

**Martin Luther and A New Missional Hermeneutics:
For Integrative Missional Theology**

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The purpose of the paper is to retrieve a new horizon of Luther’s theological and missional hermeneutics and to explore his theological insight into developing a new paradigm in the studies of God’s mission, missional church, and World Christianity. My reading strategy of Martin Luther and mission is to contextualize Luther’s hermeneutical theology as the driving force for developing the integrative missional theology in linguistic, creational, and emancipatory direction.

At Luther’s time, we know that Spanish Catholics after Columbus’s so-called discovery of America had undertaken mission in an unfortunate fashion of colonialism. Some scholars in the area of missiology tend to sidestep the socio-historical situation of Luther and easily charge that Luther lacked a fundamental affirmation of the missionary duty of the church. For instance, I am mindful of David Bosch’s critical evaluation of Luther. Bosch argues that Luther’s teaching of justification paralyzed any missionary effort, because it emphasizes God’s initiative, preoccupied with human depravity. This perspective undergirds a pessimistic view of humanity “as mere pawns on a chessboard.” There is nothing humans can do to change reality or save people, because it would be blasphemy.¹ However, if I see Bosch’s critique in light of the German Protestant context as represented by John Wichern and WilhemLoehe in the nineteenth century, Bosch’s argument is difficult to accept. Recovering Luther as a missional, integrative thinker, I am concerned with articulating Lutheran teaching of justification and justice as the stronghold for refining mission as constructive and integrative theology in a linguistic-creational-

¹Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 242.

emancipatory fashion. Thus, I further engage with Trinitarian, social-ethical, ecological, and interreligious perspective. This missional reading of Luther undergirds a concept of integrative missional theology in hermeneutical and constructive framework for proposing a new paradigm in understanding *missio Dei* as *promissio Dei*.

Trinity and Missional Theology

Since the Willingen Conference, and especially through Vicedom's publication of the *Mission of God*, a theology of mission has been developed and elaborated in a Trinitarian framework. Following in the footsteps of Luther, Vicedom insists that a Trinitarian model of sending is built on the grace of justification and *theologia crucis* rather than the Barthian concept of predestination in a supralapsarian sense. Confessional theology of God's mission is undertaken in special (gospel) and general, irregular manner (the first function of the law in the sense of *creatio continua*), and it provides a larger framework in the studies of God's mission, missional church, and World Christianity as a counter proposal to the Dutch reformed school of thought.

In the North American study of God's mission in the Trinitarian lead it is unfortunate not to pay attention to Luther's unique contribution to Trinitarian theology. Jesus Christ reveals to us the profound depths of God's fatherly heart. God participates in God's mission characterized by the life, mission, death, and resurrection of the Son. Thus, *theologia crucis* becomes a clue to mission of the triune God for Luther. The church is also sent into the world and exists for the sake of the world, because the church as the assembly of saints occurs through the Word and the sacraments in the presence of the Holy Spirit "who effects faith where and when it pleases God in those who hear the gospel, ...not on account of our own merits but on account of Christ."²

Confessional theology emphasizes that Luther elaborates his ecclesiology within the theological framework of the third article: the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit makes our existence holy by the word and so in the community of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. The word *ecclesia* properly means an assembly, "a holy Christian people."

²"Augsburg Confession," art. V. in *Book of Concord*(=BC), 41.

Furthermore, Luther defines the church as “the mother that begets and bears every Christian through the Word of God, which the Holy Spirit reveals and proclaims, through which he illuminates and inflames hearts so that they grasp and accept it, cling to it, and persevere in it.”³ The sacramental dimension of the church is connected with the spiritual dimension of the believers in fellowship with the church.

God’s *promissio* is central in Luther’s thought concerning the proclamation of the word. This aspect can be seen in a Trinitarian-linguistic framework, grounding God’s mission as proclamation in human words. Thus Luther appreciates the classic doctrine of appropriation in a linguistic direction bringing the Triune God to language-event. Seen in light of the language-event and relations of origin, Luther’s Catechism affirms a hermeneutical significance of appropriation: the concept of Father and creation, Son and redemption and Holy Spirit and sanctification. This unique role of the Triune God cannot be understood apart from God’s internal communion (*perichoresis*). Divine communion of *perichoresis* is inseparably connected with a hermeneutical process of defining the name of God, God’s triune identity (appropriating and assigning to one person which is common to all). Luther’s unique contribution implies that an ontological notion of *perichoresis* can be seen anew in terms of God-in-dialogue.

It is certain that for Luther the Triune God is a relational God. The immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity are not in conflation, as proponents of social Trinity argue in the fashion of Rahner’s rule. Rather, Luther’s reluctance to conflate God *in self* and God *for us* can be seen in the way that God *in self* belongs to God’s majesty and mystery (*theologia archetypa*). God *for us* in the world (*theologia ektypa*) brings us to respect the freedom and majesty of God *in self*. Luther provides an insight into the dynamic mediation of God’s Word-in-action for comprehending the relationship between *God in se* and *God for us*, without reducing the triune God into a panentheistic pitfall as seen in the model of social Trinity.

In distinction from the Barthian model of correspondence between the immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity in an analogical sense, reminiscent of Plato and Aristotle, Luther makes a

³ Luther, “Large Catechism,” in BC 436.

unique hermeneutical contribution to the teaching of the Trinity built on the event of Jesus Christ in view of creation, reconciliation, and the final consummation of the triune God at the end of time. God creates the world through the Word. The Word of Gospel stands in deep conversation with the world of creation. This perspective undergirds a model of two kingdoms and law-gospel hermeneutics.

Linguistic Featuring of the Trinity and Language-Event

In his exposition of John's Prologue, Luther argues that God is the Word speaking in, with, and to God's self. The Word brings with itself the whole essence of divine nature. God's being speaks because it is the Word, force of communication, enabling the communication within God's self and for the world. Luther conceived of God as the Subject of divine Speaking in dialogue and relation; Trinity strengthens a relational God. God as the speaking Subject upholds Luther's notion of Gospel as *viva vox evangelii*. God is living, effective, life-giving, and emancipating in the Gospel, since God's Trinitarian being is framed in the internal structure of language-event. As Luther states, "God of himself speaks his word so that the godhead follows the word and remains with its nature in the word and is there in its essence."⁴

God's being is revealed by the Word to which the incarnation is closely connected. In contrast to the Greek *logos*, the word in Christian tradition is pure event, because the Word became flesh. The theological problem of the Word means the unity of God the Father and God the Son. The mystery of this unity is reflected in the phenomenon of language. The Scriptures state that creation once took place through the word of God. The miracle of language is explained in the un-Greek notion of the creation. The sending of the Son, the mystery of the incarnation, is also described in terms of the word in the context of St. John's prologue. The Word is with God from all eternity and the problem of language is situated within inner thought.

Similarly, Gadamer argues that the mystery of the Trinity is reflected and mirrored in the miracle of language, since "it has its being in its revealing."⁵ For Luther, Gospel as living voice of God is

⁴ WA 101/1:186.15; LW 52:45. Bayer, *Luther's Theology*, 340. Footnote 47.

⁵Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 421.

sung and proclaimed as oral cry. This Word is proclaimed ever new in proclamation. Hence, Luther's cardinal metaphor "what urges Christ" (canon within the canon) plays a hermeneutical principle in dialogue with the world of the entire Scripture as well as the realm of creation. What emerges and externalizes itself in utterance is always a word. The meaning of the word is closely connected with the event of proclamation. As Gadamer contends, "being an event is a characteristic belonging to the meaning itself."⁶

According to Luther, God's act of speech is not only present in the ecclesial and confessional sphere, but is also working in the world of creation. In light of God's communicative action, Luther proposes in his "Smalcald Articles" the mutual colloquium and consolation of brothers and sisters⁷ as an objective and necessary form of the gospel alongside preaching, the sacrament, and the ecclesial office. God's word-event points to an open event involved in the public sphere of human daily life. Luther grounds his concept of the fifth form of the Gospel on Matt 18: 20, "For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them." This Lutheran theology of language-event is more rich than the Barthian notion of the word of God in the threefold sense based on God's predestination, which tends to run into a Christomonistic pitfall associated with positivity of revelation from above (according to Bonhoeffer's critique).

Luther's theology of the word-event corresponds to an important explanation of Hebrews 1:1 according to which "God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets." The Word of God in Jesus Christ cannot be understood apart from God's act of speech throughout all the ages in their plural horizons of effect. God's word can be understood interpersonally, having an authority located in *mutual colloquium*. Luther adds the *consolation of brothers and sisters*, explaining it as a supplementary characteristic of God's word. Based on the dialogical presence of God in Jesus Christ by the Spirit, Luther thinks of the comforting aspect of the gospel in a pastoral and practical sense. Here, missional theology retains a pastoral dimension in caring for the people in a different cultural context. Luther's hermeneutical genius shapes missional theology as integrative and constructive theology, making it more amenable to the reality of the world.

⁶Ibid., 427.

⁷Luther, "Smalcald Articles," in BC 319.

As we already said, the word-event aspect is embodied in the gospel which is the living voice of God, being cried out and screamed as living, oral cry. The law-gospel hermeneutics pertains in the proclamation, as the first function of the law stands in dialogue with a hermeneutic of “what urges Christ.” A theology of proclamation is central in our missional discipleship. Here I refine theology of proclamation (in the sense of *viva vox evangelii*) as the foundation for proposing a missional, integrative theology of God’s promise and mission as word-event.⁸ God’s promise in the life of Israel comes to us as the gospel of Jesus Christ in the sense of word-event – proclamation – which establishes the hermeneutical dialogue with people in the world behind which God continues to work and address in God’s ongoing activity. This confessional mission makes the gospel-message more amenable to invitation of cultural others and to engagement with a prophetic dialogue with people of cultural and linguistic plurality.

God’s Mission as Interpretation

The character of the gospel as *pro nobis* is grounded in God’s *promissio* which is foundational for God’s *missio*. This line of thought highlights Luther as an inspirer for encouraging us to develop God’s mission as interpretation in engagement with human life, language, and culture in the public sphere of multicultural society and in the global and postcolonial reality of the World Christianity. A concept of *viva vox evangelii* implies a priority of the spoken word (God’s Saying; *Dabar* in Hebrew) over the written word (the Scripture). It is a voice resounding in all of the world, shouted and heard in all places through the proclamation of the Word of God.

Luther is concerned with setting forth and affirming the necessity of an interpretation to be undertaken anew in listening to the word of Scripture. This creative engagement with the Word of God can be undertaken over and against a normative interpretation as previously established and placed over the Scripture. The necessity of interpretation accords with Luther's conviction that Scripture is not merely written word belonging to the past, but a living voice of God which encounters us here and now (Heb 4:12-13, 1 Cor 1:18, Isa 55:10, 11).

⁸ Chung, *Public Theology in an Age of World Christianity: God’s Mission as Word-Event*.

Luther pays special attention to the Hebrew way of expression regarding God's acts of speaking. God's word is related to a real thing or action (*verbum reale*), transcending the question of ontology, because God's being is in God's word in deed, in other words, speaking is doing, so that the word is the deed.⁹ Mission is not mechanically conveying or repeating certain words or statements from the Scripture to people in different times and places. Even the same word can be said differently to another context. Mission as interpretation of biblical narrative assumes a central place in the context of World Christianity today.¹⁰ Given this, I present a concept of missional integrative theology in linguistic, creational, emancipatory manner which upholds a new paradigm in studies of mission in response to the postcolonial challenge and World Christianity.

The Grace of Justification: Spiritual Formation and Justice

Luther views Jesus Christ as the objective ground for our justification *extra nos*. Faith justifies because it takes hold of its treasure: the risen, present Christ. Luther's teaching of justification embraces a forensic element from without while at the same time incorporating an effective and transformative moment of happy exchange into it. In his reflection of Christian freedom coupled with his reflection of happy exchange, Luther argues that a Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none while he/she is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.¹¹ Thus the rule for the life of Christians means that we should devote all our works to the welfare of others, serving the neighbors by voluntary benevolence and doing good works to them.¹² Spiritual formation and social justice come together through the grace of justification in *diakonia* to our fellow people in need. The grace of justification which entails the living Christ in union with us in Word and sacrament makes the grace of justification and faith dynamically amenable to the service of the others in the public sphere. The grace of justification strengthens a participation model of public discipleship in conformity to Jesus Christ in prophetic *diakonia* to those in need.¹³ As Luther prophetically relates Eucharistic theology to our anamesitic reason in solidarity with people who suffer. "Here your heart must go out in love and learn that this is a sacrament

⁹Marquardt, *Das christliche Bekenntnis*, 141-5. Further see Paulson, *Luther*, 78.

¹⁰Sanneh, *Whose Religion is Christianity?*

¹¹*Ibid.*, 393.

¹²*Ibid.*, 405.

¹³Peura, "Gott und Mensch in der Unio," in *Unio*, eds. Repo und Vinke, 44.

of love. As love and support are given you, you in turn must render love and support to Christ in his needy ones. You must feel with sorrow all the dishonor done to Christ in his holy Word, all the misery of Christendom, all the unjust suffering of the innocent, with which the world is everywhere filled to overflowing. You must fight [resist], work, pray, and—if you cannot do more—have heartfelt sympathy.”¹⁴

According to Luther, Jesus Christ as “a mirror of the Father’s heart” is also the first born among many brothers and sisters. He is to be understood as the exemplary prototype to which they are conformed through experience and sufferings. Luther tells us that Christ is with us, the tormented among those who are tormented, the one who suffers injustice among victims of violence, the forsaken among the forsaken. Conformity to Christ characterizes our discipleship and participation in Christ’s ministry and mission for God’s reign in the world. This perspective is important, when we discuss a postcolonial dimension of God’s mission in terms of hermeneutics from below and commitment to the life of the subaltern-*minjung* (Bonhoeffer)

Mission and Socio-Economic Sphere

Luther comprehends three life arrangements (political realm, economic sphere, and church) within the two kingdoms in which framework the subject matter of the Gospel is dynamically and realistically connected. The church is created by the Gospel, and stands in service of the Word of God, while the Gospel is in deep dialogue and interaction with the world of the first function of the law. As we already said, Luther’s prophetic view of *status economicus* was seen in his critique of the system of devouring capital. Likewise, *status politicus* belongs to the political *diakonia* of God. For the sake of the freedom of the Gospel, Luther spoke out against those who sought to misuse his theology ideologically for a theology of revolution which is under human political interests and the camouflage of political interests in religious clothing. For Luther, suffering can be understood as a form of political activity—thereby politics of martyr in the sense of *status confessionis*, although his discourse—“suffering, suffering, cross, cross is the Christian right, no other”—was often disputed during the Peasants’ War. Luther sought to

¹⁴ Luther, “The Blessed Sacrament of the Holy and True Body and Blood of Christ, and the Brotherhoods (1519),” in *Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings*, ed. Timothy F. Lull, 247.

reframe their fight into another political form of church struggle which does not refute a form of resistance. Luther's critique of violence of concrete state was no less angry than his critique of the rebellion. His critique of both sides is so radical, asserting that a solution comes only from God, which is central in his teaching of justification of the ungodly only through the grace of God. The preacher and the politician stand before God's command and judgment. The *verbum Dei* for Luther points to the new world of God that stands against the political and economic powers.¹⁵

Luther's discovery of the significance of the world from the perspective of justification led him to challenge the begging of mendicant monks and denounce the issue of usury.¹⁶ Luther regards mammon as the chief example of opposition to God, which motivates Luther to fight for the sake of the poor and needy against the "devouring capital" system dominating the social reality of early capitalism at his time. For Luther the trust and faith of the heart alone make both God and an idol. Those who have God and everything needed (money and property),—without care for anyone else— too, have a god-mammon; it is by name money and property on which they set their whole hearts. "This is the most common idol on earth."¹⁷ Luther's theological axiom of God against mammon is elaborated in his critical analysis of economic issues in the context of the seventh Commandment ("You are not to steal") as elaborated in his *Large Catechism*.

Luther defines stealing in comprehensive manner, at the individual and at the socioeconomic level concerning the market system. The economic reality, which is stamped by misusing the market in an arbitrary, defiant, and arrogant way, causes the poor to be defrauded every day, and new burdens and higher prices are imposed upon their life.¹⁸ God's justification refers to creating justice and to bringing the sinner to righteousness. God lavishes a wonderful blessing upon those who benefit and befriend the neighbor in need.¹⁹

¹⁵ For a detailed analysis of Luther's model of two kingdoms in this direction see Chung et al. *Liberating Lutheran Theology*, 138-9.

¹⁶ Linbeck, *Beyond Charity*.

¹⁷ Luther, "Large Catechism," in BC 387.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 417-8.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 420.

Given this, F.W. Marquardt and Duchrow are right in maintaining that economic field is for Luther no longer simply an ethical problem, but becomes a dogmatic-confessional problem in the sense of *status confessionis*. In the *Large Catechism* Luther takes issue with mammon as a system of totality in which people want to be god of the whole world through mammon and to make themselves worshipped as such.²⁰ Mission for the grace of justification integrates our prophetic *diakonia* in the realm of economic justice which emphasizes an emancipatory horizon of integrative missional theology.

This integrative perspective of justification and justice establishes the justification and compassion of God's grace socially, politically, ecologically, and culturally. Sharply critiquing the devouring system and the process of capital concentration and accumulation, Luther denounced the Christian character of early capitalism in reference to colonialism in America. The concept of greed assumes a critical meaning in Luther's theological thought, when the greed is in contradiction to faith in God. Driven by a biblical, prophetic realism, Luther demands the accountability of faithful believers in the church for the worldly and economic realm. Confession to God and resistance against mammon is grounded in the confessional notion of *status confessionis* as classically stated in Formula of Concord. The truth of the gospel and Christian freedom are at stake... In such matters [the confirmation of open idolatry] we can make no concessions but must offer an unequivocal confession and suffer whatever God sends and permits the enemies of his Word to inflict on us."²¹ The politics of martyr grounded in confessional resistance was performed by Bonhoeffer in his resistance against National Socialism, and then in the context of racism and apartheid and even in today's context of neoliberal principle of economic globalization.

Securing justice for the poor must be an integral part of the present day church's mission in our postcolonial context of World Christianity. Such a contribution can be obviously seen in the Lutheran World Federation's documents on the church as communion and its critical engagement with the neoliberalism of economic globalization.²²

²⁰Duchrow, *Global Economy*, 176.

²¹ "Formula of Concord," in BC 516

²²LWF "A Call to Participate in Transforming Economic Globalization."

Having considered this integration in Luther's thought, a question about salvation is not merely reduced to the intellectual acceptance of doctrinal propositions in the sense of repristination. Rather it includes restoration and wholeness of creaturely life in the public sphere. God as the subject of salvation loves the world through Jesus Christ and faith of believers as a gift of the Holy Spirit lies in serving the gospel and the entire world with which God is reconciled in Christ's *diakonia*. This Lutheran perspective on God's mission in terms of grace of justification and economic justice in the reconciled world retains Lutheran distinctiveness, challenging the common U.S assumption about mission embedded within American cultural exceptionalism, manifest destiny, and cultural mentality of American civil religion.

God's Mission in Ongoing Creation

Luther's language of God hidden and revealed needs to be seen in terms of hermeneutics of law and gospel. In *On the Bondage of the Will*, Luther follows in the footsteps of St Paul. God is wholly incomprehensible and inaccessible, as St Paul exclaims (Rom 11:33).²³ Divine majesty is reserved for God's self alone, since "God must therefore be left to himself in his own majesty."²⁴ The justified becomes collaborator with God as St. Paul does in teaching the Corinthians (1 Cor 3:9). Although the human being remains passive in the realm of justification, he/she is a collaborator with God in the missional context.²⁵ God the Creator works all in all. God's on-going act of new creation in the world points to Luther's heuristic concept of God, notably emphasizing the first function of law in reference to the Gospel and also sharpening missional existence as created co-worker.

God's on-going act of new creation (*creatio continua*) implies divine power itself, preserving the creation and being present in its innermost and outermost aspects. Luther's genius paves a hermeneutical manner of speaking of God in both an all-embracing and inclusive tendency, while retaining a radical and exclusive tendency. A dialectics between the exclusive tendency and an all-inclusive comprehensiveness enables Luther's language *sola* (alone) to be closely associated with the term *simul* (at the same time). Luther's teaching of justification, when seen in

²³Luther and Erasmus, 330.

²⁴Ibid., 201.

²⁵Ibid., 287-8.

light of God's universal reign and care, has an inclusive dimension, particularly in his commentary on 1 Timothy and his reflection on Jesus' descent into hell.

In this light we need to see Luther's openness to the world embedded with his model of two kingdoms. Luther boldly takes pagan authority as a model to show what the task of secular authority is. God is a gentle and rich Lord granting a great deal of gold, silver, riches, dominions, reason, wisdom, languages and the kingdoms to the godless. Christians seem to be mere children, fools and beggars in comparison with pagan authority. In this regard Luther was not reluctant to praise the Turkish state and exercises a critique of Christian authorities with unprecedented frankness.²⁶

As we previously maintained, the first function of the law stands in hermeneutical conversation with "what urges Christ." The *primus usus* as the unalterable will of God is designated as the natural law innate in the human heart; this is in coincidence with the Decalogue; it does not imply the possibility of a conflict between the *lex naturae* and the Decalogue.²⁷ The *primus usus* is relative to and it is not separated from proclamation of the Gospel. According to Bonhoeffer, God alone distinguishes between the law and the gospel. Here the church is not deprived of the universality of its mission. Mission keeps in view its responsibility for the world in light of the signs of the times.²⁸ Luther's model of two kingdoms or strategies needs to be reinterpreted as a foundation for Christian discipleship, vocation, and mission. This perspective corrects Barth's limitation in his understanding of Lutheran theology. Barth's formulation of the law as the necessary form of the gospel is sharply critiqued in the German Lutheran context because Barth eliminates the first function of the law. Regarding the Lutheran critique of Barth's theology of gospel and law, Pannenberg makes a lucid clarification on Luther's influence on Barth's theology of gospel-law in light of Luther's notion of *paranesis*.²⁹

²⁶Ebeling, *Luther*, 189.

²⁷Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 305.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 309. 311.

²⁹Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3: 89. Barth is also critical of the Calvinist notion of the third use of the law based on practical syllogism (*Church Dogmatics*, II/2:113). Finally, integrating the Lutheran notion of general revelation in his later stage, Barth provocatively states that "dangerous modern expressions like the 'revelation of creation' or 'primal revelation' might be given a clear and unequivocal sense in this regard" (*Church Dogmatics*, IV.3.1: 140). See also Barth's reconciliation toward Emile Brunner. "And tell him, Yes, that the time when I thought that I had to say 'No' to him is now long past, since we all live only by virtue of the fact a great and merciful God says his gracious Yes to all of us." Busch, *Karl Barth*, 476.

For Luther, a lively faith goes hand in hand with praise of God's beauty and glory in the creation. All creatures are tools in the service of God's working or masks under which God hides God's activity. God remains free to give in the ceaseless activity with which God works all in all. The article of creation is that of faith. Faith in God's creation is faith in the triune God. Faith and justification are correlated to ecological or environmental stewardship which is an indispensable part in shaping and directing missional Lutheran theology in integrative-constructive manner.

Luther's marvelous sense of the aesthetic dimension of the creation is striking, because "the wonderful and most lovely music [comes] from the harmony of the motions that are in the celestial spheres."³⁰ We are encouraged to listen attentively to the beautiful music of God coming from the creation, because creation is conceived of as a linguistic and salvific phenomenon. God's work takes place in faithfulness even in the realm of the creation. Creation is the sphere of dialogue and communication occurring between God and the creatures. Given the creation as communicative sphere, the world is to be conceived of as text which is readable and decipherable and through which God may speak to us in a completely different manner than heard in the ecclesial sphere.

Luther's missional method is an invitation to the gospel while acknowledging that the non-Christian leads a morally mature life on the basis of the commands written upon all human hearts. Luther warns against misleading people of other religions through a conversion to Christianity by means of colonialism and dominion. Rather mission can only be effective when it is performed by a continual renewal of the church and the Christian.³¹ The alien and irregular nature and peculiarity of God's Word-in-action exclude any notion of impure motive in the combination of missional proclamation with human purpose of colonialism, cultural export, and confessional rivalry.³²

³⁰ LW 1:126.

³¹Stolle, *Luther Texts on Mission*, trans. Klaus D. Schultz, 104-5.

³²Ibid., 13.

Lutheran Witness in Interfaith Context

Luther's linguistic renovation embracing the church and creation in light of God's language-event remains a driving force for upholding our missional vocation as existence of prophetic dialogue with the world, characterizing it in terms of proclamation, interpretation, and engagement with the life of the public sphere. Luther's sensitivity to others is expressed well in their bearing the face of Christ, his reflection on the irregular grace of God as remarkably seen in the other. Luther's remark on Ishmael is striking at this point: "For the expulsion does not mean that Ishmael should be utterly excluded from the kingdom of God... The descendants of Ishmael also joined the church of Abraham and became heirs of the promise, not by reason of a right, but because of irregular grace."³³ Luther's Christological idea of regular grace in the church does not stand in competition with God's mystery regarding irregular grace in the world. Despite Luther's late anti-Jewish writing and polemic, his understanding of Jesus as a born Jew and his pro-old Testament hermeneutics can contribute to the Jewish-Christian relationship, including God's blessing to Ishmael. Abraham remains a cardinal example of evangelical life in Luther's theology of vocation. Abraham's mission means God's blessing to the other.

Luther in his letter to Justus Jonas (June 30, 1530), while staying in Colburg, stated that the Decalogue is the dialectics of the Gospel and the Gospel is the rhetoric of the Decalogue. Therefore we have, in Christ, all of Moses, but in Moses, not all of Christ. Luther confessed that he became a new student of the Decalogue.³⁴ In *How Christians Should Regard Moses* (1525) Luther is interested in learning from Moses as a moral teacher rather than a lawgiver. What Luther notices as the best thing in Moses is "the promises and pledges of God about Christ."³⁵ We read Moses for the sake of the promise about Christ—thereby "what urges Christ." Here we notice that there is evangelical freedom or delight in the law (*paranesis*) that is, evangelically conceptualized notion of the law,³⁶ because in Moses there is a fine order, a joy about the gospel of Christ.

³³ LW 4:42-44.

³⁴ WA 30, II, 8.48. Iwand, *Luthers Theologie*, 84.

³⁵ Luther, "How Christians Should Regard Moses," in *Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, 129.

³⁶ Iwand, *Luthers Theologie*, 203-4.

This perspective forms one feature of New Testament theology. According to Gal 5:25, “if we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.” Here we encounter an indicative and an imperative. The indicative of divine promise in Christ becomes the presupposition and basis for the imperative of the divine command. The indicative comes into its fulfillment through the imperative. Parenthesis is conceptualized in the dialectical relationship between the indicative and the imperative.

Furthermore, driven by hermeneutical dialogue between the natural law written in the heart through God’s irregular grace and “what urges Christ,” I insist that there is a new insight which is central for developing Lutheran-Jewish-Islamic relationship as an important task of our missional theology. To the degree that God’s mission embraces both the church and the world, the gospel remains central as a blessing to the world as seen in the missional life of Abraham.

It is certain that Luther was not able to systematically develop his reflection on God’s irregular grace embedded within his hermeneutical dialectics of the hidden and revealed God underlying law-gospel relationship and the model of two kingdoms. Driven by Luther’s impulse, I take a step further in refining and contextualizing his irregular thinking for Lutheran public mission in light of God’s reconciliation with the world, notably by emphasizing Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s ethical concretization of *theologia crucis* from below and reconciliation.

Bonhoeffer appreciates the reality of the ungodly in light of the Gospel and reconciliation. Bonhoeffer incorporates Luther’s provocative statement into his theology of the cross: “the curses of the godless sometimes sound better in God’s ear than the alleluias of the pious.”³⁷ According to Bonhoeffer, the biblical radicalism of Luther’s teaching of justification takes seriously such blasphemies more than any other hymn of praise. This irregular dimension of Luther and contextuality of Bonhoeffer also finds appreciation in Asian *minjung* theology which stands in a direction of upholding a model of Jesus’ sociobiography with *massa perditionis* (public sinners and tax collectors—*ochlos-minjung*).³⁸

³⁷Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 160; LW 25:390.

³⁸ Chung, *Irregular Theology*.

God speaking in dialogue, seen in Trinitarian perspective, provides a new hermeneutical model of God's mission in terms of grace of justification, reconciliation, justice, and recognition of the other. God's being, according to Luther, is in proclamation, creating, and reconciliation. Here I am convinced of the hermeneutical notion of fusion of horizons between the meaning of the Gospel and God's irregular voice in the creation for the thick description of the Gospel, as we engage in dialogue with people of other faiths, acknowledging their wisdom, language, and spiritual relationship with the ultimate truth.³⁹ The Lutheran confessional theology affirms this position, referring to God's initiative: "Conversion to God is the work of God the Holy Spirit alone."⁴⁰

As Luther says, "it is not said, therefore, that God desires to convert everyone. St. Paul only declares of the Gospel that it is a cry, which he causes to go out over everyone. It is supposed to be pure blessing."⁴¹ Luther's theology of conversion is unique in its understanding of the conversion in light of the grace of justification *extra nos*. Proclamation, dialogue, and *diakonia* (as our discipleship and vocation) are in service of witnessing to the gospel as the living voice of God, while recognizing God's natural law in the people of other cultures in the sense of the first function of the law and *creatio continua*. Our proclamation or witness is not the basis for conditioning the work of the Holy Spirit, but is undertaken as gratitude to the grace of God to serve the initiative of the Holy Spirit. The indicative of the grace of God is basis and foundation for our missional vocation and discipleship. In evangelization, dialogue, and *diakonia* a genuine conversion to God takes place only through the Holy Spirit, whose aspect is differentiated from a Calvinist notion of the third use of the law coupled with the practical syllogism and sign of election. It is unfortunate to see that mission based on human work righteousness was misused in the colonial context of the nineteenth century, notably in East Asia during the time of the opium wars and Taipeng rebellion. Given this, confessional theology of conversion finds its validity in the postcolonial context of world Christianity, in which a Norwegian missionary Karl L. Reichelt (1877-1952) remains a great contribution to the Lutheran church in Hong Kong.

³⁹ Chung, *Luther and Buddhism*.

⁴⁰ "Formula of Concord" BC 561. Karl Barth also follows the Lutheran theology of conversion as he argues: "This [conversion] is the work of God alone." (*Church Dogmatics*, IV.3.2. 876).

⁴¹ Stolle, *Luther Texts on Mission*, trans. Klaus D. Schultz, 29.

Constructing Lutheran Theology for Integrative Missional Theology

Given what I have explored about Luther and mission in linguistic-creational-emancipatory horizon, I characterize Lutheran theology as the fulcrum for integrative missional theology. An integrative approach to God's mission and public ethics in the postcolonial context of world Christianity is undertaken in the interests of communicating the word of God to people in the world, addressing public ethical issues, taking into account God's relation with the church and the world, as hermeneutically mediated and freshly and anew constructed in light of God's universal reign based on law-gospel principle. An integrative approach to God's mission and public ethics begins with reflection on God as the infinite horizon of language event which embrace textual ecclesial horizon as well as extratextual social world, that is intertextuality of God's word-in-action (*Dabar* in Hebrew). A theological method which is capable of being faithful to God's salvific drama in God's promise in the life of biblical Israel and Gospel of Jesus Christ makes a new paradigm in studies of mission necessary. For a new paradigm in constructing the integrative missional theology, I attempt to reinterpret Luther's hermeneutical theology as an arbiter in comprehending the word of God as word-event in the experience of World Christianity concerning postcolonial challenge, emancipation, and inculturation.

An Integrative missional theology in hermeneutical framework entails constructive character in terms of conceptualizing a logical, coherent, open-ended step in approximation to the subject matter of God's word-event in the sense of *viva vox evangelii*. That is, (1) appreciation of the Christian tradition, confessional language, classical theology and texts, and church history as mission history as sites of missional learning, (2) a suspicion and deconstruction of limitations and backwardness of the tradition in its hierarchical and oppressive manner (for instance, espousal of mission and colonialism) as well as a critical analysis of interplay between knowledge, power, interest, and dominion in social cultural-material formation of a given society, (3) a thick description of the biblical narrative in an encounter between God's act of speech in textuality and social word and social biography and narrative in the life of the others, (4) reconstructing a new horizon of meaning in hermeneutical circle and undergirding fusion of horizon between biblical narrative and worldly life connection in terms of dialogue, translation,

and interpretation in eschatological light of the coming of God, (5) missional-ethical commitment in empathic listening to those fragile and vulnerable in the sense of prophetic *diakonia* in light of grace of justification, reconciliation, and public discipleship

This hermeneutical epistemology is interested in refurbishing biblical, confessional, and theological language in missional encounter with those outside walls of church. An integrative missional theology, first of all, is internally grounded and integrative and relational with other theological disciplines, bringing to these what missional theology experiences and expresses in interaction with culture, moral ethos, religious worldview, and social-economic and political background of those who receive the Gospel. Externally, integrative missional theology in hermeneutical construction is interacted with non-theological methods involved in cultural anthropological studies, sociology of religion, comparative religious studies, philosophical hermeneutics, and political economy. Faithful living and missional discipleship flow from the grace of God in Christ's *diakonia* of reconciliation to the world as water springs from a fountain. Christian identity as missional self lives in convictions that believers are authentically before God (*coram Deo*) and ethically responsible in relationship with others, through whose face God awakens us to be more sincere and publicly engaged and in service to the world.

Thus integrative missional theology entails a strong ethical component, as it is biblically-exegetically grounded, historically related, culturally-contextually sensitive and thick, hermeneutically deliberate and open-ended in approximation to God the infinite horizon of language event, and profoundly, ethically oriented toward enhancing the integrity of life in creation. This approach to mission as integrative theology in hermeneutical-constructive framework is sharply differentiated from an approach to integrative theology in apologetically defending the classical doctrine as universally relevant and permanently valid.⁴² Such an apologetic and doctrinal approach is performed in negligence of hermeneutical engagement with the living word of God in different contexts, thus it undermines mutual learning in dialogue with the others, in whose life God continues to work, especially in care of those poor, marginalized, and victimized under the dominion of Empire.

⁴²Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative theology*, Vol.1: 10.

An integrative missional theology in hermeneutical-constructive framework emphasizes linguistic, creational, and emancipatory dimensions as it considers communication of biblical narrative in the act of interpretation, recognition of the other, and ethical commitment to those fragile and vulnerable in the sense of prophetic *diakonia*. Driven by this direction, I reconceptualize postcolonial mission in a confessional, prophetic sense, engaging in thick description of the biblical narrative in an encounter between etic horizon of the self and emic horizon of the other. God as the infinite horizon of human language brings such an encounter in a direction of fusion of horizon, making our missional vocation into a blessing to the other.

According to Gadamer, in a hermeneutical conversation with the other, and in an encounter of different horizons, a new meaning can be acquired. Interpretation is in this regard open-ended and dynamic.⁴³ Our mission is to witness to the mystery, freedom, and promise of God in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, communicating its universal message and translating and interpreting it anew in different times and places. This witness shapes and characterizes Luther as an integrative missional theologian, inspiring our discipleship in conformation to the way of Jesus Christ. This discipleship underscores Luther's idea of the priesthood of all believers, because every Christian is bound by duty to give a missional witness. Gospel as living voice of God is "just as if one throws a stone into the water. It makes waves and circles or wheels around itself, and the waves roll always farther outward...The waves continue forward. So it is with preaching."⁴⁴

⁴³Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 306-7.

⁴⁴Stolle, *Luther Texts on Mission*, trans. Klaus D. Schultz, 24.