

Scripture with the context of the recipients in mind, in order to make it more understandable to them while respecting their full humanity. Concerns about syncretism and the danger of culture undermining divine truth must not be overlooked. We are both “called out” of the world to worship (1 Pet. 2:5–9) and “sent back” into the world to serve as effective witnesses (Jn. 17:18, 20:21). But such concerns must not dampen or suppress our efforts toward contextualization. This dialogue between Pentecostals and Lutherans illustrates the benefits of different Christian traditions engaging together to find ways to be a meaningful witness of Christ to all.

PART III: MISSION AND THE POOR

“ . . . to bring good news to the poor . . . ”

Introduction

41. As Christians, we take seriously the call we have received, that in following Jesus we are to carry a message of “good news to the poor,” which includes all who are vulnerable, marginalized, living with disability, or otherwise in need. It would be easy to be selective in our readings of the Bible, noting, for instance, that even Jesus observed, “You always have the poor with you” (Mt. 26:11). Anyone hearing these words might conclude that poverty is an intractable problem. But Scripture has much to say about the poor and their care (Deut. 15:11, Prov. 14:31, Is. 58:6–10, Mt. 25:40, 1 Jn. 3:17–18), and above all, “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God” (Luke 6:20).
42. Jesus was himself born of a poor woman in humble circumstances. Mary, expecting the child promised by the angel, sings a joyful song (Lk. 1:46–55). This song became known as the Magnificat, because in it Mary exalted God’s marvelous mercy towards her. In his explanation of the Magnificat, Luther pointed out that God did not regard Mary’s “humility” as a moral virtue, but her “low estate,” her being poor, her “nothingness.” It was precisely Mary, a poor woman, who was chosen to be God’s servant and to be called by all generations a blessed one.⁷
43. In his inaugural sermon, Jesus began with the words of the prophet Isaiah, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed

⁷Martin Luther, “Commentary on the Magnificat,” in *Luther’s Works* vol. 21 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968), 297–358.

me to proclaim good news to the poor” (Lk. 4:18). When Jesus was approached by a rich young man inquiring how he might receive eternal life, Jesus instructed him to sell all he had and give the proceeds to the poor (Mt. 19:21) and follow him. When Jesus saw the poor widow giving out of her poverty, he honored her (Mk. 12:42–44). In the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus invites his disciples to reflect on neighborly love, both in serving the one in need, and using the despised Samaritan as an example of neighborly love (Lk. 10:29). God has called the followers of Jesus to care for the poor, the marginalized, the migrant and refugee, and especially the widow and orphan, following the tradition of the Old Testament law (Lev. 19:9–10 and 34) and the prophets (Is. 10:1–2, Zech. 7:10). All human beings are made in the image of God (Gen. 1:27). All are to be regarded with dignity and respect as people who have the opportunity to hear and to share the Good News, to bring hope and the possibility of flourishing through a full and abundant life (Jn. 10:10).

44. Through God’s generosity, the earth has the capacity to produce enough to satisfy the needs of every human being in it. This is part of God’s good creation that should be proclaimed as good news. Due to sinful human actions and the brokenness of our world, all are not granted equal access to what God has already provided. Wars, oppression, corruption, mismanagement, environmental destruction, selfishness, greed, and unjust social, economic, and political systems result in unequal access, unjust distribution, and unfair vulnerability for some members of the human family. Throughout the world, individuals, organizations, governments, and even churches have quite often acted in ways that participate in structures that support those who would take advantage of the situation, leaving many people vulnerable to their abuse of power. Clearly, such actions contribute to famine and poverty that affect so much of the world and from which it is often difficult to escape. As such, we believe that inescapable poverty is an injustice that we are to work to overcome.

Engagement with the Poor in Our Churches

45. We understand that, as followers of Jesus, we have been called to carry the Good News of Jesus Christ to the world in a holistic mission of word and deed. Just as Jesus instructed his first followers to go to Jerusalem and wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit, so we trust that we also, like the followers of Jesus in the

early church, have received the Spirit and are thereby equipped to become his witnesses throughout the world (Acts 1:8). In serving the poor, believers both share Jesus Christ with the poor and also encounter Jesus Christ in the poor, which leads to mutual transformation (Mt. 25:31–46).

46. At the origin of both of our movements, the poor played a significant role. Already in his famous Ninety-Five Theses (1517), Luther made it clear that he was deeply concerned about the exploitation of the poor by certain church practices.⁸ The Reformation spread and was taken up in conditions of late medieval poverty, and even centuries later, the LWF had its origins in addressing the refugee crises of two World Wars. Pentecostalism originated among the poor ministering to one another in places like India, Chile, and the USA. Both Lutherans and Pentecostals have seen tremendous growth in the Global South, an area of the world that experiences overall higher levels of poverty than elsewhere.
47. Our communities have always been concerned with serving those in need and showing solidarity with the poor and oppressed. For example, in many countries Lutheran and Pentecostal missions have been active among the most destitute, such as the Dalits in India, which has led to the formation of many churches. Our churches have established and also cooperate with many different institutions offering humanitarian aid, from refugee resettlement to disaster relief to development work, including the Convoy of Hope and LWF World Service.
48. Striving to be faithful to our calling, we teach the depth of God's generosity, as well as the need to trust in God's promises and provision. Even when Pentecostals have moved up socially and economically, they have remained aware of the needs of the poor, and as such, they frequently speak not only to the spiritual needs of others but also to their material needs. They reflect upon and emphasize the importance of stewardship, the giving of tithes, offerings, and other sacrificial gifts to be used to meet the needs of others. Pentecostals frequently emphasize God's promise of faithfulness to supply the needs of those who put their trust in him (Prov. 28:25). They typically view this promise, however, in terms of a sense of well-being, *shalom*, fullness or purposefulness in life. This way of looking at their gifts enables them to rejoice when these gifts bear fruit in the salvation of others. Historically,

⁸Martin Luther, "The Ninety-Five Theses," #45, in *Luther's Works* vol. 31 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1957), 29.

in response to God's graciousness, Lutherans have shared generously out of their resources to help those in need. Lutherans, too, emphasize the importance of stewardship and offerings to be used to meet the needs of others. They respond individually and communally to God's invitation to participate in the building of just and safe societies for all people, through advocacy, education, and various diaconal projects.

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Case Studies in Mission to the Poor

When Luther wrote to the German nobility in 1520, stressing their responsibility as "secular" authorities nevertheless always acting before God to serve the people, he also advanced a comprehensive list of social and economic reforms.⁹ Among other things, Luther advocated for wide educational programs for both boys and girls, the latter of which was highly unusual in his time. He also supported the creation of common chests of public funds to provide for the needs of the poor, widows, the elderly, and the sick. Luther returned to these reforms throughout his career, in addition to harshly criticizing authorities that acted in self-interest only or secured personal privileges for themselves.

A contemporary Lutheran example of holistic service is the expanding diaconal work in and around the Church of St. Clare in Stockholm, Sweden. From the early 1990s onwards, this church has created strong networks of people, private companies, and public institutions mobilizing resources to address urban poverty. Hundreds of people, including asylum seekers, daily receive food and shelter, clothing, pastoral counseling, and legal advice. Over the weekends, teams of clergy and laity assist people in the streets suffering from alcoholism, drug abuse, and prostitution. Sunday worship retains a traditional Lutheran liturgical order combined with many charismatic elements. Proclamation in word and deed go together hand in hand.

Solidarity in proclamation and service may lead to an identification with the life conditions of poor people. As an example, we can mention Roberto Zwetsch and Lori Altmann, Brazilian Lutheran missionaries among an indigenous population in the Amazon region in the state of Acre in northwestern Brazil. In the 1980s they decided to live amidst the indigenous Kulina-Madihá people in a village located seven days by boat upstream from the nearest modern settlement. When the couple was expecting their second child, they faced the difficult dilemma of deciding

⁹Address to the German Nobility.

where to give birth. Should they leave the indigenous community, go to a city, check in to a hospital, and afterwards return to live with the indigenous? They realized that, if they did this, they might lose the confidence of the indigenous people. They decided to stay. And there, without hospital, doctors, nurses, or even a bed, but surrounded by the care, love, and natural knowledge of the indigenous women, Lori safely gave birth, according to local custom, to her second child, a boy, who then received an indigenous name, Binô Maurirá. Later Lori wrote that she would never trade that profoundly human experience for the technical assistance she had had when giving birth to her first child, the daughter Pamalomid, a unique name given by the Paíter-Suruí people, in the state of Rondonia, also in the Amazon region.¹⁰

An early example of Pentecostal ministry to the marginalized was that of Lillian Trasher (1887–1955), who in 1912 founded an orphanage in Egypt and became known as the “Nile Mother.” Later she also helped to set up a home for widows and a place for the blind. Her work, funded by the Assemblies of God, eventually won support also from Presbyterian churches as well as other Christian, humanitarian, and governmental organizations.¹¹

Pentecostal civic engagement has been increasingly recognized as empowering the lives of the poor. For instance, a squatter community moved into a quarry at the edge of Baguio City, Philippines, because farming could no longer sustain their families, and they hoped to support themselves by sorting trash or cleaning houses. A Pentecostal church under the leadership of Pastor Joel Tejedo helped these settlers with a feeding project for the children; skills- and livelihood-training followed. Since many of the couples who already had children were too poor to afford a wedding ceremony, the church organized a wedding for twelve couples. This gave the couples an official status and increased their sense of self-worth. The church also became a hub for finding employment for these people.¹²

In similar fashion, a Pentecostal pastor in Peru organized a program that includes a soup kitchen, a medical office, and educational programs in one of the poorest districts of Lima. In cooperation with doctors, he created free healthcare programs that take place in the church. During

¹⁰Lori Altmann and Roberto Zwetsch, *Paíter: o povo Suruí e o compromisso missionário* (Chapecó: Caderno do Povo-PU, 1980). Also: Roberto Zwetsch, *Partejando a esperança* (Brasília, Porantim, 1984, VII, nr. 65/66, July/Aug 1984, p.17).

¹¹<https://www.handsalongthenile.org/causes/lillian-trasher-orphanage-assiut/>

¹²Joel A. Tejedo, “Doing Pentecostal Civic Engagement in the Squatter Area of Lower Rock Quarry, Baguio City, Philippines,” *International Review of Mission* 107/1 (2018): 159–178.

the COVID-19 pandemic he moved the soup kitchen outdoors to provide nutritious meals, especially for children and the neediest. Workshops and training are provided to the residents on topics such as nutrition, ecology, feminism, and the prevention of anemia, among others. The pastor's motivation is to serve his community as Christ would, addressing spiritual, social, and bodily needs.

Weaknesses and Challenges

49. Together we critique and condemn the abuses of the biblical idea of prosperity in the teaching of certain Neo-charismatic and Independent churches, and not unknown even in some Classical Pentecostal, Lutheran, and other historic churches.
50. The so-called "prosperity gospel" has its roots in nineteenth-century American "positive thinking" movements, and only later was picked up by certain Christian church leaders. The fundamental idea behind it is that both Christ's atonement and the Christian's faith function like legal contracts, obligating God to reward the believer with material wealth and physical health in return for faith and sacrificial giving. This is based on the notion that on the cross Jesus overcame every instance of poverty, sickness, and death, but it ignores Jesus' call to believers to carry their own cross (Mk. 8:34–35) and suffer with him and one another (Col. 1:24, 1 Cor. 12:26). This teaching is misleading and becomes destructive when continuing poverty and suffering are taken as proof of inadequate faith. It is equally destructive when it convinces the wealthy and successful that their advantages are due to their own flawless faith, and when it licenses church leaders to demand donations from their flocks with the false promise that it will lead to equally great wealth on the part of the donor. This is an unfaithful response to Christians who struggle in poverty hoping for a compassionate intervention from God to release them from their hardships (Ex. 33:19, Is. 49:10).
51. Preachers of the prosperity gospel are not necessarily motivated by personal greed. Sometimes they are responding to the extreme need of their community and hope in this way to inspire the self-confidence that comes from knowing some of the genuine promises of prosperity in Scripture. This teaching may appear attractive to the poor as it promises a way out of misery. But the long-term consequences of prosperity teaching are so destructive on both individuals and communities that it must be opposed and replaced

with a better understanding of the prosperity that God intends for all people.

52. Together we acknowledge in our own histories and practices certain tendencies that may have led to a breach of solidarity with the poor, creating a vacuum filled in by prosperity preachers. For example, Pentecostals are at times guilty of triumphalism, issuing promises of victorious life that may mislead believers regarding what they can expect in this life, as well as an over-spiritualization of faith, leading to neglect of this-worldly concerns. For their part, the early Lutheran commitment to caring for the poor has sometimes turned into a delegation of this responsibility to charitable agencies or the state, absolving individuals of personal engagement with the poor and vulnerable. There have also been occasions when too-rigid distinctions between the “two kingdoms” and a misunderstanding of “passive righteousness” have excused Lutheran neglect of the needy.
53. In addition, together we recognize that the exercise of governmental authority can be an efficient way of serving people in need, but it also presents heavy temptations to use such power to secure unjust advantages and privileges. We believe that it is important for our churches to admit that we have at times become supporters of unjust and even oppressive regimes and systems, or have sought advantages personally or for our own church institutions rather than for the common good. We are reminded that Jesus himself, before starting his public ministry, had to face the temptation of power but resisted it by rebuking the devil with the words: “You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve” (Mt. 4:10).

Faithful and Unfaithful Approaches to Prosperity

54. Together we commend to all Christian believers a faithful teaching on the abundance of God’s gifts, given so that the whole human family and the earth may flourish. God wishes to bless us, but this is always a free divine gift, never a matter of obligation or coercion. Furthermore, God’s promise of blessing does not exclude the possibility of illness, economic hardship, persecution, suffering, and indeed death, as evident in our Savior’s own experience.
55. Recognizing the specific false teaching of the prosperity gospel, the Assemblies of God (to give one example) published the document “The Believer and Positive Confession” in 1980, condemning the

- false promises associated with that teaching.¹³ Both Pentecostals and Lutherans are appreciative of ecumenical Christian statements against false prosperity teaching, such as the Lausanne Theology Working Group's "Statement on the Prosperity Gospel" (2009).¹⁴
56. To help Christians navigate true from false teachings about the prosperity that God intends for us, we commend these four questions to ask about any promise of prosperity:
- a. *What exactly* is being promised and on what grounds? Does God actually promise such things, or has the text of the Bible been read selectively or dishonestly?
 - b. *At what cost?* For example, is the earth exploited or is civic life corrupted by the appeal to a promised prosperity?
 - c. *At whose expense?* Is one believer or community being lifted up at the expense of, or in disregard of, another?
 - d. *For what motive?* Do preachers or wealthy and healthy people seek their own self-interest, or is love of neighbor paramount? Is one organization or ministry being elevated to the disadvantage or defamation of another? Does it contribute to proselytism?
57. Looking at the issue positively, Christians can affirm the riches they have received in Christ (Eph. 2:5–8, Phil. 4:19), the fact that they are incorporated into a caring and resourceful community that seeks the advancement of God's kingdom and its righteousness (Mt. 6:33, 2 Cor. 9:9–11), and that their new life in Christ, with the assistance of the Holy Spirit, empowers them to serve the common good (Jn. 13:12–17, Rom. 12:6, 1 Cor. 12:4–7) to the glory of God (Mt. 5:16).

Conclusion

58. We rejoice that although our churches use terminologies and emphases that at times vary, we are of one mind in our commitment to serving the poor as fellow human beings who are created in the image of God and worthy of dignity and respect. Together we affirm a commitment to a holistic understanding of mission that includes the proclamation of the Good News to the poor along with joining in solidarity with the poor, always keeping in mind that God became poor in Jesus Christ (Phil. 2:5–11).
59. Nonviolent efforts to overcome poverty and the causes that lead to

¹³<https://ag.org/Beliefs/Position-Papers/the-believer-and-positive-confession>.

¹⁴<https://www.lausanne.org/content/a-statement-on-the-prosperity-gospel>.

it are legitimate and valuable, because the Bible teaches us to come to the defense of the poor. Such engagement with the suffering of others may bring us into situations that lead to our own suffering in the struggle to overcome the suffering of others. This can be understood as an experience of bearing the cross of Jesus Christ, conscious that Jesus Christ suffered for us so that we may receive the fullness of life.

60. Although we reject a theology of prosperity which offers false promises and runs the risk of turning God into an object of our desires, we do affirm an understanding of prosperity as a blessing of God freely given and affirm Jesus' promise to bring abundant life for all people. Those who are so blessed are called to be a blessing to others and to work for the betterment of all society, to overcome injustices, and to care for all of God's creation.

PART IV: HEALING AND DELIVERANCE
“. . . to proclaim release to the captives,
and recovery of sight to the blind,
and let the oppressed go free . . .”

Biblical Foundations

61. As already seen in previous sections of this statement, together we look to the Scriptures to inform and guide our teaching and practice regarding healing and deliverance from evil.
62. As Scripture testifies, God's intention for his good creation has always been its wholeness and flourishing. Even after the broken trust that is human sin, God has cared for the earth and the people created in his image. God has blessed the sick, the suffering, and those afflicted by evil spirits with physical healing, spiritual healing, and communal reconciliation. Healing and deliverance have not been restricted to the people of God but have been extended to those on the “outside,” such as Naaman the Syrian (2 Kgs. 5:1–27) and the Syrophenician woman (Mk. 7:24–30).
63. The ministry of Jesus Christ was especially distinctive for its emphasis on healing and deliverance alongside feeding, teaching, and proclaiming the kingdom of God. He commissioned his disciples to do the same. The apostles healed in Jesus' name throughout the book of Acts (e.g. 3:1–10, 9:32–34, 14:8–10). Paul identifies healing as a spiritual gift (1 Cor. 12:9). James 5:13–15 commends prayer for and anointing of the sick.