther: the teachers) shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever." (Daniel 12:3).

Presented in Christ's Name,
Pastor Gavin Winter
(6 November 1988)

