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LCMS Identity and Mission in the American Urban Context: Engaging Conian Black Theology Through Strategic Lutheran Missiology

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To the one who made real freedom possible for all who believe, our crucified and risen Lord Jesus, and for all those who, with courage, audacity, and compassion, are compelled to bring His freedom to others no matter the personal cost or contextual challenges, this work is dedicated prayerfully to be useful to that cause, that mission.

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ABSTRACT

Seltz, Gregory P., "LCMS Identity and Mission in the American Urban Context: Engaging Conian Black Theology through Strategic Lutheran Missiology." Ph.D. diss., Concordia Seminary, 2017. 304 pp.

This dissertation addresses the challenges of the American urban context by dialoging with James Cone's Black Theology in order to construct an LCMS urban missiology. This LCMS urban missiology is a dynamic, Two-Kingdom, sacramental engagement strategy that addresses the issues endemic to the urban community for the sake of the community and for the sake of the Gospel.

The American urban setting is fraught with challenges: identity politics, ethnic-sociological fragmentation, and the delegitimation-politicization of virtually all aspects of urban, public life. For faithful missiological engagement in the urban context, the LCMS needs to take such challenges seriously, by engaging in a racial critique of its missional practices and by relying upon its Two-Kingdom theology to form a unique missiological response. Through Bevan's synthetic model of contextual theology, this dissertation dialogues with Conian Black Theology to offer a racial, missional critique of the LCMS and to construct an LCMS urban missiology that differs from the public missiological engagements of Evangelical Theology and Black Theology. This urban missiology analyzes and then builds upon the historical-social location of the LCMS in urban ministry, offers a Two-Kingdom response to Cone's challenges, and presents a sacramental concrete understanding of missional practice that is not ultimately captive to specific political ideologies or policies. This LCMS urban missiological engagement is then used in a case study of the church's missiological engagement in the racially charged events of Ferguson, Missouri.

INTRODUCTION

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. (Gal. 5:1)

The growing ethnic-sociological fragmentation of American cities makes proclamation of the good news of a text like Gal. 5:1 to diverse people groups in urban America a challenge. This is particularly true when it is done by The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS), a mainly white church body. What are the appropriate mission strategies in the urban context for a church like the LCMS? How can it engage the culture missionally when it knowingly or unknowingly embodies the culture of oppression to the very people it is seeking to serve? One possible answer could be incarnational mission strategies, such as those taught by anthropologist, Sherwood Lingenfelter.¹ In such a strategy, the missionary divests oneself of a portion of one's own cultural, sociological values while seeking to invest oneself as fully as possible in new cultural perspectives concerning matters such as time, work, play, judgment, community, etc. Such strategies often work well in a context of mutual, cultural-reciprocity. When the LCMS in urban ministry in the United States seeks to engage the black community, or other minority communities, in mission however, the racial dynamics of the American culture and its history with slavery, racism, discrimination etc. demand more.

In the introduction of *Risks of Faith*, theologian James Cone succinctly presents the contextual challenge to LCMS urban mission. He explains, “White theologians need to recognize

¹See Sherwood G. Lingenfelter and Marvin K Mayers. *Ministering Cross-Culturally: An Incarnational Model for Personal Relationships* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986), 117–24, where he speaks about becoming a “150% person culturally” for more effective Gospel communication, a divesting, investing process of enculturation for the sake of effective Gospel communication “cross-culturally.”

that their theologies will never have integrity as long as they fail to incorporate a persistent and radical race critique in their discourse.”² For, as it stands now, he bluntly says, “White theology is not Christian theology at all.”³ Mark Chapman, in his book, *Christianity on Trial*, summarizes Cone’s critique on American Christianity saying,

Cone’s analysis of the perpetual racism exhibited throughout the history of the white church—from its active support of slavery and segregation to its conspicuous silence in the face of institutional racism—led him to emphatically conclude that the white denominational churches are unchristian.⁴

Such an indictment of American Christianity contains elements of truth. The anger in the Black community over the injustices suffered in America is completely justified. As Thomas Sowell rightly points out, “Black Americans were the only racial or ethnic group brought to America against their will. . . . Black Americans are thus among the oldest Americans, and their cultural heritage is one formed almost exclusively on American soil.”⁵ Furthermore, for African Americans, slavery, oppression, and political disenfranchisement were synonymous with that “American soil” for hundreds of years. Cone uses these historical realities to give voice to a critical indictment of Christian theology as practiced in white churches in the American cultural setting.

For the LCMS to engage the challenges voiced by Cone, many inter-related questions arise: What would a “persistent and radical racial critique” of one’s theology entail? What would that look like? Can a church of western origin (“white” by Cone’s categories), be “black” in its

² James Cone, *Risks of Faith: The Emergence of a Black Theology of Liberation, 1968–1998* (Boston: Beacon, 1999), xxvi. The question is what does a racial critique have to do with an ethnological, cultural critique? Are they the same? Are they different? Why? Why not?

³ James Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1990), 9. Cone’s contention is that true Christian theology must arise out oppressed communities. Since whites are the oppressors, they cannot do Christian theology faithfully.

⁴ Mark L. Chapman, *Christianity on Trial* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996), 127.

⁵ Thomas Sowell, *Ethnic America* (New York: Basic, 1981), 183.

witness among black people or is the “ontic” barrier too great for such mission? What challenges to urban, cross-cultural mission work must the LCMS face due to its unique history among the churches of the American experiment? What place does the LCMS inhabit amidst the historical reality of American, white, Anglo-Saxon, even progressively secular, elite privilege? Does a concrete Christian theology have to be political to be contextually meaningful? Can the liberating emphasis of identity politics or the various political theologies actually get in the way of a faithful, effective sharing of the Gospel of Jesus? Are all “White” proclamations of the Gospel the same, namely political incarnations of the Gospel for the sake of the powerful?

What is the LCMS’s unique relationship to these questions? Must a church body that has been historically “ethnic-immigrant” in nature, “hamlet oriented” culturally, and confessionally centered and driven in its contextualization of the Gospel, necessarily be lumped into the socio-political gospels of white or black power just because this group of believers happens to possess the same skin color of the dominant culture of its new heritage? More positively, are there any cultural or theological characteristics distinctive to the LCMS that might allow it to be a unique missional voice of the Gospel in the midst of the racial tensions of urban ministry in twenty-first century America? Can the LCMS, with generally white ministers of the Gospel, interact in an authentic dialogue with black culture⁶ with a different understanding of the Gospel’s liberating praxis than that defined by Cone and Black Theology?

This dissertation will not attempt to answer every contemporary question about race, politics, and religion. Yet, facing Cone's challenge specifically will enhance the possibility of a

⁶ James Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1970), 27. Cone would emphasize the “ontologically black” difference between anything white and the black community. In dialogue with Cone then, it would be a mistake to assert that the typical, Germanic, Anglo pastor of the LCMS can become “a black man in white skin.” This thesis asserts that there can be an authentic dialogue that takes seriously the unique concerns of the black and urban community, even as one shares the Good News of the Gospel as proclaimed in the LCMS.

more effective LCMS mission in the city. With a critical self-understanding of its relationship to the present United States urban context, coupled with a unique public perspective of care for the poor and the disenfranchised in its ministries in the city, the LCMS can form an understanding of its place in public, urban mission and, thereby share the Gospel of Jesus Christ more clearly, faithfully, and effectively.

The Thesis

This dissertation will dialogue with James Cone to articulate an LCMS missiology that can deal with the challenges and opportunities in urban ministry in the sociopolitical-theological milieu of the modern North American city.⁷ Such a dialogue will form a missiological response to the potentially delegitimizing paradigm of Black Theology⁸ and its challenges for LCMS concrete, social engagement.⁹ This will be accomplished: (1) by applying Cone's paradigmatic race critique culturally and politically to the LCMS and its public identity in the modern American urban context, uncovering its present social location in urban ministry; (2) by offering

⁷There are other "culture specific" theologies that inform the modern identity politics movement, but this author will focus on "Black Theology" due to the encompassing nature of its influence on the Modern American psyche with its continuing struggle to overcome the effects of slavery. Black Theology, the civil rights movement, community solutions for poverty and equal access to education are issues that become more and more publically intertwined so that the principles behind "Black Theology" increasingly provide a philosophical, theological framework for an urban, political ideology. This ideology challenges any orthodox Christian church both politically and theologically, as this paper hopes to demonstrate.

⁸ Will Herberg, *Protestant, Catholic, Jew* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983); Gibson Winter, *The Suburban Captivity of the Churches* (New York: MacMillan, 1962); and Peter Berger, *The Noise of Solemn Assemblies* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1961), all paint a picture of the fusion of Christian values with the White Suburban Values of 1950s America. Of course, that hegemony is what unraveled in the social upheaval of the 1960s. James Cone's "Black Theology" is a codification of these critiques, albeit in an even more convicting presentation, since in Cone, White Theology is not only cultural bound, but racist to the core.

⁹ In some ways, this is a more pressing issue for our church in mission. For while authors like Anthony B. Bradley, *Liberating Black Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), argue persuasively that the Black Theology of James Cone, Dwight Hopkins, and Cornel West is exerting less and less influence on orthodox Christian theology from a Black perspective, it is still very influential in the academy and in the politics of the city (identity politics) as a challenge to churches like the LCMS who seek to do ministry in the city as an authentic voice to the neighborhood.

a Two-Kingdom missional response to Cone's paradigm in dialogue with Anthony Bradley, delineating the potential limitations and opportunities for the LCMS as a concrete public voice in urban mission; (3) and, in view of that Two-Kingdom critique, by presenting a sacramental¹⁰ concrete understanding of the Gospel message of freedom with its unique implications for an LCMS missional praxis that takes Cone's concerns seriously while offering a concrete hope for those in the city, not ultimately captive to specific political ideologies or policies.

Presently, mission strategies for community engagement stress an "incarnational" approach.¹¹ Due to the unique "Christian"¹²American struggle with slavery and race, and the cultural hegemony of "white power," such a strategy is unable to answer Cone's radical racial critique and is not sufficient for LCMS urban outreach. Historically, the LCMS has faced the pressures of Americanization through cultural and contextual affirmation of its identity in relative isolation to the community at large. Now, however, it must face the contextual challenges of Black Theology. This dissertation will articulate a way in which the LCMS can contextualize a Two-Kingdom, sacramental voice in the community, engaging in social issues in

¹⁰ This paper seeks to flesh out the unique, concrete missiological implications of the LCMS emphasis of the sacramental character of the Good News of Jesus. As Arthur Carl Piepkorn, "The One Eucharist for the One World," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 43, no. 2 (Feb 1972): 101, states concerning the "real" presence of the body and blood of the cosmic Christ in the sacrament, "Because we eat the body and drink the blood of the cosmic Christ, we are bound to His concerns." And, "The Eucharist is part of our preparation for service to the whole world," 105. The Lord's Supper compels and empowers the Christian in vocation to serve the neighbor whom the Lord brings to their life. The question of "how," is more difficult to define, especially as one speaks about the actions of structures and policies rather than personal service to others in one's community. In view of Cone's challenges of "structural racism" being implicit in all white churches, what would a dynamic, Christian life lived vocationally, even publically for the sake of one's neighbor begin to look like? These are the questions of concern to this paper.

¹¹ Lingenfelter and Mayers, *Ministering Cross-Culturally*; Paul G. Hiebert and Eloise Hiebert Meneses, *Incarnational Ministry: Planting Churches in Band, Tribal, Peasant and Urban Societies* (Grand Rapids, Baker, 1995); David J. Hesselgrave, *Planting Churches Cross-Culturally* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000); and *Communicating the Gospel Cross-Culturally*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991).

¹² A question throughout the dialogue with Cone is "To what degree is America "Christian" and who defines that?" His sweeping indictment of American Christianity assumes that "white theology" is a monolithic whole with respect to the theology and politics of race in America. This paper will seek to show that the LCMS is a voice differentiated from certain aspects to that charge for the sake of its mission in the city.

the urban context for the sake of the Gospel and the people whom the church serves. As such, this dissertation will provide a missiological third way of community involvement compared to Conian Black Theology's Gospel of structural liberation or the Evangelical focus on individual repentance as the key to fundamental societal change.

CHAPTER ONE

THE NEED FOR AN LCMS URBAN MISSIOLOGY: AN LCMS DIALOGUE WITH JAMES CONE VIA THE SYNTHETIC MODEL

In *Urban Ministry*, Harvie Conn describes the mission challenge facing the Christian church in the twenty-first century as increasingly urban.¹ With the mission mandate to preach the Gospel to all nations and the sociological reality that virtually all nations are coming to our cities, the context for mission in America is increasingly urban, multi-cultural, and multi-ethnic. The present political-cultural realities of the urban context pose challenges to the LCMS' capacity and ability to engage the urban context in a meaningful way. Compelled by the Gospel, it must find a way to do so. For there to be an engaging LCMS urban missiology, then, there must be an understanding of the ethos of the urban environment and context. To begin, it is helpful to consider the cultural, political, and ecclesial dynamics that shape ministry in an American urban context.

The Cultural Setting of the Modern Urban American Environment

In order to articulate an LCMS urban missiological engagement, it is necessary to understand the dynamics of the current urban cultural setting and the sociological cultural location of the LCMS in reference to that setting. A helpful way to begin is to consider the research and analysis of James Davison Hunter.

In his work *Culture Wars*, Hunter examines particular movements in America that are

¹Harvie M. Conn and Manuel Ortiz, *Urban Ministry* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001).

presently in conflict in what he calls a “culture war.”² Hunter defines “culture war” as a contest for cultural ascendancy and the capacity to enforce conformity. For Hunter, at the base of this culture war are two politically competing, culturally engaging ideologies, which he labels the “*impulse toward orthodoxy* and *the impulse toward progressivism*.”³ Major differences at the foundational level of their worldviews result in increasing polarization between these two groups. The orthodox impulse has a commitment to an external authority,⁴ while the progressivist impulse views moral authority as “defined by the spirit of the modern age, a spirit of rationalism and subjectivism.”⁵

In his most recent work, *To Change the World*, Hunter analyzes the systems of power in American society that account for cultural creation, transformation, and change.⁶ Hunter argues that it is not ultimately “ideas” that make or change culture, or even heroic individuals, for ideas are “inexorably ground in social conditions and circumstances.”⁷ Instead, what makes the difference is the “power of networks and the new institutions that they create, and the

² James Davison Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* (New York: Basic Books, 1991), 201. Hunter also reminds the reader that in elite realms of cultural production (for example, academia) a certain kind of narrow secularity prevails. This secularity has many of the same political goals and strategies as Black Theology for the problems of the urban environment. Hunter’s point that the “winning side” of the culture war in a particular context means that the “opposing side,” or the side deemed irrelevant to that particular context, must face that delegitimation if it seeks to be a meaningful part of that community.

³ Hunter, *Culture Wars*, 43. See also James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 150–56, where he also adds a third category, “the Neo-Anabaptist” or “purity from” perspective of cultural engagement. For our purposes, this third category (a non-engagement of the political, public culture for the sake of the Gospel) is not relevant because, according to Hunter, “There is a world hating theology. . . . Their dominant witness is a witness of negation . . . and they have little to say to those outside of their own particular community besides judgement,” 175. Therefore, such a separatist emphasis would be dismissed by Cone out of hand, circumventing a meaningful missional dialogue with Cone and the missional challenge to the LCMS to engage the urban, minority community with a concrete liberating political engagement with respect to race and racism issues. As such, the charge presently leveled against the LCMS is that they are already disengaged concerning issues in communities unlike themselves.

⁴ Hunter, *Culture Wars*, 44.

⁵ Hunter, *Culture Wars*, 44.

⁶ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 44.

⁷ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 44.

communities that surround them.”⁸ He states that culture “at root provides the very terms by which life is ordered,”⁹ even more importantly that culture is a form of power.¹⁰ He says,

Culture is not neutral in relation to power but a form of power. In other words, like money, accumulated symbolic capital translates into a kind of power and influence. But influence of what kind? It starts as credibility, an authority one possesses which puts one in a position to be listened to and taken seriously. It ends as the power to define reality itself . . . it is the power of “legitimate naming.”¹¹

The key for creating, sustaining, or transforming culture is not merely the truth or power of ideas, but whether or not these ideas are wedded to and empowered by the deep structures and networks foundational to a particular culture. Such power exists in defining cultural norms and in naming cultural issues. It also exists politically in determining the cultural questions to be handled and solved by the public, power-resolving force of the state.¹² It even exists to define the potential and final solutions that are appropriate for a given community.

According to Hunter’s research, the progressivist vision is one whose influence is extended in the elitist structures of the American culture, namely in education in general, in universities, the media, the arts, and even law.¹³ The use of such power in the dense networks of society not

⁸ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 44–45.

⁹ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 46.

¹⁰ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 46, says, “In our own culture, the inherited categories derived largely from biblical and classical source by which we understand the most basic aspects of human life have been and are being transformed by very powerful forces over which individual and social groups have little control.” Whether one agrees with Hunter’s analysis or not, his idea that weak, outsider entities or communities, not tied to the elite structures of American society, cannot effect cultural change of any significance, is a cultural reality the LCMS has to face if it seeks to be missiological relevant in urban, minority communities in the United States from which it is presently detached, sociologically, politically, and culturally.

¹¹ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 36. In the area of cultural influence, Hunter argues that the Evangelical Church (the church the LCMS is often associated with sociologically), even with its institutions, publishing House and media, it remains at the periphery of American society, far away from the center of what produces culture and transforms culture.

¹² Hunter, *To Change the World*, 101–2, states that the state “is the final repository of legitimate force. . . . In its ability to make law, the state has the ability to assert its power positively or negatively on people and communities—to confer privileges or impose sanctions, to provide assistance or create difficulty, to bestow rights or to inflict punishment, harm, injury, and loss.

¹³ Hunter, *Culture Wars*, 301, says, “Yet other important sectors of the (knowledge) industry, as we have seen, such as the entertainment, news, and political media, and the educational establishment—both lower and

only can define narratives to effect societal change, but also can have the power to delegitimize any other competing voices concerning what is best for the American culture and its communities. Hunter's research demonstrates how intertwined the progressivist view is with networks of power, even the power of the state itself. The broader social location of the progressivist vision carries greater import.¹⁴ It is one that tends to be rooted and most influential in the major power cities of America, the “urban centers of the Northeast, Midwest and West Coast—Los Angeles, San Francisco, Denver, Chicago, New York, Boston and Washington, DC, While the social location of the orthodox impulse tends to be from small towns and rural areas of the South and Midwest.”¹⁵ Hunter's books delineate the camps vying for public power in the American culture. His research also demonstrates that the power structures influencing American culture are urban, academic, media driven, and overwhelmingly progressivist.¹⁶

The Political Setting of Twenty-First Century America: Power Politics, Ressentiment, and Delegitimation

In addition to attending to cultural dynamics, an urban missiology will need to attend to political dynamics. According to Hunter, two predominant challenges in American culture are

higher levels—and the so-called helping professions, are demonstrably anti-orthodox.”

¹⁴ At this juncture, this dissertation is making no judgment about this information. What is to be noted is the fact that such delegitimizing power and pressure does exist and that it must be faced in sharing the Gospel in communities where such a 'worldview' has credibility and influence. Hunter's argument is that no cultural change can be effected unless the culture's deep structures and networks are engaged. This dissertation seeks to posit a Two-Kingdom engagement that more effectively engages the community for the sake of the whole community while still positing the unique missiological engagement that only the Gospel can provide.

¹⁵ Hunter, *Culture Wars*, 302.

¹⁶ Hunter's second work, *To Change the World*, laments all this politization but he speaks very matter-of-factly about the reality of how cultural norms are formed and changed. It has to do with the elites and with the deep structures of culture. On page 78, it speaks of cultural change amidst "a rich source of patronage that provides resources for intellectuals and educators who, in the context of dense networks, imagine, theorize, and propagate an alternative culture." This happens at times, even against the popular will of the common man. Conian Theology is well received in these elite structures today, even if it is not as popular within the Black Churches themselves.

difference and dissolution, both fueling a politicization of daily life.¹⁷ Pluralism, the radical difference between worldviews of people who now form the citizenry of the United States, creates a loss of cultural consensus. As Hunter says, modern pluralism produces a “fragmentation not only among worldviews, but the social structure that support those worldviews.”¹⁸ Concerning a Christian engagement of culture, pluralism “creates social conditions in which God is no longer an inevitability . . . because the most important symbols of social, economic, political, and aesthetic life no longer point to him.”¹⁹ Dissolution is the disintegration of modernity, or as Hunter states, it is “the deconstruction of the most basic assumptions about reality.”²⁰ Dissolution “dissolves all meaningful authority, and all meaningful moral purposes but will.”²¹ Such dissolution means that, “in the contemporary world we have the capacity to question everything, but little ability to affirm anything beyond our own personal whims and possessive interests.”²² What remains in the public arena is the will to power and the political power to enforce one’s will. In response to the challenges of difference and dissolution, the public turns to that which is political, the instrumentality of the coercive state, as the one institution to “find solutions to public problems.”²³

Presently, as Hunter describes it, all things public, social, and cultural, especially since the New Deal, have become overly political. When all is politicized, the final arbiter is power of the state, politically engaged.²⁴ He makes the statement that,

¹⁷ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 202–6.

¹⁸ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 202.

¹⁹ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 203.

²⁰ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 205.

²¹ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 211.

²² Hunter, *To Change the World*, 206.

²³ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 102.

²⁴ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 106, He says, “Politicization means that the final arbiter within most of

Politics has become so central in our time that institutions, groups, and issues are now defined relative to the state, its laws and procedures. Institutions such as popular and higher education, philanthropy, science, the arts, and even the family understand their identity and function according to what the state does or does not permit.²⁵

With the politicization of all things cultural, the modern methodology for societal transformative engagement requires harnessing the power of the state towards one's ends. When the coercive state is the arbiter of all things cultural through a politics of power, the dynamics and motivations involved in transformative, cultural engagement are not ones of dialogue and compromise. They are ones of Ressentiment and Negation ultimately seeking to legitimate or delegitimize a particular voice or position in the public square. Ressentiment is the Nietzschean idea that couples the notion of resentment, namely the "feelings related to perceived insult or unfairness, with the motive for political action and victory engendered by anger, envy, hate, rage, and revenge."²⁶ Hunter says that Ressentiment has "become the distinguishing characteristic of politics in modern cultures."²⁷

Ressentiment²⁸ is a key force, then, at work within culture, politics, and communities.

Ressentiment is a political psychology not only based on a narrative of injury, of being wronged,

social life is the coercive power of the state."

²⁵ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 103.

²⁶ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 107.

²⁷ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 107.

²⁸ Throughout the paper, I will use the word "delegitimize/delegitimation" as a particular form of Ressentiment's negation, namely Black Liberation Theology's power to negate any white theology in the city. Hunter states generally that "Resentiment adds pathos to our situation (which is primarily legal and political publicly) . . . it is grounded in a narrative of injury . . . which leads the aggrieved to accuse, blame, vilify, and then seek revenge on those whom they see as responsible." Both conservatives and progressive liberals seek to use the power of politics to do this. This thesis merely points out that in the city, the power of that "delegitimation" is theologically undergirded by Black Power politically and culturally. To "delegitimize" then is to describe the public power of a particular narrative to negate, even silence opposing opinions or perspectives germane to community issues and solutions. Using Cone's definition of "white theology" as one that always undergirds white privilege and dehumanizes black people, the white perspective on Christianity in all its forms is assumed to be negated as a relevant voice in the black community, for the black community by its relationship to white power and racism, no matter what the actual, particular relationship is between particular white theologies, churches and communities.

either real or perceived, but expressed “as a discourse of negation, the condemnation and denigration of enemies in the effort to subjugate and dominate those who are culpable.”²⁹

Applied politically, with the power of the state to coercively conform people to a particular policy or worldview, Ressentiment carries the power to also delegitimize a particular position, policy, or worldview to the point of it being silenced or shamed in the public square.

In the engagement of culture, then, the state has a growing overarching relationship with virtually every aspect of life and the coercive power to conform people to its wishes. Hunter calls this political culture “the implicit framework of moral claims and narratives within which ideals and attitudes, institutions, and actions operate.”³⁰ He also states, “Slowly, often imperceptibly, there has been a turn toward law and politics as the *primary* way of understanding all aspects of collective life.”³¹ Political participation is the accepted vehicle then for public engagement, with political success often delegitimizing the losing side. As such, the questions, the problems, even the vocabulary used for decidedly political community discourse is determined not by worldviews, ideas, or individual people, but by the enmeshed networks of influence already established in the deep structures of society.³²

In Hunter’s assessment, both the right and the left practice this use of political power as a way of enforcing their perspectives on the community. At the time of his writing, however,

²⁹ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 108.

³⁰ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 108.

³¹ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 108, emphasis mine.

³² Hunter says in a *Christianity Today* interview, “Faithful Presence,” (*Christianity Today*, May 2010), “Populism underwrites American Christianity, especially within evangelicalism. That populism speaks to cherished values, but it also works against the dynamics of cultural change. The main reason Christian believers today lack influences in the culture, despite their aspirations, is not because they don’t believe enough or try hard enough or thing Christianly enough. It’s because they have been absent from the arenas in which the greatest influence in the culture is exerted.” ³⁴ As we will see, Christianity, even in its most publicly, political form is on the periphery of America Culture. The LCMS is but a footnote even to that.

Hunter demonstrates that the progressivist worldview and its culture conforming/transforming power is much more influential in the dense networks of American society, networks that actually can affect cultural change. Such urban centers are places where the conservative worldview, the view that is most often associated with the LCMS, is the least engaged and represented politically. It would be easy to argue that the LCMS needs to harness political power for the accomplishment of its ends. It would be easy but wrong. Such an approach, according to Hunter, only politicizes the church so that it suffers both the irony that in seeking to address a political context the church itself becomes politicized and the tragedy that by being politicized the church loses its authentic and powerful voice. The goal of this dissertation, then, is not merely to create a “conservative, right” reengagement of the urban community by the LCMS, but to offer another way of doing public theology missiologically through dialogue.

Ecclesial Engagement in the Public Sphere: Participating in Cultural Issues via Political Dynamics

In *To Change the World*, Hunter more clearly nuances contemporary ecclesial cultural engagement by describing present public theologies in reference to their access and use of political power. He expands the different ecclesial, political engagements from “conservative and progressive” to three, namely “conservative, progressive and neo-Anabaptist” engagement.³³ He also describes each group in relationship to power in the America context as “‘Defensive Against’ (conservative); ‘Relevance to’ (Progressive) and ‘Purity from’ (neo-Anabaptist).”³⁴ The “Defensive Against” perspective tends to think of political engagement as the exercising of

³³ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 109.

³⁴ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 213.

power for the “right ordering of a free society”³⁵ according to Christian principles. As such, they tend to see a more limited role of the coercive power of the state in that regard. The “Relevance to” perspective seeks a modern rebranding of Christianity in terms of the effecting of public justice and equity, exercising the political use of power for the sake of the achievement of biblical ideals of liberation. In this perspective, the state has a much bigger role in actuating those ends for the good of all.³⁶ The neo-Anabaptist perspective would see Christian engagement as the creation of an alternative public, Christian community altogether.³⁷

Undergirding each political theology are foundational principles that still emanate from the competing factions of the culture war, namely the “cultural conservatives and cultural progressives.”³⁸ Some other particulars of each worldview give clues as to why churches and theologies tend to align themselves with each group. The Progressivist worldview, uncomfortable with appeals to biblical authority due to modern scientific skepticism, redefines the public purpose of the church as a structure or institution that exists to find structural answers for the problems posed by modern industrial capitalism. Hunter says,

The only lasting solution (for the problems caused by the brutal power of contemporary social and economic institutions) would be found through institutional measures of redress. It was here in addressing the problems of labor, the demand for industrial education, the expanding requirements of poor relief, and the necessity of a

³⁵ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 112.

³⁶ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 145, points out that the liberal political theology emphasizes that “the framework by which change is enacted, however, is the State—its rituals, practices, laws, policies, and procedures. Though animated by a social movement, the dominant vehicle for achieving the goals of justice and peace is politics.”

³⁷ The key concern here is the “use of power” and each ideology’s relationship to the state in accomplishing its goals. Hunter summarizes those goals as “the main challenge presented by the modern world (for Conservatives) has been secularity . . . their solution, the ‘resacralization’ of society. (For Progressives) the primary challenge is inequality . . . the solution is the redistribution of wealth and power with reference to the poor and needy. (For neo-Anabaptists) The main issue is the violence and coercion built into liberal democracy . . . the solution, the peace-loving koinonia of the church based community.” Hunter, *To Change the World*, 199. For a more detailed description of each of these political theologies, see 111–66, 213–24.

³⁸ Hunter, *Culture Wars*, 46.

spirit of Christian communitarianism in public life that the modern church could most effectively serve the cause of Christianity.³⁹

The conservative worldview sees this redefining vision of the church's public purpose as one that ultimately moves away from the central teaching of the Bible. While the conservative worldview seeks temporal answers to real world, community problems, it views the main purpose of the Church as a public "institution" which calls individuals to personal repentance before God. The Church's calling is primarily to spread the Gospel of God's eternal salvation in Christ. Any resulting societal engagement flows from an obedient joy to that message lived out in loving service to one's neighbor.

These competing impulses have fundamentally different descriptions of the foundational standards for public life in the American culture. Hunter says,

Where *cultural conservatives* tend to *define freedom economically* (as individual economic initiative) and *justice socially* (as righteous living), *progressives* tend to *define freedom socially* (as individual rights) and *justice economically* (as equity).⁴⁰

In addition, at the foundational level, each worldview has radically different views of authority and thereby offers competing claims concerning public behavior in the American context.

Conservatives view morality, even public morality, as rooted in a transcendent authority, namely God, or in the ten commandments of a sacred authority, the Bible. Progressives reject any such transcendent notion of morality, seeing moral authority and its public manifestations as something "conditional and relative."⁴¹

Hunter's nuanced view of the Christian church's public, community engagement is helpful to delineate the issues each theology faces in its use of public political power or access to such

³⁹ Hunter, *Culture Wars*, 78.

⁴⁰ Hunter, *Culture Wars*, 115.

⁴¹ Hunter, *Culture Wars*, 123. In this section, Hunter defines the progressive view of Scripture that defines its authority at best as a "witness to divine revelation."

power.⁴² In one sense, he says that both “engagement oriented” impulses—namely the conservative or progressive, and not the neo-Anabaptist—have tried to bend power to their particular public agendas, saying,

Both theological conservatives and theological progressives have done this (reduce the tension between historical/political and transcendent issues in life) by “Christianizing” their very different ideals of the social order; the former by uncritically associating revelation with traditional social practices and the latter by relativizing revelation in conformity to liberal-modernist social practices.⁴³

To be noted at this juncture are the differences that each “political theology” has in terms of the proper use of public power for the good of all, as well as the proper use of the coercive nature of the state in service to their political theology. The conservative view has a more limited, yet necessary role for the state’s coercive power to define base cultural issues and solutions. The dominant issues are social in nature, issues such as religion in public life, (defense of) the traditional nuclear family, and traditional morality.⁴⁴ The liberal view has a more expansive understanding of the state’s role to define and solve a variety of cultural concerns. This theology focuses the church’s use of power pertaining to the issue of justice, defined as “economic

⁴² See Hunter, *To Change the World*, 94, where he says, “The creation mandate inevitably leads Christian believers to a transformative engagement with the culture. . . . Yet by its nature, this engagement will not be neutral in character. Whether we like it or not, merely engaging the culture implies the issue and exercise of power.”

⁴³ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 183.

⁴⁴ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 122. Hunter explains that the Christian right exercises the public use of power by “aligning with the Republican Party in a stealth fashion, and seeking to dominate, or have a controlling influence in American politics and culture (124). I found this section a bit perplexing because all politics is an exercise of power. Since all law is “moral” and limiting in some form or fashion, the goal of the conservative may not be to “conform” the culture to one particular way of seeing things as is Hunter’s charge, but merely a public policy debate about the best ordering of society for the survival of the unique freedoms Americans enjoy. Due to the real history of the jettisoning of the conservative philosophy from the halls of power (the Ivy league, the progressive, urban political movements since FDR, and of course the secularization of media (even as early as movies like “Inherit the Wind)), it would seem logical that the conservative movement as a relatively “powerless” cultural movement (his terms), would adopt a “take back the culture” posture. Whether this posture is good for the church, that’s an entirely different question. But it seems somewhat unfair to label this movement one that seeks “to dominate,” when all politics is a form of domination, and the conservative movement tends to focus on the individual’s use of power in the vote coupled with a built-in suspicion of the corporate use of the raw power of the state.

equity.”⁴⁵ Hunter notes that one of the strongest manifestations of the Christian left is Liberation Theology, where the “struggle, suffering and hope of the poor and the person of Jesus Christ as the liberator of the oppressed”⁴⁶ ultimately defines the Christian faith. The idea of Ressentiment is also prominent in liberal political theology, where the heart of the agenda can be stated as “God hates inequality,” and the Christian right is the enemy that has “legitimated these inequalities of power and wealth.”⁴⁷ Oddly then, he argues that the influence of this theology since the 1960s is fading “because the mainline social agenda was realized . . . and the civil rights movement had largely succeeded.”⁴⁸ Such a notion is surely premature. The neo-Anabaptist view is more generally one of public political disengagement. It sees the church as an alternative polis in sharp distinction to the power politics of liberal democracy. Hunter describes the public impulse of this tradition as “pietist and perfectionist,” with such tendencies being the “source of their separatism”⁴⁹ in which the church can somehow exist disconnected from the culture in which it lives.⁵⁰ Such a disengaging perspective runs contrary to the missiological

⁴⁵ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 132. Hunter points out that the secular and theological progressive movement shares a common root in the values of the Enlightenment. As such, there is an emphasis of the prophetic tradition in liberal political theology whereby the prophet stands as a voice of judgment against the rich in society, with specific political solutions as part of that prophetic work.

⁴⁶ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 135.

⁴⁷ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 141. This idea of Ressentiment is attached to liberal political theology in general, and in Black Theology specifically, as the idea of resentment of the poor oppressed by the rich impassioned to break free of the shackles of oppression. It is interesting to note that the left actually blames the Christian right for such inequities.

⁴⁸ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 135. That statement seems to be a gross miscalculation of the enduring influence of liberation theology based on the data he presents. With Black Theology undergirding the secular progressive movement as well as a growing fragmentation of post-modern culture undergirded by the identity political movement . . . it would seem that the liberating praxis of Black Liberation theology was/is just beginning to exert its public power politically.

⁴⁹ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 165.

⁵⁰ Such a disengaging perspective would seem to run contrary to the missiological engagement challenges that the urban environment demands of white churches like the LCMS. Black Theology and its delegitimizing power in the urban context will demand some form of political engagement as a sign of relevance for the white church in the black community with separatistic tendencies like that of the neo-Anabaptist only furthering the LCMS tendencies towards a confessional, tribal isolation.

engagement challenges demanded of white churches like the LCMS as it works in the urban environment.

Each political theology defines its issues relevant to public engagement of the state's norming power towards their ends. Hunter points out that all ecclesial engagements presently "make no distinction between the public and the political."⁵¹ The conservative tends to view the state as an encroaching power, limiting the influence of faith and morality in the public square. As such, the goal is to "take back the culture for Christ"⁵² through political means. Hunter notes with surprise the "hope that conservatives place in politics"⁵³ to accomplish these ends. The liberal view tends to see the power of the state as a coercing power for cultural good, progressively moving post-modern culture humanely forward. Hunter states that in substance the political theology of the left does not "offer an alternative to the ideology of the secular left, but a faith-based extension of its discourse."⁵⁴ As such, the very work of the Church tends to be politicized in both engagements.

The question yet to be answered is "How does the LCMS form and implement a mission strategy in light of this social context?" Hunter's descriptions of these two "engagement theologies" will prove helpful to more clearly delineate the urban context and its challenges to LCMS urban missiology. Hunter's research will also be helpful to differentiate the uniqueness of an LCMS public political engagement for the sake of its urban missiological work, one that is not conservative, liberal, or neo-Anabaptist.⁵⁵ In answering the question, "How should the LCMS

⁵¹ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 163.

⁵² Hunter, *To Change the World*, 131. The principles to be reclaimed from the secularists include promoting the traditional family and traditional morality, ensuring broadcast decency, individual liberty, right to life, etc.

⁵³ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 126.

⁵⁴ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 145.

⁵⁵ See Hunter, *To Change the World*, 213–17, also chapters 3–5. While Hunter's more nuanced differentiation of the public players in public Christianity in America is helpful in setting the stage for his solution, "faithful

as a church begin to missiologically engage the black, minority communities in urban America for the sake of its witness of the Gospel?” this dissertation proposes an engagement that is not primarily political, nor apolitical, but dialogical. The primary focus of such engagement is on the unique concerns of the black and minority communities in the city from the community’s perspective.

Therefore, to form an engaging Lutheran urban missiology, there must not only be an understanding of the American urban context but also of the LCMS within that context. Having considered the cultural, political, and ecclesial dynamics that shape the American urban context, it is necessary to now turn to the theological and sociological location of the LCMS in such a context.

The Theological and Sociological Location of the LCMS in American Society

The theological and social location of the LCMS in reference to Hunter's descriptions and delineation of the modern, urban American context demonstrates why there is need for an LCMS missiology now more than ever. The LCMS is at best a displaced church in reference to the public challenges involved in urban ministry, or, at worst an isolated, even incapacitated church in this regard. Its public alignment with the “conservative worldview”⁵⁶ places the church

presence,” it doesn't change the fact that Cone and his demand for a concrete Christology still fits most comfortably in the Liberal-Progressive arm of the public, political voices of the church today. In fact, his description of the political left's use of power in the action of resentment (a “discourse of negation, the condemnation and degradation of enemies in the effort to subjugate and dominate those who are culpable,” 107), is very similar to the notion of delegitimation by which Black Theology dismisses White Theology as unChristian. Cone and practitioners of Black Liberation Theology would most likely cast Hunter's solution of a “faithful presence,” as a white solution to problems created by white people.

⁵⁶ Robert D. Putnam and David E. Campbell, *American Grace* (New York; Simon & Schuster, 2010), see chapter 12 where churches like the LCMS, with traditional gender roles, which are less political “at Church” tend to be Republican in political persuasion. The question remains, do LCMS members see such alignment in the same manner as either Evangelicals or their progressive counterparts, namely as a way to transform culture? For the sake of our mission in the city, should we rethink our political engagements and how they affect our capacity for mission and outreach?

immediately in tension with the general worldview of urban America. Its weak historical sociological location relative to the societal fabric of America in terms of power and influence poses continuing challenges for the church's missiological engagement in the urban community for the sake of the Gospel.

Displaced: The LCMS, an Immigrant Confessional Church in America

Historically and theologically, the LCMS is a confessional church, bound together at its core by a clearly defined proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.⁵⁷ Diana Rankin, summarizing Charles Piehl's social analysis of the LCMS, writes,

Historical inquiry has led Charles K. Piehl of Concordia Teachers College, Seward, Nebraska, to conclude that Missouri Synod Lutherans are an ethnic group — not by virtue of language retention, foodways, or any obvious German way, but rather through a consistent pattern of doctrinal and liturgical conservatism based on beliefs about the nature of Lutheranism as taught by Luther and their Saxon forefathers, particularly C.F.W. Walther. The actual ways in which this pattern of conservatism is expressed would seem to constitute the spirit of Missouri Synod Lutheranism.⁵⁸

The Saxon immigrants, principle founders of the LCMS, journeyed to this country for mainly religious reasons. Theirs was not a motivation to participate in the millenarian hopes of America as the “New Jerusalem” or “New Zion on the Hill”⁵⁹ so central in other immigrant churches.

⁵⁷ The tight confessional and ethnic nature of the LCMS differentiates it from other white churches in the American experiment. The question is “how?” Does that differentiation matter in the dialogue with Cone? This author believes that it does, but that does not mean that we are not answerable to challenges of Cone's theology either. A synthetic model of contextual theology (as articulated in Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* [New York: Orbis Books, 2011], 88–102), therefore, allows for a clear articulation of the LCMS difference and yet also a rigorous engagement with the context of an urban mission environment shaped by Cone's Concrete Christological Paradigm.

⁵⁸ Diane Rankin, “Ethnicity and Religion: The German-American Experience,” *A Heritage Deferred*, 100.

⁵⁹ See Harvey Cox, *Fire from Heaven* (Cambridge: Da Capo, 1995), chapter 1, where he delineates the millenarian hopes of the United States at the turn of the twentieth century especially as it is seen in the Chicago world's fair. One of the fair's main exhibits was called, “the white city,” for its majestic, plastered Romanesque style city of the new world. Others called it the “New Jerusalem,” delineating the millennial hopes and dreams of America as the new Zion, the New Jerusalem.

Instead, they sought a place that would allow the church to practice their faith free of the persecution that the church and its people were facing in their German homeland.⁶⁰

Such a motivation may contribute to the theological and sociological isolation⁶¹ of the LCMS in American culture today. Mark Noll argues that C.F.W. Walther's confessionalism, and the LCMS's "strictly theological solitude for Lutheran Traditions," coupled with a desire to maintain old world distinctiveness, caused a "morally suspect retreat from public activism to social quietism."⁶² Concerning the LCMS formation in America, Heinrich Maurer highlights this distance from a sociological perspective, "creed-fundamentalism becomes the homologue of tribal-mindedness."⁶³ The historical experiences both in Germany and America fashioned a sense of confessional and ethnic unity within the German Lutheran community, while also highlighting sharp differences between the LCMS and the American community at large.

From the beginning, the LCMS differentiated itself from the dominant public themes of

⁶⁰ See Walter Forster, *Zion on the Mississippi: The Settlement of the Saxon Lutherans in Missouri* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1990); Carl S. Meyer, ed., *Moving Frontiers: Readings in the History of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1986); Also *The Lutheran Witness* 116:4 (April 1997) and 116:5 (May 1997) and <http://www.lcms.org/aboutus/history>, for an exhaustive discussion about the unique pressures for the Saxon emigration from Germany to America. A driving unifying force for the Saxon emigration, as compared to other German Lutheran emigrations, was the desire for religious freedom resulting from religious persecution at home exemplified in the Prussian Union. The Saxons desired to be able to practice their orthodox Lutheran Faith in the freedoms of the American Experiment but not to create a Christian America or Christian Society.

⁶¹ See Mark Sonntag, "Fighting Everything German in Texas, 1917–1919," *Historian* 56, no. 4 (Summer 1994): 656–71; Mark Ellis and Panikos Panayi, "German Minorities in World War 1: A Comparative Study of Britain and the USA," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 17, no. 2, (April 1993): 238–59; Stephen Scott Gurgel, "The War to End all Germans: Wisconsin Synod Lutherans and the First World War," (University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, *Thesis and Dissertations*, paper 52) for a detailed discussion on the German experience in America as it pertains to education, religion and cultural assimilation. Germans, while always admired for their thrift and self-sufficiency, were always considered out of step with the Anglo-American culture. Language, religion, education, and culture would isolate the Germans in general and Missouri Synod Lutherans specifically due to the suspicions that were aroused from their cultural isolation and the rise of Germany in world affairs at the beginning of the twentieth century. Lynchings, beatings, murders, government spying, Loyalty Oath demands, all these were part of the Americanization of the German community during the period of World War 1 and 2 in American history.

⁶² Mark A. Noll, "The Lutheran Difference," *First Things* 20, (1992): 35. Noll argues that such isolation, which lasted until after the 2nd World War, may have allowed the Lutheran Church the opportunity to speak with a unique voice in modern America, a voice that is not modernist, nor fundamentalist, but Lutheran.

⁶³ Heinrich H. Maurer, "The Problems of Group-Consensus: Founding the Missouri Synod," *American Journal of Sociology* 30 (May, 1925): 682.

American “Manifest Destiny”⁶⁴ and American Millennialism.⁶⁵ In 1932, Franz Pieper, states the LCMS’ position in “A Brief Statement,” which rejects all forms of Chiliasm and Millennialism “since it not only contradicts Scripture, but also engenders a false conception of the kingdom of Christ, turns the hope of Christians upon earthly goals, 1 Cor. 15:19; Col. 3:2, and leads them to look upon the Bible as an obscure book.”⁶⁶ In the American millenarian context, the LCMS was theologically, even politically, positioned as ‘amillennialists,’ with no illusions of America as the new ‘Zion,’⁶⁷ white or otherwise. The Lutherans in America who were to become the LCMS had learned the dangers of this kind of ‘kingdom of God on earth’ in its dealings with the Prussian Union in Germany, the very cause of their emigration to America. As such, the LCMS has always been a “confessional Church somewhat outside of the American Mainstream.”⁶⁸

Displaced: The LCMS, a Sociologically Ethnocentric “Fundamentalist” Church

While the confessional nature of the LCMS compels and identifies the church, so does the ethnocentric, “hamlet oriented”⁶⁹ nature of its people in the panoply of American religions and

⁶⁴ This differentiation will be vital to the LCMS in describing itself “concretely” as compared to the Utopian, Manifest Destiny themes of “white” theology, as well as the more publicly, palatable “concrete theology of Black Theology” today. In this sense, the LCMS theology is not “white” at all . . . but to what degree?

⁶⁵ As a church of the Augsburg Confession, the LCMS is bound by Article XVII, which clearly rejects all forms of Millennialism. The early LCMS rejected union with the General Synod over disagreements of Chiliasm, among other things.

⁶⁶ <http://www.creeds.net/lutheran/missouri.htm>, “Of the Millennium.”

⁶⁷ This theological position will be very important later in this paper in reconstruction of a broader, concrete LCMS missiology, constructed in full view of the even greater challenge to LCMS urban mission, the Black Theology of James Cone and its delegitimizing power towards all white churches that seek to do ministry in urban communities in general and black communities specifically.

⁶⁸ Recent political involvement of the LCMS in matters dealing with abortion, healthcare, and traditional marriage, make the church more visibly active from a cultural point of view. Such activity only furthers the notion that the church is aligned with the conservative movement in America, though it is arguable whether the LCMS actually wields any power in that realm. This merely reaffirms the cultural challenges faced in a missiological engagement of the city.

⁶⁹ See Sowell’s discussion of Germans in *Ethnic America*, 57–64, where he describes Germans as people “perpetuating their culture and language for generations, reflecting a cultural and residential isolation,” “with the least possible mixture of Anglo Americans,” striving for education, industry, farming, and leisure within such a self-sufficient unit. Of all the Germans in America, the ones from Saxony (later the LCMS), they were the most

cultures. This reality, as well as its small size, 2.5 million people, poses significant challenges to the LCMS for effective urban missional engagement. Historically, the LCMS has been small, Midwestern, ethnocentric, and rural. This ethnocentric church of a “tribal people”⁷⁰ is identified by its language,⁷¹ its cultural traditions, and its confessional identity from the time of its initial emigration until virtually the end of World War II. In fact, the “German” identity of the church remained a limiting factor for LCMS assimilation into the mainstream of American culture well into the twentieth century.

The LCMS has historically dealt with the challenges involved with assimilation into the mainstream of American culture by focusing upon LCMS work in the realm of Lutherans for the sake of Lutherans. Much of the early history of the LCMS in American culture had to do with doctrinal issues and public, confessional relationships among other German Lutherans. Such a detachment from the culture at large is exemplified during the 1960s and 70s amidst America's civil rights struggles. During the time that the culture at large was engaged in an issue of this magnitude, the LCMS was dealing with an internal doctrinal struggle that threatened its very existence.⁷² This observation further illustrates the LCMS as an ‘ethnocentric’ church in the

conservative of all, binding themselves not merely by language and culture, but by their confessionalism.

⁷⁰ See Sowell, *Ethnic America*, which delineates historically the diverse experiences of all ethnicities in the “American Experiment.” He describes the characteristics of the community as one of “discipline, thoroughness, and perseverance,” (50). Additionally the German settlements were often “tribal in nature,” namely “a German settlement typically ‘becomes a nucleus of a pure German circle, which is born, marries, and dies within itself, and with the least possible mixture of Anglo-Americans’” (58).

⁷¹ In her study on the history and decline of Lutheran Churches in Chicago, Patricia K. Rose states that the decline of once vibrant, large urban churches was due to several factors, not the least of which was “holding on to the German language and customs” too long, while adapting to English too late. In addition, she notes that it was amidst persecution for being German, during World Wars 1 and 2, that the LCMS finally adopted the move to conduct services only in English. “Church History Speaks . . . Are We Listening,” *Lutheran Educator* 144, no. 4 (June, 2011): 1–9.

⁷² See various books on the breadth and depth of the struggle within the church, namely, James C. Burkee, *Power, Politics, and the Missouri Synod: A Conflict That Changed American Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011); Kurt E. Marquart, *Anatomy of an Explosion: Missouri in Lutheran Perspective* (Fort Wayne, IN: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 1977); Paul Zimmerman, *A Seminary in Crisis: The inside Story of the Preus Fact Finding Committee* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2007).

context of its social and cultural location in the United States.⁷³ The German language and culture played a prominent role in the organization and growth of the LCMS. The public confession of the Gospel of Jesus Christ stands as the most important identification mark of the LCMS. Robert Putnam fairly describes the LCMS sociologically then as a “Fundamentalist, ethnic”⁷⁴ church rivaled in ethnic and confessional uniformity only by the “black church” in America.

The LCMS: A Sociologically “Outsider-Insider” Church

Historically, the LCMS has faced the pressures of Americanization through cultural and contextual affirmation of its identity as a tribal-ethnic,⁷⁵ politically powerless, cultural-outsider⁷⁶ church. Such a history limits the church's social capital to be a public voice or change agent in the modern, urban context due to the LCMS' isolation from the American context in general and from the urban context specifically. If the goal were for the LCMS to be a more publicly

⁷³ Noll, “The Lutheran Difference,” 32, says that, “In the language of political scientists . . . present day sociological data shows . . . the ethnic character of Lutherans, since church-going usually reveals the sharing of ‘associational values’ as opposed to merely ‘communal values.’ ”

⁷⁴ See Putnam and Campbell, *American Grace*, 266–67, where he demonstrates the close intertwining of ethnicity and Lutheranism. See also, 180–95, where Putnam presents a vignette of an LCMS church in Houston, Texas, describing it as coming from a conservative, biblically literalist Missouri Synod, a congregation that still doesn't let woman vote, that still uses the German language, etc. as a good, representative example of the LCMS in America.

⁷⁵ Putnam and Campbell, *American Grace*, 267–74, states that Lutherans, especially LCMS Lutherans reflect a reality for whom “ethnicity and religion have historically been in a symbiotic relationship.” The only more “ethnic-religious” church in America is the Black Protestant Church. Robert Benne, *The Paradoxical Vision: A Public Theology for the Twenty-first Century* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 123, states that “Lutherans as a church body in this country continue in anonymity” with the uniqueness of the LCMS being that it “is the most persistently ethnic of the Lutheran Church bodies.”

⁷⁶ The PEW research center, in its statistical analysis of all American Denominations according to race, <http://pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/religious-denomination/lutheran-church-missouri-synod>, describe the LCMS denomination according to its racial makeup as 95% white; 2% black; 1% Asian; 1% Hispanic and 1% other. The “controlling societal data” is listed as Total US population, 71% white; 11% black; 3% Asian; 12% Hispanic and 3% other. Ninety six percent of Lutherans in America are white (it is to be noted that the ELCA is even more “white” than the LCMS according the PEW study). The question here is whether the statement of that fact undergirds wrong conclusions concerning the LCMS, namely that it is a white “power structure church” that participates in the ongoing racial tensions in the American cultural experience.

positioned church of influence in the American culture, the issue might be relatively hopeless due to the detachment of the Synod and even its people from the power, culture-forming centers of America. But the goal of this dissertation is not public policy per se, but meaningful urban community engagement, especially with African Americans and other minorities for the sake of sharing the Gospel.

For the sake of its own, urban missiological efforts, the LCMS needs to be aware that such efforts exist in the midst of a public-political setting shaped and empowered by ideas and structures that can erect real barriers to its effective mission.⁷⁷ The LCMS needs to be aware of its own social location publicly as a “fundamentalist, ethnic” church, even amongst evangelicals and other Lutherans. Sociologically the LCMS, as an “outsider-insider”⁷⁸ church, faces great challenges concerning its capacity to missionally engage⁷⁹ the city.⁸⁰ From the urban context, the

⁷⁷ See Josh Kron, “Red State, Blue City: How the Urban-Rural Divide Is Splitting America,” *The Atlantic* (Nov. 30, 2012), <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2012/11/red-state-blue-city-how-the-urban-rural-divide-is-splitting-america/265686/>, where he states that virtually “every major city (cities over 100,000 people,” are liberal. What is to be noted is the power that the city exerts in the forming of an “urban cultural context” as he says that the people do not make the city liberal, the cities make the people liberal. Again, this speaks to the real contextual, missiological issues, issues of the racial and contextual legitimating/delegitimizing power of the urban context, facing “conservative, confessional” churches like the LCMS.

⁷⁸ Hunter asserts that conservative churches like the LCMS have less cultural power in American culture. Also, Putnam and Campbell, *American Grace*, 14, 103, and Chapter 7. Note their identification of the LCMS as a fundamentalist, evangelical church, very much out of step with the American culture, especially in their vignette of the biblical literalist, conservative, male suffrage only congregation Our Savior Lutheran, Houston. See also, Robert Benne, *Paradoxical Vision*, 123, states that “Lutherans as a church body in this country continue in anonymity” with the uniqueness of the LCMS being that it “is the most persistently ethnic of the Lutheran Church bodies.”

⁷⁹ Recent political involvement of the LCMS pertains to issues that would be at odds with much of the progressive culture of the urban environment. That is not to say that such engagement is wrong. But, in terms of missiological engagement, dialogue with the community on the community’s terms would be a better first step in concrete, community involvement. It might even reframe some of the political issues that are presently of great concern to the LCMS and many other conservative churches in America. The LCMS historical reluctance towards political activity, and now it’s more engaged activity from a conservative perspective, both perspectives devoid of an authentic racial critique would be unwise, even counterproductive in meaningful missiological engagement of the black community in the city.

⁸⁰ The LCMS may have an even more challenging situation missionally, being a church body identified negatively along with the mainline churches of the culture, and yet being an outsider church in the culture as well. See Charles K. Piehl, “Ethnicity, the Missouri Synod, and the Mission of the Church,” *Currents in Theology and Mission*, 3 (August, 1976): 239–44, and Clarence Glasrud ed., *A Heritage Deferred* (Washington, DC: Minnesota Humanities Commission, National Endowment for the Humanities, 1979). Both works highlight the difficult assimilation of German immigrants in America in general, while identifying the Missouri Lutherans as the most

LCMS is seen as an “outsider” church, one that is unaware, unconcerned, and detached from the issues of the city. Yet, from the perspective of the culture, the LCMS exists as part of the “white” church hegemony of America in its politics, power, and privilege. This reality might indeed prove debilitating. This paper will argue that it also could provide a unique opportunity to speak as a third voice missionally in the city for the sake of the city.

Consider the social location of the LCMS with respect to the culturally defining American urban issues in the 1960s and 1970s. At that time, the urbanization of America and the unique missiological issues of the urban context challenged all evangelicals, but they challenged the LCMS even more. In 1966, fissures concerning urban missiology and evangelism between essentially progressive Christian Mainline denominations and Neo-Evangelical Christians were already forming and solidifying.⁸¹ Thomas Berg, in his article, “Proclaiming Together? Convergence and Divergence in Mainline and Evangelical Evangelism, 1945–1967” says,

The two lines of attack on “conversionist” evangelism were nicely dramatized when Billy Graham appeared at the 1966 NCC General Assembly in Miami. A luncheon address by Graham was followed by attacks from two mainline evangelism secretaries. Willis Elliot of the United Church of Christ epitomized the sharp theological division: he deplored Graham’s “scribal” obsession with the total accuracy of the Bible, a “demonic” approach that kept the Christian message tied to “antiquity” and “pagan myths” and out of touch with modern society. The NCC’s Colin Williams again argued that work for social justice was the essential component

resistant to Americanization and to other assimilation pressures because of their uniqueness as a confessional religious sub-group even among the Hamlet-oriented Germans.

⁸¹ One can imagine the LCMS relating to the Billy Graham side of the discussion (as a side note, Dr. Billy Graham and Dr. Oswald Hoffman of the Lutheran Hour were lifelong friends), but with virtually none of the capacity or power to effectively lead the conversation on a national scale. One can also hear the ridicule in the challenges to Graham’s obsession with the accuracy of the Bible and the non-progressive attitude that made his proclamation of the Gospel akin to antiquity and pagan myths. In the 1970s, the LCMS would soon be embroiled in a battle over the issues of modernity, the authority and infallibility of the Scripture, and the modernist interpretative methodology of exegesis, a battle that conservative evangelicals dealt with 40 years earlier in the 1930s. To the progressives of the Mainline Denominations, if Billy Graham was out of step with the times, the LCMS was surely completely out of touch. In the progressive worldview that would soon dominate the urban context, such a view of the LCMS has only intensified.

of real evangelism, emphasizing that the “old” and the “new” evangelism positions on this question presented a “real clash not just a fake war.”⁸²

Already in the 1960s, progressive challenges were being raised against all Christian churches in general regarding their capacity to meaningfully engage black and minority communities in the urban setting. The struggle to properly define the relationship between social justice, a more progressive emphasis of public church engagement, and personal evangelism, a more conservative evangelical emphasis, was further complicated by the civil rights movement's exposure of this struggle among “white churches” in the context of “white hegemony” in the American context.

White Christian churches tended to deal with such racial issues with a conversionist methodology. Michael Emerson and Christian Smith demonstrate in their work, *Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America*, that evangelicals⁸³ tend to see racial issues in personal, relationship terms,⁸⁴ namely in terms of personal repentance and personal reconciliation.⁸⁵ The LCMS, with its emphasis on salvation by grace alone, through faith alone,

⁸² Thomas C. Berg, “‘Proclaiming Together’? Convergence and Divergence in Mainline and Evangelical Evangelism, 1945–1967,” *Religion and American Culture* 5, no. 1 (1995): 67.

⁸³ Charles Colson and Nancy Pearcey, *How Now Shall We Live?* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1999), 295, summarizes this viewpoint saying, “Transformed people transform cultures.” Other practitioners of this “conversionist methodology for Social Change” include Bill Bright and the Campus Crusade for Christ, James Dobson and the Focus on the Family program, especially as it pertains to their “Truth Initiative” project, Promise Keepers, even Billy Graham and the modern Graham organization with its enduring emphasis of personal decision as a means to personal and cultural change. Hunter, *To Change the World*, 18–31, argues that this view of cultural change via transformed individuals is culturally naïve, rooted in misplaced idealism and a false sense of the actual power of the individual to influence one’s community.

⁸⁴ Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000). Defining evangelicals as Christians who “believe in the authority of the Bible, believe that Christ died for all people, are born again with a personal relationship to Jesus Christ and believe that the Gospel is to be preached to all people” (3), they see issues of racism as personal, relational and not structural. Their work demonstrates that the emphasis of the personalness of salvation not only fails to see any structural issues with racism, it tends to see the solution to racism in terms of personal repentance and right relationships (118).

⁸⁵ See also Putnam and Campbell, *American Grace*, 318, where he says, “Most significantly, evangelicals are less likely to perceive systemic causes of racism, and thus less likely to endorse systemic efforts to ameliorate its consequences.”

independent of one's works before God or neighbor, tends to get lumped together with this personal emphasis of salvation which is often dissociated from concrete community concerns. The LCMS historically has used similar evangelism strategies with that of the Evangelical churches. Evangelism programs in the LCMS, like Dialogue Evangelism I and II, look very much like “Evangelism Explosion, EE” of D. James Kennedy or Key73, the neo-evangelical program to call the nation of America back to Christ. Such efforts were individualistic in nature, emphasizing personal repentance and a call to faith, with no reference to the racial, community issues that plagued the context of the American Christian Church.

The identification of the LCMS with the ‘personal evangelism’⁸⁶ perspective of this debate, its own internal struggle over maintaining its confessional witness of the Bible as the “inerrant and inspired Word of God,”⁸⁷ as well as its relative public powerlessness in comparison to the larger evangelical churches in America, delineates further the real challenges facing the LCMS in constructing an urban missiology.

⁸⁶Personal Evangelism in the LCMS tends to follow the example of the individual witness perspective in the Evangelical churches. I was trained in Leroy Bisenthal, *Dialogue Evangelism* (St. Louis: The LCMS Board for Evangelism) which mimicked the diagnostic, individualistic approach of D. James Kennedy’s *Evangelism Explosion*, albeit for Lutheran application. Also, in my training for church planting ministry in 1988, and my participation in Mission Planter’s Institutes (Center for U.S. Missions, Irvine, CA) in 2003, 2004, 2005, etc, there were various strategies discussed, but no discussion whatsoever about race in America and its challenges to church planting in U.S. cities. That’s not to say that cross cultural challenges weren’t discussed, but again, they tended to be language based or culture based with the belief that there could be earned “reciprocal” sharing between the LCMS and the minority communities it sought to serve. Such an individual focus can be seen also in Charles S. Mueller, *Strategies for Evangelism* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1965) and Norbert H. Mueller and George Kraus, ed. *Pastoral Theology* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1990), 16, where the individual nature of pastor work is mention as “The art of applying that living Word of God to the human heart in all its varied conditions.” The cultural issue of race, systemic racism and the LCMS’ churches relationship to that issue are not addressed at all in any of these works and evangelism tends to be spoken about as sharing the Gospel to individuals who have recognized their sin so that they might believe and be saved. If issues of race and racism were discussed in this context, it was as a personal issue in need of personal repentance, forgiveness and faith.

⁸⁷ Kurt E. Marquart, *Anatomy of an Explosion: A Theological Analysis of the Missouri Synod Conflict* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977). The main argument of the book is that the confession of the Scripture as the inspired, inerrant Word of God is the foundation of the Gospel. The battle over the Word of God and the confessions of the Church was a battle for the Gospel itself. Such a conflict within Missouri would surely have been castigated by the same mainline church’s charge against Billy Graham as a “demonic” approach that kept the Christian message tied to “antiquity” and “pagan myths” and out of touch with modern society” as well.

Summary: By General Survey Alone, the LCMS Seems Ill-Equipped to Deal with the Challenges of the Urban Environment to Missiological Engagement

The LCMS as a “non-mainline, tribal, ethnocentric, confessionally conservative” church is outside of the ring of power churches in America. Even in the midst of the conservative churches in the United States, the LCMS maintains a limited position of influence. As Hunter’s research demonstrates, the LCMS is aligned, historically, confessionally, and sociologically, with the “impulse towards orthodoxy-conservative” designation, with no real public power even in the midst of that movement.⁸⁸ This places the LCMS as a church relatively alienated from the urban context, which is substantially influenced by the “impulse towards progressivism,” and the dense networks that exert cultural power within the city. With the mission mandate to preach the Gospel to all nations becoming increasingly more of an urban initiative, the LCMS presently seems alienated from any meaningful engagement. The differentiation of the LCMS from other conservative churches in America might afford the LCMS an opportunity to develop a third voice in the city, for the city as well as for our church. Long overdue is the need for the LCMS to articulate its urban missiology.

Delegitimated: Black Theology’s Challenge to LCMS Urban Missiological Engagement

The forces of urbanization, progressivism, and identity politics, since they demand more than personal evangelism and witness for an effective missiological contextualization, are forces to be reckoned with for any meaningful missiological engagement in the city.⁸⁹ Due to the LCMS

⁸⁸ http://hrr.hartsem.edu/research/fastfacts/fast_facts.html#denom, The largest Christian group in America is Catholic - 68 million; Southern Baptist - 16.1 million; non-denomination - 12.2 million; Methodist - 7.6 million; Church of God - 5.5million; Assemblies of God - 3 million; Presbyterian - 2.7 million . . . 13th on the list, the LCMS at 2.3 million members. If one were to assume that the various Baptist denominations were virtually one church on many social issues as well as the Churches of God, the Assemblies of God etc. One can see the relative anonymity and social powerlessness of the LCMS just in its relationship to other denominations in American Christianity.

⁸⁹ See Bevens, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 4. Contextualization is the idea that in developing or communicating the message of the Gospel, one needs to take into account the cultural reality of both the speaker and

alignment with the “personal evangelism, individual witness” methodologies so typical of an Evangelical public engagement, the LCMS is presently unprepared for the contextual challenges that such an engagement entails. Also, the incarnational strategies⁹⁰ involved in sharing the Gospel across cultures which tend to assume cultural reciprocity are insufficient for urban mission work by churches like the LCMS due to the present political and racial polarization in the United States and the alienation⁹¹ of churches like the LCMS from urban contexts in general, and minority contexts specifically.

The greatest cultural hurdle, though, for the LCMS to face for the sake of a more effective urban mission and evangelism strategy may indeed be the cultural, political challenges posed, not only by the forces of Ressentiment⁹² aligned with secular, progressivistic political ideologies in the urban context, but also by the challenges posed by Conian Black Theology. In Black Theology, as will be seen, the negation tendencies of political Ressentiment in secular, progressivistic policies are aligned with elements of the civil rights movement as well as the Christian religion. For an LCMS urban missiology, Conian Black Theology presents the most potent cultural challenge due to Black Theology’s ability to potentially stigmatize, even

the hearer. Practitioners of contextual theology then would take the Bible, tradition, and present human experiences as sources and norms of contextual theology. The various models of contextualization are derived and extended from the weight of authority given to each “source of theology.” This paper will use the term “contextualization” rather than “indigenization or inculturation” (the mutual goodness, reciprocity of cultures), because of its broader inclusion of the sociological, political and economic aspects demanded of a truly “contextual” theology. As Bevans states, “*Contextualization*, then, as the preferred term to describe the theology that takes humans, social location, culture and cultural change seriously, must try to keep a balance.” 27.

⁹⁰ See Lingenfelter and Mayers *Ministering Cross-Culturally*; Hiebert and Hiebert Meneses, *Incarnational Ministry*; Hesselgrave. *Planting Churches Cross-Culturally*; and *Communicating the Gospel Cross-Culturally*.

⁹¹ At this point, such alienation is merely a statement of cultural reality between the LCMS, African Americans and the urban cultural context with no moral culpability intended. The reasons for why there is such alienation will be explored in chapter two in a dialogue then with Conian Black Theology for the purpose assessing of missiological efforts needed to overcome such alienation.

⁹² See Hunter, *To Change the World*, 107, where he says, “Ressentiment is the Nietzschean idea that couples the notion of ‘resentment,’ the feelings related to perceived insult or unfairness, with the motive for political action and victory engendered by anger, envy, hate, rage, and revenge.” He further says that Ressentiment has “become the distinguishing characteristic of politics in modern cultures.”

delegitimize the church's message before it is heard.

James Cone not only challenges the missional strategies of white churches in urban mission engagement, but he also challenges the very credibility of the message of white Christian churches at their core. His call for a "concrete, liberating Christological praxis,"⁹³ a demonstrated political liberation of oppressed people reflecting the person and work of the Jesus of the Bible, calls into question the contextual legitimacy of any missiological work in urban America, but specifically that of white churches who have often sided with what he deems the oppressive powers of American culture.

Again, virtually all missiological literature,⁹⁴ see Lingenfelter⁹⁵, Sanneh,⁹⁶ Newbigin,⁹⁷ and others, calls for some form of contextualization as a part of an authentic presentation of the Gospel across cultural and ethnic barriers. Still, absent in such literature is any reference to the

⁹³ Throughout the document, I will call this Cone's "Concrete Christological Paradigm," namely Cone's call for the Gospel of Christ to be a concrete, politically liberating action to those who are oppressed. His theology, as stated in *God of the Oppressed* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1975), 82–83, adheres to four guidelines: 1) There can be no Christian Theology that is not social and political; 2) Theology cannot simply repeat what the Bible says or what is found in a particular theological tradition; 3) Theology cannot ignore cultural tradition; and 4) Theology is always about the liberation of oppressed victims. There are hermeneutical, theological ways to engage Cone. Others do that well, as this proposal will later demonstrate. The issue of missiology still remains, namely that Cone's political theology is a significant challenge to urban mission for churches like the LCMS.

⁹⁴ See Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* for a useful summary of the present discussion of contextual missiology, the models used in contextualizing the Gospel as well as the major names associated with the practice of each model. In Bevans's book, Cone is discussed as an Anthropological Model, one that would then be unique in and of the Black Community. Absent in his discussion of either the anthropological or the Praxis (liberation theology) model is Cone's charge of the delegitimation of all eurocentric, white, male theologies as "non" Christian.

⁹⁵ Lingenfelter and Mayers, *Ministering Cross-Culturally*, speaks about becoming a 150% person in a new context for the sake of transformative discipleship and evangelism.

⁹⁶ Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact of Culture*, American Society of Missiology Series 13 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1998). The translatability of the Gospel is a key prerequisite to the possibility of crossing cultures with the Good News of Jesus.

⁹⁷ Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (London: SPCK, 1986). The Church community is to be countercultural, giving pre-eminence to the obedience to Christ even as it seeks to engage the cultural around it "authentically." The Church community, as well as the individual Christian are "sent in mission" to others. The people of God are then, not only in the community, of the community, but are there "for" the community.

“delegitimizing” charge of Black Theology and its racial critique of White Theology⁹⁸ and the white churches of America. This delegitimizing charge, which demands concrete, political solutions as part of an authentic missiology among black Americans and other minorities, is especially challenging to an LCMS, urban missiology due to the church’s historic reluctance toward overt political activity and its now recent engagement in political action of a conservative form. The delegitimizing charge also challenges Lutherans contextually in their evangelism efforts due to the influence of Black Theology and its political-cultural progenies⁹⁹ as well as the Ressentiment influence in secular, progressive politics present in the American urban context today. The dialogue for an effective, contextual LCMS urban missiology best begins with Cone due to the significance of the underlying issue of race and racism, not only in America in general, but in the urban environment specifically.

James Cone was a dominant theological voice amidst the social chaos of the 1960s. In 1968, his foundational book, *Black Theology and Black Power*, would take the notion of “concrete social justice” not merely as a strategy for sharing the Gospel, but as an indictment of the entire white, Christian, American theological enterprise. Cone shocked the church with the claim that “White theology is not Christian theology at all.”¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ With Cone, the concept of “white theology” is hard to accurately define. In *For My People: Black Theology and the Black Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1984), 159, he defines being ‘against whiteness’ as “being against racism, corporate capitalism, police brutality, unjust laws, prisons, drugs and so on. This list could go on and on, and that is why it is convenient to sum it up in one word—whites.” A better definition of white theology for Cone might be that it is a theology that justifies or masks oppressive power structures even as they oppress people. As such, all things connected to western culture, i.e. Christian theology emanating from that same culture, would be by definition “white.” Cone’s emphasis of Christian theology as that which emanates from an “oppressed” community which also “centers on Christ,” (*A Black Theology of Liberation*, 5) would label even confessional Lutheran theology as “white” since it has been absent in the discussions and actions of the liberation of black people in the American cultural context, tending towards “abstractions” rather than concrete actions. Blackness is an “ontological symbol of oppressed people” and whiteness is an ontological symbol of “oppressors” (7).

⁹⁹ Various other liberation theologies such as feminist theology, LGBT liberation theology, Chicano liberation theology, Latin American Liberation theology, MinJung theology etc. The social analysis and the “concrete” political actions of these theologies also tend to be very similar to Black Theology.

¹⁰⁰ See Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 9. Cone’s contention is that true Christian theology must arise

The writings of Cone offered common cause and common hope to the anger of Black nationalism and the hopes of the black Christian Church in America. Cone's writings addressed issues faced due to a unique matrix in the history of the United States: the continuing remnants of slavery, such as the Southern Democratic resurgence of the "civil war" through Jim Crow laws, poll taxes, and personal intimidation of anyone who supported the "colored cause," and the chaos of the culture due to the assassinations of both Kennedy and King. In recent reflections on the book, Cone said,

Black Theology and Black Power was written in the context of the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements. Martin Luther King, Jr. was the most powerful symbol of the Civil Rights Movement and Malcolm X was the voice behind the Black Power Movement. In *Black Theology*, I wanted to make Martin King and Malcolm X *one* voice because each spoke a truth that was essential in the Black freedom struggle.¹⁰¹

Cone's public attack on white Christian theology and white America in *Black Theology and Black Power*, had predecessors, as Elijah Muhammad and the Black Muslims had already called for black people to jettison Christianity as White man's religion. But his call originated from a faith outside the American mainstream. Albert Cleage, a Christian minister, brought the charge of the delegitimation of American Christianity closer to home in his call for a "black Messiah" for the Black Church, calling them to give up its "individualistic, otherworldly salvation (White Christianity), and join the fight for black liberation in racist America."¹⁰² But his indictment focused more on the Black churches' unwillingness to engage in the fight, rather than on white theology specifically.¹⁰³ Cone's unique accomplishment was to focus Black

out oppressed communities. Since whites are the oppressors, they cannot do Christian theology faithfully. See also Chapman's analysis, *Christianity on Trial*, 127.

¹⁰¹ James Cone, "Some Brief Reflections on Writing Black Theology and Black Power," *Black Theology* 8, no. 3 (2010): 265.

¹⁰² Albert Cleage, *The Black Messiah* (Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1968).

¹⁰³ Cleage, *Black Messiah*, 87, claimed that the classic doctrine of Christianity, the atonement, the salvation of individual people by the work of Jesus on the Cross must be discarded altogether because it dissuaded people to get involved in concrete action for liberation here and now. He was convinced that "everything about traditional

Theology's delegitimizing charge not at Christianity per se, nor at the Black Church and its lack of engagement, but at White Christianity specifically. Chapman summarizes it well,

But unlike Mays¹⁰⁴, who focused on the *ethical failure* of white Christians in the area of race, Cone emphasized the failure of white American theologians to grasp the *essential meaning of the gospel* because of their tendency to overlook black suffering in the formulation of their theologies. For if the biblical God is only revealed in the historical struggles of an exploited people fighting for freedom, how can the white church be doing American Christian theology when it fails to consider the theological reflections of *oppressed black Americans*?¹⁰⁵

Cone would attack American White Christianity at its theological core, indicting American Christianity (all western Christianity) as “anti” Christian in its fundamental, theological proclamations.

Cone's paradigm was more than an academic protest, it was an indictment of American white society and the white Christian churches and their theology¹⁰⁶ as fully complicit in hegemonic American political enterprise of oppression. Using Barthian Christology,¹⁰⁷

Christianity was wrong” and that “nothing is more sacred than the liberation of Black people.”

¹⁰⁴ Benjamin Elijah Mays (1894–1984) is considered one of the most influential Black leaders “pre-Black power and Black Theology,” fighting the notion of black inferiority with education, discipline and work, stressing also the inter-relatedness of all human beings.

¹⁰⁵ Chapman, *Christianity on Trial*, 129.

¹⁰⁶ To Cone, this would include churches like the LCMS. This dissertation therefore argues that the “delegitimizing” power of Black Theology includes the LCMS missiologically.

¹⁰⁷ For the purposes of this thesis it is enough to state that for Barth, like Cone, the nationalism of power was antithetical to the true revelation of God in the world. Barthian Christology, or the radical differentiation of the Revelation of God in Jesus Christ and any form of natural theology was an influential point of departure for James Cone in constructing Black Theology in white America. He did his PhD thesis on Barth, see James H. Cone, “The Doctrine of Man in the Anthropology of Karl Barth” (PhD diss., Northwestern University, 1965) Also, Cone quotes Barth, *Epistle to the Romans*, trans. E.C. Hoskyns (London: Oxford University Press, 1922), 330–31, who notes, “God . . . who is distinguished from men and from everything human, and must never be identified with anything which we name or experience or conceive, or worship as God.” to again express Barth's attack on natural theology as a means for the revelation of God. Barth's insistence on the Absolute otherness of God meant that God would have to reveal Himself on His own terms. Therefore God is revealed in the person and work of Jesus Christ alone. Such a return to Jesus through the witness of the Bible alone was Barthian Christology's push back not only on natural theology but on the nationalism of Nazism or any human expression as being revelatory of God's work in the world. Cone would use Barth's critique to unmask white theology in America as the same. He would later dispense with Barth as insufficient in reconstructing a theology for the needs of black people in racist America.

emphasizing the “infinite qualitative difference between God and man,”¹⁰⁸ Cone unleashed a Christological, delegitimizing attack on American white theology as a public, “natural theology run amok.”¹⁰⁹ As Barth sought to unmask Hitler’s German nationalism as a false political theology, so Cone sought to unmask White Theology¹¹⁰ and its politics in America as illegitimate. For Barth as for Cone, there is an absolute difference between “God and creature, infinite and finite, eternity and time, Christ and culture.”¹¹¹ Any theological/political/structural claim to theological hegemony was by Christological definition “anti-Christian” because “God does not do theology. Human beings do theology.”¹¹²

While Barth was helpful to Cone in unmasking White Theology as “not Christian,”¹¹³ such a transcendent Christology was lacking in any meaningful revelation of the Christ of Scripture to Black People. Cone leaves Barth behind in reconstructing a tangible paradigm of God’s revelation in Christ, as a “concrete event of liberation of oppressed people.”¹¹⁴ The “liberating Christ” in culture connected with those oppressed. It was in the “community of the Oppressed”

¹⁰⁸ Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 37.

¹⁰⁹ See J. Cameron Carter, *Race: A Theological Account*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), for a thorough discussion of the theology of Race in Western Culture, especially his assessment and critique of the theological implications of James Cone’s Black Theology and its impact on white theology in American Culture.

¹¹⁰ White theology, in political terms could also be defined as a political theology from above much the same way that Black Theology is political theology from below. Cox, *Fire from Heaven*, recounts this white theology through the historical event of the “World’s Columbian Exposition” in Chicago, 1893. Cox says that this event was the “consummate symbol of America’s pride in its brief past and confidence in its limitless future” (22). The exhibits carried overt religious overtones “suggesting that the history of Christianity had reached its culmination in America” (27). The theological principles and political aspirations of the “white city” exhibitions (named because of the white marble architecture) along with the concurrent religious parliament at the gathering were post-millennial, with an overarching spirit of progress and enlightenment “under the benevolent, liberal, Protestant and American Auspices” (37). Of course, such enlightenment was for the elite whites of the culture alone.

¹¹¹ Carter, *Race*, 160.

¹¹² Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, xix.

¹¹³ Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 9.

¹¹⁴ See Cone’s full discussion on the Hermeneutics of “God talk” as “Liberation of Israel, completed in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. . . . The doctrine of God in Black Theology must be of the God who is participating in the liberation of the oppressed of the land.” *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 55–61.

where the “Oppressed one, Jesus Christ” could be found as their liberator. For Cone, ‘blackness’ became an ontological category of being, an experiential reality of oppression in a racist society.¹¹⁵ For Cone such a concrete reality was also the privileged location of the Christ who fights for the concrete liberation of the oppressed from their oppressors.

Concerning the extent of Cone’s “unmasking of white theology,” Chapman says,

For most Christians the names Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther, and John Calvin represent the theological foundation of Western Christianity. But for James Cone, all these persons supported the maintenance of a status quo that perpetuated the oppression of the poor and the downtrodden. Specifically, Aquinas’s claim that “between a master and his slave there is a special right of domination”; Martin Luther’s identification with the state and condemnation of the Peasant’s Revolt; the easy association of John Calvin’s theology with capitalism and the silence of them all concerning the horrors of the African slave trade.¹¹⁶

In *Black Theology*, Cone did not merely critique white theology, he sought to present a more faithful Christian theology, one that provided a deeper analysis of Christian doctrine,¹¹⁷ one rooted in black experiences amidst a culture of white supremacy and racism masquerading as Christianity. Using the Exodus as a fundamental narrative, as well as Jesus’ declaration in Luke 4 that he came to “to proclaim good news to the poor, to proclaim freedom for the prisoners, to set the oppressed free,” Cone recast traditional Christian terminology through the prism of “concrete liberation for those who are oppressed.” A faithful proclamation of the Trinitarian work of God identifies God “as creator, God (who) identified himself with oppressed Israel,

¹¹⁵ See Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 204n. 5, where he says, “First, blackness is a *physiological* trait. . . . Secondly, blackness is an *ontological* symbol for all those who participate in liberation from oppression. This is the universal note in black theology. It believes that all human beings were created for freedom, and that God always sides with the oppressed against the oppressors.” For Cone, being oppressed is to be ontologically black. Being one who fights against the oppressors, means one is ontologically black. In the context of the racism of America against black people, Jesus is black, the revelation of God is a black event etc.

¹¹⁶ Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 124.

¹¹⁷ Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation, Twentieth Anniversary Edition* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989), xi. Here Cone delineates his understanding of systematic theology as a theology that is “not universal language about God. Rather, it is human speech informed by historical and theological traditions, and written for particular times and places. Theology is *contextual* language—that is, defined by the human situation that gives birth to it.”

participating in the bringing into being of this people; as Redeemer, God (who) became the Oppressed One in order that all may be free from oppression; as Holy Spirit, God (who) continues the work of liberation.”¹¹⁸ True Christian theology was concrete liberation, a praxis oriented theology of those oppressed. In the American context, that means black liberation from all things white.

Such a concrete liberation would also demand a “concrete Christology.” He says, “The norm of all God-talk which seeks to be black-talk is the manifestation of Jesus as the black Christ who provides the necessary soul for black liberation. . . . What is needed is an *application of the name (Jesus) to concrete human affairs.*”¹¹⁹ Also,

The definition of Jesus as black is crucial for Christology if we truly believe in his continued presence today. Taking our clue from the historical Jesus who is pictured in the New Testament as the Oppressed One, what else, except blackness, could adequately tell us the meaning of his presence today? Any statement about Jesus today that fails to consider black as the decisive factor about his person is a denial of the New Testament message.¹²⁰

He posits then a concrete Christology as a concrete salvation of liberation¹²¹ as well as a concrete understanding of the presence of the liberating Christ today, namely among the community of the oppressed.¹²² White theology, disconnected from any of these racial concerns in the context of American culture, without any concern or liberating reference to the oppressed of the land,¹²³ was not merely wrongheaded, it was evil,¹²⁴ and needed to be dispensed with. It was also to be

¹¹⁸ Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 64.

¹¹⁹ Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 38. Emphasis mine.

¹²⁰ Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 120.

¹²¹ Cone, *Risks of Faith*, 8, calls the work of Christ “essentially one of liberation.”

¹²² Cone, *Risks of Faith*, 9–10 says, “If the Gospel is a gospel of liberation of the oppressed, then Jesus is where the oppressed are.”

¹²³ Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 204n. 4.

¹²⁴ Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 8–9, proposes that “black theology seeks to analyze the satanic nature of whiteness and by doing so, prepare all nonwhites for revolutionary action.” Also, in order for white theology to be “Christian theology, it must cease being *white* theology and become black theology by denying

replaced with a concrete, liberating gospel of Christ. As such, Black Theology sought to delegitimize all white theologies as theologies of the powerful, designed to maintain the status quo regarding black people and other minorities. With the black experiences of slavery, Jim Crow, lynchings, political disenfranchisement, and poverty in white Christian America, the charge of the white church's illegitimacy, even unfaithfulness demands a concrete missional answer from anyone seeking to do ministry among African Americans or other ethnic minorities in an urban setting.¹²⁵

America's unique relationship to the slavery issue, namely its racial overtones, was the soil that germinated Cone's work. Cone says,

Like Black Power, Black Theology is not new either. It came into being when black church men realized that killing slave masters was doing the work of God. It began when black churchmen refused to accept the racist white church as consistent with the gospel of God.¹²⁶

America's unique struggle with racism and slavery makes the delegitimation of white theology missionally difficult to overcome, but a challenge that must be engaged nonetheless.

In his writings, Cone intended to merge the cultural, theological influence of Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X into an organic whole in Black Theology. The victim-liberation construct extending out from Cone's "concrete Christological paradigm"¹²⁷ occurred at a time

whiteness as an acceptable form of human existence.

¹²⁵ Throughout the paper, the reference to Black Theology and other minorities is not a diminution of the Black cause, but an expansion of its purview from Cone's perspective. For Cone, things are binary, Black and White, Oppressors and Oppressed. In that regard, issues and answers that pertain to Black people with regards to White Theology and White churches, also pertain to other minorities.

¹²⁶ Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 26.

¹²⁷ Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 1. Cone's definition of Christian theology and the Gospel of liberation is that it is "a rational study of the being of God in the world in light of the existential situation of an oppressed community, relating the forces of liberation to the essence of the Gospel, which is Jesus Christ." His theology roots the presence of God and the purposes of God in oppressed communities with their concrete liberation as the goal of the Gospel." namely Cone's call for the Gospel of Christ to be a concrete, politically liberating action to those who are oppressed. See also his theology, as stated in *God of the Oppressed*, 82–83, as adhering to four guidelines, 1) There can be no Christian Theology that is not social and political; . . . and 4) theology is always about the liberation of oppressed victims. Throughout the paper, this is summarized as a "concrete christological

when the pressures of “Americanization” and assimilation were waning in the face of similar cultural, political pressures towards ethnic balkanization and isolation. Arthur Schlesinger describes this phenomenon as “arising both among non-Anglo Whites and among nonwhite minorities to denounce the goal of assimilation, to challenge the concept of ‘one people (in America)’ and to protect, promote, and perpetuate separate ethnic and racial communities.”¹²⁸ This “Identity politics” found a theological foundation in Conian Black Theology, often fragmenting people into many constituencies, each with a unique set of grievances against the white American government or the colonialistic culture of the West in general.

Historically, Cone is a significant force, theologically and politically, in American society’s struggle for the civil rights of Black people. But why dialogue with Cone concerning urban missiology today?

First, Cone remains a force even today in academia and by extension, in urban culture and politics.¹²⁹ While Cone has been supported, critiqued, and even challenged, the emphases of his theological perspective continues to be extended in today’s political, academic, and ecclesiastical arenas,¹³⁰ and as such his work is still formidable to any engagement in the urban context. Black

paradigm,” namely a concrete political liberation of oppressed people of which Christ is the ultimate example of God at work in the world for oppressed people.

¹²⁸ Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., *The Disuniting of America: Reflections on a Multicultural Society* (New York: Norton, 1998), 21.

¹²⁹ See Carter, *Race*, 159–60, where he summarizes Cone’s historical significance and says, “His influence has been exerted not only within the academy but also with the so-called broader public square. Cone’s Stature as a public intellectual can be seen, for example, in that he was the key drafter of the June 13, 1969 statement of Black Theology, a statement that represented the growing consensus between black clergy and academics. . . . With his intellectual finger so close to the religious pulse of the era, Cone was positioned in many respects to establish the theological terms of engagement with the realities of black faith and life in America.” (This author would argue that political terms of engagement were also established by Cone and those who would follow in his academic, theological footsteps).

¹³⁰ All theologies, feminist political theology, LGBT political theology, Chicano political theology, which operate from a “Oppressed, Oppressors” perspective owe their allegiance in some part to Conian Black Theology due to its unique perspective with regards to the American struggle of its Christianity with black slavery, race, freedom, and civil rights. Some of these theologies are actually critiques of Cone, even critical of Cone, but they extend his paradigm even in their critique. The “concrete” political actions of these theologies also tend to be very

Theology's enduring, legitimating/delegitimizing influence may be illustrated in some of the radical changes made to the curricula of many mainline academic institutions in the United States.¹³¹ Present-day Black academicians such as Dwight Hopkins and Cornel West build on critiquing power of Cone's emphasis of the pervasiveness of white racism and black victimhood in a relatively welcoming academic environment. Clay rightly says, "Black Liberation Theology as a religious engagement of Black Radical imagination has been instrumental in the transformation of religious institutions, theological education and social structures."¹³² One might argue that Cone mainly sought to retranslate the Gospel of Jesus for the black church in the context of its life in the United States.¹³³ Yet, the enduring influence of Black Theology is pervasive and evident in modern academic and political discourse,¹³⁴ creating an urban cultural worldview especially challenging to the mission efforts of churches like the LCMS.

The influence of Black Theology and its delegitimizing power is still in force in the academy and in contemporary politics, but not without evaluation and challenge. Though Cone's concrete, delegitimizing paradigm is critiqued, such efforts often further advance the scope of

similar and, as this paper will demonstrate, they are very influential in the urban centers of America.

¹³¹ See David O. Sacks and Peter A. Thiel, *The Diversity Myth: Multiculturalism and the Politics of Intolerance at Stanford* (Oakland, CA: The Independent Institute, 1995); Alvin J. Schmidt, "With 'Friends' like These . . .," in *The Menace of Multiculturalism: Trojan Horse in America* (Westport: Praeger, 1997), 163–74, where the author speaks of the secularizing emphasis of the modern "progressive" American University under the guise of "multi-culturalism." This work characterizes the LCMS as naïve to the progressive influence in society by adopting the mantra of multi-culturalism without being aware of its stated goals (172).

¹³² Elonda Clay, "A Black Theology of Liberation or Legitimation? A Postcolonial Response to Cone's *Black Theology and Black Power* at Forty," *Black Theology* 8, no.3 (2010): 310.

¹³³ Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 74, says, "The hermeneutical principle for an exegesis of the Scriptures is the revelation of God in Christ as the Liberator of the oppressed from social oppression and to political struggle, wherein the poor recognize that their fight against poverty and injustice is not only consistent with the Gospel but is the gospel of Jesus Christ."

¹³⁴ That influence is key to understanding the challenge that Black Theology poses to LCMS urban mission strategy and effectiveness. Black Theology, as a theology of/for the "oppressed" is a foundational theology for the political praxis of a wide variety of philosophies and perspectives today. Diverse issues in ecology, gender, economics, all find their stabilizing roots in the Black Theology's legitimation of their voice as victims of western, colonial, White theology and praxis. As such, the LCMS voice in the city is illegitimate by default.

Cone's delegitimizing attack on all things “white.” Dwight Hopkins, a disciple of Cone, in *Heart and Head: Black Theology—Past, Present, and Future*, extends Black Theology’s political-societal demands, arguing that the politic solutions of Cone, with regard to income distribution, racial critique, and community transformation (manifestations of real world ‘Gospel’ action on behalf of the poor), have not gone far enough.¹³⁵ Hopkins also extends Cone’s racial concern for the powerless beyond categories of color, demanding that economic justice for women and for homosexuals belong as a stated goal of Black Theology’s liberating emphasis.¹³⁶ Cornel West brings Marxist categories more clearly to bear on Conian theology’s critique of white culture, fusing Black Theology, Marxist categories, and political policy in the answers to urban community issues.¹³⁷

Cone himself would likely agree with many of his sympathetic critics. In *For My People* and *A Black Theology of Liberation: Twentieth Anniversary Edition*, he argues that his initial writings were negligent of an in-depth social, economic, and sexual orientation analysis as it pertains to the concrete liberation of oppressed peoples. Later too, in *Risks of Faith*, he seeks, similar to Dwight Hopkins, to expand the liberative revelation of Jesus by positing the revelatory power of Black Spirituals akin to the biblical revelation. Such evidence argues persuasively that, though many critique Cone’s thinking, it is often critiqued as “not having gone far enough in delegitimating white theology and creating a concrete, political praxis of liberation for Black people in America.” Cone would most likely agree.

¹³⁵ Dwight N. Hopkins, *Heart and Head: Black Theology—Past, Present and Future* (New York: Palgrave, 2002).

¹³⁶ Hopkins, *Heart and Head*, 187, says, “If it is wrong to interpret the Hebrew story and the Jesus narrative as instructing black slaves to obey white masters and women to obey men, then why isn’t it wrong to interpret this same Bible as saying homosexuals should deny the sexual orientation that God gave them when God created them?”

¹³⁷ Cornel West, “Black Theology and Marxist Thought,” in *1966–1979*, ed. James H. Cone and Gayraud S. Wilmore, vol. 1 of *Black Theology: A Documentary History* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1979), 554.

Those who advocate a womanist perspective join the critique of Cone's category of "oppression" calling for "concrete, liberative praxis." Cone admits an initial failure of Black Theology regarding the exploitation of Black women in the United States. He says, "Black Theology learned the patriarchal bad habits of its progenitors."¹³⁸ Such a delegitimizing critique of Black Theology would also be a challenge to the missiology of the LCMS in the city, but the impact of Black Feminist Theology is beyond the scope of this paper.

While such critiques might challenge Cone's stature as a leading voice of Black Theology and the full implications of Black Political Theology today, such critiques still further the categories of victimhood central to Cone's "liberationist" agenda of the political Gospel of Jesus Christ. In other words, such critiques, while extending the forms in which Black Theology is powerful as a movement, present it as a continuing challenge for the LCMS. While some have critiqued, challenged, supported, and even extended¹³⁹ his work, Cone's Black Theology is still formidable for any engagement in the urban context. Cone links America's perceived Christian heritage, with its overtures to biblical notions of freedom, to a very specific, concrete theological/political expression of bondage pertaining to those who were enslaved in the land of the free.

Second, in forming an urban missiology, one should dialogue with Cone because he articulates the concrete liberation praxis that lies at the heart of academic and public theological

¹³⁸ Cone, *For My People*, 133. In fact, for Cone and early proponents of Black Theology, women's liberation was a "white" thing that threatened to change the discussion and focus needed for Black liberation.

¹³⁹ As previously stated, all theologies, feminist political theology, LGBT political theology, Chicano political theology, which operate from a "Oppressed, Oppressors" perspective owe their allegiance in some part to Conian Black Theology due to its unique perspective with regards to the American struggle of its Christianity with black slavery, race, freedom and civil rights. Cone himself undergirds this assertion when he, discussing racial healing, says, "Putting Malcolm and Martin together enables us to overcome the limitation of each and to build on the strengths of both and thereby move blacks, whites, and other Americans (including Indians, Asians, Hispanics, gays, lesbians and bisexuals) toward healing and understanding." Cone, *Risks of Faith*, 136. In many of his writings since the publishing of Black Theology, he supports the expansion of its focus to almost every progressive, political issue.

practice in relation to urban ministry. Cone's theology also undergirds the potential progressivist delegitimation of anything orthodox, conservative or 'white', both in the academy and by extension, in the urban public, political sphere as a theology invalid to blacks and other minorities at its core.¹⁴⁰ He says, "They preached sermons about a loving God and loving thy neighbor as if the violence that whites committed against blacks did not invalidate their Christian identity."¹⁴¹

In *Black Theology and Black Power*, Cone not only challenges the public notion of the superiority of white,¹⁴² Christian theology and the supposed inferiority of the theology of the American Black Church, he elevates Black Theology as a Christological delegitimizing critique of all things White.¹⁴³ Today, Black Theology and its paradigm of concrete, Christological liberation is foundational for other progressive "Liberation" theologies. The ontological racial categories of the oppressed, namely all things 'black,'¹⁴⁴ define the revelatory location of God

¹⁴⁰ It is to be noted here that this dissertation is not making a moral judgment about the American context, rather, the dissertation is merely stating the nature of that context, perceived or real, that faces an LCMS missiological endeavor in the modern, American city.

¹⁴¹ Cone, *Risks of Faith*. xiii.

¹⁴² In *For My People*, he defines being 'against whiteness' as "being against racism, corporate capitalism, police brutality, unjust laws, prisons, drugs and so on. This list could go on and on, and that is why it is convenient to sum it up in one word—whites." (159). A better definition of white theology for Cone might be that it is a theology that justifies or masks oppressive power structures even as they oppress people. As such, all things connected to western culture, i.e. Christian theology emanating from that same culture, would be by definition "white." Cone's emphasis of Christian theology as that which emanates from an "oppressed" community which also "centers on Christ," (*A Black Theology of Liberation*, 5) would label even confessional Lutheran theology as "white" since it has been absent in the discussions and actions of the liberation of black people in the American cultural context, tending towards "abstractions" rather than concrete actions. Blackness is an "ontological symbol of oppressed people" and whiteness is an ontological symbol of "oppressors." (7).

¹⁴³ In expressing Black Theology's challenge to white theology and white missiology, Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 107–8, says, "The country was founded for whites, and everything in it has emerged from the white perspective. The Constitution is white, the Emancipation Proclamation is white, the government is white, business is white, and the unions are white. What we need is the destruction of whiteness which is the source of human misery in the world . . . whites cannot know us, they do not even know themselves."

¹⁴⁴ See Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 7, where he says, "Blackness does not mean that only black suffer as victims in a racist society, but that blackness is an ontological symbol and a visible reality which best describes what oppression means in America." Also, 128, where he says, "Today the oppressed are the inhabitants of black ghettos, Indian reservations, Hispanic barrios, and other places where whiteness has created misery." Again, this is a description of Cone's view that will be engaged with missiologically concerning the urban context,

among the oppressed, even the essential teachings of Christianity, as “the concrete liberation of the oppressed.”¹⁴⁵ The concrete liberation praxis of Conian theology first posited in the civil rights era of the 1960s and 1970s now exerts a norming influence in other theologies and academic disciplines. Diana Hayes, in her article “James Cone’s Hermeneutic of Language and Black Theology,” argues that Cone’s use of language has undergirded other Liberation theologies.

(Black Theology) in company with other such theologies continues to provide a critical voice in academia and a challenging praxis within U.S. society. Contrary to dire predictions at its birth as an articulate theology in the 1960’s, Black Theology has not only survived, it has served as a catalyst for the emergence of other such theologies, both in the U.S. and around the world. In a sense, Black theology can be seen as “classic,” . . . a critical retrieval and interpretation of Christian tradition.”¹⁴⁶

For the sake of an LCMS missiology in the city and the purposes of this dissertation, Cone’s Christological paradigm posits the hermeneutical question, “Where is Christ that we might find Him, follow Him, and share in His liberating message with one another?”¹⁴⁷ Black Theology, defining the social location of God at work in the world among the oppressed, not only sought to make Christian theology practical for black people, it sought to finish the delegitimization of White theology in the United States. Elonda Clay in her critically sympathetic work on Black Theology, summarized its impact correctly saying,

It was Black Liberation Theology that dared to speak of Black poor people as the center of God’s liberating activity in the world. It was Black Liberation Theology that

not apologetically.

¹⁴⁵ Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 46–47. His argument is that God’s revelation is liberation, “nothing more, nothing less.” And such revelation is experienced in the actual emancipation of oppressed peoples. And, finally, only the community of the oppressed can receive and understand God’s revelation because God takes sides. On page 58, he says it even more clearly that Black Theology understands that “Christian freedom grounded in Jesus Christ is inseparable from civil freedom.”

¹⁴⁶ Diana L. Hayes, “James Cone’s Hermeneutic of Language and Black Theology,” *Theological Studies* 61, no. 4 (December 2000): 626.

¹⁴⁷ This will be a key emphasis of a Two-Kingdom, sacramental engagement with Cone. There are ways of speaking about “concrete Christology” and “Concrete Liberation” that take up his challenge to proclaim a Gospel that is meaningful to the oppressed.

spoke of Black Power as compatible with Christianity, and the importance to perceive the divine as Black.¹⁴⁸

Third, Cone's theology needs to be engaged because his theological emphasis potentially delegitimizes not only the content of White theology, it also challenges White theology's capacity to speak the word of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to black communities today. For Cone, the American participation in slavery and racism flowed from an underlying commitment to "White supremacy" in the very fabric of the culture. He argues:

Two hundred forty-four years of slavery and one hundred years of legal segregation, augmented by a reign of white terror that lynched more than five thousand blacks, defined America as 'white over black.' White supremacy shaped the social, political, economic cultural and religious ethos in the churches, the academy, and the broader society.¹⁴⁹

American culture at its core is "committed to the perpetuation of white supremacy,"¹⁵⁰ not only with its particular mores but maintained by a stealthy system of racial advantage and privilege enjoyed by White Americans irrespective of their conscious awareness or choice.¹⁵¹ The churches' acquiescence to such a system of White cultural, political, and social dominance, being intertwined with the "American Way," makes it virtually impossible to understand the needs and the questions of the black and urban community, and even harder to communicate the good news of Jesus.¹⁵²

Theologically, Black Theology's delegitimizing paradigm should be addressed in the academy and the seminaries. But, missionally, of great concern to any LCMS urban mission

¹⁴⁸ Clay, "A Black Theology of Liberation," 316.

¹⁴⁹ Cone, *Risks of Faith*, 132.

¹⁵⁰ Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 55.

¹⁵¹ James H. Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power, Twentieth Anniversary*, 15–16.

¹⁵² Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 56. This paper, in dialogue with Cone's theology via Anthony Bradley, will start with the questions and concerns of the black, urban community, as the key to an LCMS missiology that presents the Gospel seeking to be understood, but also seeking to bless the communities in which one serves.

engagement is the delegitimizing power of Conian Theology in the present-day context of the city.¹⁵³ For example, missiologically, Cone's emphasis of the hermeneutical location of the work of God solely among the black oppressed has political and theological implications for those working among black Americans and any minorities with a Conian vision. Such a hermeneutical location of the work of God only among the oppressed can serve as a potentially potent force to legitimize and to delegitimize one's whole theological and missional enterprise.

Cone's merging of Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X into an organic whole in Black Theology could be viewed as a redefinition of what it means politically to be the legitimate church in American culture.¹⁵⁴ One could argue that Black Theology was the final unmasking of White, Post-Millennial,¹⁵⁵ Manifest Destiny public theology in the United States. The missiological question is how damning is that reality for other conservative, confessional theologies which are not post-millennial in nature and how does this condemnation limit their ability to share such a confession across racial lines? To what degree would there be guilt by

¹⁵³My first experience with Black theology in academia was as a student in the Doctor of Ministry program at Emory University, Columbia Theological Seminary. I and all other white, male students in the program were asked to stand up during one of our classes and "repent" of being white. I was the only student who sat down not doing so. The guest professor that day as well as the head of the program directing the class asked that I defend my decision "not to repent" before class could continue. I also experienced its delegitimizing power in NYC publicly, being loudly called out by an influential bishop from the Episcopal Church in a gathering of various clergy to answer why I would be a pastor of a church like the LCMS, which was obviously homophobic, racist, and anti-woman. No one rose to defend me in light of the accusation, nor did I expect them to.

¹⁵⁴ Cone's emphasis of the "oppressed person in community" as the only source for a legitimate biblical Gospel theology virtually defines any "white" theology or "white" church involvement in the city as "illegitimate." "Inasmuch as white American theologians do not belong to the black community, they cannot relate the gospel to that community. Invariably, when white theology attempts to speak to blacks about Jesus Christ, the gospel is presented in the light of the social, political, and economic interests of the white majority." Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 23.

¹⁵⁵ See Cox, *Fire From Heaven*, xvii, where he describes the explosion of Pentecostal Theology (one that could be argued as Black Pentecostal Theology in its inception), as a historical narrative of a "spiritual awakening" that occurred in an American culture whose liberal, Post-Millennial aspirations had been dashed (see the World's Fair Columbian Exposition, 1893 in view of the Chicago Fire; WW1 and WW2), whose "scientific/mechanized/modern" cultural elite had even declared God as dead. For some, Cox says, this new "age of the Spirit" was the "revenge of God." The question for this dissertation is "how do either of these realities, white hegemony, black deconstruction etc., relate to how LCMS people see the world and seek to share the grace of God in Christ 'cross-culturally?'"

association? And how would that be overcome?” From Cone's perspective, the question he might pose is “why even dialogue with a church like the LCMS in the first place?”

Whether James Cone would be a willing dialogue partner or a reluctant one, from an LCMS missional perspective: dialogue we must. The mandate to go to all nations with the Gospel, the fact that all nations are gathering in our cities in America, the fact that 80 percent¹⁵⁶ of Americans now live in an urban environment compel the church to be a part of the urban mission efforts of Jesus Christ to all people. To do that then, the Church must find a way to dialogue with Cone missiologically.

Bevan's Synthetic/Dialogical Model: A Structural Way to Begin the Dialogue with Cone

A missiological dialogue with James Cone is between theologies that are at best “in tension with each other,” or at worst, “opposed to each other.” Since this effort is not an apologetic but a missiological conversation designed to inform an LCMS urban missiological engagement, such tensions can remain and still be fruitful. To carry on such a conversation, Bevans “Synthetic/Dialogical model (SDM)”¹⁵⁷ will provide structure and direction.

The use of models of theology¹⁵⁸ is helpful to guide discussions regarding complex theological issues and concerns especially when dealing with the dynamics of cultural, historical

¹⁵⁶ <https://ask.census.gov/faq.php?id=5000&faqId=5971>. According to the 2010 US Census, 250 million people live in urban communities.

¹⁵⁷ Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 89. When Bevans using the term "synthetic" he does not mean that the model is artificial. Rather, it is a synthesis of some of the aspects of all the other models, ultimately seeking to maintain faithfulness to one's theological tradition while taking the questions and challenges of a particular context seriously in sharing the Gospel. (Also, from here on out, the Synthetic/Dialogical Model will be called the SDM).

¹⁵⁸ Stephen B. Bevans is a Professor of Gospel and Culture at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago. His work on “Models of Contextual Theology” is a classification and delineation of how various traditions do theology in particular contexts. His work also delineates differing ways that the particular cultures and contexts impact theological and missiological expression. As such, his work brings clarity to discussions of contextualization by helping differing theological traditions understand each other, dialogue with each other, even find common ground from which to engage each other theologically and missiologically.

and social contexts. Models are “constructions . . . that can provide an angle of vision”¹⁵⁹ to clarify and to understand. While models do not give the whole picture concerning a theological issue or practice, they are “organizing images that give a particular emphasis, enabling one to notice and interpret certain aspects of experience.”¹⁶⁰ For Bevan then, “each model presents a different way of theologizing that takes a particular context seriously . . . each represents a distinct theological starting point and distinct theological presuppositions.”¹⁶¹ For this dissertation, the SDM not only helps clarify different theological positions and practices, it also provides a way to dialogue with differing theologies for the sake of a more effective cross-cultural, missiological engagement.

Why choose the Synthetic model and not the Praxis model, or the Translation model? The Translation model,¹⁶² the one most often practiced by churches like the LCMS, emphasizes the unchanging message of the Gospel for all cultures, but tends to treat differing cultures as interchangeable at their root.¹⁶³ Such a view prefers fidelity towards the Scriptures, subordinating the experiences and particular theologies of a particular community in the process. The Translation Model posits that the main teachings of the Bible are supra-cultural, something to be delivered on their own terms. In dialogue with Cone, such a model would not be missiologically helpful due to its subordination of culture in the process of doing theology, something Cone

¹⁵⁹ Bevens, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 29–30.

¹⁶⁰ Bevens, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 30.

¹⁶¹ Bevens, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 31.

¹⁶² See Bevens, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 38–44. Basic assumptions of this model are the supra-culturalness of the Gospel as a message that never changes, the relative similarity of all cultures at their core, the propositional truth of the Gospel that can be understood by people of various cultures the same. The LCMS would most like be identified as a Church that practices this model generally. The main critique of this model is that it doesn't take the culture of the hearer very seriously and that the Gospel often gets sifted down to mere propositional truths in which to believe, rather than an encounter with the God who loves you.

¹⁶³ Bevens, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 37–44.

would reject. Also, the dissonance between Conian Black Theology and all White theologies, including that of the LCMS, would tend not to receive proper attention, both theologically and missiologically.

The Praxis model also proves an ineffectual tool for a missiological dialogue with Cone and the LCMS from the other end of the spectrum. The Praxis model prefers the actions of the believing community over the Bible as the “primary source of God’s revelation” or as Bevans says, “the praxis model understands revelation as the presence of God in history.”¹⁶⁴ While this model describes well how Black Theologians like Cone do theology, it relativizes the Scriptures as merely another witness to God’s mighty acts of liberation in history. Such a concentration on the liberating actions of a particular believing community “as God’s revelation,” alienates the LCMS, with its view of the Scripture as the source and norm of all theology, from any meaningful missiological engagement as well.

Therefore, to give ample credence to the concerns of the urban context as well as to maintain a high view of the Scriptures and the norming teachings of the Gospel in mission, this dissertation will utilize Bevan’s Synthetic/Dialogical model to engage James Cone and Black Theology.¹⁶⁵ Bevans says of the SDM,

It tries to preserve the importance of the gospel message and the heritage of traditional doctrinal formulations while at the same time acknowledging the vital role

¹⁶⁴ Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 25.

¹⁶⁵ This particular concern to be dialogical, authentic, credible and concrete in engaging another culture, or a difference community than our own is a concern that is generally not common to the "white" church in America. Bradley, *Liberating Black Theology*, 131, says, “What Anglos theologians fail to do is dialogue with other cultures.” He points out that white theologians often determine the key questions, or key issues in society that demand the church’s attention as if they are the only issues or questions that must be addressed. Even when discussing things about "our" culture, then tend to assume that everyone agrees with what they mean by "our." The LCMS history in America tends to illustrate that tendency in our church for vary different reasons than "white supremacy." The LCMS issues were often for the sake of confessional purity, or ethnic cohesion. While the reasons may be different, the cultural isolation from issues pertaining to the city remains.

that context has played and can play in theology, even to the setting of the theological agenda.¹⁶⁶

The maintenance of the tension between differing theologies like that of Black Theology and the LCMS will be helpful for the LCMS missiologically. It will frame the dialogue in a way in which the LCMS can honestly engage the cultural challenge of Black Theology in an effort to be authentic in its mission of sharing the Gospel to a culture unlike its own.

Some presuppositions then of the Synthetic, dialogical model are as follows:¹⁶⁷

1. Every context has both elements that are unique to it and elements that held in common with others. Important for the synthetic model is the notion that one needs “to emphasize *both* uniqueness and complementarity” of each culture in the dialogue.

2. Context in itself is ambivalent. “Every culture can borrow and learn from every other culture and still remain unique,” expressing common ideas in particular cultural ways.

3. Each participant in a context has something to give the other, and each context has something from which it needs to be exorcised.

4. The dialogical process needs to “start with the local culture . . . on its own terms, yet not denigrating the wider context of the Christian tradition.”

5. Throughout the process, there should be a spirit of openness and dialogue.

The Goal of using the SDM is that such a dialogue will produce a missiological work authentic to the local culture, while at the same time maintaining respectability within one's own theological tradition.¹⁶⁸ For this paper, that means that any urban missiological sharing of the Gospel would be the sharing of the confessional, historical teachings of the Augsburg

¹⁶⁶ Bevens, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 89.

¹⁶⁷ Bevens, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 90–93, the various presuppositions are extrapolated from Bevan's discussion of the model on these pages.

¹⁶⁸ Bevens, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 94.

Confession. The contextualization of that message is one that the urban resident believers understand as their own, one that is meaningful to the particular experiences of their lives.

The configuration of such an LCMS missional dialogue with Cone starts in the place that Cone prioritizes, the place of black peoples' experiences in urban America. For such a dialogue to be missiologically fruitful, the concerns of the black community must be concretely engaged on their own terms. The LCMS must be open to the "critique" of its own Christian identity in the urban context from the community's point of view. This paper will assume that James Cone has a better perspective on that experience, even more than the most concerned, contextualized LCMS urban practitioner presently understands. His initial contextual demands for a "Concrete Christology" will also guide the challenge faced throughout the dialogue in hopes of a better LCMS urban missiology.

Engaging Cone: A Racial Critique of the LCMS; Delineating the Challenges of a "Concrete Christology" in the Cultural Context of Urban Black America

An LCMS dialogue with Cone for the sake an engaging, authentic contextual missiology in the city will be a demanding one. Bevan's model challenges the LCMS to begin the process of that dialogue by listening, listening to the concerns raised by Cone, Black Theology and the black experience of people in the city in a culture that is still beholdng to notions of white supremacy. Cone's call for a racial critique of white theology pushes the discussion further than merely an authentic LMCS, missiological methodology. His call for a concrete Christology, missiology applied for black people's challenges effectively defines the contextual legitimacy or illegitimacy of an LCMS, urban missiological work. He says,

It is unthinkable that oppressors could identify with oppressed existence and thus say something relevant about God's liberation of the oppressed. In order to be Christian theology, white theology must cease being *white* and become black theology by

denying whiteness as an acceptable form of human existence and affirming blackness as God's intention for humanity.¹⁶⁹

What exactly such a critique completely entails is not always clear as Cone himself still maintains that black theology must create an “enduring radical race critique against white Christians,” one that ends white silence on racism . . . one that will ensure that “no one will be able to forget the horrible crimes of white supremacy in the modern world.”¹⁷⁰ Such a critique must address the LCMS's relationship to the questions of slavery, racism, and political engagement with issues pertaining to black Americans historically, theologically, and practically. The answers to those questions, and the prayerful, repentant reflection on the LCMS engagement of these issues in the past, (or lack thereof), will frame the beginnings of the racial critique of the LCMS in the next chapter, defining its relationship to the issues endemic to the black community particularly, and the urban community by extension.

Such an engagement will inform the LCMS concerning a more effective urban missiology, taking into account Hunter's research that demonstrates the influence of progressive power and politics in the urban environment,¹⁷¹ as well as taking seriously Conian Black Theology's role to undergird much of the progressive, political, cultural ideological context of the city. Gayraud Wilmore says of Conian Black Theology today,

I am persuaded that, notwithstanding the apparent impotence of black liberation theology in this period of “the continuation of Reaganism by other means,” it is still the most viable expression of progressive religion in North America . . . it has lent some of its power to the Christian-Marxist movement in Latin America, to the Christian feminists in the United States, to theological questioning among America's

¹⁶⁹ Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation: Twentieth Anniversary*, 9.

¹⁷⁰ James H. Cone, “Looking Back, Going Forward: Black Theology as Public Theology,” in *Black Faith and Public Talk*, 255–57.

¹⁷¹ See note 16. For further discussion, see Hunter, *To Change the World*, 99–110.

other ethnic groups, and most impressively, to the black theology movement in South Africa.¹⁷²

Such critique of the LCMS will be directed even more pointedly by Cone's challenge of a "Concrete, Christological Paradigm," one that resists mere theologizing and demands action on behalf of the oppressed of the community. Centered on Cone's challenge for a "Concrete Christology," LCMS theology, history, and practical involvement with questions pertaining to the black community¹⁷³ will be delineated in reference to Cone's guidelines necessary for such an authentic, critical engagement in America, namely,

1) There can be no Christian Theology that is not social and political; 2) Theology cannot simply repeat what the Bible says or what is found in a particular theological tradition; 3) theology cannot ignore cultural tradition; and 4) theology is always about the liberation of oppressed victims.¹⁷⁴

In the context of urban America, Cone posits such a discussion between black people and minority people groups against the white majority in power. As stated before, the critiques and solutions apparent in Cone, also are prevalent in progressive political policy in urban America. A Conian critique of the LCMS has the potential for negation and delegitimation in the city. The Ressentiment prevalent in urban politics and culture, coupled with the delegitimizing charge of Black Theology is one that the LCMS must face. Via the racial critique, it will.

The first goal in this racial critique is not to begin fashioning a missiological response per se, but to hear the questions emanating from the community, the concerns unique to black people, especially in the city. There are hermeneutical, theological ways to engage Cone. Some have successfully done so to one degree or another, as this dissertation will later demonstrate.

¹⁷² Gayraud Wilmore in *A Theology of Black Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2008), 156, 158.

¹⁷³ As Cone notes in *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 23, "There can be no black theology that doesn't take seriously black experience—a life of humiliation and suffering. This must be the point of departure of all God-talk which seeks to be black-talk."

¹⁷⁴ See again, Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 82–83.

The critiques of Cone, whether from within his tradition or from within the Evangelical tradition, do not negate the missiological challenges that Cone brings to the forefront of a serious, urban engagement of the black community for the sake of the Gospel. Cone's political theology is a significant challenge to urban mission for churches like the LCMS.

What are the pressing questions concerning the experiences of black people in the context of urban America? How must such an experience be explicated? Again, Cone's reflections of the issues that black Americans have faced are pivotal for starting a meaningful conversation between the LCMS and the urban community. Cone defines being "against whiteness," or critiquing "whiteness" as, "being against racism, corporate capitalism, police brutality, unjust laws, prisons, drugs and so on. This list could go on and on, and that is why it is convenient to sum it up in one word—whites."¹⁷⁵

Carl Ellis, Jr., expresses a similar "concrete engagement" challenge, saying,

One must be familiar with several issues, including the reality of American slavery, the multigenerational psychological effects of legal and ecclesiastical dehumanization, contemporary manifestations of racism, joblessness, the influences of black nationalism on African-American consciousness, the Nation of Islam, the historical dynamics of the African-American family, the modes and forms of social cohesion and stratifications in the black community, violence, illegitimacy rates, mortality rates, the role and function of the historical African-American church, black theology, womanist theology, African theology etc.¹⁷⁶

In short, a racial critique deals with sin in more than a personal fashion, something white churches generally do not do. Cone explains: "Whites, because they are white, fail to perceive . . . the nature of [social] sin. It is characteristic of sin that it permeates the whole of one's being, distorting one's humanity, leaving the sinner incapable of reversing the condition or indeed of

¹⁷⁵ Cone, *For My People*, 159.

¹⁷⁶ Bradley, *Liberating Black Theology*, 155, quoting Carl Ellis, Jr. *Going Global: The Role of the Black Church in the Great Commission*. (Chicago: Urban Missions, 2005), 79.

truly recognizing it.”¹⁷⁷ He further laments white theology’s inattention to such fundamental injustices in the black community saying, “It is amazing that racism could be so prevalent and violent in American life and yet so absent in white theological discourse.”¹⁷⁸

This dissertation will engage these concrete questions in the next chapter, heeding Cone’s desire for a more expansive perspective. Cone’s racial critique will serve to analyze the history, theology, and practical responses of the LCMS in light of the issues of slavery, race, and white supremacy. Such a critique will also help define the urban culture and its challenges for LCMS missional engagement. Focusing the missional dialogue directly on Cone’s challenge for a “Concrete Christology” does not mean that the LCMS is running from the challenge of Cone’s theology as if it has nothing to offer the discussion in and of itself. Such a dialogical posture seeks to ensure that the LCMS truly hears the questions and the challenges of the urban context for the sake of it being an effective conveyor of the Gospel to the neighborhoods it seeks to serve. The definition of Cone’s challenges of the urban environment as well as the delineation of the LCMS’s history in response to those challenges will be pivotal to fashion a missiological response to Cone’s critique.

Fashioning an LCMS Urban Missional Response for the City: Maintaining a Concrete, LCMS Missiology Rooted in an Orthodox Biblical Perspective of the Gospel

The goal of the racial critique of the LCMS is to help the LCMS fashion a response that engages the challenges of Conian Black Theology on its own terms. This missional response must maintain a fidelity to the theological heritage of the LCMS. This dissertation seeks to address this challenge as well through Bevan’s Synthetic/Dialogical Model, maintaining an

¹⁷⁷ Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 107–8.

¹⁷⁸ Cone, *Risks of Faith*, 133.

authentic LCMS voice in this missional dialogue.

Cone's use of Scripture is one of the challenges that must be addressed to move the dialogue forward. While Cone states that, "Black theology is Christian, biblical theology,"¹⁷⁹ and "there can be no theology of the Christian gospel which does not take into account the biblical witness,"¹⁸⁰ the orthodox, Evangelical Christian tradition challenges his use of the Scripture in spite of the worthy goal of black liberation in the United States. His stated view of the Scripture is that it is merely a "witness to the liberating work of God with Jesus as the ultimate manifestation of that freedom."¹⁸¹ Coequal with the Bible for the revelation of God is "Black Experience; Black History; Black Culture"¹⁸² for revelation is a "black event—it is what blacks are doing about their liberation."¹⁸³ Cone, and later black theologians like Dwight Hopkins, consider black spirituals as divine revelation.¹⁸⁴ For, as Cone says, "Divine liberation of the oppressed from slavery is the central theological concept in the black spirituals."¹⁸⁵ And while the Bible is "a source of Black Theology,"¹⁸⁶ there are others, such as the "narratives of slaves

¹⁷⁹ Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 31.

¹⁸⁰ Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 31. To clarify further, he says that "the Bible is not the revelation of God; only Jesus is. But it is an indispensable witness to God's revelation and is thus a primary source for Christian thinking about God....our interpretation must be consistent with the biblical witness." But that witness is ultimately about God at work in the world liberating oppressed people.

¹⁸¹ Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 31. Cone limits the impact of the Scripture as the source and norm when he says that "the Bible is not the revelation of God; only Jesus is."

¹⁸² See Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 23–39. With the idea that the core teaching of Jesus was political emancipation, God's revelation then is anywhere where oppressed people are being liberated politically, economically and socially. As such, the experiences, the histories and the traditions of oppressed people yearning for such liberation is revelatory.

¹⁸³ Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 30.

¹⁸⁴ See James H. Cone, *The Spirituals and the Blues* (New York: Seabury, 1972); *God of the Oppressed*, 1–28; Dwight N. Hopkins and Cummings, George, *Cut Loose Your Stammering Tongue: Black Theology and the Slave Narratives* (New York: Orbis Books, 1991). See also Cone's assessment that Black experience and history are revelatory in statements where he says, "Black Theology came into being when "black Clergy realized that killing slave masters was doing the work of God." Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 26.

¹⁸⁵ Cone, *Risks of Faith*, 17.

¹⁸⁶ Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 29.

and ex-slaves,”¹⁸⁷ as well as “the spirituals, the gospel songs, the churchly expressions of the moan, the shout and the rhythmic bodily responses to prayer, song and sermon . . . projections of the pain and joy experience in the struggle of freedom.”¹⁸⁸ One might even argue that Cone hermeneutically reduces the revelatory power of the Bible by narrowing its message to one of political freedom of the oppressed, best described today not merely as a “Christ event of Scripture alone,” but presently, contextually more pointedly a ‘black event.’”¹⁸⁹ His view of the Revelation of God in the Scripture is clearly at odds with most Evangelical perspectives on the Scripture, as well as that of the LCMS, especially when he says,

As in 1969, I still regard Jesus Christ today as the chief focus of my perspective on God but not to the exclusion of other religious perspectives. God’s reality is not bound by one manifestation of the divine in Jesus but can be found wherever people are being empowered to fight for freedom.¹⁹⁰

This dissertation, seeks to fully engage Cone’s contextual challenges, but to do so with a missiological practice rooted and normed by Scriptures as God’s inspired, inerrant Word in human words. To begin to fashion a missiological response, another dialogical partner will be added to the conversation, Anthony Bradley. Bradley, an associate professor of religious studies at The King’s College in New York City and a research fellow at the Acton Institute, is a respected theologian who writes extensively in the context of black issues¹⁹¹ and is aware of the

¹⁸⁷ Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 25.

¹⁸⁸ Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 21. Cone argues that in the black experiences of liberation amidst white racism, “the divine One informs and becomes present in black reality.”

¹⁸⁹ Cone, *Risks of Faith*, 54. Cone elevates the experiences of blacks as revelatory because they are oppressed ones seeking liberation and the God of the Bible is the God of the oppressed. See also p. 63 where he says, “God is either identified with the oppressed to the point that their experience becomes God’s experience, or God is a God of racism.”

¹⁹⁰ Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 163. Such a view of Scripture that resulted from the limitation of the revelation of Jesus to the concrete liberation of oppressed communities would allow Cone to see the Negro spirituals as revelatory, as well as the theological reflections of any oppressed community yearning for liberation.

¹⁹¹ See Bradley, *Liberating Black Theology; Black and Tired: Essays on Race, Politics, Culture, and International Development* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011); *John Rawls and Christian Social Engagement: Justice as Unfairness* (London: Lexington, 2014); *Keep Your Head Up: America’s New Black Christian Leaders*,

dynamics of Black Theology. Bradley also validates the role of Scripture as an authoritative voice in the formation of an ecclesial missiology.

As a contemporary sympathetic critic of Cone, Bradley maintains a commitment to a more classical confession of Christianity for black people amidst the United States' issues, in particular slavery, race, and racism. In *Liberating Black Theology*, Bradley employs an evangelical "black"¹⁹² Christian perspective to differentiate Cone's hermeneutical challenge to classical Christian teaching from the missiological issues that the Evangelical church, both black and white, have neglected and must face. In *Liberating Black Theology*, he speaks of rethinking black hermeneutics to "maintain orthodox principles of hermeneutics while understanding and applying the biblical story in light of past abuses by 'white' theologians and abuses by a form of Afrocentricism (i.e., the black experience in America)."¹⁹³ He posits a fresh approach to theology for African American people that avoids the error of Black Theology in its "misdirected attempt at contextualization (of the Scriptures) which confused application with interpretation,"¹⁹⁴

Social Consciousness, and the Cosby Conversation (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012); *The Political Economy of Liberation: Thomas Sowell and James Cones on the Black Experience* (New York: Lang, 2012). Bradley does write as an Evangelical, so many of Cone's supporters would tend to classify him more adversarially. Bradley himself has great respect for Cone as evidenced in his extensive work *The Political Economy of Liberation*, which puts in dialogue James Cone and Thomas Sowell for the sake of concrete solutions to issues pertinent to the black community.

¹⁹² In this sense "black" is a description not merely of skin color but of a perspective that concerns itself with the concerns of the poor and the disenfranchised minority communities in the United States. In his book *Black and Tired*, Bradley demonstrates his "blackness from a Conian perspective" by wrestling with issues pertaining to the black community, 'this generation's issues, bringing theology to life and demonstrating God's relevance in a metamodern world. (xiii). Cone's call for a concrete Christology that concerns itself with real world concerns of the black, minority communities of the United States, that's a black perspective. Bradley demonstrates these concerns throughout his writings. Bradley's solutions to some of those same concerns would differ from Cone's, but they are offered from the same experiential position in this culture, addressing the same concrete concerns. See also Anthony Bradley, ed. *Keep your Head Up* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012).

¹⁹³ Bradley, *Liberating Black Theology*, 144. Bradley demonstrated how correcting the abuses of Eurocentric oppressive readings of the Scripture with Afrocentric absolutist readings both misuse the power of the self-attesting Word of God and God's message of salvation to all people, even as it speaks to the particular needs and struggles of a people in a certain time and place.

¹⁹⁴ Bradley, *Liberating Black Theology*, 145.

positing one that is “true to the Scripture and, at that same time, speaks to African Americans” in their unique, current situations.¹⁹⁵

Bradley's effort to offer a fresh approach to theology for the Black Church in general and to black people particularly, is also helpful to the LCMS missiologically. Bradley's critique of Cone does not diminish the need for cultural and political answers demanded by Cone's “concrete Christology” for the sake of the black community in the city. Nor, does it absolve the white, evangelical church, including the LCMS, from its dissociative posture to the needs of the black communities in urban America.

Engaging Bradley to frame a missiological response to James Cone moves the dialogue forward from racial critique to a concrete missional response rooted in an orthodox understanding of the Scriptures that still takes seriously the issues particular to urban context and those who live there. It also focuses the dialogue to a “concrete missiological” dialogue, one that seeks to define the concrete Christian action and service to the urban neighborhoods as mission application of the Scriptural message of the Gospel rather than Cone's hermeneutical recasting of the whole Christian faith.

Responding to Cone's challenges via Bradley privileges the issues pertinent to African American communities in the United States, historically, culturally, and anthropologically. Such a response, with a more confessional view of Biblical authority, more clearly provides dialogical space for a practical, missional dialogue between Cone and confessional churches like the LCMS. Bradley reveals Cone's hermeneutic as one that ultimately relativizes the Gospel itself,¹⁹⁶ whereas the trans-cultural Gospel, textually understood, is contextualized in various cultures.

¹⁹⁵ Bradley, *Liberating Black Theology*, 158.

¹⁹⁶ Bradley, *Liberating Black Theology*, 151, argues that even the focus on oppression and black liberation has within it relativizing realities as some African-Americans gain economic and political power.

Bradley seeks to demonstrate that an Evangelical view of the Scripture speaks to the needs of black people authentically on its own terms.

Bradley argues that understanding the Bible on its own terms, even in the midst of the evils of slavery in the United States, was the very reason that the slaves themselves recognized white people's misuse of the Scripture. Quoting Cain Hope Felder, he says,

It was the slaves understanding of Scripture that led them to realize that they were being treated in a way that was inconsistent with God's redemptive plan, regardless of the way the Word was being misused by Anglo Christians.¹⁹⁷

Bradley acknowledges white "misuse" of the Scripture. He argues that misuse does not diminish the authority and power of the Bible for all people, especially for Black people. His work brings a fresh approach to theology for the Black Church, but it also opens up dialogical space for an LCMS missional response and engagement with the practical concerns of Black Theology, even amidst theological disagreements with some of Cone's seminal theological foundations.¹⁹⁸

Bradley's critical analysis and efforts at reconstruction help bridge the gap between the missiologically motivated LCMS and Cone by maintaining a focus on the Scriptures as well as a focus on the issues that affect the black community.

Bradley helpfully demonstrates a way to address Cone's demand for "concrete liberation," in terms of the application of the trans-cultural message of the Kingdom of God to the particular contextual concerns of black people. This provides structure for an LCMS missiological

¹⁹⁷ Bradley, *Liberating Black Theology*. 157; also Cain Hope Felder, "Cultural Ideology, Afrocentrism and Biblical Interpretation," in *Black Theology: A Documentary History, Volume 2: 1980–1992*, 187.

¹⁹⁸ The obvious theological issues would be hermeneutical as well as exegetical. Cone's view of the Bible, his political use of the Exodus as a Liberation paradigm, his view of the redeeming work of Jesus as political liberation of the oppressed and disenfranchised, the very message of the Gospel is radically different than confessional LCMS teaching or traditional, biblical Christianity for that matter. This dissertation is not going to engage those issues apologetically (Bradley does that winsomely, effectively for our purposes) except as it pertains to the missiological issues that Cone rightfully illuminates, ones that must be a part of an effective, or at least authentic LCMS missiological practice in urban America.

response to those same questions. By bracketing the theological discussion in terms of practical application, one can deal with the concrete questions that demand attention in urban missiology, especially in the African American context.

Though helpful in many ways, there exists weaknesses in Bradley's *Liberating Black Theology* as it pertains to the urban challenges for LCMS missiology. Primary among those weaknesses is that it deals with Black Theology's challenge "theologically" and not missionally or practically. In the second book, *The Political Economy of Liberation*, Bradley seeks to address this by bringing into dialogue, albeit in tension, James Cone and Thomas Sowell. In this work, he effectively creates a broader conversation of what is "concrete" and liberating. Unfortunately, he sees Cone's work as theological with Sowell's work as more pragmatic and rational. The comparison of Cone and Sowell creates further space for a contextual, missiological dialogue that seeks to answer the question of what is best "publicly" liberating for the black, and other minority communities. Such a discussion provides space for the LCMS to engage the discussion with a theological and practical response that is presently absent.

In *The Political Economy of Liberation*, Bradley demonstrates that Cone and Sowell both offer practical, liberating solutions to the reality of black people and other minorities in the American experience. This dissertation hopes to build on Bradley's momentum by recasting the Cone/Sowell dialogue as a "left-hand kingdom" dialogue of God at work in the world, which can effectively open up the discussion for more solutions to real world problems without compromising the central message of the Bible. This dissertation will seek to demonstrate the wisdom of a "left-hand kingdom" dialogical perspective which calls all community voices into the public square for the concrete, common good, or in Conian terminology, "a christological paradigm" for the purposes of concrete liberation . Such a dialogue is one that the LCMS could

spearhead as it seeks to embrace the challenges of the people of the urban neighborhoods it serves, while sharing the Gospel with anyone who would receive it.¹⁹⁹

Defining the Issues and Challenges of the Urban Context

James Cone's call for a "concrete Christology" that deals with concrete issues of liberation among oppressed peoples effectively defines the contextual legitimacy or illegitimacy of the missiological work of any white church in urban America. Cone's radical "race critique" demands that white churches deal with the issue of white supremacy as a theological and practical, political issue. As such, he undergirds the progressive spirit of the urban culture as well, solidifying the issues and often times the solutions to the problems of black people and other minorities in America. Again, Cone not only helps define the cultural and political issues systemic to urban missional engagement, his Black Theological critique of white theology means that churches like the LCMS must address issues like slavery, racism, and civil rights in American society as part of their missional work in the city.

And, while theologians like Anthony Bradley might help structure the beginnings of a missional response for churches like the LCMS, Bradley provides further clarity concerning the needs to be addressed for a meaningful theological application of the Gospel to black people in the American context. In his book, *Black and Tired*, Bradley lists a host of specific issues that are particular to the racial discussion that is systemic to the challenges in urban ministry. In five specific areas, he discusses issues that need to be addressed in a missiological contextualization

¹⁹⁹ Presently, this author sees Bradley's work with Cone and Sowell as a very positive development. Holding Cone and Sowell in tension, in dialogue, seeing Cone's work theologically and Sowell's practically. Where an LCMS, Two-Kingdom perspective might be helping is locating the "concrete solutions" of both Cone and Sowell in a left-hand kingdom discussion of God's work in the world. With that, a broader discussion of solutions is possible, and even the category of the "lesser of two evils" as a social reality for temporal solutions could be helpful in providing theological framework for real world solutions otherwise not possible from a Conian progressive perspective, or a mere common, informed wisdom perspective such as Sowell's.

of the Gospel in the black community: 1) Race; 2) Politics/Economics; 3) Culture; 4) International, Global issues; 5) Education. His book intends to ““explore issues of race, politics and economics, social trends in culture, international development, and trends in education by integrating justice principles from the Action Institute.””²⁰⁰ In the dialogue with Cone and Bradley, not every issue can be, or needs to be explored. With some issues, especially those that deal with education, both the black community and the LCMS share a common concern. But seminal issues that confront any urban missiology, issues that tend to be overlooked in white theological and missional circles, issues of racism, poverty, crime, violence, joblessness, family breakdown, single parent homes, morality, access to and quality of education etc., present unique challenges and opportunities for service in the urban black community. Bradley, quoting Bruce Fields in *Introducing Black Theology*, rightly says, “for an African-American cultural hermeneutic, these issues and more will aide not in deriving the truth in the exegetical task but rather in the communication of truth principles in a form that African Americans will understand and be able to apply to their lives.”²⁰¹ Even with a more traditional view of the authority of the Scripture, with an evangelical perspective on the transcultural nature of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, Bradley can still posit the Conian starting point, the need to address the enduring contextual concerns for serious cultural, missional engagement.

²⁰⁰ Bradley, *Black and Tired*, xiii. Those principles include “The dignity of the Person - the human person created in the image of God is individually unique, rational and the subject of moral agency; The social nature of the Person - people were meant to act not only for self-interest but also for the interest of others; The importance of Social institutions - especially the family as foundational to society; Human action and the need to act to actualize one's potential; Sin - Although created in God's image, sin is pervasive and a reality; The Rule of Law and the Subsidiary Role of Government; the Creation of wealth, property rights and its positive relationship reducing poverty; Economic liberty, rights and duties; Economic Value; The Priority of Culture - moral culture that embraces the truth of the transcendent origin and destiny of the human person.” xiii-xvi. Within this framework of justice, Bradley addresses the political and social issues particular to the Black community. For the purposes of this paper, it demonstrates the concrete issues that begin an LCMS dialogue with the black community for an effective, contextualization of the Gospel.

²⁰¹ Bruce Fields, *Introducing Black Theology: Three Crucial Questions for the Evangelical Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 86–87.

An LCMS missiological response to the challenges of Conian Black Theology will demonstrate how the church relates to those particular struggles endemic to the black community in its struggle against the institutionalization of racism and the community's yearning for the basic human rights. The church engages these questions and challenges, which are burning in the hearts of those in the community, on their own terms. Employing a missional dialogue with James Cone, via the Sythentic/Dialogical model, this dissertation hopes to create a missiological response for a more authentic community engagement in sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ clearly, faithfully and effectively.

Summary

The need for an LCMS urban missiology is evident from its displacement in the urban context historically, theologically, and sociologically as well as its general identification with the dominant white, evangelical Church in America. Whether the church is displaced, isolated, or miscast, the delegitimating power of Conian Black theology places the stiffest demands on the LCMS for an authentic, effective missiology in the city. For dialogue to continue, the LCMS must take seriously the challenges of Black Theology and its call for a racial critique of itself.

In view of America's struggle with slavery and race, Cone's call for a concrete, Christological praxis is a powerful centering force in the urban community, gathering people around a common sociopolitical-theological voice of shared (real or perceived) victimhood. This view that can limit the force of other voices, especially voices like the LCMS, delegitimizing them by definition rather than by their "liberating or non-liberating results in the community." As such, Cone's call for a politically concrete Christological freedom, a mixing of political and theological language, challenges all "white" voices of the Gospel in American culture, mainline, evangelical, and even "tribal churches" like the LCMS, not just to examine who they are but

where they are in reference to the issues that pertain to the black, urban community. Such a critique calls the church to examine the words employed to proclaim the Gospel. Cone's writings highlight the need for these churches to recognize how even words like "orthodox, confessional, evangelical, conservative, Bible-believing," carry unintended or unobserved negative, political and religious overtones.²⁰² Bradley also observes in *Liberating Black Theology*, that Black theologians have reason to be cautious, even suspicious of "white orthodox" theology, saying,

Those who held to the inerrancy, infallibility and authority of the Bible also used the Bible as a theological basis for maintaining slavery, oppression, racial segregation, and dehumanization, [and] any conservative hermeneutical method associated with that tradition, perpetuates Eurocentric hegemony and must, therefore, be rejected as a valid system for us in an African-American ecclesiastical construct.²⁰³

In the urban context then, for the sake of its mission of the Gospel to all people, the LCMS must face the same challenges as all white, evangelical churches. To do that, the LCMS must face the challenge that "Black Theology was and remains a polemic hurled at the American white church leaders and their theological traditions,"²⁰⁴ a polemic of potential missional and socio-political delegitimation.

This thesis addresses that charge not by refutation, but by critical dialog with Conian Black Theology via the Synthetic/Dialogical model for an effective LCMS missional engagement of the city with the Gospel. Such a dialogue will start with the concerns, the questions, and the

²⁰² Hunter, *Culture Wars*, 323, states that even progressives who try to use "moral" language risk being branded as a right-winger. He says, "Yet with the contemporary discourse, one risks being branded a 'right winger' by even invoking moral criteria (rights and responsibilities). Indeed, the very word 'morality' has become a right-wing word. It should not be." Such branding tends to silence any discussion of personal responsibility as a pejorative perspective, one not deserving of a hearing.

²⁰³ Bradley, *Liberating Black Theology*, 129. See also Cain H. Felder, "Biblical Hermeneutics and the Black Church Tradition," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 42, nos. 1-2 (1988): 63-67; Robert A. Bennett, "Biblical Hermeneutics and the Black Preacher," *Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center* 1, no. 2 (1974): 38-53. Bradley also points out that "misuse of proper tools for biblical interpretation" is not the fault of the method, but of the practitioner.

²⁰⁴ Patrick Bascio. *The Failure of White Theology* (New York: Lang, 1994), 87.

community on its own terms as keys to such an engagement. While a missional response to Cone, through the critical lens of Anthony Bradley, liberates this missiological paper from engaging Cone hermeneutically, it does not absolve the intended missiological endeavor from being fully committed to issues that pertain to the black, urban community or the goal of sharing the Gospel in ways that are indigenous to the community. The goal of the racial critique in dialogue with Cone is to learn from the questions asked in the Black community and then apply those questions to an LCMS urban missiology. While Cone tends to create a binary, “this versus that” perspective of a black-minority cultural issues vs. white cultural engagement, the dialogical model’s emphasis of the potential common concerns, yearnings, and solutions between even contrasting cultures guides and directs the conversation.

CHAPTER TWO

THE CONCRETE CHRISTOLOGICAL PARADIGM AND ITS RACIAL CRITIQUE OF LCMS MISSIOLOGICAL ENGAGEMENT

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod is, in fact, an ethnic church body. It is hard for a white person, who is not German, to feel fully at home in the denominational structures of our church. I believe that the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod will overcome the ethnic barriers, just as it overcame the language barriers in the recent past. I believe that the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod will also overcome, eventually, the barriers of race, of caste, and of class in the social setting of America and of the world.¹

The LCMS is aptly described as an ethnic church body² in the United States. In the socio-cultural, political environment of twenty-first century America, the LCMS is a “white” church. The hope Richard Dickinson expressed for the LCMS is shared in this dissertation. Yet this optimism is mitigated by the painful reality that even now for a black person, in a denomination whose total black membership is less than one percent, “it is truly difficult to get the feeling that one truly belongs.”³ While the LCMS has worked to reach out to black people in America with an honest attempt “to transmit its message (the Gospel and Lutheran theology) across cultural boundaries,”⁴ the question remains, “Has the LCMS ever really addressed the questions that the

¹ Richard C. Dickinson, *Roses and Thorns*. (St. Louis: Concordia, 1977), 195.

² Such a description comes from within the LCMS, as seen in the quotation from Dickenson as well as from without. See Noll, “The Lutheran Difference,” 32, where he says that, “In the language of political scientists . . . present day sociological data shows . . . the ethnic character of Lutherans, since church-going usually reveals the sharing of ‘associational values’ as opposed to merely ‘communal values.’” and Putnam and Campbell, *American Grace*, 266–67, where he demonstrates the close intertwining of ethnicity and Lutheranism. See also, 180–95, where Putnam presents a vignette of an LCMS church in Houston, Texas, describing it as coming from a conservative, biblically literalist Missouri Synod, a congregation that still doesn’t let woman vote, that still uses the German language, etc. as a good, representative example of the LCMS in America.

³ Dickinson, *Roses and Thorns*, 193.

⁴ Jeff G. Johnson, *Black Christians: The Untold Lutheran Story* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1991), 232.

black community is asking, or prioritized the issues missiologically that the black community itself deems vital?” As this chapter will explain, previous LCMS urban missional engagements have lacked meaningful dialogues with the black community about the issues that the black community faces from their own perspective, and the racism that contextualizes these discussions and efforts in sharing the Gospel.

Harvie Conn describes urbanization as the mission challenge facing the Christian church in the 21st century.⁵ The LCMS generally understands this challenge, namely that, “God’s Word is meant for all nations and all creation and is not limited to a select group of privileged people.”⁶ However, the church has failed many times to live up to that clear, biblical expectation, often fleeing the “seething turmoil of the modern city, seeking refuge in a rural frame of reference—a village atmosphere.”⁷ Urbanization and industrialization are not the only challenges for an effective LCMS urban missiology. Urbanization and industrialization challenge LCMS missiology due to the church’s historical location in the rural context of American culture and the hamlet nature of German settlements in general.⁸ But Cone reminds us that it is not merely the “seething turmoil of the modern city” that is to be overcome. It is, rather, the racism and the racialization of black and minority communities in the city that remain a daunting, missiological task for white churches like the LCMS.

⁵ Conn and Ortiz, *Urban Ministry*.

⁶ See Walter Kloetzli’s quote in Richard Luecke’s “Themes of Lutheran Urban Ministry, 1945-85,” in *Churches, Cities, and Human Community*, ed. Clifford J. Green, (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1996), 125.

⁷ Luecke, “Themes of Lutheran Urban Ministry,” 125.

⁸ See August R. Suelflow, ed., *Heritage in Motion*, (St. Louis: Concordia, 1998), 256, who says, “The earliest mission effort of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod was to reach the large numbers of German immigrants who settled in the rural areas of the Midwest. The many rural congregations with which these immigrants were gathered were a great source of strength in the Synod for nearly 100 years. But during World War II there began an internal migration of the American population from its rural roots into the cities and suburbs. The urbanization of America has had a pronounced impact on the LCMS.”

Therefore, an LCMS dialogue with James Cone is needed to achieve the goal of a more effective urban LCMS missiology. In such a dialogue the LCMS' proper disposition for engagement is primarily one of listening. What makes this engagement challenging is that Cone's racial critique does not merely expose the LCMS to the questions of the Black community, but potentially delegitimizes one's engagement with those questions due to issues of race in the American context.

Concerning the white church, racism, and black power, Cone says, "It is amazing that racism could be so prevalent and violent in American life and yet so absent in white theological discourse."⁹ Not only must the white church cease its silence on racism, "It is the job of the church to become black with him (Jesus) and accept the shame which white society places on blacks."¹⁰ And, "if American theology is going to serve the needs of the Church by relating the gospel to the political, economic, and social situations of America, it must cut its adoring dependence upon Europe¹¹ as the place to tell us what theology we ought to be talking about."¹²

The key for such engagement, from Cone's perspective, is to address the issues that matter to black Americans on their terms. Cone defines those issues as "racism, corporate capitalism, police brutality, unjust laws, prisons, drugs and so on."¹³ Other "concrete engagement" issues

⁹ Cone, *Risks of Faith*, 133.

¹⁰ Cone, *Spirituals and the Blues*, 69.

¹¹ The question concerning "dependence upon Europe" is to what degree a particular context determines Christian theology. There is no question that the colonialism of Europe affected the genesis of America and its values. It is not clear, though, to what degree the ideas of freedom, self-government, and commerce were merely colonial in nature and not principles that stand on their own with roots in a Judeo-Christian ethic.

¹² Cone, *Spirituals and the Blues*, 88. Ironically, the LCMS would wholeheartedly agree with this statement. The very motivating purpose of the Saxon emigration to America was to escape religious persecution in its German homeland. And, once in America, the key was to maintain a confessional integrity of the Gospel that eluded them in Europe. It should be noted that this wasn't a "pietism" of practice per se, but a desire to maintain the freedom of the Gospel that comes by Grace alone through faith.

¹³ Cone, *For My People*, 159.

include, “the reality of American slavery, the multigenerational psychological effects of legal and ecclesiastical dehumanization, contemporary manifestations of racism, joblessness, the influences of black nationalism on African-American consciousness, the Nation of Islam, the historical dynamics of the African-American family, the modes and forms of social cohesion and stratifications in the black community, violence, illegitimacy rates, mortality rates, etc.”¹⁴

Cone calls on the Church to politically deliver¹⁵ on these issues and not simply to acknowledge them. He also points out that this is not merely political, but a Christological politic that honors the experiences and needs of black people and honors the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the Scripture.¹⁶ His concrete, Christological Paradigm is one that is “social and political; not merely repeating a theology found in a particular theological tradition; one that is about the liberation of oppressed peoples.”¹⁷ Any dialogue with Cone and his theology must first discuss issues that matter to the black community, such as race, racism, structural sin, and the experiences of oppression and liberation of the black community in America.

In order to engage in critical and self-reflective dialog with Cone, this chapter will examine the missional history of the LCMS with black Americans, dialogically comparing and contrasting the various voices and versions of that history in a Conian critique. For each segment

¹⁴ Bradley, *Liberating Black Theology*, 155, quoting Carl Ellis, Jr. *Going Global: The Role of the Black Church in the Great Commission* (Chicago: Urban Missions, 2005), 79.

¹⁵ Throughout his writings, Cone asserts that concrete liberation of the oppressed is the essential element of the Gospel of Jesus. Politically applied, that means the challenge is “are oppressed people being liberated by the teachings and political applications of the teachings of the Church of Jesus?” Such a standard will be addressed throughout the dialogue. But, it is important to note that such a standard will be demanded of Black Theology as well.

¹⁶ While this dissertation would disagree with the particulars of that statement from Cone’s perspective. It seeks to take up the challenge laid by Conian Black Theology for an LCMS missiology to be one that is concretely engaged in the political, practical issues that face the black community in the United States, as well as to be faithful not only to the Christological focus of that engagement, but the Christocentric focus of that engagement for Black people as well.

¹⁷ See again, Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 82–83.

of that history, the missional work of the LCMS will first be set within the context of the experiences of oppression and liberation of the black community of America. Then, this missional work will be considered from the perspective of the white voices of the LCMS and then from the black voices within the LCMS.

By contextualizing the history, we will be able to hear the issues that Cone would argue need to be attended to by the church; by listening to and comparing and contrasting the white and black voices within the missional work of the LCMS, we will capture a sense of the racial dynamics that are present within the LCMS itself and be able to offer a critical analysis of the issues of race and LCMS missional work over a significant period of time. Such a dialogue will not only delineate LCMS efforts in and among the black community, it will assess the missional authenticity of its concern with black issues from a black perspective, and its missional efforts towards those concerns with the hope of sharing the Gospel.

For a definitive voice about black issues and concerns at the particular times in American history under discussion, the dissertation will use as its historical resource John Hope Franklin's, *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of African Americans*,¹⁸ and Alan Westin's work, *Freedom Now*.¹⁹

¹⁸ John Hope Franklin and Evelyn Higginbotham, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 9th ed. (New Jersey: McGraw-Hill, 2010). This book remains the most revered, respected, and honored text on the market concerning the preeminent history of African Americans and their journey from their origins in Africa, through slavery in the Western Hemisphere, to struggles for freedom in the West Indies, Latin America, and the United States.

¹⁹ Alan F. Westin, ed., *Freedom Now* (New York: Basic Books, 1964), the book is an anthology of influential writers concerning the historical struggle for freedom for black Americans and the issues that they faced for full acceptance as citizens of the United States.

Heritage in Motion,²⁰ *Moving Frontiers*²¹ and the CTCR issue on *Racism and the Church*²² represent the “white” voice of the LCMS and its perspective of LCMS engagement of the black community in America. For critical voices within the LCMS, Jeff Johnson’s work, *Black Christians*²³ and Richard Dickinson’s *Roses and Thorns*,²⁴ will principally be referenced.

Analysis of the LCMS racial engagement through this dialogical model reveals that the LCMS has suffered from structural ethnocentrism and, as a church body, has often said the right things but not followed such speech with action. There have been moments, however, where individual people and congregations have effectively engaged the racial question facing the

²⁰ See Suelflow, *Heritage in Motion*, v. This work is a “useful collection of key documents . . . on contemporary church life, that provides their historical background or context.” While the book deals mainly with issues from 1962–1995, it also notes the historical events or statements of issues on race and evangelism that historically undergird the discussion of the work. It is a foundational resource for various issues in the LCMS, race, evangelism, and mission being part of the topics presented. The stated purpose of the work is that “it is a conscious effort to make documents of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (1950s to 1990s) more readily available as a pallet from which a more detailed history can be produced,” v.

²¹ Meyer, *Moving Frontiers*, contains important documents of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod from its beginnings in Europe up until 1960. It too provides a historical summary of what the LCMS deemed important concerning its identity, its creation and assimilation to the American culture, as well as its mission and ministry here to others outside of its ethnic fellowship.

²² *Racism and the Church—Overcoming the Idolatry*, A Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, February, 1994. This report of theologians and laity of the church, in dialogue with black pastors and parishioners, was a document “assisting us all not only in understanding the problem of racism, but also, with God’s help, in dealing with it in our own personal and corporate life,” 5. This CTCR document was the result of a dialogue of the President of the LCMS and LCMS African American pastors in 1986 to produce a document on Racism. The Synod in convention in 1992, calling on its members to “Combat all Racism,” urged the “rapid completion of the CTCR study” so that the members of the Synod might “make the maximum use of this study,” 5. Unfortunately, in view of the many issues involved in race and the American culture, the study was probably 20–30 years late.

²³ Johnson, *Black Christians*, 13, “describes the love of God towards Lutherans in the New World. But the record also shows how Lutherans have failed in their responsibility, specifically on the part of whites towards black. . . . [This work] is unique in that it includes the history of black Lutheranism in all branches of that family of denominations in the New World. It summarizes patterns that are common to all Lutherans as well as the distinctive differences with in individual groups.” For this chapter, those differences, historically related are key to fully understanding the context, capacity, and activity of LCMS work among black Americans.

²⁴ Richard C. Dickinson, *Roses and Thorns: The Centennial Edition of Black Lutheran Mission and Ministry in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod*. (St. Louis: Concordia, 1977). See page 10 where the author states the purpose of the book as “an outgrowth of the desire of the Black Lutheran Centennial Committee to have an appropriate publication for the occasion of the Black Lutheran Centennial.” The book is a “narrow perspective relative to Black Lutheranism in the U.S.A.,” 13, and relates the “Roses and Thorns” reality of LCMS mission motivates, perspectives, and actions among blacks in America.

church at large motivated by the very Gospel that is central to the essence of the LCMS.

Moments and Days: LCMS Mission Work among Black Americans in the United States

Historically, issues of race, racism, and public political involvement have not been at the forefront of LCMS theology, especially in the early period of its immigration to America when these German Lutherans had their own particular struggles concerning their own integration into the Anglo-American culture.²⁵ In *Heritage in Motion*, August Suelflow speaks of three historical periods of the LCMS's mission efforts amidst the cultural context of the United States mission field. This view provides a picture of the LCMS' relationship to the American culture in its own communal development and assimilation, as well as its mission work among black Americans especially in the South. He notes the "Moments and Days" report of the board for Mission Services at the 1973 LCMS convention which divided up the mission efforts of the Synod as:

1847–1892: Moments and Days of Inner Mission;
1893–1946: Moments and Days of a Growing Involvement in Christ's Mission;
1947–1972: Moments and Days of Mushrooming Mission Expansion.²⁶

These periods will be the historical framework for this chapter's dialogical analysis.

Period 1: 1847–1892: Moments and Days of Inner Mission

For the LCMS, issues of organization, assimilation, and mission marked each period.

Suelflow notes, however, that especially in this early period (1847–1892) the church was in a

²⁵See Carl S. Munding, *Government in the Missouri Synod* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1947) where he recounts the initial challenges that faced the Saxon emigrants who would become the LCMS, causing their ethnic isolationism. First was the challenge merely to survive the Frontier reality of the new world. The Stephan Controversy, 41-109, left the nascent community leaderless at a time when its physical survival was in question as well. Assimilation issues and the community's desire to "plant a soundly Lutheran Church on American soil," 166, were key motivations to retain the German language in all of its public worship, teaching, and writing, 205, thereby contributing also to its further isolation in the American culture at large. The puritan, Anglo culture was seen as a force that leads to the "deterioration of doctrine and polity," and of the community.

²⁶ Suelflow, *Heritage in Motion*, 317.

gathering phase, marked by decentralized²⁷ congregational survival. He says,

In the First period, congregations dominated the scene. Congregations were locating fellow Lutherans, assimilating them, or supplying them with pastors or lay leaders. Leaders of the Synod were trying to bring Lutherans of America together.²⁸

Carl S. Meyer also notes,

The history of the Missouri Synod from the end of the Civil War to the end of World War I was marked by two dominant characteristics. The first was a vigorous theological conservatism which led it to resist any compromise in the history Lutheran Confessional position. The second characteristic, shared with other ethnic groups, was a continued isolation from American linguistic, economic and social patterns.²⁹

This German American isolation would exist until World War I and II forced the LCMS to truly assimilate and to look outwardly from its narrow community concerns. Before that, even English speaking Americans and Germans, as well as Italians, Irish, or other European ethnicities, all were outside of any meaningful LCMS mission effort. George Gude notes the power needed to break the LCMS' ethnocentric, inward, missional focus, saying:

God was leading the Synod to a more extensive mission involvement in North America also. World War 1 caused many Missouri Synod congregations and schools to switch over to the English language—and, as a result, to discover a deeper obligation to English-speaking Americans around them.³⁰

²⁷ See Carl S. Mundinger, *Government in the Missouri Synod: The Genesis of Decentralized Government in the Missouri Synod* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1947) for an extensive account of the decentralized, confessional nature of LCMS government and polity. Often when analyzing the LCMS action or lack of action concerning an issue relative to the culture in which it serves, it is the nature of the Synod as an “advisory body” that confuses people. With a congregational polity that emphasizes the authority of the congregation, the pastor and people of God gathered around the means of Grace rather than an institutionalized hierarchy, the LCMS often lacks a spokesperson about issues that are beyond the community in which a particular church serves. Such an organizational model does not preclude community or social action, it just goes about that process in a different manner. Fortunately, or unfortunately, this is the pattern that emerges in the LCMS engagement of race in American culture in general.

²⁸ August Suelflow, “Church Polity,” in *Heritage in Motion*, 159.

²⁹ Meyer, *Moving Frontiers*, 344. Meyer also notes that the rural nature of most LCMS congregations was a key to their social isolation as well and that “Essentially, the Synod in 1920 was the Synod of 1865,” 345.

³⁰ George J. Gude, “The Church in Society,” in *Heritage in Motion*, 317. This author believes that the forces that compelled the LCMS to begin to emerge from its isolation in the United States and become more sympathetic to needs of English speaking Americans and the mission opportunities therein are the forces that will continue to open up the LCMS similarly with respect to mission and ministry amidst the various ethnic cultures in urban America today.

This first period was of adaptation and survival in the broader American culture for a German speaking immigrant community like the LCMS which sought to escape the persecutions of its native Germany and fashion a confessional community in the New World.³¹ At this stage in its history, the LCMS had no foreign mission program per se, and certainly not one in the United States. Indeed, “the first 40 years Synod’s foreign mission program consisted of supporting European Lutheran Mission societies.”³² This was a time of gathering confessionally like-minded Lutherans into a faithful “German” Lutheran church body. Even reaching out to English³³ speaking Americans of other various European roots was a cultural challenge to these early American Lutherans in America due to the dissimilarity of their language and culture with the dominant Anglo-Saxon culture.

Black American Experience

This period of time, especially as it pertains to the experiences of black Americans, was defined by the Civil War and its resulting changes on American society. It was a time of tension between the movements of change and the movements seeking a return to the status quo, slavery included. It was a time of great promise of freedom, yet great disappointment in its actuation, especially for black Americans. John Hope Franklin writes,

³¹ See Ralph Dornfield Owen, “The Old Lutherans Come,” *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* 20 (April 1947): 3–56, for a brief history of the Old Lutheran emigration to America.

³² Suelflow, “Church Polity,” 159.

³³ See Everette Meier and Herbert Mayer, ed. “The Process of Americanization,” in *Moving Frontiers*, 344–85 where it is argued that the LCMS was very resistant to the forces of Americanization, even maintaining itself as a subculture within the dominant American culture, at least up to the time of World War I, due to the dominant use of the German language within the community, the continual flow of German immigrants into the country, as well as the Synod’s extensive, parochial school system. Again, the hamlet nature of the German-Lutheran communities, that the community strove for self-sufficiency as a community, is descriptive of how they interacted with the American community at large.

Perhaps no decade in the history of the United States has been so filled with tense and crucial moments as the ten years leading to the Civil War, and closely connected with most of these crises was the problem of slavery.³⁴

It was a time of the Compromise of 1850,³⁵ Uncle Tom's Cabin (1852),³⁶ the Kansas-Nebraska Act,³⁷ and the Dred Scott decision (1857).³⁸ It was also a time of growing awareness for the need for civil rights for black people in America, slave and free. Civil rights issues were an important component of the social fabric of America during this first period of LCMS missional engagement. Alan Westin writes, "From 1865 through the early 1880s, the general trend in the nations was toward wider acceptance of Negro patronage"³⁹ and even civil rights. In 1855 in Boston, the issue of desegregating schools was being vehemently debated.⁴⁰ In 1871, protests about "white seats and black seats" on street cars in Louisville, Kentucky demanded General Grant's attention. In 1875, "congressional republicans led by Senator Charles Sumner pressed for a federal statute making discrimination in public accommodations a crime."⁴¹

³⁴ Franklin and Higginbotham, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 192.

³⁵ See Franklin and Higginbotham, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 192, where he notes that the Congressional compromise to keep slave states as slave states and free states as free, also declaring new states as free, was "by no means satisfactory to all."

³⁶ See Franklin and Higginbotham, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 193, where he says, "The appearance of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe increased the strain on intersectional relations. . . . Its story of abject cruelty on the part of masters and overseers, its description of the privation and suffering of slaves, and its complete condemnation of Southern civilization won countless thousands over to abolition and left Southern leadership busy denying the truth of the novel."

³⁷ See Franklin and Higginbotham, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 193, where he notes, "Introduced into the senate by Stephen A. Douglas of Illinois, the act provided that Kansas and Nebraska should be organized as territories and that the question of slavery should be decided by territorial legislatures." Such a notion fueled both pro-slavery and anti-slavery groups in America and the battle for a federal solution could no longer be avoided.

³⁸ See Franklin and Higginbotham, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 194, where he notes that the Supreme Court ruled that Scott was not a citizen and therefore could not sue for freedom, though he had lived in the free territory of Illinois for four years. This decision "had the effect of widening the breach between North and South . . . and only two more links were needed to bring on the bitter war that gave freedom to the slave: one was the raid of John Brown, and the other was a Republican victory at the polls in 1860."

³⁹ Westin, *Freedom Now*, 70.

⁴⁰ Westin, *Freedom Now*, 61–67.

⁴¹ Westin, *Freedom Now*, 70.

Unfortunately, the Supreme Court took an active posture in declaring this statute unconstitutional, saying that it made negroes a “special favorite of the law,” rather than merely “rank of citizen” that all were guaranteed under the Constitution.⁴² The actual, concrete result of this ruling made desegregation legal throughout the land, de facto and helped bring about the Civil War. This ruling would later undergird the post-Civil War rebellion against reconstruction, allowing for the political disenfranchisement and social subjugation of emancipated blacks in the South. Westin laments,

Today, as this line (the chalk line of Jim Crow) is slowly and painfully being erased, we may do well to reflect on what might have been in the South if the Civil Rights Act of 1875 had been upheld, in whole or in part. Perhaps everything would have been the same . . . Yet it is difficult to believe that total, state-enforced segregation was inevitable in the South after the 1880’s. If in these decades the Supreme Court had taken the same *laissez-faire* attitude toward race relationship as it took toward economic affairs, voluntary integration would have survived as a counter tradition to Jim Crow and might have made the transition of the 1950’s less painful than it was.⁴³

In many ways, post-Civil War America was no less tense for black Americans than before the war. The issues of emancipation had been earned, but the social transformation of society towards that end was merely beginning. There were political successes in elections in the South for black Americans, but there was also political backlash and bigotry in the South towards blacks, especially once the spirit of “reconstruction” faded. This was a time of emancipation, of freedom, of political enfranchisement then disenfranchisement,⁴⁴ and even enduring violence⁴⁵

⁴² Such a statement is amazing, seeing that, while some black Americans were free, most were in bondage and forced servitude.

⁴³ Westin, *Freedom Now*, 74.

⁴⁴ See Franklin and Higginbotham, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 255, where he notes that already in the 1870s, Democrats in the South had been re-elected to positions of power. Soon these ruling bodies, “now controlled by zealous white-supremacy Democrats, helped to disfranchise blacks. Areas with a heavy concentration of blacks were divided by a system of gerrymandering that renders the black vote ineffective. Poll tax requirements, elaborate and confusing election schemes, complicated balloting processes, and highly centralized election code were all statutory technique by which blacks were disfranchised.”

⁴⁵ See Franklin and Higginbotham, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 253, for a discussion of the rise of the KKK as a “terrorism” force of the Democratic Party in the South that eventually re-established Democratic rule, and black

long after the fighting of the Civil War ceased.

Further complicating matters for black Americans was the continued arrival of immigrants from Europe. Franklin says,

The problem of American political immaturity after the Civil War cannot be dismissed merely by observing that there were 4 million blacks who were without any experience in public affairs. To these must be added the millions of Europeans who poured into the country and muddied the political waters considerably. Many of them had not participated in any kind of government, and most of them had no understanding of the workings of representative governments. The vast majority, moreover, spoke “strange” languages and were poorly educated... These factors, in addition to their low standard of living, made adjustment in the New World even more difficult.⁴⁶

Cone’s perspective implies that to missionally engage black Americans during this time required first and foremost to seek to know and understand the issues of the black community, from the black person’s point of view. One church that was making such efforts during this period was the Catholic Church in America through a radical idea, that of a “national congress of African American Catholics,”⁴⁷ a lay driven gathering of black Catholics recognized and authorized by the Catholic hierarchy. This gathering, led by Daniel Rudd, an entrepreneurial black owner of *The American Catholic Tribune*, the nation’s first black owned Catholic newspaper, addressed the needs and issues of black Americans from their perspective. The gathering was initiated to encourage the Catholic Church at large to deal more specifically with

social subjugation post-Civil War reconstruction.

⁴⁶ Franklin and Higginbotham, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 222. Ironically, this statement could be applied in many ways to the LCMS in its dislocation in the American experiment. Isolated by language and culture, fleeing persecution themselves, the LCMS was disconnected to the kinds of issues that were being contested in America. While they were looking for a “Zion on the Mississippi,” in America, black people were merely looking to be accepted as human beings.

⁴⁷ See Cyprian Davis, *The History of Black Catholics in the United States*, (New York: Crossroad, 1990), 163, “The date was January 4, 1889 . . . the last day of the first black Catholic lay congress in the nation’s history. This visit to the White House and reception by the president was the climax of what had been a triumphant meeting of black Catholics, where as a body they deliberated, voiced their opinions, and made decisions regarding their church and their place within it.”

issues that were unique to black people⁴⁸ in America⁴⁹ at time when black Americans were being disenfranchised and politically oppressed in the resurging South.

That such an effort was “unprecedented” speaks to the realities of this period. Genuine missional engagement with black Americans should have begun with a desire to “understand the particular plight of poor black people in America at this time,”⁵⁰ to sympathize with a people who had lived for 250 years in slavery in America where supposedly “all men were created equal.” Cone would remind us that to engage black Americans at this time would have been to realize that they had fought for their right to be understood as fully human in a culture that treated them as less than human. It was a time where terror and violence and social humiliation was heaped upon anyone who believed that such a reality was for black as well as white people.

Cyrpian Davis notes:

The last decade of the nineteenth century, sometimes referred to as ‘the Gay Nineties,’ was in fact, the nadir of African American history. Violence against blacks increased with impunity throughout the South; lynching’s double tragically each year. The volume of segregation laws swelled as the decade progressed.⁵¹

Franklin notes the pressures for change as well as status quo that were surging in the country:

The end of the war was, moreover, the beginning of a new era in the history of the United States. The economic revolution ushered in by the tremendous forces let loose in war was to transform every phase of American life and to create new problems and injustices for reformers to solve. . . . Blacks would have to perfect their freedom in a society that was changing so rapidly that adjustment would be difficult even for the best educated of them. For all Americans, perhaps the greatest problem that arose of the Civil War and its economic aftermath was to find a way to retain freedom, the

⁴⁸ See Davis, *History of Black Catholics*, 166, where he notes that the difference of this church engagement “was its perspective—a black person’s point of view.”

⁴⁹ See Davis, *History of Black Catholics*, 167, where he notes the specifics of Rudd’s efforts as “promoting race pride,” and “the educating and building up the unfortunate from every race and tribe,” 168; “the establishing of schools,” 174; “condemning the practice of renting black people poorly constructed housing, roughly planned tenement housing,” 174; all with the goal of “social and civil equality,” 183.

⁵⁰ See Davis, *History of Black Catholics*, 167.

⁵¹ Davis, *History of Black Catholics*, 167.

desire for which had become almost an obsession, and yet at the same time enjoy security, which was becoming more precarious in the new economic order.⁵²

LCMS Missional Activity among Black Americans: Structural Ethnocentrism and Isolationism

The concerns of the black community in America at this time were not the concerns of the LCMS. For the LCMS, this early period was a time of ethnocentric confessionalism⁵³ in its initial evangelistic, church gathering efforts. As a church body, new LCMS congregations were gathered around the church's ethnic identity as much as by its public confession. Suelflow relates an incident in the 1860s that typified the role that ethnicity, as well as confessional integrity, played in the formation of early German-Lutheran congregations. He relates a story when,

A son of Missouri Synod pioneer C.F.W. Walther arrived in New Brunswick, Missouri, to start a congregation. ... His mentor, the missionary-minded J.F. Buenger, the young Ferdinand Walther's uncle, took his charge to Main Street on Saturday before the man's planned ordination. "Now we have to go around and drum up a congregation for you so that I can ordain and install you tomorrow as their pastor." Buenger buttonholed every passerby who looked like a German: "You are surely a German and a Lutheran, are you not?" If he guessed right, Buenger urged the accosted person to be at a certain location for church the next day. The technique worked, a congregation was formed, and Walther spent his whole pastoral career among them.

The LCMS' official foray into evangelism with black Americans during this early period also demonstrated its ethnocentrism and isolationism. Its initial efforts did not stem from some grand mission strategy compelled by the Gospel, or by its confessional theology. The motivation for mission among black Americans was due to a crisis within the Synodical Conference, a group that the LCMS was associated with for corporate mission work. The internal and structural crisis

⁵² Franklin and Higginbotham, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 219.

⁵³ Even today, it is hard to differentiate the confession from the form in which it is received or delivered. Whether the words of LCMS hymns, or words of the Church's liturgies are sung with traditional German chorale, or Gregorian Chant, whether worship times or traditions are set to more clearly proclaim the Gospel, or to give the gathered parishioners a feeling that we are "at home" in our faith, these are the issues that must be faced if the church seeks to reach beyond its cultural boundaries to a culture unlike itself, indeed to a culture that has reason to be suspicious of churches like the LCMS because of the racism that exists in the American culture at large.

was caused by a “hostility between the Leipzig and Hermannsburg Mission Societies in Germany.”⁵⁴ This hostility caused the Synodical Conference to sever its ties to the Mission societies in Germany, but ultimately left the Conference with no foreign mission effort. The Conference responded to this lack of an official foreign mission effort by turning its foreign mission efforts towards Negroes in the Post-Civil War South.

This “filling of a void” perspective for the initial corporate outreach efforts to black Americans may be one reason why the missional efforts never focused on the concerns or issues of the black communities themselves, but merely sought to make black Americans, German Lutherans, if that was possible at all.

Missionally, the initial concrete evangelistic efforts among black Americans were also hastily engaged. In view of LCMS’ own immigrant status, the church was mismatched for the job. Jeff Johnson states, “The New Lutherans who had only recently settled in the Midwest, were so new to the American scene that few of them spoke English. Nevertheless, the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America in a flurry of action suddenly became the ‘new boy on the block’ for black Lutheranism.”⁵⁵

To show how disconnected and isolated the LCMS was to the issues overwhelming to the black community, issues of slavery, racism, and the basic freedom of black Americans, one need only read C.F.W. Walther’s writings on slavery and emancipation. Neglecting any of the particulars of the slavery endemic to the United States, Walther in *Lehre und Wehre*⁵⁶ focuses

⁵⁴ Johnson, *Black Christians*, 152.

⁵⁵ The question remains, was this for all the right reasons or the wrong reasons?

⁵⁶ See William F. Arndt, “The Story of *Lehre und Wehre*,” *Concordia Theological Monthly* 12 (December 1955): 888. *Lehre und Wehre* functioned as an official journal of the church, addressing pertinent issues of the day. Walther is quoted as saying, “The journal is not to be a friend of the church, but a servant of the church. It is to take a position not above or alongside, but in and under, the church. It will not serve as a sort of arena for those whose aim is to attack the church of the true doctrine and its sacred institutions and who—while they cannot destroy these foundations, for even the gates of hell cannot do this, let alone the bellowing of would-be-wise men—will at least

merely on slavery as a theological problem. His strict application of the Lutheran doctrine of the two Kingdoms, advocated a total disengagement from the issue in the culture. While engaging the issues from a theological point of view, not a socio-political point of view⁵⁷ helpfully dealt with the nuances of human relationships in a sinful world in general, it sounded detached, uncaring, or even callous to those who suffered under the particularly racial, dehumanizing form of slavery practiced in America.⁵⁸

In “Slavery, Humanism and The Bible,” Walther’s concern is that the LCMS confess the ultimate freedom that comes in Jesus Christ and the threat that a humanistic substitute presents to that good news. Walther argues that modern man has supplanted the things of God, wanting people today to “renounce happiness and the life to come as something dubious. It wants that man finds this happiness within himself which will surely change the earth into heaven and promises equal happiness to all.”⁵⁹ Therefore the church needs to limit its ultimate focus on how these issues affect how we treat each other, especially as it pertains to the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He says,

try to damage and to shake them." All this is highly significant. While many theological journals are free lances, as it were, being entirely without church control, this magazine was to have a different nature. It was to belong to Synod, and the teachings which it was to set forth were to be those of the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions.”

⁵⁷ See Sowell, *Ethnic America*, 61, where he notes that “Germans did little political organizing, however. Politics never became a consuming interest of German Americans. They were among the targets of nativist political attacks during the Know-Nothing era of the 1820s.” World War 1 and 2 would rekindle that nativism against Germans hastening their final assimilation to American culture.

⁵⁸ Walther speaks about slavery as a human institution, like other relationships that sinful human beings create amongst themselves. For him, the key was the humanity of these relationships, the mutual respect and love that people were to share towards each other. His point was that there is no humanistic solution to these ultimate issues that is disconnected from God’s work in the Gospel. In today’s terminology, he would be wary of identifying, even reducing the Gospel of Jesus to some political movement or policy which he saw happening in American manifest destiny Christianity.

⁵⁹ C.F.W. Walther, “Slavery, Humanism, & the Bible: Selections from *Lehre and Wehre*,” Trans. By Erika Bullmann Flores. http://www.lutherquest.org/walther/articles/cfw00002.htm_4. Again, the article deals with slavery as a human institution, much like various governments etc. Walther’s point is that there is no perfect, utopian form of government that will supplant the message of the Gospel as the only solution to mankind’s ultimate need, repentance/forgiveness for our sins, a reconciled relationship to God. Spoken in the context of 1850 and 1860 it is a detached, disconnected perspective at best, to black Americans it is callous indifference at worst.

The question about slavery had been foremost in the hearts and minds of many. In following issues, we intend to deal with these questions. Of course, not as it relates to political issues, for we have *nothing to do with that*,⁶⁰ but as it relates to Christian-religious morals. Before we discuss the agitating question of slavery, we wish to reiterate that we are not concerned with emancipation, which for political reasons is being considered by government, for this is not a theological issue. . . . What we are dealing with here is the question whether slavery itself, that is, the relationship between slave and master, is a sin; or does sin adhere to this relationship merely *in concreto*, as all relationships between sinful men, for instance between poor and rich, seller and buyer.⁶¹

Walther addresses the question of Slavery as a human institution by which mankind in general has organized itself for thousands of years. As such, sinful human beings have found ways to provide relative peace and human dignity within some “less than perfect” social relationships. He asserts that there is an even larger issue for sinful people, no matter the social arrangements, namely their ultimate reconciliation to God by grace through faith which indeed transforms how we treat one another, no matter the social patterns. This approach is missionally destructive and socially unfeeling in the face of the actual slavery, racism, and violence that existed in America Pre and Post-Civil War. Similar perspectives are seen in others writings where Walther also says,

We have no hidden agenda underlying our protest against acceptance of the humanistic, revolutionary, sourdough into our Lutheran theology. We are merely concerned with the preservation of the purity of our Lutheran, biblical theology. We have long since given witness privately, and in publications, of our opposition of the current political confusion and the dangerous abolitionist movements which are anti-Gospel and anti-Christ. . . . We come to the close of this year’s foreword by declaring our serious fight against the spread of humanism.⁶²

Theologically, the writings of *Lehre und Wehre* professed the clarity of the Gospel of Jesus Christ as proclaimed by the LCMS in the face of many issues and challenges in the new world.

⁶⁰ Emphasis mine. For the clarity of the discussion in general, this might be a point well taken. But, in reference to the missional work that the church was to engage in with black Americans, this was offensive.

⁶¹ Wather, “Slavery, Humanism, & the Bible,” 5.

⁶² Wather, “Slavery, Humanism, & the Bible,” 12.

Properly understood, these statements demonstrate the dangers of Enlightenment rationalism, Utopian Chiasm, Nationalistic Manifest Destiny, and the idea that America was the new promised land, all which undergirded the very white supremacy that James Cone would call America's greatest sin.⁶³ Missionally, however, these words alienate black people due to their actual experience of slavery in America, theologically and politically. The reason for such a missional "tin ear" was, most likely, a result of the LCMS' prominent ethnocentric isolation at this time. It should be noted that "in concrete" political action though, "The Germans of Missouri and even the Wendish Germans of Texas were very much "anti-slavery."⁶⁴ No LCMS leaders ever owned slaves.

LCMS Missional Activity among Black Americans: Saying the Right Things, Not Doing the Right Things

In general, concerning racism, white supremacy, and American Manifest Destiny, the LCMS has generally said the right things. Theologically, the LCMS never advocated the idea that America was the new Zion, nor did it advocate the "America is the New Israel" millenarianism⁶⁵ of much of mainline American Colonial Christianity which clearly was steeped with views of white supremacy.⁶⁶ The LCMS also concretely engaged in "Negro" mission early

⁶³ For a fuller discussion of this, see James H. Cone, "Theology's Great Sin: Silence in the face of White Supremacy," *Black Theology: An International Journal* 2, no. 2 (2004): 139–52.

⁶⁴ See Sowell, *Ethnic America*, 63, where he says, "In the North, Germans were strong opponents of slavery. While most German voters were Democrats into the 1840s, they switched to the newly formed Republican party in the 1850s, when slavery became a heated political issue. The large German element in Missouri has been credited with keeping that state from joining the Confederacy when the Civil War erupted."

⁶⁵ See Augsburg Confession, Article XVII which clearly rejects all forms of Millennialism. The early LCMS in practice among other Lutherans rejected union with the General Synod over disagreements of Chiasm, among other things. See also, <http://www.creeds.net/lutheran/missouri.htm>, "Of the Millennium," the LCMS Brief Statement that clearly rejects millennialism as a false teaching which "engenders a false conception of the kingdom of Christ, turns the hope of Christians upon earthly goals, 1 Cor. 15:19; Col. 3:2, and leads them to look upon the Bible as an obscure book."

⁶⁶ See again Cox, *Fire from Heaven*, Chapter 1, where he delineates the millenarian hopes of the United States at the turn of the twentieth century especially as it is seen in the Chicago world's fair. One of the fair's main exhibits was called, "the white city," for its majestic, plastered Romanesque style city of the new world. Others

in its history. But that engagement, from 1877 through the end of World War II, was as a relatively isolated ethnic, German-speaking community in American culture. As August Suelflow notes,

The primary mission concern of the Missouri Synod during its first 45 years was “Inner Mission”—that is, contact and gather German immigrants pouring into the country. . . . God moved the Synod . . . to reach out also to those not of “its own kind.” Attempts . . . were made to proclaim the Gospel to the Chippewa Indians in Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota. Funds were raised at Mission Festivals and sent to German mission societies for work in India. Some pastors began to preach in English as well as German, leading to the formation of the English District in 1872. The synodical Conference, a federation of conservative Lutheran synods established in 1872, began work among blacks in the South in 1877.⁶⁷

In 1877, the LCMS, in partnership with the Synodical Conference, began a new phase of mission work in the United States among black Americans. As usual, the work began by saying the right things. In its own adjustment to the American culture, there were rumblings within the church that it was not being faithful to the mission of Christ to reach out beyond our own ethnicity. Rev. Ferdinand Sievers wrote in an editorial for *Der Lutheraner*, saying,

One thing lies heavy on our hearts constantly. We do not have our own mission to heathen anymore. For more than ten years our Synod has stood idle in the marketplace with regard to the mission to the heathen. We have missed that direct, fresh, joyous participation in the mission field. Many a heart beating for the cause of mission to the heathen has been saddened over this and has sighed often to God concerning our failure.⁶⁸

called in the “New Jerusalem,” delineating the millennial hopes and dreams of America as the new Zion, the New Jerusalem. The whole event was steeped in an arrogance of White Supremacy which was often rooted in the arrogance of secular philosophy and scientism that was not only co-opting Christian themes, but retranslating them culturally in America at the time. The LCMS was surely a reactionary opponent of this way of thinking.

⁶⁷ Suelflow, *Heritage in Motion*, 316. The LCMS’ ethnocentricity is clearly evident in its early history. To that end, “those who were not like them,” would include English speaking Americans, Catholic believing Europeans, Irish Catholic Immigrants and others. Sadly, the outreach to black Americans was treated the same way, as outreach reach to the “other” even though Jeff Johnson, *Black Christians* clearly shows that there were black Lutherans in America even before the LCMS was in America.

⁶⁸ See quoted in Dickinson, *Roses and Thorns*, 37.

The church had been faithful to its own people as they immigrated to America. Now it was time to reach out beyond itself.

C.F.W. Walther was aware of the LCMS' cultural limitations concerning this mission work, saying, "It will be difficult to begin mission work among the colored people as we have not more men who are conversant with the English language."⁶⁹ Nonetheless, with a missional zeal, the LCMS and the Synodical Conference voted to begin mission work among black Americans in the South, "touring the South, singling out the most likely areas, gathering small circles of responsive Negroes who would be headed by a Negro presbyter in the missionary's absence, and finally edit a missionary publication to interpret the work to the home constituency."⁷⁰

Unfortunately, these zealous initial efforts were plagued with missional missteps that tended to depersonalize, even dehumanize the very people the Conference sought to evangelize.⁷¹ First of all, this initial mission effort was improperly conceived as a "mission to the heathen."⁷² The Synodical Conference failed to see their own mission efforts with blacks in America in the historical context of previous Lutheran mission efforts, "attempts by other Lutherans to reach out to black Americans, slave and free."⁷³ That perception of "mission among the heathen," precluded the possibility that some blacks were indeed Christian, and of those, some might even

⁶⁹ See quoted in Dickinson, *Roses and Thorns*, 38.

⁷⁰ Dickinson, *Roses and Thorns*, 40.

⁷¹ Again, Cone would point out correctly that the needs and issues of the black community as a community were never a part of white people's outreach to them. The socio-cultural demand to "be like us," not merely "share the same faith" with us, was evident in these early efforts of the LCMS, even though passionately engaged.

⁷² Johnson, *Black Christians*, 153. Other Lutheran mission efforts were actually gatherings of German Lutherans who had immigrated to America. One wonders what would have happened if those initial LCMS efforts among black Americans in the South were seen as gatherings of Black Lutherans, not work among the "heathens," for the sake of expanding the Church.

⁷³ See Johnson, *Black Christians*, 1–150 for a more detailed work of Lutherans among black Americans in the Colonial North and South, the Danish West Indies, Surinam, and Guyana.

have been Lutheran.⁷⁴ Such efforts, though sincere in their desire to reach non-believing black people in the South, were also culturally ignorant of the racial issues of the community or the particular needs of the black people with whom they were seeking to share the Gospel.

During this time, the LCMS missionaries and the mission board were relatively ignorant of the issues that blacks were facing in America. They also exhibited the naiveté of sending a white missionary to tour the Post-Civil War South between October 1877 and July 1878. Johnson reports,

Sending a white man in to the rural South on that kind of mission was most unwise and could only fail. It was 1877. The Reconstruction had just ended; the carpet baggers had done their damage; and Southern whites, especially in rural areas were not about to have some strange white man “foolin’ with their niggers.”⁷⁵

Finally, the ethnocentrism of the LCMS was clearly demonstrated in its mission efforts among black Americans in this early period. The CTCR, in its report on “Racism and the Church,” identifies this assimilation methodology in evangelism as a misguided, general practice of the Lutheran Church, especially as it relates to black ministry. It reports:

[A] review of black ministry programs in the history of the Synod reveals, however, that integration has on the face been understood as “assimilation.” These two activities have often been confused with one another. As a sociological phenomenon, assimilation refers to the disappearance of all former cultural difference so that the individual is no longer distinguishable from the group into which he or she has been assimilated. . . . Integration as assimilation is perceived by many among ethnic minorities, included especially African Americans, as a call for the surrender of one’s heritage and identity in order not only to “get in,” but also to become what others label as fully “human.”⁷⁶

To put it more bluntly, Jeff Johnson states,

To put the matter differently, in its work in the black community, the Synodical Conference had attempted to convert black people to the German culture under the guise of bringing them the Gospel. Black congregations had to be organized like

⁷⁴ Johnson, *Black Christians*, 153.

⁷⁵ Johnson, *Black Christians*, 152.

⁷⁶ CTCR, “Racism and the Church,” 31.

German Lutheran congregations. Black congregations had to sing German hymns as German Lutheran congregations sang them. Black Lutherans had to think in German theological categories as German Lutherans thought. All issues of church life had to be defined as German Lutherans defined them and thought about them. In order to be a “Good black Lutheran,” one had to become a “good black German.” One could not be authentically Lutheran unless he/she was authentically German.”⁷⁷

Ethnocentric control was evident with regards to the leadership challenges of these early mission efforts as well. The mission strategy of this time period was to raise up, train, and leave “black presbyters in charge of the mission while the white, LCMS missionary was away,” yet, as Dickinson reports, “nowhere was any presbyterial responsibility placed into the hands of Negroes.”⁷⁸

In these early tours of the South, such paternalistic attitudes were clearly demonstrable. In the missionary ministries of pastors like Rev. Frederick Berg in 1878 and Rev. Lorenz Wahl in 1880-81, in Little Rock, Arkansas, black culture was disregarded even discounted. Berg’s attitude of preaching the Lutheran Gospel to black people in Little Rock was labeled “a grand opportunity to present the *complete* understanding and truths of the Scripture which these conservative Lutherans of the Synodical Conference believed they alone believed.”⁷⁹ Berg was very disappointed to learn that only two pastors confessed their ignorance and wished to be instructed by him. Wahl, in teaching black students in the local Lutheran school, disavowed black heritage altogether as well, “teaching his black students how to sing German chorales and nothing else. He too did not last long.”⁸⁰

The mission efforts of these early Lutherans to black Americans were carried out with a cultural superiority of the “sending church,” dismissive of the culture that they sought to reach.

⁷⁷ Johnson, *Black Christians*, 196.

⁷⁸ Dickinson, *Roses and Thorns*, 42.

⁷⁹ Johnson, *Black Christians*, 154.

⁸⁰ Johnson, *Black Christians*, 155.

Johnson summarizes that,

When a black person joined the Lutheran Church, he/she had to leave the black community. . . . [T]he Lutheran Church was minimally aware of the ramifications of this mode of operation. The church saw this as a problem of simpleminded people and suggested that pastors speak to blacks accordingly.⁸¹

LCMS Missional Activity among Black Americans: Congregational, Grass-Root Successes

While the LCMS was hindered by structural ethnocentrism and the inability to put word into action as a church body, there were some effective efforts at the congregational level that tried to engage the black community in ways that were not culturally condescending. Pastor John Doescher, for example, preached among black Americans on their own terms, wherever and to whomever would listen. He also sought to raise up leadership from within the community. Doescher possessed a pioneering spirit that would “visit people in their homes, teach their children, and organize mission committees.”⁸² He even raised up “a promising young black Presbyterian (Willis Polk) as an assistant pastor.”⁸³ Such a pioneering spirit was labeled as overly unionistic which got Doescher in trouble with the Synodical Conference because he would “preach the Gospel anywhere, also in non-Lutheran churches.”⁸⁴ Such work established a Sunday school, a church, and later a school in New Orleans and also in Little Rock, Arkansas, “succeeding in opening the Synodical Conference’s first black missions.”⁸⁵ Later, Rev. N.J. Bakke, would “stay the course, and build another day school which helped start St. Paul’s

⁸¹ Johnson, *Black Christians*, 180.

⁸² Dickinson, *Roses and Thorns*, 42.

⁸³ Johnson, *Black Christians*, 153.

⁸⁴ Johnson, *Black Christians*, 153.

⁸⁵ Johnson, *Black Christians*, 153. In Little Rock, Arkansas, he began with a Sunday school in December in 1877. The following year, a congregation was organized and took the name St. Paul’s Colored Lutheran Church. Doescher’s pioneering, even unionistic, spirit caused him to run afoul of the Synodical Conference, but not before starting a church in New Orleans as well.

Lutheran Church, New Orleans, LA.”⁸⁶

Not all successful missional efforts were officially organized. Jeff Johnson notes a lay-driven effort, “another ‘success story,’ in the annals of black Lutheranism coming out of Mensura, LA.”⁸⁷ Henry Thomas, a member of St. Paul’s in New Orleans, moved to Mensura and met several people in the town, eventually helping to organize another St. Paul’s Lutheran in Cocoville, LA. This congregation, though never growing very large, was influential in producing leaders for the LCMS. Johnson says that this church was special because of “the number of pastors (12) it has given to the Lutheran Church.”⁸⁸ This type of effort afforded greater opportunity to address the issues of the black community on their own terms, since it was from the lay people themselves.

Summary

A survey of the records of early missionaries to Negroes during the 1880s reveal the remarkable consistency in outlook and practice . . . among the missionaries. Their letters and articles supply cogent proof of the almost insurmountable difficulties encountered by the consistent maintenance of the goal to remake Negroes in the Lutheran image.⁸⁹

Whether such efforts were racist in nature or merely hyper-ethnocentric,⁹⁰ these early mission efforts were at best condescending to black Americans. In the midst of faithful theological proclamations and well-intentioned efforts, there existed growing evidences of racial

⁸⁶ Johnson, *Black Christians*, 157.

⁸⁷ Johnson, *Black Christians*, 157. This was especially interesting to me because it was the historical background for the church, St. Paul’s, which I served in Los Angeles. Several of the families had roots to the Mensura Mafia. Many of the original pastors of St. Paul were of the lineage of the Mensura Mafia of Louisiana.

⁸⁸ Johnson, *Black Christians*, 157.

⁸⁹ F. Dean Lueking, *Mission in the Making*, (St. Louis: Concordia, 1964), 102.

⁹⁰ See Sowell, *Ethnic America*, 57, where he says, “Whether in a rural or an urban setting, concentrations of Germans perpetuated the German language and German culture for generations. Often this reflected residential as well as cultural isolation.”

bigotry, caricatures from the culture that were perpetuated in Lutheran periodicals.⁹¹ Johnson says,

Two German language periodicals widely circulated in the Missouri Synod, *Der Lutheraner* and *Die Missionstaube*, reported with some regularity on the progress of the new mission to the black community. The language of both journals was condescending, referring to the prospective converts as the “children of Ham,” or the “perishing darkie heath,” and depicting blacks in highly negative racial terms.⁹²

But Johnson also states that the LCMS English language publication, *The Pioneer*, “dealt almost exclusively with the Synodical Conference work among blacks in the South, regularly depicting the Negro as the hero in its stories, referring to him as ‘the freedman of the South.’ ”⁹³

In early post-emancipation, post-Civil War times, therefore, the LCMS entered the mission field of the South to reach African Americans. The LCMS outreach to blacks was plagued by several problems: an ignorance of the long history of black Lutheranism; a faulty projection of the black mission field as reaching out to the “heathen”; a naïveté of the Southern Culture and the challenges of reaching out to black Americans in the post-Civil War South; and a paternalism rooted in ethnocentrism, even racism.⁹⁴ Therefore, such efforts were naively condescending to the culture that the church sought to reach. These problems were barriers to effective LCMS missional work among black Americans. The goal of the LCMS mission, therefore, appeared to

⁹¹ See Schulze, *Race against Time*, 103–8 for a summary of all Lutheran journals and periodicals concerning race, racism, bigotry, integration etc. He says, “The chief criticism that must be directed against the official periodicals of the Synodical Conference and of the Missouri Synod is not primarily in what they said in the earlier decades of our analysis. It is rather to be found in what was not said. These periodicals circumvented, bypassed, or ignored the problem altogether.” 108.

⁹² Johnson, *Black Christians*, 156.

⁹³ Johnson, *Black Christians*, 156.

⁹⁴ In my work at the Cross-Cultural Ministry Center, CUI as Director, I was often involved in various ethnic ministries housed in ethnic Anglo churches. Very often these self-supporting Lutheran ministries were seen as second tier ministries, i.e., Hispanic ministry as one of “Barrios work,” or Black ministry as ministry “among the poor,” . . . rather than seeing them as multi-dimensional efforts of the Gospel in those communities just like in the Anglo community as well. Also, there was often resistance to real integration of that particular ethnic work in the congregations as far as representation on boards or committees, which is the basic evidence for a partnership in ministry.

be the German-Lutheranizing of black Americans rather than the humble sharing of the message of the Gospel.

Period 2: 1893–1946: Moments and Days of a Growing Involvement in Christ’s Mission

In this second period in American culture, the LCMS experienced its own assimilation problems. Such pressure affected the Church positively in its mission efforts by forcing the church to become more “culturally aware” and culturally committed as it rapidly accepted English as the language of their church and mission work⁹⁵ and it increasingly began to engage issues of the American culture as their own.⁹⁶ As German Americans, Lutherans faced their own version of nativist bigotry due to Germany’s role as America’s enemy in both World Wars. Franklin Clark Fry says, “Lutherans came out of the *Bierstube* into American life.”⁹⁷ But, such a burden to prove one’s patriotism occurred within the need for the LCMS to completely assimilate to Anglo-culture. Kathryn Galchutt notes, “With the onset of World War I, German Lutherans not only became more exposed to the outside world, they also experienced a brief, but intense period of ethnic persecution.”⁹⁸

Prior to World War 1, “in spite of an active nativist sentiment and a desire of Anglo-conformity in late nineteenth-century America, German immigrants tended to be more accepted by Anglo-Americans than other immigrant groups.”⁹⁹ But with the war against Germany,

⁹⁵ See Alan Niehause Graebner, “The Acculturation of an Immigrant Lutheran Church: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1917-1929” (PhD. Dissertation, Columbia University, 1965) for a more in-depth analysis of the challenges and blessings of the LCMS rapid Americanization.

⁹⁶ That is not to say that the LCMS was more social ministry focused, merely that they were becoming less isolated and more a part of the American culture as its own.

⁹⁷ Luecke, “Themes of Lutheran Urban Ministry, 1945-85,” 123.

⁹⁸ Kathryn M. Galchutt, *The Career of Andrew Schulze: Lutherans and Race in the Civil Rites Era* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2005), 26.

⁹⁹ See John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patters of American Nativism. 1860-1925*, 2nd ed. (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992).

German Americans became the targets of anti-German hostility. The pressures for total assimilation not merely integration were intense. Galchutt notes,

In fact, the pressure for German Americans, especially tight knit, German speaking, isolated communities like those of the LCMS churches and people, to become Anglicized was incredible. German communities across America came under tremendous pressure to prove their loyalty. German Americans were harassed with acts of violence and vandalism, but much of the pressure was psychological. Family, business, and street names became anglicized. (Street names changed, business names changed) German language papers were censored and German-language instruction was eliminated from the public schools. German books and music were now considered suspect.¹⁰⁰

Among Germans with church affiliations, it was the Mennonites, Lutherans, and Catholics who experienced the most difficulties. Frederick Luebke differentiates the LCMS even from these groups, stating, “In few German-American churches was the identification with the German government so weak and the retention of the German language and culture so strong as in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.”¹⁰¹

The Missouri Synod, in particular was singled out for criticism. As Carol Coburn explained:

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod’s exclusive use of the German language, its pro German stand before 1917, its rigid definition of the separation of church and state, and its aversion to ecumenical fellowship with other Protestant groups made it an obvious target for charges of un-Americanism.”¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Galchutt, *Career of Andrew Schulze*, 27.

¹⁰¹ Luebke, *Bonds of Loyalty*, 311, 102.

¹⁰² Carol Coburn, *Life at Four Corners: Religion, Gender, and Education in a German-Lutheran Community, 1868-1945* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1992). To be noted, each “defining characteristic” of the LCMS community needs to be viewed from within the context of both its reason for coming to America (religious, not financial), its desire to lived faithfully to its confession as well as its community, and its hamlet nature of assimilation as it relates to culture. Its use of the German language was tied to maintaining its faithful confession of the Gospel. Its confessions were in German and Latin and the German language was much more precise than English. Its rigid definition of the distinction between Church and State was due partly to its persecution in Germany with regards to the Prussian Union and its churches and pastors being forced to use state sanctioned hymnals and liturgies in worship. Finally, its confessional posture with regards to ecumenism goes right to the heart of the Lutheran Church and the Reformation where the Church literally found itself under persecution and pressure merely for its stance on the graciousness of the Gospel message as pure gift. It is true that ethnocentric concerns were part of this passion as well. That is the challenge of the LCMS as it seeks to give away what it possesses.

Alan Graebner says,

At the time of World War I, the Missouri Synod was still known as the German Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States. Missouri quickly dropped “German” from its name. The war also expanded the use of English within the Synod. Before the United States entered the war, approximately one-sixth of the congregations in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod had begun holding at least one English-language service per month. By the end of the war, nearly three-fourths of Missouri congregations were making the transition to English.¹⁰³

Many German Lutherans served in the war against Germany, “to prove their loyalty to America.”¹⁰⁴

The LCMS’ experience with nativist racism in America might cause one to expect that the church was more sympathetic to the black experience in American culture. What actually occurred was a “roses and thorns” reality of LCMS missional engagement among black people. In describing the mission work of the LCMS among Black American’s, Dickinson paints the picture of the Lutheran Church as the ship of salvation. When the church throws the rope to those Black people who might be drowning in the sea, it’s not a rope, but “long rose vines that are laden with many thorns.” He further clarifies, “The roses are the means of Grace, the Word of God, taught and administered according to Christ’s commands. The Jewels are ‘Scripture alone, grace alone, faith alone. . . . [T]he thorns appear when Black people strive to partake of these precious jewels of Salvation, these priceless riches of God in Christ Jesus.”¹⁰⁵

Although there were concerted efforts to evangelize Black Americans, the Synod itself and even many of those early missionaries subscribed, to some extent, to the cultural notion of Negro inferiority. As George Gude notes, “Although the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S.

¹⁰³ Graebner, “Acculturation of an Immigrant Lutheran Church,” 92.

¹⁰⁴ Frederick Nohl, “The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod Reacts to United States Anti-Germanism during World War I,” *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* 35 (July 1962): 63.

¹⁰⁵ Dickinson, *Roses and Thorns*, 11–12, describes the sentiment of the Lutheran black community in relationship to the LCMS at large as “it’s been quite a bed of roses, it is just that they forgot to clip the thorns.”

Constitution established the political equality of the races, it was not until after World War II that the nation and the Synod took seriously the task of eliminating racial discrimination.”¹⁰⁶

In this time period, the LCMS lived in two worlds, the world of its confessional, socio-cultural heritage and the new world of the English speaking United States. For the LCMS, this social schizophrenia was a chosen if not changing reality. For black Americans, living in two worlds was not by choice, but by force. Franklin says,

In the three centuries that blacks had been a part of the evolving American civilization two important processes vitally affecting them were in operation. They were compelled to live in a world apart from the dominant group in the community ... and at the same time, however, they participated to some limited extent in the affairs of the larger community. . . . These two processes went on simultaneously and imposed on blacks a most difficult task: that of trying to live in two worlds at the same time.¹⁰⁷

Cone demands that any authentic witness of the Gospel “cannot afford to be an abstract, dispassionate discourse on the nature of God in relation to humankind; such an analysis, has no ethical implications for the contemporary forms of oppression in our society.”¹⁰⁸ At this period in history, German Lutherans, especially those of the LCMS, had experienced something similar. The church was positioned to empathize with the black experience and to fashion a missiology that heard the cries of the community as it shared the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Black American Experience

Black Americans may have been emancipated, but the war for their continued enslavement was reconstituted in the South by other means. As noted earlier, Cyprian Davis says, “The last decade of the nineteenth century, sometimes referred to as “the Gay Nineties,’ was in fact, the

¹⁰⁶ Gude, “The Church in Society,” *Heritage in Motion*, 254.

¹⁰⁷ Franklin and Higginbotham, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 429.

¹⁰⁸ Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 17.

nadir of African American history.”¹⁰⁹ Many of the Southern Democrat Confederate leaders who were pardoned during the reconstruction began a social war of political means. In response to the policies of reconstruction, guerilla, terrorist style, secret societies like the Klu Klux Klan grew. These societies stood as resistance to the reconstruction, terrorizing blacks and whites who supported black independence and self-sufficiency. In a subtler battle, Black people faced disenfranchisement movements from “legislatures now controlled by zealous white-supremacy Democrats.”¹¹⁰ It was a time of “poll-taxes, elaborate election schemes, complicated balloting processes, and highly centralized election codes”¹¹¹ all designed to take back what emancipation and the Civil War had hoped to deliver. It was a political reassertion of white supremacy in the South, a time of *Plessy v Ferguson*’s “separate but equal” stratification of society, the strengthening of Jim Crow laws, segregated schools, and laws prohibiting intermarriage.¹¹²

It was also a time of increasing violence for black people. While violence in the form of lynchings was decreasing in the early part of the twentieth century, “riots were perceptively increasing.”¹¹³ In the early part of the century it was whites victimizing blacks. Towards the end of the century black people exerted their resistance to such a plight.

The seeds of this later resistance were sown in the experience of the black men who fought for their country in World War II, who experienced acceptance in other parts of the Western world, and then returned to the growing cultural bigotry and racial dislocation in the United States.¹¹⁴ Black infantry men, aviators, and leaders served in World War I and II with distinction

¹⁰⁹ Davis, *History of Black Catholics*, 167.

¹¹⁰ Franklin and Higginbotham, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 255.

¹¹¹ Franklin and Higginbotham, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 255.

¹¹² Franklin and Higginbotham, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 262.

¹¹³ Franklin and Higginbotham, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 313.

¹¹⁴ See Franklin and Higginbotham, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 433–61.

only to return to a subservient position back in the borders of the country they fought to protect.

Franklin tells of a German propaganda piece directed to the all-black Ninety-Second Division of the US army to destroy their morale. The document says:

Do you enjoy the same rights as the white people do in America, the land of Freedom and democracy, or are you rather not treated over there as second-class citizens? Can you go into a restaurant where white people dine? Can you get a seat in the theater where white people sit? The circular asserted that Germans liked blacks and treated them as gentlemen in Germany. The African Americans were invited to come over to the German lines, where they would find friends who would help them in the cause of liberty and democracy. None deserted, and all seemed to have continued to fight even more energetically.¹¹⁵

Such commitment to the American culture was not rewarded upon the soldiers return.

The desire to overthrow the powers of oppression experienced in post-World War II America flowered in the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s. This period was a time of black people living in two worlds: separate housing, separate schools, political disenfranchisement, growing violence, and a continued unwillingness of the culture to even consider the possibility of integration and assimilation, even when blacks earned such respect in fighting for the country that treated them poorly. But it was also a time for sporadic anomalies to the status quo. One such anomaly was the Harlem Renaissance in the 1920s, a literary and cultural movement wherein Harlem's destiny was finally "thrown into their own hands, where they developed a responsibility and a self-confidence that they had not previously known. . . . [Unfortunately], [t]hey began to see the discrepancies between the promises of freedom and the reality of their experiences."¹¹⁶ The Harlem Renaissance and black consciousness of Marcus Garvey¹¹⁷ was one example of the flourishing of black culture when given a glimpse of freedom

¹¹⁵ Franklin and Higginbotham, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 333.

¹¹⁶ Franklin and Higginbotham, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 362. For a more complete discussion of the Harlem Renaissance, see 361–81.

¹¹⁷ Marcus Garvey was a publisher, a journalist, and an orator who became one of the leading voices of black self-expression and self-determination in 1920s New York City. Franklin says of him, that he was "one of the great

and self-determination.

As previously noted, German Americans were faced with similar assimilation demands. The German Americans became accepted as full-fledged Americans by means of fighting for America and jettisoning much of their cultural uniqueness. This shared experience could have resulted in an empathy and understanding of the black experience in America, one that might have aided in an authentic sharing of the Gospel by Lutherans among black Americans. Generally, that was not the case.

LCMS Missional Activity among Black Americans: Structural Racism and Paternalism

The LCMS' involvement in missional outreach in the United States in general, and in black mission work particularly expanded after World War I/II. In the early 1930s, the Lutheran Laymen's League, a grass roots movement of the LCMS, started the radio broadcast, "the Lutheran Hour,"¹¹⁸ to proclaim the message of the Gospel to the nation at large.¹¹⁹ During the 1940s the LCMS begin to deal with the race issue more pointedly. As Andrew Schulze says,

The wind was now shifting in a different direction; from 1946 on, the Missouri Synod was to be more and more directly confronted with the race issue. With the passing of the resolution by the Synodical Conference which made it possible for Negro mission congregations to become members of the Missouri Synod, and with such

energizers of the New Negro Movement," Franklin and Higginbotham, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 363.

¹¹⁸ Schulze notes several times in his book, *The Race against Time*, how the Lutheran Hour inspired people to seek out the church for membership. The Story of Ruth Smith, 23–25, is a story of a young woman who was not only inspired by the teachings of the Lutheran Hour to join a Lutheran church, it was a story of a woman who wanted to be trained by the church for leadership and service. Unfortunately, the story is one where our academic institutions refused to receive her. Schulze also notes (31), that whenever black people sought out Lutheran Churches who had Lutheran Hour signs on the front, people assumed that Schulze (a noted activist for integration and full fellowship of black people in the Lutheran Church), "had sent them."

¹¹⁹ See Galchutt, *Career of Andrew Schulze*, 66, where she notes that "Walter Maier's fame reached far outside the Synod," and many new members of Schulze church wanted to become Lutherans because of what they heard on the Lutheran Hour. The point to be noted was that the Lutheran Hour was a program that sought to introduce the teachings of the Lutheran Church to a broader audience in America. It was one effort that was national in scope. It introduced the teachings of a small, immigrant church to the national polis. It thankfully was understood as a message for all people, even black Americans. But the program didn't especially target anything uniquely associated with the black community at the time.

congregations become members of that body, the race issue could not be overlooked or evade as it had been in previous years.¹²⁰

The end of this period of engagement (1942–1950) saw many firsts in the black Lutheran community. But these developments tended to be ad hoc developments from “below,” from individual efforts of pastors, lay people, and black congregations themselves. Johnson notes these developments.

(1) For the first time, black Lutheran Congregations became self-supporting. (2) For the first time, black Lutherans became members of the LCMS and the America Lutheran Church. (3) For the first time since the establishment of Immanuel Lutheran College, blacks were admitted to institutions of higher education in the Missouri Synod. (4)¹²¹ For the first time, with the formation of the Lutheran Human Relations Association of America, racism in the Lutheran church was openly attacked by black pastors and congregations. (5) For the first time, racially inclusive Sunday Schools were established.¹²²

If the 1940s ushered in a time of relative acceptance of black Lutheran congregations in the Synod, it did so on the heels of overt disenfranchisement of those same congregations merely a decade earlier. Much of the growing awareness of the need for a civil rights emphasis in outreach to black Americans came from below, from pastors, lay people, and churches that were seeking to share the Gospel in black communities.¹²³ The LCMS as a church was often as resistant to the discussions of civil and social rights for black people as the culture at large. This was the

¹²⁰ Schulze, *Race against Time*, 88. It took nineteen years, though, for the fullness of this proclamation to be realized in the Synodical Assembly when several proposals concerning race and mission were introduced with the statement, “The Missouri Synod is no longer German. Brothers we are here!”

¹²¹ See Schulze, *Race against Time*, 16-25, where he discusses the segregation-styled resistance of the colleges of the LCMS to accept Negro students at their white institutions. Many were not “accepted” due to their race, but finally after much cajoling from pastors like Andrew Schulze, and with many qualified “Lutheran” candidates who happened to be Negro, and were desirous of matriculating at “white” LCMS colleges and seminaries, finally, the first candidate, Jeff Johnson was accepted, eventually matriculating from Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, in 1948. There would be more candidates to follow.

¹²² Johnson, *Black Christians*, 178–79.

¹²³ Galchutt, *Career of Andrew Schulze*, 74, notes that “If Schulze was an example of an early integrationist, Behnken (the President of the LCMS in the 1930s-1950s) was an example of an early reactionary.” The move to integration would not be stopped, but the pressure would come from the congregational level, from individual pastors, and people.

ongoing historical record of the continued “Roses and Thorns” reality of LCMS missional engagement with black Americans and missional partnership with Black Lutherans. Early in this period, the structure of the church¹²⁴ was still very much closed to dealing with issues of concern in the black communities. But, worse, the ethnocentrism of the earlier period, under social pressures to assimilate fully to the English-speaking culture, transformed the LCMS virtually overnight to an Americanized Lutheran Church, which reflected the same bigotries and racism as the dominant culture.

The LCMS still suffered from the negative results of such a transformation during this time. As Dickinson says, “It is clear that there is no support for racism in the *Handbook* of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, the Book of Concord, or the Bible, but the old evil foe (racism, racism in the church) refuses to die.”¹²⁵ That reality was never more apparent corporately than in the activities and rulings of the 1936 Convention of the Lutheran Synodical Conference, a group of which the LCMS was the primary leader. One of the major issues at convention was the full fraternal membership and participation in the Synodical conference of two self-supporting, Negro, Lutheran congregations. The resolution recognized black Lutherans and white as brothers and sisters in the family of faith.¹²⁶ One congregation was St. Philips in Chicago, pastored by Rev. Marmaduke Carter.¹²⁷ The other was St. Philips in St. Louis, pastored

¹²⁴ It should be noted that the LCMS is not a hierarchical church in that the policies of a particular leader or convention resolution are not binding of the congregations in the way that a hierarchical church structure (like the Roman Catholics) would be. In that sense, the LCMS corporate structure is advisory, with the congregations being the power of its polity structure. Very often, this meant that even in the face of corporate bigotry and racism, faithful things could be happening at the congregational level. This author believes that is where the missional solutions will originate going forward as well.

¹²⁵ Dickinson, *Roses and Thorns*, 194.

¹²⁶ Cone’s main critique of American white supremacy is that it dehumanizes anything that is not “white.” This vote would have been a clear rejection of that way of thinking at a time when it was fashionable to think so in polite society.

¹²⁷ Luecke, “Themes of Lutheran Urban Ministry,” 139, notes that Marmaduke Carter was an “entrepreneurial black preacher who charmed Midwest congregations with German sermons and gathered his own support to form

by Rev. Andrew Schulze. Both congregations were self-supporting, Lutheran Congregations that wished to be recognized as such by the larger church. Schulze recalls,

The resolution recommended that the two self-supporting congregations of predominantly Negro constituency—one in St. Louis and the other in Chicago, and though neither of them were actually in the South—be advised to seek membership in the synodical districts in which they were located.¹²⁸

The resolution was rejected.

Schulze also recalls the bigotry of then Synodical President, Dr. John W. Behnken, who has been described as “the first American-born president of the Missouri Synod . . . the great Americanizer of the German-American church, and on the race issue, he was not only American, but Texan.”¹²⁹ Behnken spoke to some of the reasoning of the decision saying, “You know, Pastor Schulze, if you give a colored man little, he will want everything.”¹³⁰ Such views were more pointedly confessed in an earlier letter from Dr. Behnken to the Walther League concerning integration of black and white Walther league societies. He wrote, “As far as mission work among the Negroes is concerned, our Southern people try to do their part, but we know that it is absolutely impossible for us to sanction social equality.”¹³¹

Such segregational views became less overt, and less effective overall in the subsequent decades, but they would subtly undergird debates concerning race throughout. While the LCMS soon began the process of integration (1940s) and desegregation (1950s), the pressures for such

the first LMCS congregation headed by a black clergyman. All other early black congregations were headed by white clergy and all were called “St. Philips.” (black churches with whites at the head, metaphorically just like the Ethiopian eunuch.) . . . Even in this example, it is amazing to see the length that a black American had to go to be a leader in the LCMS. If only white pastors would adopt the same methodology in reverse.

¹²⁸ Schulze, *Race Against Time*, 43.

¹²⁹ Behnken was President of the LCMS from 1935–1962. See Galchutt, *Career of Andrew Schulze*, 74. His issues of racial segregation did not prevent him from leading the LCMS for 27 years.

¹³⁰ Schulze, *Race against Time*, 44.

¹³¹ Schulze, *Race against Time*, 45.

efforts originated either from the culture at large, or from pressures from pastors, lay people, or congregations from below.

LCMS Missional Activity among Black Americans: Not Always Saying the Right Things, Often Not Doing the Right Things

Publicly, the LCMS still tended to say the right things about white supremacy and the false nationalism of American Millennialism, rejecting the white supremacy of National events like the Chicago world's Fair with its "white city" and "new Zion, millennialism." The LCMS' official perspective in "A Brief Statement," rejected white supremacy completely and unequivocally.¹³² But engaging black Americans for the sake of evangelism and mission was a different story in this period. The rigid Two-Kingdom responses to issues like segregation and civil rights continued to undergird an LCMS non engagement of such issues politically or socially, even though these issues were vital to an authentic outreach to black Americans, and a much-needed empathy towards black Lutherans. Much like Walther's Two-Kingdom writings on slavery, mere rejection of white supremacy, without any solutions, sound indifferent and callous to those suffering under the weight of such white supremacy views. When the church specifically engaged the growing issues of civil rights and the integration of black Lutherans during this period, they often failed to say or do the right things.¹³³

The successful missional engagements of black Americans during this period tended to

¹³² See "A Brief Statement," <http://www.creeds.net/lutheran/missouri.htm>, "Of the Millennium."

¹³³ This is one of the great disappointments in the history of LCMS outreach to black Americans. Having experienced their own version of "forced assimilation" to the Anglo-American culture because of World War I and II, with the violence experienced because of the LCMS' cultural differences, and with their fighting of their homeland to prove their allegiance, this would have been a perfect time to identify somewhat with the travails of the black community in America fighting merely to be accepted as citizens. It is the opinion of this author that the "successful, albeit culture-annihilating, assimilation" of the LCMS to the Anglo-American culture actually helped transform the LCMS' confessional, ethnocentricism into a more Americanized bigotry in the post World War II years in American history. Rather than lead the discussion of civil rights and social rights, the LCMS was now positioned to merely follow the culture's lead.

happen in-spite of the church at large. There were still growing successes of black ministry within the Synodical Conference, but these were generally segregated activities, not fully accepted like other similar white efforts by the overall church. The work in Alabama¹³⁴ was growing, as the CTCR notes:

The Synodical Conference opened its first school, Immanuel Lutheran College, and Seminary, to train African American church workers. Two other schools were subsequently opened to train African Americans for professional church work: Luther College, New Orleans, Louisiana and Selma Academy, 1922 in Selma, Alabama.¹³⁵

There were growing pressures for dialogue in the church to examine the issue of race more thoroughly. Already at the LCMS convention in Cleveland, 1944, a committee was formed to consider full membership of Negro congregations in the Synodical conference. By 1946, after months of contentious discussions, the advisory committee report recommended “full membership” to the congregations in question. Full membership may not have addressed racism fully within the LCMS, but it meant that going forward, the race issue now must be addressed more directly from within.¹³⁶

Again, for every step forward, there always seemed to be two steps back. Notions of black inferiority and German cultural superiority¹³⁷ were undercurrents throughout the debates even when “right” decisions on integration were made. Among any positive decisions and efforts were unofficial, yet influential bigoted ideas that lingered for decades. Andrew Schulze notes:

As late as 1943, the attitude of the Missionary Board of the Synodical Conference on race relations was seemingly little different from that held by people in our society in

¹³⁴ For a more thorough discussion of the work in Alabama, see Johnson, *Black Christians*, 165–72; and Dickinson, *Roses and Thorns*, 65–72. Johnson notes that such efforts were grassroots in nature. This methodology would aptly describe much of the missional work among black Americans during this time period.

¹³⁵ CTCR, *Racism and the Church*, 27–29.

¹³⁶ Schulze, *Race Against Time*, 88.

¹³⁷ It was as if Acts 10 didn't exist in the Bible. The failure to see our theology of creation, that all are created in God's image; our theology of mission to love as we are loved, the vulnerable and even our enemies; and the mission to serve others as we share the Gospel (1 Cor. 9) is disheartening.

general. Executive Secretary Louis A. Wisler, in a paper presented at a aboard meeting in September of that year, stated that all efforts to bring the races together “can only result in the greatest harm and obstruction in . . . the Christian Church,” since God separated the races as He separated the languages at the Tower of Babel.”¹³⁸

Generally, the LCMS had become appallingly silent in the discussion of racism. While the church eschewed “white supremacy” in society, it practiced such supremacy concerning black mission oversight. While there was no rule against “black leadership over ministry areas in the field,” only white LCMS overseers were chosen. In the field, not only was there segregation of black Lutheran Churches from white, there was also a racial caste system that treated black Lutheran pastors and churches differently than their white counterparts. Johnson notes:

Black pastors were consistently excluded from membership in any of the constituent synods of the Synodical Conference; that most of them did not receive a “call” to the congregations they served; and that most were paid salaries arbitrarily by superintendents (completely out of line with their white counterparts).¹³⁹

The key thing to note is the “arbitrary” nature of many of these actions. Integration movements in the 1940s and 1950s finally put such arbitrariness to rest. But at this time, it was all too easy for the church to mimic the racial notions and practices in society. In his chapter on such abuses, “The Era of Lutheran Bishops,” Richard Dickinson¹⁴⁰ observes that not only was there subtle racism in the church, there were overt, LCMS-overseer abuses with regards to black ministry in the field. It was a time of centralized, despotic rule over black pastors and congregations; a time of secret, pitiful salaries, harsh oversight, and restrictive policies.

¹³⁸ Andrew Schulze, *Race Against Time*, 71. The essay of Wisler was accepted. This author wonders why the group didn’t see the issue of Pentecost and the specific ministry issue of St. Peter with Cornelius as God’s clear intention of the person and work of Jesus as the reconciliation work of God meant to overcome the protective linguistic, segregation at Babel.

¹³⁹ Johnson, *Black Christians*, 194–95.

¹⁴⁰ Dickinson, *Roses and Thorns*, 73–104, during this time, starting in the early part of the twentieth century up until roughly the late 1940s with the “reception of several black congregations into the geographic District of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod,” 98.

Dickinson says, “Black Lutheranism survived and is on the move again, not because of the era of bishops, but in spite of it.”¹⁴¹ For the LCMS, this was a time of callous disregard for the issues of the black community in America, yet grassroots movements existed to the contrary.

LCMS Missional Activity among Black Americans: Congregational, Grass-Root Successes

While this second period was a time of Americanization in both the positive and negative senses of the term, it was also a time when the power of the Gospel, in spite of impediments from the church at large, worked in the faithful ministries of LCMS pastors and churches. This was the time of the “Lutheran Hour,” a powerful Lutheran lay-driven proclamation of the Gospel to the American culture. The program grew from the grass roots efforts of lay people who actually rescued the LCMS as a church from overwhelming debt in 1917. The program today, much like then, did not deal directly with political issues, but spoke to many issues in the context of an individual’s personal relationship with God in Christ and with each other. Rev. Andrew Schulze, pastor of St. Philip’s, St. Louis from 1928–1947, credits the Lutheran Hour on KFUE, St. Louis, as one of the reasons that the church grew so rapidly.¹⁴² When Andrew Schulze wrote the book *My Brother of Another Color*, Walter Maier, the first speaker of the Lutheran Hour, said that “the book calls for an entirely new approach to mission work.”¹⁴³ The message of the Lutheran Hour was a driving force to bring black Americans into the Lutheran Church.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴¹ Dickinson, *Roses and Thorns*, 97.

¹⁴² Galchutt, *Career of Andrew Schulze*, 66.

¹⁴³ Schulze, *Race against Time*, 99.

¹⁴⁴ See Schulze, *Race against Time*, 24–25, where he speaks of one incident, in 1935, where Miss Ruth Smith heard the “message of a forgiving and loving God in Jesus Christ” preached on the Lutheran Hour, sought out a Lutheran Church and eventually became a teacher. Unfortunately, the story is one where she was not accepted into our schools at the time because she was black. Undeterred, she eventually graduated and served the church nonetheless. Schulze remarks about other incidents like this involving the Lutheran Hour, saying that if black people showed up at a Lutheran Church, they often thought that he had sent them, when in reality, they were coming because of the message they had heard on the radio.

This was a time of the faithful ministries of Rev. Andrew Schulze and Rev. Marmaduke Carter. Schulze was a dedicated pastor of St. Philips who truly listened to the concerns of the people he served. He was a tireless shepherd and teacher, and was an advocate for black concerns like civil rights, integration, excellence in education, and other issues of fairness for the sake of the people that he served long before such advocacy was fashionable.¹⁴⁵ From Cone's perspective, this is the place to start any missional engagement with the black community.¹⁴⁶ It should be noted too, that St. Philip's was a self-supporting congregation, started and maintained by a faithful core group of black laity even before Schulze arrived. Together they helped build one of the strongest black congregations in this second period of Lutheran mission. Such a spirit of self-determination was evident in the success of this congregation.

Rev. Marmaduke Carter was successful in black ministry from a different vantage point. Carter was a black Lutheran pastor who began by serving white Lutherans from their cultural perspective. To accomplish that, Carter taught himself German and preached in German. In Chicago, he often met people at the trains to tell them about the LCMS church in the city. In 1955, the Chicago Daily Tribune described Carter as St. Philips, Chicago's founder and pastor, a "Negro Pastor Lutheran Pioneer," who labored for "nearly 40 years of missionary work,"¹⁴⁷ among the people of the community. Incredibly, Carter overcame the German cultural obstacles to bring the Gospel, first to Germans, then to Black Americans. Cone's teaching highlights the

¹⁴⁵ See Galchutt, *Career of Andrew Schulze*, 3.

¹⁴⁶ See Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 9, where he says, "In order to be Christian theology, white theology must cease being white theology and become black theology by denying whiteness as an acceptable form of human existence and affirming blackness as God's intention for humanity." This dissertation takes issue with the Utopian assertions of a political theology that is Christian theology in its entirety, or that political liberation is Christ's liberation message over-all, but the idea of immersing oneself in the concerns of the black community as one's own, is surely the missional place to start for sharing the Gospel.

¹⁴⁷ "Negro Pastor Lutheran Pioneer," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Sunday, April 10, 1955, 227.

LCMS' racism that forced black ministers to go to these lengths just to belong.

Finally, this summary of the individual, congregational success of black LCMS ministry would not be complete without highlighting the work of Rosa Young¹⁴⁸ and her brother Sam Young who planted the seeds of Lutheranism and Lutheran education in Alabama.¹⁴⁹ Their work¹⁵⁰ culminated in the creation of the Alabama Lutheran College, which “was the first Lutheran institution of higher education to be staffed solely by blacks.”¹⁵¹ It must be noted that in spite of the many challenges of this era, as well as the impediments that occurred even from the church, lay ministry like this crossed barriers and brought the mission of the Lutheran Church to black Americans to fruition. Johnson says,

Lutheranism in Alabama grew from the grass roots, not the result of a church planner or administrator sitting in his office deciding where and when a church was to be planted. Lutheranism in Alabama's black belt was carried from community to community by simple, committed lay people.¹⁵²

Summary

The second period under consideration was a time of the Americanization of the LCMS. Unfortunately, the Church suffered from a nativist bigotry as it sought to become fully Americanized in its adopted homeland. Concerning issues pertinent to the Black community, issues like “Jim Crow laws, Integration, education, housing, violence,” the LCMS could have

¹⁴⁸ See <http://www.lcms.org/thefirstrosa>, for more information on this incredible woman, who from the advice of Booker T. Washington, helped bring Lutheran education to Alabama.

¹⁴⁹ Johnson, *Black Christians*, 168–69.

¹⁵⁰ See Galchutt, *Career of Andrew Schulze*, 165, where it notes that in the 1960s, even today, there are those who feel that Young was too accommodating to the segregationism of the culture in which she worked. What is noted here was her tireless effort to lift up the black community through education. Whether that is the best strategy to overcome segregation or not, is another question.

¹⁵¹ Johnson, *Black Christians*, 170.

¹⁵² Johnson, *Black Christians*, 170. Unfortunately, the successful planting of Lutheran congregations and schools in Alabama happened just about the time when the population of the rural South experienced a great decline due to the boll weevil infestation and the World War I draft.

been experientially empathetic, but was virtually silent in this period. It tended to reach out to black Americans with the Gospel “on its own terms,” rather than with a concern for the community itself. It also was a period when the LCMS’ own version of corporate/structural racism, bigotry, and paternalism was exposed.

But this second period also marks a helpful shift in the corporate racial discussions of the church. Though it is premature to state that the church itself was coming to grips with the racial issues of the country, after 1947, Black Lutheran churches were now full members of the LCMS. The issues of race, therefore, became a dialogue among brothers and sisters of the faith. Structural racism was soon addressed by black and white pastors and people from within the LCMS.

Even more important though, the faithful missional activities of LCMS churches, pastors, and people in this period, involved reaching out to black Americans on their own terms. In spite of the lethargy and even unfaithfulness of the corporate church, the mission work of the LCMS among black Americans expanded from the dedicated work of faithful congregations and pastors. In Alabama, the ministry of Rosa Young brought the Lutheran Church to the black community through education. In St. Louis, the ministry of Andrew Schulze was a “white” voice serving black parishioners in the still very “white” LCMS. This voice represented the concerns of the congregation to the church at large, while serving the church faithfully in its community. The contextualization in reverse¹⁵³ ministry of Marmaduke Carter demonstrated the contextual challenges of Lutheran mission among black Americans in general. Carter, a black pastor, became a German-Lutheran to Germans, and a black American to Black Americans. To bridge

¹⁵³ By contextualization in reverse, this paper merely points out that Carter did what the dominant, mission church should do. He immersed himself in a foreign culture (German) to cross the cultural divide, to grow a Lutheran Congregation. He then had to do it again, representing the unique culture and message of the Lutheran church as he sought to evangelize the black community of Chicago.

the gap between the LCMS and the black community, he truly became bi-cultural. These kinds of efforts at the congregational level was the work that began to expand in the next period as the LCMS and the United States finally came to grips with the issues of racism in its midst.

Period 3: 1947–1972: Moments and Days of Mushrooming Mission Expansion

August Suelflow describes this next epoch as a time of “mushrooming growth,” which tended to be due to the complete Americanization of the LCMS and its participation in the suburbanization of the Church. He says:

In North America God had also been at work to get the LCMS into the mainstream of American life and make it ready for the post-World War II era. The late 40s and 50 became years of extensive “new church” (70 to 125 new congregations annually), as servicemen returned from the war and suburban housing developments sprang up everywhere.¹⁵⁴

For the LCMS, the processes of evangelism and assimilation were compelling forces for their missional successes. In general, it was a time of greater assimilation for the LCMS in American culture and with that, greater opportunities to share the Gospel, since the barriers of language and culture were removed.

Also, “during the 60s, congregations, Districts and the Synod were confronted with rapid changes in American life and with a renewed awareness of the plural nature of American society.”¹⁵⁵ The issues of racism, paternalism, and ethnocentrism continued to challenge the LCMS from within. The societal issues of segregation and integration, white superiority and black inferiority, paternalism and self-rule, challenged from without. Unfortunately, the record of

¹⁵⁴ Suelflow, *Heritage in Motion*, 318. An argument could be made that the assimilation challenges brought on by World Wars I and II coupled with the post-World War II boom in American society allowed the LCMS to meld into the background of the US culture as a church and a people that was finally at home in its new home, if not theologically, then sociologically. A similar assimilation path traveled by black Americans unfortunately resulted in exact cultural expression, further alienation in American society.

¹⁵⁵ Suelflow, *Heritage in Motion*, 318.

the LCMS at this time was one of integration even total assimilation of black people into the culture of the Lutheran Church, rather than empathetic evangelism with mutual respect for the black community's values and culture on their own terms.

Black American Experience

The tension between living in two worlds, especially considering black Americans' exemplary service in the military and growing desire for self-determination, finally erupted in the 1950s and 1960s in a variety of ways. Promises of civil rights no longer satisfied; there was an expectation of equality. That equality was demanded. In 1955, Martin Luther King, Jr., Rosa Parks, and others protested segregated seating on buses in Montgomery, AL. The non-violent public protests and boycott finally succeeded. Westin says, "The success in Montgomery gave new stimulus to organizations committed to nonviolent action."¹⁵⁶

Resistance to black Americans' full exercise of their civil rights was now met with the force and protection of the federal government. In 1954, the landmark case "Brown v The Board of Education" desegregated the schools in the United States, effectively overturning "Plessy v. Ferguson." In 1957, President Dwight Eisenhower reinforced the decision by sending federal troops to Little Rock, Arkansas "in response to the governor's defiance of a court order to desegregate Central High School in Little Rock, allowing the African-American children to gain admission to the school."¹⁵⁷ Jim Crow laws were broken by "sit ins"¹⁵⁸ In 1963, the centennial of emancipation, marches were organized to politically exercise the new-found power that was

¹⁵⁶ Westin, *Freedom Now*, 153.

¹⁵⁷ Franklin and Higginbotham, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 492-93.

¹⁵⁸ See Franklin and Higginbotham, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 495. The movement started on Feb. 1, 1960, when four black students in Greensboro, NC were refused service at a variety store, so they refused to leave until the store closed. It spread to public facilities like libraries, beaches, and hotels.

coalescing in the black community. “The most critical demonstration began in Birmingham on April 3, under the leadership of Martin Luther King. . . . As they marched, demonstrators demanded things such as fair employment opportunities, desegregation of public facilities, and the creation of a community to plan for desegregation.”¹⁵⁹ The Civil Rights movement went national with the March on Washington, August 28, 1963 under the banner “Free by 63.”¹⁶⁰ It culminated in the Civil Rights Act of 1964, a “comprehensive law in support of racial equality, also giving the attorney general additional power to protect citizens against discrimination.”¹⁶¹

The racism of the South was not the only challenge to the black community in America. Franklin notes that another tremendous challenge to the black community in the years after World War II was that of urbanization.¹⁶² The War created a dramatic shift in the black population from agrarian to urban. At the same time, whites were leaving the cities and participating in the boom of the suburbanization of America. Such movements often left the city devoid of businesses, services, and infrastructure. Franklin says:

One of the most dramatic facts of life for black Americans in the postwar years was their continuing urbanization and the profound impact this process had on them both as individuals and as a community. Of the 15 million blacks in the United States in 1950 about 53 percent were living in metropolitan areas. Thirty years later, there would be approximately 26 million blacks, 81 percent of whom were living in metropolitan areas.¹⁶³

¹⁵⁹ Franklin and Higginbotham, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 503.

¹⁶⁰ Franklin and Higginbotham, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 501.

¹⁶¹ Franklin and Higginbotham, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 508.

¹⁶² It should be noted that Richard Dickinson, in “Urban Ministry, the Church’s Inescapable Challenge,” *African Americans and the Local Church*, ed. Robert H. King (St. Louis: Concordia, 1996), also notes the rapid urbanization of the American culture as the inescapable issue that must be faced in 21st ministry. “The existing problems plaguing us today are manifest in the natural resistance to the swift and sweeping changes which urbanization naturally produces,” 35. Unfortunately, coupled with racism, such changes and problems have been even more destructive to the black community and black families in America.

¹⁶³ Franklin and Higginbotham, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 470–71.

The problems of urbanization encompassed issues of work and employment, fair housing, poverty, equal access to quality education, and safety from violence. In this period, America was transforming into an industrial, urban nation. In the midst of, and fueled by, that transformation, grew movements for desegregation, pressures to end Jim Crow laws and a rising tide of the political call for black power which demanded the full civil rights of black Americans.

The 1960s was a time of revolution among blacks in the United States. The decade began with high hopes. There was still the belief that the school desegregation decision would somehow bring about a truly democratic educational system in the United States. The sit-in movement, the freedom riders, the marches and demonstrations, and the voter registration drives, supported by untold numbers of whites as well as black, suggested that an entirely new and thoroughly effective approach to race relations was in the making. . . . Slowly, the optimism gave way to pessimism even cynicism.”¹⁶⁴

To engage the black community then, these same issues must be a part of the discussion of an authentic dialogue from Cone’s perspective. The radical urbanization of the black community during this time frame is another reason that embracing a mission strategy to black Americans must also be a strategy for the city. In one form or another, many of the issues of the last century are still contested today.

LCMS Missional Activity among Black Americans: Structural Racism and Paternalism Yet Growing Awareness

During this period of ministry among black Americans, the structural sins of paternalism and disenfranchisement still plagued the LCMS to a certain degree. The corporate church body, however, grew more aware, even empathetic of the black person’s cause in a country of enslavement and racism. Johnson notes this trend, saying, “In addition to the many resolutions it (the LCMS) had passed beginning in 1947, during the twelve-year period from 1975 to 1986 the

¹⁶⁴ Franklin and Higginbotham, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 518.

Missouri Synod debated 33 resolutions that dealt directly with integration/black ministry.”¹⁶⁵ In the 1950s, *Brown v Board of Education*, overthrew the legality of the racial caste system that thrived especially in the South. The LCMS called for the desegregation of its churches in 1956. In January, 1960, the article, “Is the Church Retarding Integration?” appeared in the *Lutheran Witness*. This article demonstrated that social issues were an important part of the church’s cultural engagement. Unfortunately, the article’s answer tended to reflect the LCMS’ historically tepid response to such matters, saying, “There is no easy answer to such charges and questions.”¹⁶⁶

During this time period the corporate church increased her efforts to address the social issues, including race and racism, which were brought forth by those seeking answers. The Lutheran Human Relations Association of America (LHRAA)¹⁶⁷ became an ad hoc voice of conscience in the LCMS concerning matters of race. The group was responsible for challenging the LCMS to respond to the social issues of the day. For example, the 1965 Detroit LCMS Convention saw 10 Resolutions that dealt with racial issues and LCMS mission to black Americans:

- For open congregations and an end to “negro missions.”
- For staying in changing communities
- For fair housing and employment practice and removal of all restrictive clauses or tacit understandings in congregation and their communities.
- That all synodical schools and publications teach truths about race that according with sound theology and science and that interracial education be supplied for pastors,

¹⁶⁵ Johnson, *Black Christians*, 206–7.

¹⁶⁶ Elmer A. Kettner, “Is the Church Retarding Integration?” *The Lutheran Witness* 79 (12 January 1960), 6. Many reacted negatively to this position, as many other “social sins” are clearly engaged, denounced, and remedied. See issues about divorce, living-together, abortion . . . etc. One letter said, “we don’t wait until ‘people are ready’ to engage many of these social sins.

¹⁶⁷ See Luecke, “Themes of Lutheran Urban Ministry,” 140. The LHRAA was a voluntary organization started by Andrew Schulze in the 1940s that began to address racism in the church and in society. They produced various resolutions to be addressed in LCMS convention. Often, such resolutions were affirmed in an advisory fashion, or committed to groups for further study and action.

teachers, and leadership.

- That districts anticipate and plan a community-based future with their inner-city parishes, and that all parochial schools be open to neighborhood children and be strengthened in areas of racial unrest.
- That seminary students be assigned for their experiential year to inner-city parishes.
- That cooperation with the poor, nonwhite, and Native Americans be made mission priorities and a focus of expenditures.
- That support be given to organize efforts in minority communities.
- That members who have engaged in demonstrations for furthering racial justice be commended and encourage.
- That church schools and church publications adopt this stand, and that these resolutions be implemented by those in authority at every level.¹⁶⁸

In response to these resolutions special conferences on race¹⁶⁹ were convened, and the President of the LCMS, Dr. Oliver Harms, established a “Race Relations Advisory Council to help the Synod better respond to racial issues in both church and society.”¹⁷⁰ Kathryn Galchutt notes that “after decades of racial insensitivity and institutional racism, the institutional church was making an attempt to come to grips with the racial situation in its midst.”¹⁷¹

While such awareness may be laudatory in one sense, it is not necessarily helpful to the LCMS mission to the black community. Such awareness still tended to focus on our issues with race and racism in the church, namely, issues of integration and assimilation. The LCMS responded as usual: it sought to do black ministry by cultural conversion. Johnson summarizes:

In 1947 the church adopted policies of *integration*, and in 1964 adopted policies of *inclusiveness*. In both instances, those policies dealt primarily with structural issues, designed to bring black people inside the organizational structure of the church. By the mid-1980s there was actually a significant decrease in the number of black people who held membership in the Missouri Synod.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁸ Luecke, “Themes of Lutheran Urban Ministry,” 140–41.

¹⁶⁹ Luecke, “Themes of Lutheran Urban Ministry,” 141.

¹⁷⁰ Galchutt, *Career of Andrew Schulze*, 215.

¹⁷¹ Galchutt, *Career of Andrew Schulze*, 215.

¹⁷² Johnson, *Black Christians*, 237.

The 1970s and 1980s saw more Black representation in Synod leadership to address issues concerning LCMS work among black Americans. Johnson notes,

There were now (by 1988) three black groups within Missouri concerned with black ministry; (1) the Black Clergy Caucus (composed of black Lutheran clergy men), (2) the Commission on Black Ministry (composed of 4 clergymen, 4 laypersons, 1 parochial school teacher), and (3) the Convocation (a plenary group composed of black Lutheran congregations).¹⁷³

But there was also an enduring paternalism with respect to these groups as “None of these groups had any formal authority to implement anything regarding black ministry in the Missouri Synod.”¹⁷⁴ Such a paternalistic, even despotic attitude could be observed even in the appointment process of the Black Mission Models Task Force. Dickinson states,

The appointment of the Black Mission Models Task Force is perhaps one of the most interesting episodes in the annals of Black Lutheran history. The Reverend A. L. Barry, executive secretary of the board for mission, felt that the task force should have nine members, six whites and three blacks. The Reverend Simon Bodley, chairman of the Black Caucus was furious. . . . He felt that since the task force was to study and relate to Black work, there should be more Blacks on the task force than whites. He opted for eight Blacks and one white. . . . The compromise was an expanded task force of eight Blacks and three whites. One additional Black person was to serve as the executive director.¹⁷⁵

In 1986, following a survey of black ministry in the Synod, Dr. Ralph Bohlmann called an urgent conference to assess the reality of the findings and to begin to plan new strategies to move forward. The information and numbers gathered referenced over one hundred years of work among black American. They were staggering.

(1) Between 1974 and 1984, there was a 14-percent decline in the number of black Lutherans in the Missouri Synod, despite a 21-percent increase in the number of congregations supposedly involved in black ministry; (2) in the synodical(national) office of the church, there was only one black person who occupied an executive/managerial position; (3) only 19 of the 37 geographical districts of the Synod reported any involvement in black ministry; (4) only one district employed a

¹⁷³ Johnson, *Black Christians*, 205.

¹⁷⁴ Johnson, *Black Christians*, 205–6.

¹⁷⁵ Dickinson, *Roses and Thorns*, 132–33.

black person in an executive/managerial position, whereas no districts employed a black person in a professional/technical position . . . ; (7) only five districts held regular conferences for those involved in black ministry, with another six district indicating that there was no need for such conferences; (8) in the 1984-1985 academic year, while blacks accounted for nearly 10 percent of the total enrollment in synodical colleges and seminaries, they constituted only 2 percent of those students preparing for the pastor ministry and 1.7 percent of those preparing to enter the teaching ministry of the church.¹⁷⁶

These numbers implied that black people decided to “vote with their feet,” concerning both the LCMS’ reluctance to engage the racism in its midst and its lack of any attention to the issues of great concern to the black community. Current engagements tell much the same story. Today, instead of meaningfully engaging the urban, multi-cultural community in mission, the LCMS is closing churches in the cities throughout the United States and losing more members.¹⁷⁷ It appears that the black community did not believe that the LCMS took their concerns or issues to heart, as it pertains to sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ.¹⁷⁸ There are exceptions, but, they

¹⁷⁶ Johnson, *Black Christians*, 207–8. The strategies of integration and inclusiveness have been less than effective. As the director of the Cross-Cultural Ministry Center at Concordia University, Irvine, whose mandate was to train various “other than Anglo” ethnic leaders for LCMS urban ministry, there were students from all over the world who applied, but, even with full-ride support, there were virtually no African-American applications.

¹⁷⁷ See Robert J. Scudieri, “‘Faith-full-ness’ among Lutherans in the United States.” *Missio Apostolica* 9, no. 2 (2001): 68, where he cites our own LCMS statistics concerning the declining LCMS presence in the top five US cities from 1972-1997, New York - 22,001 to 4,581; Los Angeles – 3,743 to 1,857; Chicago – 46,608 to 17,061; Houston – 23,486 to 20,455; Philadelphia – 3,031 to 981. In the years following, the decline continues.

See also Alan C. Klaas, *Mission in Urban Areas, Report of the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod Urban Ministry Task Force* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1995), especially Appendix B, A–9ff, where a detailed list of ethnic ministries presented, showing a sparse LCMS presence in cities around the country. To be noted here, the report detailed cultural, liturgical, theological challenges to be faced in “indigenization” of a church for contextual mission, but the delegitimation of LCMS theology by Black Theology wasn’t discussed as a limiting factor of successful indigenization. This author thinks that this is a glaring omission. The report is from 1995, but this author has worked with a variety of LCMS churches in urban areas. Since 1995, things, if they’ve changed at all, have gotten worse, not better.

¹⁷⁸ There are exceptions to that reality. There continue to be corporate efforts of the LCMS concerning Black and urban ministry. There is presently a commissioned ministry center in Ferguson, MO which is a direct response of the LCMS to the racial issues involved with the shooting of Michael Browne. This author also participated in one of the LCMS’ first efforts to engage the City as a new mission field. As executive director of Life’s Journey Ministries in NYC in the mid-1990s, the strategy was not only to launch a multi-cultural church, but to undergird other ministries in the city as well. In the second year of that work, Rev. Philip Saywayne, a Liberian-American, was brought on staff at LJM as part of a multi-faceted outreach to Manhattan, Queens, and Staten Island. There were corporate efforts to reach out to the black community, but, as we’ll see also in this era, they tended to be individual efforts much like they had been in the past and they do not flow from a coherent missional strategy that understands

tended to be individual efforts much like they had been in the past.

LCMS Missional Activity among Black Americans: Saying the Right Things with More Empathy and Clarity, Reluctantly Doing the Right Things

During this period, the church made several definitive positive statements. The CTCR document on *Racism and the Church* reflects that spirit as it summarizes early LCMS mission work among black Americans saying, “The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod does indeed have a positive record in dealing with the question of integration and black ministry, and for this we thank God.”¹⁷⁹ But Cone would challenge this statement, referencing the black Lutherans’ experience within the church, and black America’s critique of the church. The CTCR concedes that many of the LCMS’ definitive statements on race and racism were responses to changes that society had already addressed. On many of these issues, the church lagged behind when it should have challenged societal convention.

For example, see the “LCMS Official Statement on Race Resolution” at the LCMS Convention, St. Paul, Minnesota, 1956. It reads,

Whereas, Every redeemed individual, regardless of race or ethnic origin is most precious in the sight of God,

Whereas, It is the duty and desire of the church to bring the Gospel to these souls in order to win them for Christ, AND

Whereas, the church will measure its task and opportunities in the light of our Lord’s imminent return, and will hold itself accountable to its Lord,

Resolved, (a) that the LCMS affirm its adherence to, and application of, the Scriptural Principles of fact concerning race relations and church work as adopted by its

how to engage the community on its own terms with regards to issues of race.

¹⁷⁹ *Racism and the Church: Overcoming the Idolatry*, A Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, February, 1994, 29. Unfortunately, as this chapter’s survey will show, that assessment was not one shared by the black community that the LCMS sought to serve. Resolutions were passed and efforts were made, but whether such a record was “positive” remains to be seen.

representatives in conjunction with representatives of the sister synods of the Synodical Conference

1. God will have all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the Truth (1: Tim 2:4)
2. His plan of salvation embraces the World. (John 3:16)
3. God's grace in Christ should be proclaimed to all nations. (Mark 16:15)
4. In the execution of Christ's commandno line of demarcation should be drawn relative to nationality, race, or color, for there is no respect of persons with God. (Rom. 2:11)
5. The Holy Christian church, the communion of saints, is the recipient of Christ's injunction to "teach the nations,"
6. The Church's chief function and task is to spread the news of Jesus Christ and His salvation to men, women, and children irrespective of any national or race make-up.

And be it further resolved, (b) That in all problems which arise in connection with application and connection of these above mentioned principles of, all members of our church unreservedly obey the Savior's command "that ye love one another," and practice Christian charity, forbearance and understanding with each other . . .

Resolved, (c)

1. That all congregations of Synod regard all persons regardless of race or ethnic origin living within the limits of their respective parishes, and not associated with another Christian church, as individuals whom God would reach with the Gospel of His saving Grace through the ministry of the local congregation;
2. That congregations operating in changing communities be encouraged to continue operation in those areas . . . and that the various District Mission Boards be encouraged to subsidize these congregations should this become necessary . . .
3. That Synodical institutions, agencies, and offices continue to make no distinctions based upon race, or color in their entrance requirements or employment policies; and be it finally

Resolved, d) That since Christians are constrained to do justice and love mercy, we acknowledge our responsibility as a church to provide guidance for our members to work in the capacity of Christian citizenship for the elimination of discrimination wherever it may exist, in community, city, state, nation and world.¹⁸⁰

¹⁸⁰ Meyer, *Moving Frontiers*, 405–6. See also 264–65, "Combating Racial Discriminations" (Proceedings, 1959, Res.12, 315–17), where it says, "Whereas, in the present state of our Biblical and scientific knowledge, we possess no evidence to prove the alleged innate superiority of a race of people . . . Resolved, that we continue our efforts to combat erroneous ideas about race, and that we encourage our pastors, teachers, professors, and laymen to utilize every appropriate measure to combat ignorance and prejudice."

The statement was definitive, but it followed the culture's lead, rather than lead the way. Gone were the former statements about the tower of Babel and the separation of the races. There were no longer any references to the "children of Ham." It was a way of saying the right things, after the fact. For a church body that had worked among black people since 1877 to make such a statement in 1956, two years after the American culture had made the change, demonstrated that the church had not heard the issues that were important to black Americans.

Even the excellent work on *Racism and the Church*, commissioned by the LCMS its 1992 convention in Pittsburgh, PA, which called "on all of its members to 'Combat All Racism,'"¹⁸¹ was culturally, even missionally, "after the fact." The matters of race, racism, integration, paternalism and all of its social ills were issues in the culture for hundreds of years. Within the LCMS these issues were clearly evident at least after World War I and II, yet the document was produced thirty years after the culture had definitely dealt with them. The document was much too late.

Looking at this from Cone's perspective, this document still didn't deal with the issues of the black community from its own perspective. Most notably, the CTCR's suggestion of "indigenization" as a strategy for sharing the Gospel shows no regard for the challenges of Black Theology. It says, "Indigenization occurs when the church shares the Gospel by working 'inside' a particular community's culture (e.g., using its language, art, and music),"¹⁸² while failing to

¹⁸¹ CTCR, *Racism and the Church*, 5.

¹⁸² CTCR, *Racism and the Church*, 55. Also, the document overstates the positive record of the LCMS in terms of race relations and racism, preferring to highlight the positive episodes in the church's history without the nuances of how such efforts finally came to fruition. The racist, bigotry of the middle period of LCMS outreach is not covered at all. And, as an aside, the very cover of the document could be racist from several perspectives, first, pictured smiling are a native American male, an Asian female, a Black male, and a White female. A document such as this, written by predominantly white males featuring such a picture has racist overtones. Also, the absence of a white male is condescending to the church as it serves in multi-cultural communities (the picture without a white male is very Conian indeed). This coupled with the call for indigenization without any regard to the delegitimation of Black Theology and the LCMS history, is part of the naiveté of our past.

realize that much of the black community's language, art, and music is in response to survival in the face of racism and white supremacy. This document is the most comprehensive look that the LCMS presently has on matters of race and racism. Clearly, our church's perspective on these things must broaden.

Though the LCMS increased its embrace of these cultural issues of race during this time period, its efforts tended to follow the culture rather than lead. Even though it increasingly said the right things, often the church didn't follow through on what it pledged. Johnson unfortunately notes that amidst all the rhetoric and the multitude of resolutions during these years, not much actually changed:

No good bureaucrat could miss the key words in all those resolutions; *encourage* or *urge*. Nothing is mandated or required. The resolutions typically omit reference to any timetable for accomplishing the objectives, nor is there reference to any means for implementation, whether it be structural, monetary, or personnel.¹⁸³

This pattern of saying the right things, yet not always doing the right thing, is evident from the very beginning of LCMS work among black Americans. The notion of "self" rule in every mission among black Americans, the so-called "Presbyterial rule,"¹⁸⁴ was explicit in the plan from the earliest LCMS efforts. Yet the reality was despotic rule in those early mission societies and a lack of any substantive role in the LCMS even as late as 1981. Suelflow notes:

It may surprise you to know . . . that in the history of our church we have *never* had a Black pastor in foreign mission, *never* in college or university work, *never* in jail and prison ministry, and *only one* in hospital and institutional ministry. In the 38 Districts of our church, 15 of which have a significant amount of Black ministry, there is *not one* District executive who is Black.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸³ Johnson, *Black Christians*, 206–7.

¹⁸⁴ Dickinson, *Roses and Thorns*, 40–42.

¹⁸⁵ Suelflow, *Heritage in Motion*, 348, citing Document 12, "Report of Commission on Black Ministry," *Convention Workbook*, 1981, 31–32.

Dickinson also laments the “thorns” issues that continued to exist despite the proposals for integration of blacks and whites in the LCMS. The sad reality was that there were still congregations throughout the church that would not receive black Lutherans at their altars. He says,

Many Black Lutheran congregations owe their birth and existence to the efforts on the part of some Black Lutheran members who tried to obtain Word, and sacrament, and fellowship in the local white Lutheran congregation. Many white Lutheran congregations located in the North, South, East, or West, flatly refused to accept Negroes in their worship services or at their altars. Many white congregations of the Synod perished on the vine when their communities changed from white to Black rather than accept Blacks in their membership. It was a common practice for the white congregation to relocate when the Blacks moved in their community and also to sell their facilities to some other dominations.¹⁸⁶

LCMS Missional Activity among Black Americans: Congregational, Grass-Root Successes

In spite of the continual tension between saying the right things and actually doing them, there were positive efforts of black ministry during these times. But, again, they tended to be of an individual nature. Certain white pastors did carry the mantle for black ministry against both the subtle and overt racism of the church. Andrew Schulze continued his work with St. Philip’s, but he also helped the Lutheran Human Relations Association of America (LHRAA). Schulze spoke, petitioned, and confronted issues of race within the church for the sake of its mission. Johnson says the LHRAA was “the most outspoken group in the Lutheran Church on matters of race and integration.”¹⁸⁷ In the mid-1940s already, before the culture and even the LCMS itself dealt with desegregation and racism, the LHRAA was already bringing all these issues to the forefront. Meyer notes that “starting in 1945, the LHRAA – each year – hosted annual institutes on Race on the campus of Valparaiso.”¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁶ Dickinson, *Roses and Thorns*, 117–18.

¹⁸⁷ Johnson, *Black Christians*, 199.

¹⁸⁸ Meyer, *Moving Frontiers*, 405.

In the late 1960s, Rev. John Heinemeier became an associate Pastor at St. John Lutheran in Brooklyn, later moving to Risen Christ Church in Brooklyn. His work in the city was a principle catalyst for the “Nehemiah Project,” ultimately producing affordable homes for the working poor in New York.¹⁸⁹ Heinemeier saw his ministry as holistic, for the sake of the people that he served. He served in direct response to the needs of the urban minority community.

There were other LCMS corporate efforts that were positive in dealing with issues connected to race and the city. The “Keys for Christ” program, initiated in the 1970s, sought to provide monies for low cost housing. Such efforts tried to engage the black community missionally from the standpoint of issues that were very much “concrete concerns” of the community itself. Specialized and experimental efforts like that of Life’s Journey Ministries, NYC, LINC efforts around the country, and pastoral training programs like the Cross-Cultural Ministry Center and the Ethnic Immigrant Institute of Theology – Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, are all efforts aimed at cross-cultural ministry for the sake of the Church. They are, as Richard Luecke notes, often “specialized and experimental ministries” that are more typical of a conservative church less politically, or socially active in the community.¹⁹⁰

Other substantial LCMS congregational missional efforts can be seen through LCMS parochial schools and the city.¹⁹¹ Quality education remains a key component to a person’s

¹⁸⁹ Luecke, “Themes of Lutheran Urban Ministry,” 133.

¹⁹⁰ See Luecke, “Themes of Lutheran Urban Ministry,” 138, where he says, “‘Scholastic confessionism’ is Lueckings’ phrase for a third Lutheran Mission style, one that gives much attention to ‘pure doctrine’ and to teaching people who already believe, and that may there extend to people ill taught at others altars. A church body focused in this way leaves large space for unofficial initiatives on the part of individuals and groups who see anew or hear a call and respond to it.” Also, in note 25, 138, he says, “Voluntary associations of Lutherans, not least those arising in LCMS, exemplified both sides of this.”

¹⁹¹ On a personal note, my love for the city and for the bonding power of the Gospel for all people of every race, tribe, culture or nation, came in my experiences at Detroit Lutheran West. It was truly a foundational experience for me to attend West, and my views about the Gospel, race, mission etc. still are rooted in my time there as a high schooler.

ability to exercise the freedoms that they have in the United States. The LCMS parochial educational efforts among black Americans started with Rosa Young in Alabama, and continued with the integration of other Lutheran Schools throughout nation. Robert King says that early in our history, “the chief reason that African Americans went to church-related schools was because public schools in many areas of the south were available for white children only.”¹⁹² King also notes that “Many of the African American leaders in the LCMS, are products of Lutheran Parochial schools.”¹⁹³

There are successes at the congregational level, but the overall record of parochial schools and racial issues has its “roses and thorns” reality as well. Schulze and others note that LCMS schools were primarily schools for church members, and that integration issues were just as prevalent with schools as with churches.

The pertinent question is not whether the schools have always been up to the task of black mission and ministry, they haven’t, but whether education is a need, or concern, voiced by the black community whom the church wishes to serve. The answer is a resounding “Yes.” Richard Dickinson notes that “The Christian day school has a latent potential for good.”¹⁹⁴ He also says that Parochial schools are still “best sellers”¹⁹⁵ in the black community. He notes, “In 1952, there were no Black children in the parochial schools of the Northern Illinois District. Today, Black children constitute more than 10 percent of the total enrollment (over 2000 students).”¹⁹⁶

¹⁹² Robert King, ed. *African Americans and the Local Church*. (St. Louis: Concordia, 1996), 14.

¹⁹³ King, *African Americans*, 29.

¹⁹⁴ Dickinson, *Roses and Thorns*, 39.

¹⁹⁵ Dickinson, *Roses and Thorns*, 150.

¹⁹⁶ Dickinson, *Roses and Thorns*, 149.

Summary

In this era, the issues that are of concern to the black community were increasingly recognized as part of a faithful outreach effort to the black community. From the 1970s until the present day, there have been efforts that have dealt with education, housing, employment, and racism. The efforts tended to originate at the personal congregation, and tended to be ad hoc as well.

Unfortunately, the LCMS has been behind the movement of racial equality rather than in front of it. There were times when an LCMS voice on race, integration, and civil rights could have been a powerful one.¹⁹⁷ Too often, the church responded after the culture had set the direction for the discussion. Various pastors and churches, though, responded missionally to the concerns of their community as they sought to share the Gospel. The message of the LCMS compels such a response, and going forward, it appears that the movement will begin where it always has, at the congregational level.

Final Summary

From the end of the Civil War until the passage of the Civil Rights act of 1964, the black experience in America was one of forced alienation, disenfranchisement, and non-personhood. That such issues reemerged after emancipation and the victories of the Civil War testifies to the power of white supremacy and its dehumanizing power within the American culture. Black Americans not only experienced its dehumanizing power personally, but many times, put their very lives on the line to receive what other Americans took for granted. As Cone says, “Black

¹⁹⁷ See the aftermath of World War II when the LCMS, and other German Americans had to prove their worth as America citizens, fighting against their homeland, and assimilating completely to the American Anglo, English-speaking culture. This would have been a time of empathy for Black Americans that could have translated into an even more authentic outreach of the Gospel. Unfortunately, our ethnocentrism morphed into racism.

survival is at stake here, and we Blacks must define and assert the conditions for our being-in-the world. . . . You also have to know what it means to be a nonperson, a nothing, a person with no past, to know what Black Power is all about.”¹⁹⁸ These are the prerequisites for missional engagement of black communities in the urban context of 21st America. To not understand the deeper issues of the denial of personhood, dignity, and basic civil/social rights that are part of the fabric of the black community is to be deaf to the way to speak and act so as to share the Good News of Jesus across cultural boundaries. To embrace the uniqueness of black culture and the unique experiences that the black community has endured in this culture is the beginning of any, authentic, missiological effort.

Cone’s charge that the white church didn’t deal with or acknowledge “Black power,” is not totally true with regards to the LCMS. Ironically, in 1969, the Synod responded to the Black Power movement with a convention overture. The overture called on the Synod to affirm black power and black separatism as “valid responses to white racism which, it was asserted, prevailed in the church and nation.”¹⁹⁹ Unfortunately, it called on the black community to take responsibility for such actions, as if we had no role to play in their service, and it did so with a history of shunning the black community from full participation in its own churches, even when the black people or churches in questions were faithful to the LCMS proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.²⁰⁰

Black power was also affirmed even as the church distanced itself from the issue at the

¹⁹⁸ Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 12.

¹⁹⁹ Suelflow, *Heritage in Motion*, 255.

²⁰⁰ It is true that there were LCMS attempts to deal with “black issues,” issues of fair housing, education, and poverty, but such attempts tended to be sporadic at best. But those efforts were done in a church body that had historically disenfranchised its own self-supporting Black Lutheran Congregations and pastors. It was a church body where for decades, there was virtually no discussion of race or racism in LCMS theology or missional writings.

same time. A further reading of the overture points out that “secular dignity” was something that the Black community must fight for in and of itself. Such an affirmation calling for black people to take care of these things themselves alone, must have sounded insulting as well. It states,

That our black brothers recognize also the secular dignity, unlike the dignity that is ours in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, cannot be conferred as a fight or by mere legal action but must finally be achieved by the black community for itself, and in that goal and endeavor see the legitimacy of this concept of black power. . . . Resolved that The Synod encourage and bless its black members²⁰¹

Absent in the affirmation is any sense of our failure to confer that “common dignity that is ours together in Jesus Christ,” that shared dignity that would help us fight alongside of those who are disenfranchised culturally as brothers and sisters in Christ. In fact, such affirmations were made when racism and equality issues were still very much at issue at the LCMS congregational level. Cone would point out the many times that the LCMS fails to practice what it preaches.

Unfortunately, the church’s record in dealing with issues concerning race and racism, generally was more talk than action. Jeff Johnson notes the difference between what the LCMS said about race, racism, and ministry to black Americans and what it actually did, saying,

On paper, the Missouri Synod appeared to have a very positive record when it came to integration and black ministry. In addition to the many resolutions it had passed beginning in 1947, during the twelve -year period from 1975 to 1986 the Missouri Synod debated 33 resolutions that dealt directly with integration/black ministry... (but of those resolutions) Nothing is mandated or required. The resolutions typically omit reference to any timetable for accomplishing the objectives, nor is there reference to any means for implementation, whether it be structural, monetary, or personal. The inaction of Missouri, despite its many fine-sounding resolutions, led to growing frustration for the black constituency.²⁰²

Worse than corporate inaction was the racist history of active paternalism and disenfranchisement of black Lutherans in the LCMS, as well as the segregation and prejudice

²⁰¹ Suelflow, *Heritage in Motion*, 268.

²⁰² Johnson, *Black Christians*, 206–7.

practiced in LCMS congregations throughout the country. While such practices were never official, they tended to follow the cultural spirit of the day rather than the spirit of Christ, His teachings, and the teachings of His Church. Richard Dickinson says,

The education, adult instruction, and thorough indoctrination programs of the Lutheran Church were to prove their value. When Black Lutheran Christians moved into the urban areas of the North and West, they went in search of Lutheran congregations for worship, fellowship, and participation. Their boundless loyalty staggers the imagination. Open hostility and outright rejection by local white Lutheran congregations did not stop them. In fact, it seems to have made them more determined to either become an active part of the local Lutheran fellowship, or to create Lutheran congregations where they could belong effectively.²⁰³

When it came to changing attitudes among its people, “Adopting resolutions, however, does not change attitudes.”²⁰⁴

Dickinson correctly states that, “The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod is, in fact, an ethnic church body.”²⁰⁵ The LCMS was an immigrant, tribal, confessional Church searching for its own identity in the United States. Its ethnocentrism was evident in the LCMS’ early history in America. Sociologically it remains a fundamentalist, sectarian Church with respect to other denominations in the culture. While the LCMS’ confessionalism is laudatory, namely that the church is bound together by a clearly defined proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ,²⁰⁶ there

²⁰³ Dickinson, *Roses and Thorns*, 70. The power of this statement amidst the sad, disconcerting realities, is that the black people who faced this racism actually believed the teachings of the Lutheran Church more than the white people in those instances, people who would have had an ethnic connection to the history of the LCMS, but in these instances were far from their own teachings.

²⁰⁴ Suelflow, *Heritage in Motion*, 255.

²⁰⁵ Dickinson, *Roses and Thorns*, 195.

²⁰⁶ See Galchutt, *Career of Andrew Schulze*, 16, where she summarizes the ethos of the LCMS and its impact on Rev. Andrew Schulze’s life and ministry in matters of race and the Gospel, “Under the leadership of the Rev. Dr. Carl F.W. Walther in St. Louis, this church body, later known as the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod emerged as the largest and most influential group of Old Lutherans. Old Lutheran was a common name used for those wished to cling to the old Lutheran Faith of the Reformation. Old Lutherans strictly adhered to the Lutheran confessional documents of the sixteenth-century Reformation such as the Augsburg Confession (1530) and the Formula of Concord (1580). They opposed the rationalizing and liberalizing trends of the Enlightenment that took the miraculous out of the accounts of the Bible. The Old Lutherans also opposed unionism, the joining of churches despite doctrinal disagreements. The strong stand of the Old Lutherans on church doctrine and fellowship was meant to preserve, without compromise, their understanding of God’s Word and Sacraments.” In a country with puritanical

were negative sociological and ethnic issues involved in this “spirit of LCMS Lutheranism.”²⁰⁷

One area in which this strong identity had negative ramifications was in regards to issues of race and cross-cultural mission. Mark Noll argues that the LCMS’ confessionalism, and theological solitude caused an isolationism, even quietism from the American culture at large.²⁰⁸ Such isolationistic tendencies might have been a result of the historical persecution of the Saxons (later LCMS) and the fears associated with political demands of the Prussian Union, which led to the Saxon emigration to America. Such cultural isolation in America does not explain the fact that historically the LCMS has often been guilty in treating black people in general, including black Lutherans and Black Lutheran Churches, as second class citizens. August Suelflow notes:

Prejudice and racial discrimination plagued American society long before the founding of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. Most white Americans accepted racial superiority/inferiority as a truism. As a member of the Synodical Conference, the LCMS had been active in mission work among African Americans since 1877. . . . Nevertheless, it is also true that the Synod itself and even many of these workers subscribed to some extent to the doctrine of Negro inferiority. . . . [I]t was not until after World War II that the nation or the Synod took seriously the task of eliminating racial discrimination.²⁰⁹

The LCMS was a new arrival to the American scene. Eschewing much of the Colonialism of Europe, the Saxons came to America fleeing the religious persecution of their homeland. In America, then, the LCMS had unique assimilation and integration issues of its own. Its hamlet nature kept it disconnected from American society up through World War I. But such issues and

roots, Enlightenment politics, and Evangelical persuasions, the LCMS historically often found itself isolated both because of its ethnicity, German, and its strong emphasis on confession and liturgical worship.

²⁰⁷ Diane Rankin, “Ethnicity and Religion,” 100. See again what she says, “Missouri Synod Lutherans are an ethnic group – not by virtue of language retention, foodways, or any obvious German way, but rather through a consistent pattern of doctrinal and liturgical conservatism based on beliefs about the nature of Lutheranism as taught by Luther and their Saxon forefathers, particularly C. F. W. Walther. The actual ways in which this pattern of conservatism is expressed would seem to constitute the spirit of Missouri Synod Lutheranism.”

²⁰⁸ Noll, “The Lutheran Difference,” 20, 35. Noll argues that such isolation, which lasted until after the 2nd World War, may have allowed the Lutheran Church the opportunity to speak with a unique voice in modern America, a voice that is not modernist, nor fundamentalist, but Lutheran.

²⁰⁹ Suelflow, *Heritage in Motion*, 255.

experiences can't explain the church's missional disengagement. The hamlet nature of Germans in general cannot explain the Church's missional failures with people unlike itself. There was a spirit of outreach, a willingness to serve others "only if the new Lutheran converts became German too." It is incredible to read the stories of the Rev. Marmaduke Carter, preaching in German. It is staggering to read about those first black students at college or seminary all needing to work in the German language for their studies. Such cultural arrogance, along with a paternalism of the sending Church inhibited cross-cultural work. In the context of the United States, where the issues of racism, including so-called white superiority and black inferiority, plague the mission field, a renewed missional engagement of black, urban communities demands that these self-imposed barriers be overcome.

Therefore, the LCMS must embrace its position within the American culture, warts and all. It must confess its history of isolationism, of persecution, and of assimilation, if only to learn the lessons of cultural integration in service to the Gospel. It must also repent of its sinful acquiescence to the racial segregation and bigotry of the culture. The LCMS was an outsider church in American church history. It is now a relatively, powerless insider church in culture. It receives "muted privilege," even as it labors to work beyond its congregational boundaries.

The LCMS must embrace its history with its missions to black Americans. Unfortunately, its Gospel outreach with black Americans often tended to expose the racist attitudes of many in the church. The LCMS must expose the structural impediments that the church hid behind resulting in the exclusion of black Lutherans from full participation in the Synod.

Historically, the church was neither a power player in American culture nor an incessantly oppressed people group in America (since its isolation from the greater community often tended

to be self-imposed and its oppression short-lived).²¹⁰ But in the post-World War II period of the LCMS assimilation to the American culture, it not only failed to live up to the challenges of the culture, it also failed to live up to the challenges of the Gospel in dealing with race, racism, and authentic mission to black Americans, even black Lutherans. During this time, the LCMS as a church body often proffered resolutions that addressed race and racism, but only in an advisory fashion, leaving the actual cultural work to individual congregations or individual pastors with no accountability. As a church body, eager to engage the urban environment again, we must repent of our corporate indifference, our failing to act the way that we have spoken. As a people, we too must repent of the way that we too often embodied the prejudice and racism of the culture around us rather than being a leavening agent for change, or at least civility. We must, perhaps most of all, repent of our church's unwillingness to serve our fellow black Lutheran brothers and sisters, especially when they came looking for a church home, only to find our white congregations unwilling to see the common faith that makes us all brothers and sisters in Christ.²¹¹

The challenge is not limited, however, to what the LCMS has done or continues to do in urban settings. The missional challenge also speaks to our preparedness for the work. Historically, the LCMS has been often disconnected, dissociative, yes, and at times, even naïve regarding race, racism, and urban mission. Richard C. Dickinson's book, *Roses and Thorns*, describes the naiveté of white LCMS missionaries to southern blacks who, even with the best of intentions, failed to take into account the cultural context of intimidation and retribution in the

²¹⁰ The persecutions and prejudice that Germans faced during World War I and II were real and fear inducing, but they lasted for only a while.

²¹¹ Especially painful for me as the Lutheran Hour Speaker presently, were the stories of black Americans who heard the Gospel of Jesus on the Lutheran Hour, preached by Walter Maier, who then sought out Lutheran Churches because they wanted to be a part of a church that preached that same good news. Only to have the churches themselves close their doors to them.

post-Civil War South, and went anyway.²¹² But even today, as mentioned, there is a similar dissociative naiveté in the CTCR's view of missional "indigenization,"²¹³ which rejects "the notion that anyone should feel guilt-ridden for the crimes committed by one's forbears."²¹⁴ Cone would label such a statement dissociative and racist, since the implications of slavery and race are still apparent and operative today.

CTCR writings on "Racism and the Church" further undergirds an assessment of LCMS urban missiology as dissociative and disengaged, describing the last one hundred years in terms of resolutions and internal actions, but nothing uniquely missional concerning the racial issues to be overcome in the evangelizing of African Americans. Also absent is anything politically specific to black concerns in the public dialogue on race/racism. Such a disengagement or dissociation furthers the notion that the LCMS wasn't the church then, or now, for those in the city. Whether such naiveté is racist or merely foolishly ethnocentric, such a disengaging or dissociative, practical naiveté in urban mission fairly represents the LCMS efforts in evangelism, assimilation, and integration towards African Americans, leaving us presently without a voice or a coherent missional strategy for broad challenges of urban ministry.²¹⁵

Acknowledging such realities in repentance provides an opportunity for the LCMS to

²¹² Dickinson, *Roses and Thorns*, 43–45. In this case, the naiveté actually helped in the Synodical Council's sending missionaries to the South rather than be too intimidating to do nothing at all. But, the naiveté did get some in trouble, most especially with the vigilantes of the KKK. Their actions could not only endanger themselves, but also the people they sought to serve. With a little more contextual understanding and wisdom, there were ways to prevent such things. For more effective mission and outreach, those strategies would have to be factored in to the work necessary for an effective sharing the Gospel from a white, LCMS church with black people in the Deep South.

²¹³ CTCR, "Racism and the Church," 55.

²¹⁴ CTCR, "Racism and the Church," 33.

²¹⁵ It needs to be pointed out here that the terms "Urban Ministry/Missiology" is a broader term than merely ministry to areas that are predominantly African American. The reason that Conian theology must be engaged for the sake of the broader engagement of the urban context is that Cone's challenge to the white church would extend to many other minority groups today as well. Other various minority groups, whether ethnic in origin, or groups pertaining to sexual identity etc., all of them are undergirded by Cone's delegitimation of white, Christian theology.

become another voice of the Gospel in the city. Culturally, the LCMS is not evangelical, nationalistic, or millenarian; it is not Utopian Christologically, it is a Two-Kingdom voice of the Gospel, one able to deal with the concerns for the community if it would but listen to the cries of the people. And, it is a voice of the eternal Gospel, one that it has learned to cherish amidst its own challenges and struggles for identity as a people. The opportunity to look backwards at the LCMS through Conian eyes, creates a humility that might help the LCMS move forward in service to the urban neighborhoods that are often much different, culturally and ethnically, than its own people. At the congregational level, a great confidence in the power of the Gospel through broken vessels (2 Cor. 4) is essential. With its muted voice culturally, its sectarian relationship to the power structures due to the unique issues of its own ethnic assimilation to Anglo America, and its Two-Kingdom perspective on the issues James Cone demands be addressed, the repentant LCMS can offer a unique third voice in service to the black, multi-cultural communities it seeks to serve in the city.

There will always be a tension in the temporal needs and the eternal proclamation of the freedom of the Gospel. Chapter three will engage James Cone, James Davison Hunter, and Anthony Bradley in an attempt to broaden the potential solutions for a “Concrete Christology” in the city from a LCMS point of view. Jeff Johnson states, “The Lutheran Church can hardly be said to have become and indigenous part of the black community even today in the last quarter of the twentieth century.”²¹⁶ For the sake of an effective, LCMS missiology in the city, that statement must be changed.

²¹⁶ Johnson, *Black Christians*, 148.

CHAPTER THREE

THE CRITICAL RESPONSES TO CONE’S CONCRETE CHRISTOLOGY: OTHER “EVANGELICAL VOICES” IN THE CITY

In 1969, the LCMS in convention acknowledged the necessity and legitimacy of the Black Power movement in American culture, “recognizing that the black people in America need to overcome economic, social, and educational *disadvantages*¹, not only for the sake of securing more adequate food and housing, but as a means of asserting a quality of dignity and self-respect . . . to face the challenges of life.”² The resolution offers an example of how the LCMS positioned itself, as a church body, in direct relationship to the socio-political landscape and the needs of African Americans. In the resolution, the LCMS affirmed the validity of black power stating:

Whereas, Our black brothers [*fellow Lutherans*]³ recognize also that secular dignity, unlike the dignity that is ours in the Gospel of Christ, cannot be conferred as a gift or by mere legal action but must finally be achieved by the black community for itself, and in that goal and endeavor *see the legitimacy*⁴ of this concept of black power; and

Whereas, Our black brothers alone, immersed as they are in the community of black men, can and ought to determine the form their ministry must take and to a considerable extent also the direction in which the church needs to move in relation to them; be it

Resolved, That the Synod encourage and bless its black members, so minded, to return freely to that world in which they have so unique an opportunity of service and to use all wisdom and energy in love to work together with the black man in America,

¹ Emphasis mine.

² Suelflow, *Heritage in Motion*, 268.

³ Addition mine, for clarification.

⁴ Emphasis mine.

regardless of creed, toward fulfilling his hunger for dignity, identity, self-respect, and the respect of his fellowman, which is so vital to his life.⁵

In the framework of Lutheran, Two-Kingdom theology,⁶ this quote shows the potential for the LCMS to dynamically engage political issues “regardless of creed,” for the sake of the community in service to sharing the Gospel.⁷ Unfortunately, as demonstrated in the racial critique of the LCMS in chapter 2, this clear, Two-Kingdom theological distinction for the sake of the Gospel missionally demonstrated a painful lack of awareness, even a lack of empathy⁸ towards the people of the particular contexts the Church wished to serve. For example, even in

⁵ Suelfow, *Heritage in Motion*, 268, Quoting from Document 15, “To Affirm Legitimacy of Black Power,” Convention Proceedings, 1969, Res. 9–22, 148.

⁶ See Martin Scharlemann, “Scriptural Concepts of the Church and State, *Church and State Under God*, Albert A. Huegli, ed. (St. Louis: Concordia, 1964), for a simple definition of the uniqueness of the Church and the State under God, where he simply says, “The State exists primarily to establish justice and maintain order among men; its job is of this world. The church, on the other hand, has the task of calling men away from the evils of the world and preparing them for eternal life with God.” The notion of the two kingdoms of God’s rule on earth will be expounded more specifically in chapter 4, especially as it pertains to “how” Christians might think and act politically in this temporal world (left-hand kingdom of God’s rule, righteousness *Coram Mundo*), for the greater purpose of sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ freely as a gift of Christ’s Righteousness and salvation through His Word and Sacraments (God’s gracious rule in His right-hand kingdom, righteousness *Coram Deo*). Lutherans have always understood government as created by God as a temporal necessity, because of humankind’s universal condition of sin, for the maintaining of public justice and order; whereas the Church was created in God’s eternal plan to reconcile all things to Himself through Jesus. As such, left hand involvement, while honorable for providing temporal safety, justice, and peace, is always in service to the greater work of the Church to share God’s eternal work in Christ.

⁷ Two-Kingdom theology is only referenced here to illustrate that historically and theologically, LCMS, Two-Kingdom engagement of political and social issues has often been for the express purpose of maintaining a clear differentiation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ from any human-centered efforts for ultimate salvation and freedom. Theologically, this helps define issues in their proper sphere of influence and engagement. For the sake of an LCMS missional engagement in the urban context of America, a more thorough Two-Kingdom missiology will be presented in Chapter 4, one that proffers a more dynamic engagement in the left-hand kingdom in service to the mission of the LCMS in the city.

⁸ For example, Walther’s discussion of slavery, noted in Chapter 2, may have correctly defined the temporalness of the discussion as one of many human defined social arrangements in time. It was noted that his work primarily was to be a corrective not to the underlying issues of the abolitionists, racism, but to their more utopian, human-centered solutions for issues that Walther knew only God could accomplish by grace. Missionally though, the particulars of slavery in America also had to do with the dehumanization of people because of racism. The particulars of American slavery demanded more from Walther and the LCMS, especially as it pertained to the black experience in America. Also, while social issues like segregation vs. desegregation might be “left-hand kingdom issues alone,” Chapter 2 demonstrated how the LCMS had a missional opportunity of shared experience, to be an empathetic cultural voice with respect to the black community’s struggles with those issues post World War II. Missionally and politically the church failed to seize that opportunity.

this 1969 convention resolution, the affirmation of work among black Americans lacked sensitivity to the structural nature, even the LCMS' relative complicity, in black peoples' "*being disadvantaged.*" The resolution, the clearest affirmation of the political movement of black power and its relationship to the LCMS, speaks of the issue as one for LCMS black pastors to engage among Black Americans for the sake of Black peoples' political, social freedoms, with the white-LCMS members disengaged at best. As we have seen, even when the Church tended to say the right things, "the legitimacy of black power," it often hedged its bets, and more often did not do the right things needed for an authentic, missional engagement of the black community or other communities unlike itself.

The LCMS can and should do better. But, in order to do that, we must construct an urban missiological response. Such a response needs to be both responsive to the place of Cone and his work in the larger landscape of ecclesial engagement in the America culture and orthodox in its engagement with Cone's challenge of a "Concrete Christological Paradigm" for liberation. To those ends, this chapter will interact with James Davison Hunter's work, *To Change the World*,⁹ and Anthony Bradley's work, *The Political Economy of Liberation*.¹⁰ Hunter's work surveys how the church has engaged with broader cultural issues in America, particularly with respect to urbanization, industrialism, and globalism. The modern American culture is pluralistic, and the

⁹ Hunter, *To Change the World*. Hunter is a LaBrose-Levinson Professor of Religion, Culture, and Social Theory at the University of Virginia and Director of the Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture. He is the author of *Culture Wars* and *The Death of Character*.

¹⁰ Bradley, *Political Economy of Liberation*. Bradley is Associate Professor of Theology and Ethics and The Kings College in New York City and serves as Research Fellow at the Acton Institute. He holds a B.S. from Clemson University, and M.Div. From Covenant Theology Seminary, and a PhD. From Westminster Theological Seminary. He is the author of *Liberating Black Theology; Black and Tired: Essays on race, Politics, Culture, and International Development*; and *Keep your Head Up: America's New Black Christian Leaders, Social Consciousness, and the Cosby Conversation*. His writings more than any evangelical writers, engages Cone from both a theological and a Socio-economic-political perspective. Such engagement from an evangelical point of view, creates space for a dynamic Two-Kingdom missional LCMS engagement of many of the same issues in the urban context.

challenges to the church's faithful engagement of the culture, according to Hunter, are ones of difference¹¹ and dissolution.¹² This chapter will learn from Hunter's analysis of past ecclesial engagement with these cultural issues and explore Hunter's solution of *faithful Presence*, noting its potential benefits and its limitations towards the construction of an LCMS urban missiology in dialogue with the urban political realities of Black Theology.

Anthony Bradley's work further nuances the issues to be faced in developing an LCMS urban missiology and potentially expands the possible concrete solutions demanded by Cone's liberation challenge. Bradley uniquely addresses the economic aspects of liberation by bringing into dialogue James Cone and Thomas Sowell. This chapter will explore the solutions of *The Political Economy of Liberation*, specifically Bradley's goal of "outlining implications for social justice while incorporating a classical understanding of the nature of the human person"¹³ again to delineate its potential contributions as well as its limitations for the construction of an LCMS urban missiology in dialogue with the urban political realities of Black Theology. Bradley's work is especially helpful in creating space for an LCMS missiological voice, as a 3rd voice, a Two-Kingdom voice in the city for the sake of the city.

Cone, the Concrete-Christological Paradigm, and Modern American Ecclesial, Cultural Engagement

James Cone's initial, cultural impact was in exposing the issues of racism and white

¹¹ See Hunter, *To Change the World*, 220, where he says, "The challenge of difference is straightforward: how do we think about and relate to those who are different from us and to a world that is not our world." It is in fact, the reality of pluralism in an industrial, global, increasingly urban world.

¹² See Hunter, *To Change the World*, 205, where he says, "By the challenge of dissolution. . . . I refer to the deconstruction of the most basic assumptions about reality." Also, 206, "Thus, in the contemporary world we have the capacity to question everything but little ability to confirm anything beyond our own personal whims and possessive interests."

¹³ Bradley, *Political Economy of Liberation*, xiii.

supremacy in American culture in general and the white, Christian church's complicity amidst that reality as well as the black church's resignation to its perceived fact. Cone's work initially exposed "the hegemonic Anglo-normativity that dominated theological and biblical studies as well as the pervasive white privilege that allowed white scholars to ignore black suffering."¹⁴ His critique helped to define urban issues and solutions pertinent to black, minority, communities.

However, to fully understand Conian Black Theology's cultural impact, it needs to be understood that Black Theology does not merely help to define urban issues and potential solutions. It also contributes to the power and patterns of social and ecclesial engagement in the urban context as well. Cone influentially intersects with the urban environment due to his continuing impact in academia, both theologically and, by extension, politically. Bradley says, "he (Cone) published *Black Theology and Black Power* in 1969 as an attempt to bring theology into close contact with the social issues blacks were experiencing in America in the 1960s."¹⁵ His theological call for socio-political engagement literally created an academic discipline that helped to define the public dialogue concerning racism in American culture at large, and in the communities of the urban poor.¹⁶ Cone's concrete, Black Liberation Theology, provided a theological undergirding of certain concrete, political ideologies, legitimating them and their actions in the city as faithful to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. As Gayraud Wilmore¹⁷ states,

I am persuaded that, notwithstanding the apparent impotence of black liberation theology in this period of "the continuation of Reaganism by other means, " it is still

¹⁴ Bradley, *Political Economy of Liberation*, xii.

¹⁵ Bradley, *Political Economy of Liberation*, xii.

¹⁶ See Cone, "Some Brief Reflections," 265, where he states that his goal was to "make Martin Luther King and Malcom X one voice." Cone's Black Theology would attack white theology as a complicit voice in slavery and racism, and it would offer the vision of the synthesis of "Martin and Malcolm" as a critical retrieval of the Christian tradition. See Hayes, "James Cone's Hermeneutic," 626 for the historical theological significance of Cone.

¹⁷ Gayraud Stephen Wilmore, is a pastor, educator, historian, and theologian. His work, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism: an Interpretation of the Religious History of Afro-American People*, 1972, is a seminal work in the study of black religion.

the most viable expression of progressive religion in North America . . . it has lent some of its power to the Christian-Marxist movement in Latin America, to the Christian feminists in the United States, to theological questioning among America's other ethnic groups, and most impressively, to the black theology movement in South Africa."¹⁸

But Cone's influence is not merely academic and theological. Considering Identity Politics and its relationship to Black Theology, one notes a similar "marshalling of political power groups defined by race and grievance,"¹⁹ which also found a theological grounding in Cone. Certainly, Cone's concern was first and foremost for black people in the context of the American culture, their particular struggle with slavery, racism, Jim Crow, etc. But, other progressive theologies and ideologies today, even if critical of Cone, tend to extend his work politically as well. Cone's Black Theology "has been instrumental in the transformation of religious institutions, theological education, and social structures,"²⁰ especially in the city.

In constructing a missional engagement for the city, in view of the continuing issues of race and the pathologies systemic to urban communities, one cannot afford to dismiss Cone or to carry on with "evangelism as usual,"²¹ namely as personal conversion²² alone with no regard for the community issues involved. But how, precisely, is the LCMS to engage in such action? Missional contextualization calls for the church to move beyond personal evangelism and into

¹⁸ See Wilmore, *A Theology of Black Liberation*, 156, 158. I would also argue that it has provided a theological underpinning for many of the political expressions of civil rights politics today, secular or religious.

¹⁹ See Schlesinger, *The Disuniting of America*, for a more thorough discussion of "Identity Politics" in modern America. Also, see p. 21, where he says that this phenomenon is set against the notion of assimilation, "to challenge the concept of 'one people (in America)' and to protect, promote, and perpetuate separate ethnic and racial communities."

²⁰ Clay, "A Black Theology of Liberation," 310.

²¹ See Emerson and Smith, *Evangelical Religion*, 118, evangelicals, "see issues of racism as personal, relational and not structural. Their work demonstrates that the emphasis of the personalness of salvation not only fails to see any structural issues with racism, it tends to see the solution to racism in terms of personal repentance and right relationships." The LCMS most often is lumped in with the conversionist strategy for mission.

²² See also Putnam and Campbell, *American Grace*, 318, where he says, "Most significantly, evangelicals are less likely to perceive systemic causes of racism, and thus less likely to endorse systemic efforts to ameliorate its consequences."

public civic engagement. Yet, what does that look like for the LCMS in both the present American urban context and the present American ecclesial context?

For the American urban context, the socio-political prevalence of Cone's work demands more from urban, community engagement for mission. Cone's Christological paradigm posits the hermeneutical question, "Where is Christ that we might find Him, follow Him, and share in His liberating message with one another?"²³ To share the Gospel of Christ then, the Church must deal with the issues endemic to the Black community, issues such as:

Racism, corporate capitalism, police brutality, unjust laws, prisons, drugs"²⁴ . . . "the multigenerational psychological effects of legal and ecclesiastical dehumanization; contemporary manifestations of racism, joblessness . . . the historical dynamics of the African-American family . . . community, violence, illegitimacy rates, mortality rates, etc."²⁵

Yet, what does this look like in the present American ecclesial context? To form a concrete missional engagement, the LCMS must not only engage Cone specifically, but also, engage the ecclesial landscape of American culture in general as it relates to issues of liberation and power.

Engaging Cone's "Concrete Christological Paradigm": The Larger Ecclesial-Cultural Perspective of Concrete, Political Engagement

In order to understand the particular challenge of the "Concrete Christological Paradigm" of Cone, and its challenge to an urban, LCMS missiology, it is important to see how American Christian churches in general are engaging cultural issues publicly for the sake of society as well as for the sake of the Gospel. Hunter insightfully argues that,

²³ This will be a key emphasis of a Two-Kingdom, sacramental engagement with Cone. There are ways of speaking about "concrete Christology" and "Concrete Liberation" that take up his challenge to proclaim a Gospel that is meaningful to the oppressed.

²⁴ Cone, *For My People*, 159.

²⁵ Bradley, *Liberating Black Theology*, 155, quoting Carl Ellis, Jr. *Going Global: The Role of the Black Church in the Great Commission*. (Chicago: Urban Missions, 2005),79.

For Christian Believers,²⁶ the call to faithfulness is a call to live in fellowship and integrity with the person and witness of Jesus Christ. There is a timeless character to this call that evokes qualities of life and spirit that are recognizable throughout history and across cultural boundaries. But this does not mean that faithfulness is a state of abstract piety floating above the multifaceted and compromising realities of daily life in actual situations. . . . Faithfulness works itself out in the context of complex social, political, economic, and cultural forces that prevail at a particular time and place.²⁷

Unfortunately, the Christian Churches have done a poor job of working out faithfulness in the concrete realities of life, especially public life. Hunter laments, “contemporary Christian understandings of power and politics are a very large part of what has made contemporary Christianity in America appalling, irrelevant, and ineffective—part and parcel of the worst elements of our late-modern culture today, rather than a healthy alternative to it.”²⁸ But, how did ecclesial engagement of public issues get to this point?

Hunter asserts that there are two significant challenges to that *concrete*²⁹ faithfulness “working itself out at a particular time and place in a healthy way,” and these are the realities of the pluralism of contemporary American culture, and the politicization of all things public, “the conflation of the Public with the Political.”³⁰ Hunter’s work demonstrates that over time, the American Christian Churches reacted to pluralism and difference by seeking to resolve these issues via the political use of power.

The pluralism of modern life, according to Hunter, is unlike any other time in history. In reaction to Western industrialization, urbanization, and globalism, he says, the plethora of

²⁶ See Hunter, *To Change the World*, 5, where he explains that his analysis of Christian cultural engagement is concerned with “Christianity in its variety—at least much of it: conservative as well as moderate and progressive, Protestant as well as Catholic.”

²⁷ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 199.

²⁸ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 95.

²⁹ My word to summarize his “faithfulness working itself out in a particular time and place.”

³⁰ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 105.

“Technologies and the concomitant flow of communication and information make it impossible to avoid the plurality of cultures . . . indeed, *the majority is constituted by precisely those differences*”³¹ today. With no dominant narrative, the American culture is presently a contest of constituency groups each engaged in a “contest for cultural ascendancy and the capacity to enforce conformity.”³² With no overarching narrative, or shared cultural values due to such pluralism, all things public have been “politicized.” He says,

My contention is that in response to a thinning consensus of substantive beliefs and dispositions in the large culture, there has been a turn towards politics as a foundation and structure for social solidarity. But politicization provides a framework of expectations and action and very little substantive content. In a diverse society, ideological polarization is a natural expression of the contest to provide that content.³³

And though there are legitimate concerns for this fragmentation of society, legitimate fears that something should be done, Hunter says, the problem is that Christians of all stripes ultimately “politicize their concerns.”³⁴ Such politically coercive engagement strategies “make no distinction between the public and the political”³⁵ and as such there is a “conflation (on the right and on the left) of the history and identity of America with the life and mission of the church.”³⁶ With these strategies, the Church has acquiesced to the “spirit of the age that has made politics the dominant witness of the church to the world.”³⁷

³¹ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 201.

³² Hunter, *To Change the World*, 201. For a similar description of modern, political culture, see also Schlesinger, *The Disuniting of America*, 21, where he describes this reality as one that denounces “the goal of assimilation, to challenge the concept of ‘one people (in America)’ and to protect, promote, and perpetuate separate ethnic and racial communities.” While Schlesinger sees this as a black and minority phenomenon, Hunter, 174, would see that “Christian leaders and Christian organizations in America have been at the corrupting center of this kind of tribalism as well.”

³³ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 103.

³⁴ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 169.

³⁵ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 163.

³⁶ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 172.

³⁷ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 173.

This reality becomes especially disturbing with regards to ultimate goals of these ecclesial engagement strategies that ensue from such accommodation. He says, “What adds pathos to our situation is the presence of what Nietzsche called “ressentiment” . . . (which is) resentment that involves a combination of anger, envy, hate, rage, and revenge as the motive of political action.”³⁸ The unifying factor of this kind of political engagement is not the potential solutions to the problems to be faced, but the shared grievances of the group and the use of political power to provide redress. Such discourse makes enemies of those who disagree. Such discourse does not engage for the sake of a better solution, or the common good. It engages for the sake of power and domination. Hunter calls this modern public discourse one of negation, where “the aggrieved accuse, blame, vilify, and then seek revenge on those who they see as responsible. The adversary has to be shown for who they are, exposed for their corruption and put in their place. *Ressentiment*, then, is expressed as a discourse of negation; the condemnation and denigration of enemies in the effort to subjugate and dominate those who are culpable.”³⁹

Another result of such politicization is the elevation of the State to the level of final arbiter of all things public. And though the state in actuality is “limited to providing solutions to issues that people really care about,”⁴⁰ presently it has become the only credible voice for public resolution of the culture war.⁴¹ Hunter laments that because of the underlying values of

³⁸ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 107.

³⁹ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 108,

⁴⁰ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 171.

⁴¹ This plays itself out daily in the social issues that are finally, ultimately “decided” by the Supreme Court. Ironically, in the issues of race and racism, the supreme court history was often the villain, creating a literal, sub-human class for slaves out of whole-cloth (slaves as 3/5s voters etc., with no rights that had to be respected). Now, it is seen as the final arbiter of similar things quite uncritically. For example, in 2000, Californians voted for traditional marriage 52.5 percent to 47.5 percent. In those numbers, it was revealed that 70 percent of African Americans voted for the Proposition and 53 percent of Hispanics did as well. Later, the courts overruled the minority vote, striking down the proposition, a modern, disenfranchisement of minorities on a massive scale. But the progressive-civil rights oriented-Black theology undergirded power of the urban centers of California won out by judicial, state empowered, fiat and that was that.

democratic ideals, and democratic reasoning, no one seems to be upset by this move. But he warns,

When one boils it all down, politicization means that the final arbiter within most of social life is the coercive power of the state. When politicization is oriented toward furthering the specific interest of the group without an appeal to the common weal, when its means of mobilizing the uncommitted is through fear, and when the pursuit of an agenda depends more on the vilification of opponents than on the affirmation of higher ideals, power is stripped to its most elemental forms.

As delineated in chapter 1, Hunter nuances contemporary ecclesial cultural engagement in terms of the Church's access to and use of power. He more aptly re-labels the public Church monikers of "conservative, progressive and neo-Anabaptist"⁴² in terms of their use of power in the public realm, namely, "'*Defensive Against*' (*conservative*) - the 'right ordering of a free society'⁴³ according to Christian principles; '*Relevance to*' (*Progressive*) - the use of public power towards political issues of justice and equity, to achieve the 'biblical' ideals of liberation;⁴⁴ and '*Purity from*' (*neo-Anabaptist*) - Christian engagement as the creation of an alternative public community⁴⁵ of Christians altogether."⁴⁶

⁴² Hunter, *To Change the World*, 109.

⁴³ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 112. See also concerning the "defense against use of power," 122, where Hunter says, "The dominant issues are social in nature, issues such as religion in public life, (defense of) the traditional nuclear family, and traditional morality where the dominant view is the removal of the state in these issues, or at least the federalism of the state.

⁴⁴ See again, Hunter, *To Change the World*, 145, where he points out that the Liberal political theology emphasizes that "the framework by which change is enacted, however, is the State—its rituals, practices, laws, policies, and procedures. Though animated by a social movement, the dominant vehicle for achieving the goals of justice and peace is politics."

⁴⁵ The key concern here is the "use of power" and each ideology's relationship to the state in accomplishing its goals. Hunter summarizes those goals as "the main challenge presented by the modern world (for Conservatives) has been secularity . . . their solution, the 'resacralization' of society. (For Progressives) the primary challenge is inequality . . . the solution is the redistribution of wealth and power with reference to the poor and needy. (For neo-Anabaptists) The main issue is the violence and coercion built into liberal democracy . . . the solution, the peace-loving koinonia of the church based community." Hunter, *To Change the World*, 199. For a more detailed description of each of these political theologies, see pp. 111–66, 213–24.

⁴⁶ See Hunter, *To Change the World*, 213–24, where he describes these public engagement strategies as "old wineskins," needing a whole different way of ecclesial engagement for the sake of faithfulness.

To be sure, use of public power is not inherently evil, for he argues that Christians indeed have a mandate to engage the culture for the sake of the community. He argues, with some reservations, that Christians have a mandate to make the world a better place for the “creation mandate inevitably leads Christian believers to a transformative engagement with the culture. . . . Yet by its nature, this engagement will not be neutral in character. Whether we like it or not, merely engaging the culture implies the issue and exercise of power.”⁴⁷ Therefore, it is not power that is the problem, it is the Christian Church’s use of power that is problematic. In this regard, Hunter reveals the irony and tragedy of these politicized, ecclesial engagements for the mission of the church. Ironically, he notes, that “values cannot be achieved politically because politics is about power,”⁴⁸ period. And, ironically, abdicating all-things-public to the political realm alone, in his understanding, creates an “avoidance of responsibility”⁴⁹ from the people who are needed to do the work necessary to make the community a better place.

The ultimate tragedy then, is that even with good intentions, or legitimate grievances, the present methods of public engagement create a Christian Public Identity “rooted in resentment and hostility, (which is) an inherently weak identity because it is established negatively, by accentuating the boundaries between insiders and outsiders and the wrongs done by those outsiders.”⁵⁰ Such resentment oriented, negation oriented strategies for public engagement are “antithetical to the Church’s highest calling,”⁵¹ ultimately adopting a power-negation methodology that winds up “participating in the very cultural breakdown that the Church

⁴⁷ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 94.

⁴⁸ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 172.

⁴⁹ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 172.

⁵⁰ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 173.

⁵¹ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 175.

ardently strives to resist.”⁵² Present engagement strategies are antithetical to the Church’s highest calling and especially toxic for an authentic, missional engagement that seeks to engage cultures different than one’s own.

For the sake of an LCMS missional engagement of the urban context, informed and even undergirded by Conian Black Theology, the present ecclesial engagements with culture will not work. The conservative, “defensive against” posture merely pits the church against the context of the city from the outset, limiting the church’s ability to engage the neighborhoods it seeks to serve. The progressive, “relevance to” posture capitulates the Gospel to the cultural demands of political relevance and expediency. Hunter rightly points out that there is a better way.

Hunter’s solution to these faulty public, political, ecclesial theologies is “a theology of faithful presence . . . a recognition that the vocation of the church is to bear witness to and to be the embodiment of the coming Kingdom of God.”⁵³ “Faithful Presence” offers a way forward that begins to deal with the issues of pluralism, difference, politicization, and dissolution (delegitimation),⁵⁴ issues that are pertinent to any missiology that deals with racism in the urban context. His call for “Faithful Presence,” emanates from the reality of the “visible demonstration of Christian’s lack of influence in the larger culture . . . and far more significant . . . its absence (of people, institutions, and others resources) from key areas of culture; an abandonment of the call to faithful presence—*irrespective of influence.*”⁵⁵

Hunter’s confidence in such an engagement strategy is rooted in the biblical understanding that there is a common grace⁵⁶ from God, shared by all people, believers and non-believers,

⁵² Hunter, *To Change the World*, 175.

⁵³ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 95.

⁵⁴ The word this paper is using for dissolution as it relates to the cultural power of Cone in the urban context.

⁵⁵ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 95.

⁵⁶ See Matt. 5:44–45, where Jesus says, “But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute

compelling a mandate to find and share God's beauty in the nature, society, and culture. To that end, there is a common calling for all people as human beings, to build a culture worth living in. Such faith in common grace compels a humility towards all ecclesial, public, cultural engagements. In fact, it defines a wholly different motivation for cultural engagement. He says,

Let me finally stress that any good that is generated by Christians is *only* the net effect of caring for something more than the good created. *If there are benevolent consequences of our engagement with the work, in other words, it is precisely because it is **not** rooted in a desire to change the world for the better but rather because it is an expression of a desire to honor the creator of all goodness, beauty, and truth, a manifestation of our loving obedience to God, and a fulfillment of God's command to love our neighbor.*⁵⁷

In Hunter's view, Faithful Presence, overcomes present ecclesial "engagement oriented" strategies which strive to bend power towards their unique public agendas⁵⁸ and more faithfully engages the culture for the sake of the Church's main mission, sharing the Gospel with others.

Again, the issue of radical pluralism in modern American culture has politicized the nature of public discourse and public use of power. Presently, ecclesial engagements tend to be politically coercive in nature as a result. Hunter notes that such ecclesial engagements presently "make no distinction between the public and the political"⁵⁹ and as such there is a "conflation (on the right and on the left) of the history and identity of America with the life and mission of the church."⁶⁰ The church has acquiesced to the "spirit of the age that has made politics the dominant

you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous." This is not an eternal saving grace, but a graciousness that God bestows on all people because of His character and love.

⁵⁷ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 234.

⁵⁸ See again, Hunter, *To Change the World*, 183, where he says, "Both theological conservatives and theological progressives have done this (reduce the tension between historical/political and transcendent issues in life) by "Christianizing" their very different ideals of the social order; the former by uncritically associating revelation with traditional social practices and the latter by relativizing revelation in conformity to liberal-modernist social practices."

⁵⁹ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 163.

⁶⁰ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 172.

witness of the church to the world.”⁶¹

His call for a “Faithful Presence” flows from the deeper reality than merely political engagement of the culture. It flows from the biblical reality of the Incarnation, God’s public engagement of the whole world for the sake of its salvation. It is the place where “Word and World” meet. Hunter says,

God’s word was enacted and enacted in a particular place and time in history. In all, presence and place mattered decisively. Nowhere is this more evident than in the incarnation. Word and world, then, come together not so much because words describe the world accurately or because words correspond to reality. Rather, word and world come together through the world’s enactments—both *the fact* that God’s word is always enacted but also in *the way* his word is enacted.⁶²

Hunter asserts that the “incarnation is the only adequate reply to the challenges of dissolution,” and “it is the way that the Word became incarnate in Jesus Christ and the purposes to which the incarnation was directed that are the only adequate reply to the challenge of difference.”⁶³ His ecclesial engagement of culture builds on the reality of God’s “faithful presence” for us in the incarnation. God pursues us with His grace. He identifies with us in our struggles. He seeks to bless us in our life. And, He sacrifices to make it all possible.⁶⁴ Such a “faithful presence” reality to us compels a “faithful presence” towards others in our being fully present “for them.”⁶⁵ Such a reality compels believers then to be a “faithful presence” in the work that we do, as well as in the

⁶¹ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 173.

⁶² Hunter, *To Change the World*, 241.

⁶³ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 241.

⁶⁴ See Hunter, *To Change the World*, 241–43, for a fuller description of the Faithful Presence of God towards us.

⁶⁵ See Hunter, *To Change the World*, 244–45, where he speaks about pursuing, identifying, sacrificing for others, not just those like us, but whomever God sends into our lives. Only this kind of loving presence can overcome the tribalism that exists both in society and in the church.

spheres of influence⁶⁶ that we inhabit, not to coercively bend the context to our own whims or wishes, but to give God glory and to serve our neighbor

Hunter's critical work, clearly demonstrates the present "lack of social power" that the Evangelical Church is able to exert in the American culture in general, and the urban culture specifically. The reconstruction provided by a "Theology of Faithful Presence," rightly tempers any "transformation of society notions" as to the ultimate purpose of the church. More positively, the missional reconstruction via a "Theology of Faithful presence" does rightly root the motivation for community engagement in the "pursuing love of God for us," as well as a Christian's desire to attend to the common good.

To enact such an ecclesial, public "postpolitical witness" in the world, Hunter argues that the church must find a better relationship to power and to the powers-that-be. That is done by "disentangling the life and identity of the church from the life and identity of American society."⁶⁷ The church needs "critical distance" from the society in which it lives, both for the sake of society and for the sake of the unique message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Any notion of the absolute relationship of the Gospel of Jesus Christ with the present macroeconomic systems, or policy proclamations, or prevailing social norms must be resisted. Also, the Church, as well as individual believers must "decouple the 'public' from the 'political.'"⁶⁸ Hunter's point is that there are limits to what politics and power can accomplish. There are deep seated, fundamental problems in society that governmental fiat cannot solve. There must be public institutions that exist for the common good, above and beyond groups that merely tribally

⁶⁶ See Hunter, *To Change the World*, 246–47. He touches here on Luther's theology of vocation, God at work in the world through masks. Unfortunately, there doesn't seem to be an understanding of "how" to work in these spheres for the sake of the common good vs. for the sake of the proclamation of the Gospel.

⁶⁷ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 184.

⁶⁸ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 185.

exercise political power. Such institutions like the family, Church, schools, free associations of people beyond mere expediency, these are to be part of any public engagement as well. “Faithful presence” will exert much of its power in this reclaimed “public space”⁶⁹

To be noted, in Hunter’s sociological, ecclesial categorization, Cone is publicly aligned with the progressive-liberal engagement of culture. As demonstrated in Chapter 1, Cone’s influence in the urban context extends beyond mere ecclesial alignments, as his Civil Rights expansion of Liberation theology⁷⁰ undergirds much liberal theology and liberal politics as well. Hunter's research demonstrates how intertwined the progressivist view⁷¹ is with networks of power, namely in education in general, in universities, the media, the arts, law,⁷² and even the power of the state itself. The question then is, “How can the LCMS engage the urban context, with its negating, delegitimizing posture towards all things conservative, confessionally and politically?” What can Hunter’s solution provide for an LCMS missional engagement of a context very much unlike its own.

⁶⁹ See Hunter, *To Change the World*, 279, where he delineates the idea of a new “City Commons,” saying, “In short, commitment to the new city commons is a commitment of the community of faith to the highest ideals and practices of human flourishing in a pluralistic world.” Also, his methodology for such engagement, 281, is to “hold differences lightly,” and “where differences remain show love.” Missionally, this perspective is very helpful. Unfortunately, it misses the reality of faithful action in many vocations which require force for the sake of the common good, which also can be faithfully engaged as Christians, and supported by the Christian church for the sake of the flourishing of a particular community. A Two-Kingdom engagement of Cone will be much more clear about principles of Christian engagement in both the left and the right-hand kingdom rule of God in the world.

⁷⁰ By this identification of Black Theology, it is merely stating that Cone is merging the work of Malcolm X with that of Martin Luther King in a way that theologizes, even Christianizes Black political engagement.

⁷¹ See Hunter, *To Change the World*, 78, speaking of the power of culture and cultural change, amidst “a rich source of patronage that provides resources for intellectuals and educators who, in the context of dense networks, imagine, theorize, and propagate an alternative culture.” His research also demonstrates that the influencing power structures of American culture are urban, academic, media driven, and overwhelmingly progressivist. That’s why the discussions of ecclesial engagement seem out of balance. If the Enlightenment culture, skeptical of religious dogma, is the culture-creating power of the land, it would seem that “progressive Christian engagement,” already has a relationship to these elite structures. As such, the defensive against mentality has some validity from a “common grace” perspective, even if it is a terrible missional strategy for community engagement.

⁷² Hunter, *Culture Wars*, 301, says, “Yet other important sectors of the (knowledge) industry, as we have seen, such as the entertainment, news, and political media, and the educational establishment—both lower and higher levels—and the so-called helping professions, are demonstrably anti-orthodox.”

“Faithful Presence”: Its Potential Solutions and Challenges for a Concrete, LCMS Missional Engagement in the City.

To Change the World is especially helpful in delineating the weaknesses of current, public, Christian Church engagements to the challenges of “difference and dissolution” in modern American culture. Hunter’s research shows the weakness of the conservative response to such challenges as being defensive and combative, an accusation often leveled at the LCMS. His research also demonstrates the location of Conian Black Theology as clearly in one particular way of addressing those concerns, the progressivistic camp, which, according to Hunter, has been “animated by the myth of equality and community and therefore sees history as an ongoing struggle to realize these ideals,”⁷³ one that often conflates the Gospel with political expediency.

His call for “concrete” engagement,⁷⁴ one that flows from the reality of the incarnation, namely God’s willingness to pursue, to take on, and lovingly sacrifice to redeem the sinfully rebellious world, is a call for Christian, concrete engagement with those we seek to serve in His name detached and distanced from the raw power of politics. Hunter’s work exposes the dangers of the faulty political engagement strategies of the conservative and progressive wings of the Christian churches as merely the bending of power towards one’s political ends, something antithetical to the Gospel. For a concrete missiology that will have to deal with issues of “difference and dissolution,” this is very helpful since the LCMS’ goal is for the sharing of the Gospel of Jesus Christ confessed in Article IV of the Augsburg confession, contextualized to the concerns of the black community and other minority communities in urban America. Faulty

⁷³ Hunter, *Culture Wars*, 132. One can see the impulse for “concrete liberation” as the goal of secular progressives and Black Theologians. For Cone then, it isn’t a stretch for such liberation to be the content of the Gospel itself. Hunter exposes this flattening of the Gospel into politics alone as another example of a public, political “entanglement that the church must rid itself of” to be an effective ‘faithful presence’ in the community,” 185.

⁷⁴ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 199.

ecclesial, power engagements of the culture politically confuse the Gospel of Jesus with Kingdom building here on earth. Hunter's work reiterates the tension of "being in the world and not of the world for the sake of the world."⁷⁵

His proposed, public solution of a "faithful presence" seeks to offer a new solution that overcomes the tensions presently dividing the public political camps of the church, one that is apolitical, yet still engaged.⁷⁶ Helpfully, his work acknowledges the tension of cultural "affirmation and antithesis"⁷⁷ in a robust engagement of the Christian Church with the community, especially as it pertains to one's disposition to the context in which one serves.⁷⁸

Unfortunately, there are also limitations to using Hunter's work to engage the challenge of Cone's "concrete Christological Paradigm" for LCMS urban missiology. In limiting liberation theology to merely a subset of faulty "Progressive" ecclesial public engagement, Hunter doesn't deal with the cultural power of Black Theology and its powers of negation in the urban context. In fact, he fails to deal Black Theology's whole delegitimation of the Christian perspective in American history due to slavery and racism which presently frames many of the cultural issues concerning difference and dissolution today. Cone's harnessing of political power for liberation for the sake of the "exploited and aggrieved" is "the Gospel of Jesus Christ."⁷⁹ And Hunter's

⁷⁵ See John 17:15–20. Jesus High Priestly prayer defines "in the world, not of the world" public engagement for mission.

⁷⁶ See Hunter, *To Change the World*, 237–54, where his solution for moving forward is a "faithful presence" within culture that doesn't see culture as "evil" but sees possibility for making a difference, albeit in small, meaningful ways. As such he deals with issues in a temporal vs. ultimate/eternal fashion.

⁷⁷ Hunter's language here is helpful, yet it will be better delineated in a Two-Kingdom differentiation that can more clearly describe not only the tensions between the affirmation and antithesis/critique of culture, but also the benefits of such differentiation.

⁷⁸ See Hunter, *To Change the World*, 3. Hunter explicates the creation mandate that all human beings by nature are to be "world-makers," because they are created God's image. According to Hunter, sin has complicated this mandate, but not negated it.

⁷⁹ Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 74.

dismissal of it as another “politicization of the Gospel” is, from a Conian perspective, merely his willingness to stay silent in the midst of the racism that is still present in the political structures of the day. For missiological engagement of the city, the LCMS must find its voice as one having some level of “plausibility”⁸⁰ in the context of the city for faith sharing to be possible. There may be tensions, trials, and cultural challenges to that effect, but there needs to be the sincere effort to demonstrate the contextual plausibility of being an LCMS Christian in the urban context the Church seeks to serve.

Hunter’s research would caution Cone’s politicization of the work of the Church, reducing the Gospel to another form of cultural power, using the state to enforce its wishes.⁸¹ His research rightly notes that in substance the (Christian Church’s) political theology of the left does not “offer an alternative to the ideology of the secular left, but a faith-based extension of its discourse.”⁸² But, Cone would challenge Hunter’s notion as existing in a vacuum, failing to acknowledge the reality of the White Christian Church’s silence on this issue for the first 250 years of American history where the State did in fact do the wishes of racist Christianity. He would also challenge Hunter’s call to “decouple from politics” as a solution of one who has the personal luxury and privilege of being able to be politically disconnected and not destroyed, a reality that Black people cannot afford in being part of American culture in general.

⁸⁰ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 263.

⁸¹ See Hunter, *To Change the World*, 147, where he speaks of one of the ironies of progressive Christian social engagement, “In its commitment to social change through politics and politically oriented social movements, in its conflation of the public with the political, in its own selective use of scripture to justify political interests, and in its confusion of theology with national interests and identity, the Christian Left (not least the Evangelical Left) imitates the Christian Right (which he notes is especially bad in its use of politics).”

⁸² Hunter, *To Change the World*, 145. This tends to support the notion that James Cone’s racial critique of white theology and his Black Theology reconstruction of Christian theology serves as an undergirding narrative of political discourse from a progressive perspective. It is this author’s feeling that the civil rights political movement has been co-opted by many other grievance-based movements, and any affinity with the civil rights movement (of which this author is in much agreement), provides cultural and political cover for such movements because of that affinity, no matter how tenuous the relationship might be.

While his “faithful presence” has much to offer an LCMS urban missiology, a potential weakness of his view is that, while seeking to create a “New City Commons”⁸³ shared by all people, one that Christians are to foster in light of Jer. 29:11, his notion that only the deep, enmeshed, elitist structures/networks can affect cultural change, would seem to isolate the LCMS in the urban context from the start. Also, such a view of a “new city commons,” at least in the urban centers of America, needs to more fully engage the reality that the culture changing networks of influence are much more aligned to the delegitimizing power of the progressivist view undergirded by Black Theology.

Secondly, his call for the church to be “silent for a season,”⁸⁴ is problematic in that it is exactly the opposite impulse for a church desiring to be contextualized in the urban community to share the Gospel. In this regard, his analysis, as well as his missiological solution, would still have to address the potential delegitimation of Black Theology which would see these solutions as nothing more than white solutions to white problems created by racist white structures.⁸⁵

For example, the 1960 LCMS resolution on the legitimacy of Black Power can actually be viewed as an example of ecclesial, cultural-disengagement, “being silent for a season.” Though publicly acknowledging the realities that led to the need for an expression of Black Political Power, the church was silent to any notion of its culpability in the creation of the circumstances, or silent of any self-criticism of the actions that the Church itself, black and white, should have taken to be culturally engaged for the sake of the black community as well as for the sake of the

⁸³ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 273–86.

⁸⁴ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 281.

⁸⁵ See Hunter, *To Change the World*, 280. He posits a new Christian engagement through “faithful presence,” one that is post-political, with the healthiest public “course of action for Christians is to be silent for a season and learn how to enact their faith in public acts of shalom rather than to try again to represent it publicly through law, policy, and political mobilization.” Cone would reject this view out of hand, while a Two-Kingdom perspective would show why such a drastic action is unnecessary.

proclamation of the Gospel. Such “silence” tends to avoid the responsibilities that meaningful engagement would bring, leaving the change of systemic, racist issues to others.

To create an LCMS urban missiology, more is needed of public engagement than “faithful presence,” while not resorting to the faulty, political engagement strategies of both the conservative and progressive wings of the Church. Hunter’s work exposes the futility of any notion of the “Christianizing” of America. Cone would actually applaud this idea from the perspective of the deconstructing of the hegemony of “white” theology in American culture. Black Theology would suggest that there can be no “Christian” America due to the reality of slavery and the enduring problems of racism. Exposed as well, in Hunter’s analysis, are the limitations of the state to actually solve pressing public, social issues and the trade-offs that are inevitable in any sinful, human endeavor to construct a culture of beauty, wisdom, and order. He says,

In the present historical context (the fall), this means that Christians recognize that all social organizations exist as parodies of eschatological hope. And so it is that the city is a poor imitation of heavenly community; the modern state a deformed version of the *ecclesia*; the market, a distortion of consummation; modern entertainment, a caricature of joy, a misrepresentation of true formation; liberalism, a crass simulacrum of freedom; and the sovereignty we accord to the self, a parody of God himself.⁸⁶

A more clearly defined Two-Kingdom missiology, one that seeks to engage the challenges of Cone’s “concrete Christological paradigm” in city ministry, and one that understands that “silence for a season” often fails to engage systemic racism for the sake of the community, will be able to integrate this knowledge into a more concrete, dynamic engagement of the culture unencumbered by the demands of utopian notions to the contrary.

In the final analysis, unfortunately, Hunter’s total decoupling of the Christian’s faithful

⁸⁶ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 234.

presence from political engagement, his call for the church to be “silent for a season,”⁸⁷ calls for disengagement at the time that black theology demands political engagement for the sake of an authentic mission and ministry in the black community, especially in the urban context. Cone’s charge would be that such silence is merely another way to be acquiescent to the racism that has structured such dialogue from the beginning of the United States until today. Also, Hunter’s “Faithful Presence” fails to adequately deal with the specific “racial dissolution,” the resentment and delegitimation that black theology would raise against all white, evangelical voices that seek the “welfare of the city,” and the evangelism of black Americans or other minorities of color, no matter how sincere.

Engaging Cone’s “Concrete Christological Paradigm”: Evangelical Voices Specifically Engaging the Challenges of Black Theology

While Hunter’s broad analysis of the Christian Church’s socio-political engagement of American culture is helpful in describing its missional challenges in general, an LCMS, urban, missiological engagement needs to attend to the specific issues present in the black and minority communities that make up American cities. It is in the urban setting where the delegitimizing challenges of Cone, the contextual challenges of the city, and the progressive political solutions together begin to define what an authentic voice is in and for the community. Offering a critique of LCMS history from a Conian perspective, taking an honest assessment of the LCMS sociological location in American culture, and engaging Cone from a Black, Evangelical perspective, is the beginning for the construction of an LCMS missional strategy for the city.

In order to more completely understand the particularities of the “Concrete Christological Paradigm” of Cone and its challenge to an urban, LCMS missiology, it is important to see how

⁸⁷ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 281.

the black evangelical community in particular has engaged Cone. Why the black evangelical community? Because Bevan's "Synthetic/Dialogical model (SDM)" prioritizes a discussion that emanates from within the black community, and such a discussion provides possible connections to the LCMS orthodox voice for the city while honoring the challenges of Conian Black Theology. Engaging evangelical Black voices would privilege the dialogue from within the black community, from within its own experience as Cone would demand. To narrow the dialogue to Black Evangelical voices is to critically listen to the internal dialogue within the Black community to determine the unique space that that LCMS might then also inhabit for the sake of an authentic, missional engagement of the black, minority, urban communities it seeks to serve.

As previously noted, Bevan's Synthetic/Dialogical model, "tries to preserve the importance of the gospel message and the heritage of traditional doctrinal formulations while at the same time acknowledging the vital role that context has played and can play in theology, even to the setting of the theological agenda."⁸⁸ Maintaining the tension between differing theologies like that of Black Theology and the LCMS allows the LCMS to continue to engage the dialogue from its own tradition and still be missionally authentic, and potentially beneficial to the community because the concerns of the black community are concretely prioritized and engaged within Hunter's healthy, "doing good"⁸⁹ spirit for engagement. At this point, the dissertation has been open to "critique" of its own Christian identity in the urban context from Black Theology's perspective; now, it continues to seek to missionally contextualize the Gospel in the black, urban communities it seeks to serve out of a willingness to serve the community on its own terms.

⁸⁸ Bevan, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 89.

⁸⁹ See Hunter, *To Change the World*, 234, where he says that "any good that is generated by Christians is *only* the net effect of caring for something more than the good created. *If there are benevolent consequences of our engagement with the work, in other words, it is precisely because it is not rooted in a desire to change the world for the better but rather because it is an expression of a desire to honor the creator of all goodness, beauty, and truth, a manifestation of our loving obedience to God, and a fulfillment of God's command to love our neighbor.*"

Three presuppositions then of SDM that guide the continuing discussion at this point are as follows.⁹⁰ First, the dialogical process needs to “start with the local culture . . . on its own terms, yet not denigrating the wider context of the Christian tradition.” To that end, Anthony Bradley will be engaged as a dialogue partner with Cone, maintaining the tension between the evangelical, orthodox proclamation of the Christian faith and the Conian concern to address the issues in the black, urban community “concretely.” Second, “each participant in a context has something to give the other, and each context has something from which it needs to be exorcised.” The engagement with Cone and Bradley will provide the context necessary for a reconstructed LCMS missiology for the city that will begin to show how the LCMS can offer something to the city that is uniquely its own, yet transferable to a community that is presently very different from itself. Third, in order to understand more completely the particular challenge of the “Concrete Christological Paradigm” of Cone to an LCMS missiology, it is important to prioritize and listen to Black Evangelical engagement with Cone. This Black Evangelical engagement has both an affinity towards the issues concerning black experience of racism in America and a commitment to maintaining a confessional faithfulness to the orthodox creeds of Christianity. The voices of those who value Cone’s political critique, who agree that the black perspective in theology and society has been ignored, but still seek to construct an evangelical response that is faithful to the teachings of orthodox, creedal Christianity, prevent any LCMS urban missiology from making an easy dismissal of Cone’s concerns.

Unfortunately, the history of white theological engagement with the challenges of Cone demonstrates a different type of engagement. In that history, there is a tendency to dismiss or

⁹⁰ Bevan, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 90–93, the various presuppositions are extrapolated from Bevan's discussion of the model on these three pages.

ignore Cone, seeing racial issues in terms of personal repentance and reconciliation alone⁹¹ as part of a needed integration into a more advanced White Evangelical Christianity, or to totally acquiesce to Cone's critique and theological reconstruction. Foundational works like Joseph Washington's, *Black Religion*,⁹² and Milton Sernett's, *Black Religion and American Evangelicalism*,⁹³ see Black Evangelicalism as a subset, a subordinate copy of White evangelicalism which needs to avail itself of the enlightened advances of the modern Christianity of today.⁹⁴ Whereas works like James Perkinson's *White Theology: Outlining Supremacy in Modernity*,⁹⁵ acquiesce to Cone's particular deconstruction of all white Christian theology accepting his very specific, political solutions as if they were the essence of the Gospel.⁹⁶ For example, in Perkinson's book, the stated goal is ultimately white conscientization and black empowerment⁹⁷ with a spirituality that is witness to "the indomitable human spirit that is worldwide, multireligious, polyvocal, many colored, and ever-surprising, resistant to NAFTA, resistant to Republicans,"⁹⁸ embracing a Jesus who did deeply "imbibe the street-smarts and arts of resistance of the poor and oppressed he lived among . . . entering into their social

⁹¹ See Emerson and Smith. *Evangelical Religion*, 118, where it states that Evangelicals "see issues of racism as personal, relational and not structural." Their work demonstrates that the emphasis of the personalness of salvation not only fails to see any structural issues with racism, it tends to see the solution to racism in terms of personal repentance and right relationships.

⁹² Joseph R. Washington, *Black Religion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964).

⁹³ Milton C. Sernett, *Black Religion and American Evangelicalism* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1975).

⁹⁴ The LCMS suffered from similar views because of their ethnocentric tendencies towards evangelism towards black people in their late 1800s and early 1900s in America as well.

⁹⁵ James W. Perkinson, *White Theology: Outlining Supremacy in Modernity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

⁹⁶ See Perkinson, *White Theology*, 245, where "White Theology" is deconstructed as a false Christian, political theology, and reconstructed as a black, Marxist experience of shedding one's privilege. It is a Gospel of the "Indomitable human spirit, multireligious, polyvocal, many-colored and ever-surprising." What it surely isn't is Republican, NAFTA affirming, patriotic, or even Christocentrically dogmatic.

⁹⁷ Perkinson, *White Theology*, 4.

⁹⁸ Perkinson, *White Theology*, 247.

circumstance, learned from their cultural experience, and, in challenging their oppressors, embraced their political destiny.”⁹⁹ Either in avoidance or acquiescence, it is evident that narrowing the discussion at this point to a White evangelical discussion of Cone for the sake of an LCMS orthodox missiology, would not be helpful.

Dinesh D’Souza, explains that even now, whites and blacks see these problems much differently. In his book, *The End of Racism*,¹⁰⁰ he says,

The contemporary division between whites and blacks in America arises out of the white conviction that the civil rights movement achieved its antiracist objective and recognized the basic rights of blacks, and the black conviction that despite changes in the law, racism remains the central problem. Many whites do not deny the existence of racism, but view it as greatly abated more a case of “the way we were” rather than “the way we are now.” Blacks, by contrast, tend to see racism as different in appearance today but not in reality; for them, racism may have burrowed underground but it remains deeply embedded in the national psyche and in American institutions. . . . This perception gap . . . is politically dangerous because it balkanizes the society into hostile camps that cannot effectively communicate with each other.¹⁰¹

In surveying the way in which Black voices engage Cone, one discovers a tendency to two forms of engagement as well. While Black voices, evangelical and non, all tend to appreciate Cone’s empowering the public Black voice, politically and theologically in America, they tend to be either sympathetic and expansive of Cone, further relativizing the Scriptures and politicizing the Gospel, or they tend to be theologically critical and non-missional focused, reconstructing a theological dialogue within the black faith community itself. Concerning the expansive theological voices, one notes theologians like Dwight Hopkins who, in *Heart and Head: Black Theology—Past, Present, and Future*, extends Black Theology’s political-societal demands, arguing that the political solutions of Cone, with regard to income distribution, racial critique,

⁹⁹ Perkinson, *White Theology*, 246.

¹⁰⁰ Dinesh D’Souza, *The End of Racism*, (New York: The Free Press, 1995).

¹⁰¹ See D’Souza, *The End of Racism*, 245. See also Robert Blauner, “Talking Past Each Other: Black and White Languages of Race,” *American Prospect*, Summer, 1992.

and community transformation (manifestations of real world ‘Gospel’ action on behalf of the poor), have not gone far enough.¹⁰² Hopkins also extends Cone’s racial concern for the powerless beyond categories of color, demanding that economic justice for women and for homosexuals belong as a stated goal of Black Theology’s liberating emphasis.¹⁰³

Earlier voices such as Albert Cleage, author of *The Black Messiah*, would call for an even more nationalistic version of Cone’s concrete solutions to the unique problems of the Black community. Such a view results in a further politicizing the Gospel. And womanist theologian, Delores Williams, author of *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God Talk*, would agree with Cone’s essential teaching that the Gospel of Jesus is political in nature, but she would expand the victim voices to include more prominently the experiences of Black Women in America, furthering Cone’s demands for “concrete liberation” politically. These voices would prioritize black experience and black suffering as revelatory over-against the idea of Scripture being God’s Supra-cultural Word for all people, and they would prioritize the concrete policies of political liberation over any creedal proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus.

The other typical posture towards Cone within the Black evangelical community involves voices that are sympathetic to Cone’s cause, yet seek to construct a black evangelical voice that is faithful to the Scriptures as God inerrant Word. Such a constructive, yet critical voice would be James Cone’s brother, Cecil W. Cone, author of *The Identity Crisis in Black Theology*, which calls for a more concerted effort of Black Theology to remain faithful to the Black Church, Black experience, and Black tradition. A more contemporary and theologically exhaustive critique is

¹⁰² Hopkins, *Heart and Head*.

¹⁰³ Hopkins, *Heart and Head*, 187, says, “If it is wrong to interpret the Hebrew story and the Jesus narrative as instructing black slaves to obey white masters and women to obey men, then why isn’t it wrong to interpret this same Bible as saying homosexuals should deny the sexual orientation that God gave them when God created them?”

from J. Cameron Carter, theologically challenging Cone's ontological view of Blackness and its damning critique of White theology as a theology that is still captive to white theology and the categories of race that White Theology defines. He says,

Cone sees a connection between the meaning of black existence and an I-Thou ontology: the meaning of black existence and black faith is revealed in the struggle to transform a relationship in which black people are cast as "Its" in relationships that recognize them as "Thous." . . . [Such] a settlement with blackness is a settlement with the blackness that whiteness created.¹⁰⁴

Carter's solution is the call for a humanity that sees itself in a biblically "covenantal relationship to God in Christ,"¹⁰⁵ one that honors our uniqueness as people while calling us to an identity that flows first from our relationship to God.

Other Black theologians also effectively critique, even attack, the false conflation of the Gospel of Jesus with concrete, political liberation alone. They tend to do that hermeneutically and theologically, not practically, and certainly not missionally. Thabiti M. Anyabwile, in his book, *The Decline of African American Theology*,¹⁰⁶ argues that the theology of the African American Church, while historically orthodox, has begun to be supplanted by a theology that is more sociologically driven and culturally captive. In essence, he is calling for the Black Church to return to its biblical roots. Bruce Fields, *Introducing Black Theology*, challenges the very notion of a Christian theology that emanates from "experience alone," saying, "Experience, apart from the transcendent perspective of revelation as embodied in the Scripture and practiced in the community yielded to the Scripture, cannot be evaluated."¹⁰⁷ Anthony J. Carter's, *On Being Black*

¹⁰⁴ Carter, *Race*, 190–91.

¹⁰⁵ Carter, *Race*, 191–92.

¹⁰⁶ Thabiti M. Anyabwile, *The Decline of African American Theology: From Biblical Faith to Cultural Captivity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007).

¹⁰⁷ Bruce Fields, *Introducing Black Theology*, 73.

and Reformed: A New Perspective on the African-American Christian Experience,¹⁰⁸ engages Cone theologically, critiquing him and the white, evangelical church for the purpose of showing that “African Americans can be Reformed (Christians) and African Americans should be Reformed,”¹⁰⁹ because God’s vision is one where every tribe and nation are being reconciled to Him through the person and work of Jesus Christ.. Anthony Bradley’s first book, *Liberating Black Theology: The Bible and Black Experience in America*,¹¹⁰ deals with the hermeneutical and theological incongruities of Black Theology by turning to orthodox, Christian Theology, and positing essential presuppositions for a “New Black Theology.”¹¹¹ These authors engage Cone in order to serve and benefit the Black Christian Church with regards to Black Theology, challenging Black Theology to be formulated more “within biblically constrained presuppositions.”¹¹²

While Carter’s exhaustive study on the theology of Race is helpful in the trajectory of a

¹⁰⁸ Anthony J. Carter, *On Being Black and Reformed: A New Perspective on the African-American Christian Experience*. (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2003).

¹⁰⁹ Carter, *On Being Black and Reformed*, 103. Carter’s work is one that is sympathetic to Cone in that Cone’s work was necessary to unmask “white, millennial” theology in America, but it is also critical in that the reconstruction of Cone was just as problematic in that it reduced the salvation and liberation of Christ merely to political expediency. Carter’s work seeks a better way of reconciliation. What should be noted at this point is that LCMS theology is not Evangelical, Fundamentalistic, Millennial, America the New Zion oriented etc. So many discussions of “Black/White” theology are deconstructing the notion of “Christian America.” Absent is any discussion of Darwinism, scientism, the modernist/Enlightenment reduction of the Gospel to societal progress, etc. all of which are the roots of much of the racial ideologies that are rampant today. To deconstruct America, one needs to deconstruct every civilization the same and realize that many of these issues are discussions of “tradeoffs” between sinful people for the sake of civility, rather than Christian Gospel applications for the sake of a community or a nation.

¹¹⁰ Bradley, *Liberating Black Theology*.

¹¹¹ Bradley, *Liberating Black Theology*, 180–92. One weakness of Bradley’s first work was its purely theological critique of Black Liberation Theology, one that he rectifies in later works. Also, in *The Politics of Liberation*, he says that “the book (*Liberating Black Theology*) was overly critical of Cone” and that he returns to Cone “because of a deep appreciation of the needed paradigm shift his work created by exposing the hegemonic Anglo-normativity that dominates theological and biblical studies as well as the pervasive white privilege that allowed white scholars to ignore black suffering,” xii.

¹¹² See Bradley, *Liberating Black Theology*, and Carter, *On Being Black and Reformed*, which seeks to deal with a healthy dialogue between Christian orthodoxy (from a Calvinist perspective) and the contextual experience of Black people in America.

new and fresh theological discussion of race and the proclamation of the Gospel in the urban context, it does not change the political, social reality constructed in the public square by a binary discussion of race: namely, the delegitimizing of all non-black theologies as having any relevance for minority communities. Authors like Thabiti M. Anyabwile and Anthony Carter also demonstrate that the ultimate sterility of Black Theology's enduring impact is its diminution of the Gospel as ultimately a concrete, political, liberation alone. These theological critiques of Cone can help us learn to communicate in new and fresh ways about our common faith in Christ, but the delegitimizing aspects of Cone's call for a concrete, liberative Christological praxis remains for all "whites" sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ, doing theology in and among communities unlike their own. The LCMS would surely welcome such theological dialogue for the sake of the Gospel and the communities served, but again, the missiological challenges to the LCMS remain.

Finally, there are other voices who problematize the issues of racism and identity politics, who call into question the whole enterprise of Black Theology in America. Dinesh D'Souza offers a more historical, political redress of racism in his work, *The End of Racism*, offering concrete solutions to problems of racism that are outside the boundaries of Conian thought, politically nuanced, argued, and applied. Other more secular views of concrete liberation, critical of perspectives like Cone, yet claiming to advance the cause of Black people in America are works like Thomas Sowell's *Black Rednecks and White Liberals*,¹¹³ *Economic Facts and Fallacies*,¹¹⁴ *Wealth, Poverty, and Politics: An International Perspective*,¹¹⁵ Shelby Steele's,

¹¹³ Thomas Sowell, *Black Rednecks and White Liberals* (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2005).

¹¹⁴ Thomas Sowell, *Economic Facts and Fallacies* (New York: Basic, 2011).

¹¹⁵ Thomas Sowell, *Wealth, Poverty and Politics* (New York: Basic, 2016).

White Guilt;¹¹⁶ Larry Elder's *What's Race Got To Do with It: The End of Racism*,¹¹⁷ Each work argues for the end of racial politics and its continuing balkanization of people groups with a sociopolitical, community-ethic that deals with the issues of slavery, racism, and bigotry, while at the same time calling for personal responsibility, moral character, individual freedom, and free enterprise¹¹⁸ as empowering solutions to all people, especially people of color. Such works encompass economics, politics, and social theory, the very concrete spheres of liberation demanded by Cone's Christological paradigm. Many of these perspectives which offer "concrete solutions for the community" disconnect the solutions from any reference to the liberating work of God in the world. The clear descriptions of these political views are beyond the scope of this dissertation, but these concrete "liberty" focused theories, policies, and actions might resurface within a Two-Kingdom re-engagement with Cone after critically dialoguing with the implications of Black Theology concerning LCMS identity and social location.

Therefore, aware of this broader context of scholarly and theological work, this dissertation will pursue a missional reconstructive dialogue by attending to Anthony Bradley's work *Political Economy*, because of his unique emphasis of addressing the concrete economic challenges of "Cone's Christological Paradigm," while striving to remain faithful to the orthodox view of the Scripture and salvation.¹¹⁹ Bradley's work seeks the welfare of the black community on Cone's terms, yet does it in a way that is rooted in an Evangelical proclamation of the Gospel and an

¹¹⁶ Shelby Steele, *White Guilt* (New York: Harper Collins, 2006).

¹¹⁷ Larry Elder, *What's Race Got To Do with It?* (New York: St. Martins Griffin, 2006).

¹¹⁸As such, these ethics may be very compatible with a biblical Judeo-Christian ethic, but one need not be Christian to hold such things to be true. This is the way that Two-Kingdom theology might again structure the argument of social engagement for a civil community from a Christian worldview, while still preaching the uniqueness and necessity of the Gospel of eternal life in Jesus alone, faith that makes life possible now and forever.

¹¹⁹ As such, Bradley recaptures a broader biblical witness to the issues raised by Black Theology, providing a biblical critique of its message while seeking to expand the potential solutions to the unique issues faced in the black, urban community.

orthodox understanding of the Word of God. Such a stance helpfully focuses an LCMS construction of an urban missional engagement first, by attending to the “issues and concerns” of the black community and, second, by promoting within the LCMS a faithfulness to its confessions as well. Through dialog with Bradley’s work, one finds that an orthodox understanding of the Word of God, and an orthodox proclamation of the Gospel can still attend to the “concrete issues of liberation” that Cone demands.

Anthony Bradley and the Evangelical Engagement of Cone’s “Concrete Christological Paradigm”

Anthony Bradley’s Work, *Political Economy* seeks to offer “a social and economic analysis of black liberation theology, with James Cone as the primary representative, using the social and economic theory of Thomas Sowell to outline the implications for social justice while incorporating a classical understanding of the nature of the human person.”¹²⁰ Bradley engages the issues that plague the black community, especially those who are poor, meeting Cone’s demand that any Christian theology must seek “Concrete” Liberation for those who are oppressed. Prioritizing and answering the issues that are endemic to the Black community, the works¹²¹ of Anthony Bradley do just that. But in his book, *The Political Economy of Liberation*, he helpfully demonstrates the parameters of that concrete engagement while maintaining a faithfulness to an orthodox Christian view of the nature of the Scripture and the essence of the transcultural nature of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Bradley states that the purpose of his book is

to offer a social and economic analysis of black liberation theology, with James Cone as the primary representative, using the social and economic theory of Thomas

¹²⁰ Bradley, *Political Economy of Liberation*, xiii.

¹²¹ See Bradley, *Political Economy of Liberation*; *Black and Tired*; and *Keep Your Head Up*.

Sowell to outline the implications for social justice while incorporating a classical understanding of the nature of the human person.”¹²²

Thus, Bradley’s work seeks to engage in a dialog with Cone by attending to concrete practices of liberation even as it seeks to remain faithful to Scripture and the understanding of humanity and God’s relationship to humanity that is confessed there.

In terms of concrete practices of liberation, *The Political Economy of Liberation* offers a critical and yet empathetic engagement of Cone via the realistic-economic philosophy of Thomas Sowell. This analysis seeks to take up the challenge of offering “concrete Liberation” in the actual lives of black Americans who have endured particular struggles in America due to racism. Bradley’s engagement of Cone provides space for LCMS entrance into this dialogue as well, since his use of Sowell actually increases the possible voices and solutions for Concrete Liberation, even from sources other than the black community itself. Bradley’s addition of Sowell helps relativize the utopian tendencies of Cone, which in turn helps churches like the LCMS face the Conian charge of delegitimation.

In structuring “Concrete Solutions” for Black people, Bradley expresses his admiration for both Cone and Sowell, saying that “Cone and Sowell both are deeply committed to the empowerment of Blacks.”¹²³ In regard to his deep admiration for the work of James Cone, Bradley says,

I return to Cone because of a deep appreciation of the needed paradigm shift his work created by exposing the hegemonic Anglo-normativity that dominates theological and biblical studies as well as the pervasive white privilege that allowed white scholars to ignore black suffering.¹²⁴

It was Cone who made white American society, especially its churches, face the issues that

¹²² Bradley, *Political Economy of Liberation*, xi.

¹²³ Bradley, *Political Economy of Liberation*, xii.

¹²⁴ Bradley, *Political Economy of Liberation*, xii.

were being experienced in the black community, issues of racism, bigotry, poverty, unemployment, lack of access to quality education, and more, as a statement of the moral failure of society not merely the reality of the conditions of the black poor. The critical difference in Bradley's assessment of Cone in this work is that it is not ultimately a theological critique alone, but a socio-political, economic critique that extends the theological discussion in pursuit of the best political, economic responses to the issues raised by Conian Black Theology. Bradley notes that "James Cone and others offer some helpful observations about many of the issues and problems facing the church and the world,"¹²⁵ demanding political solutions in the name of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In later works like *Black and Tired*,¹²⁶ Bradley lists a host of those specific issues systemic to the challenges in urban ministry, seminal issues that tend to be overlooked in white theological and missional circles, such as racism, poverty, crime, violence, joblessness, family breakdown, single parent homes, morality, access to and quality of education etc. But in *The Political Economy of Liberation*, Bradley introduces the economic philosophy of Thomas Sowell to help provide parameters for not only engaging these issues, but providing structure to begin to deal with them. It is Sowell, who also is "deeply interested in the economic empowerment of blacks . . . (who engages these issues) as an economist. Sowell looks at the

¹²⁵ Bradley, *Political Economy of Liberation*, 91.

¹²⁶ Bradley, *Black and Tired*, xiii. Those principles include "The dignity of the Person - the human person created in the image of God is individually unique, rational and the subject of moral agency; The social nature of the Person - people were meant to act not only for self-interest but also for the interest of others; The importance of Social institutions - especially the family as foundational to society; Human action and the need to act to actualize one's potential; Sin - Although created in God's image, sin is pervasive and a reality; The Rule of Law and the Subsidiary Role of Government; the Creation of wealth, property rights and its positive relationship reducing poverty; Economic liberty, rights and duties; Economic Value; The Priority of Culture - moral culture that embraces the truth of the transcendent origin and destiny of the human person." xiii-xvi. Within this framework of justice, Bradley addresses the political and social issues particular to the Black community. For the purposes of this paper, it demonstrates the concrete issues that begin an LCMS dialogue with the black community for an effective, contextualization of the Gospel.

ways in which politics interferes with economic empowerment potentialities.”¹²⁷ The genius of *The Political Economy of Liberation* is that it seeks to delineate the “how” of achieving a “concrete freedom” that actually works, in a world that is limited by the leadership, the efforts, and the skills of a people who are limited by the reality of their sinfulness, their brokenness, and even their lack of knowledge about how to achieve what they desire.

Sowell’s many works¹²⁸ on economics, politics, and social pathologies are brought to bear in the *The Political Economy of Liberation* for the sake of defining the best, concrete solutions to real world problems in the black community. As such, Bradley/Sowell’s critique is helpful in defining what “concrete liberative engagement” looks like, as compared to Cone’s more general liberation demands as “freedom from White racism.” Yet, along with that economic analysis is a vision of the human creature that seeks to remain faithful to the Scriptures and the theological understanding of humanity and its relationship to God. Bradley highlights this aspect of Sowell’s work when he points to Sowell’s understanding of the nature of visions, theories, and how they compel concrete actions. Bradley summarizes Sowell, saying:

Visions . . . are “what we have before we act and analyze empirical data . . . Visions are the building blocks from which theories are constructed . . . the final structure depends not only on the foundation, but also on how carefully and consistently the framework or theory is constructed and how well buttressed it is with hard facts. Theories based on visions must both be internally consistent and justifiable with respect to cohering with reality. . . . Visions produce theories with clear implications (though not every conceivable contingency can be imagined or conceived.)¹²⁹

For the purposes of this chapter, it needs to be noted that there are two visions which affect

¹²⁷ Bradley, *Political Economy of Liberation*, xii.

¹²⁸ Thomas Sowell, *Basic Economics*, (New York: Basic, 2015); *A Conflict of Visions*, (New York: Basic, 2007); *The Vision of the Anointed*, (New York: Basic, 1995); *Economic Facts and Fallacies; Wealth, Poverty and Politics; Ethnic America; Applied Economics*, (New York: Basic Books, 2009); *Race and Culture*, (New York: Basic, 1994); *Black Rednecks*.

¹²⁹ Bradley, *Political Economy of Liberation*, 2.

the possibility of concrete, liberative actions: “the Constrained vision” and “the Unconstrained vision.” These visions are actually the presuppositions that one holds before engaging empirical data for the sake of thought and action. It should also be noted that the difference of these visions hinges on one’s understanding of the nature of human anthropology. Concerning the constrained vision, there is the

indisputable reality that human beings are limited, which leads to an egoism over time, so that a person normally doesn’t act in the interest of others. In a broken world, then one needs to consider how certain desired moral and social benefits could be produced in the most efficient way within that constraint . . . the constrained vision deals in trade-offs rather than solutions.”¹³⁰

Therefore, concrete-liberative action involves the best use of “knowledge”¹³¹ to address problems. In a limited world, it is best to have many actors, freely engaging in the knowledge of ideas and the free marketplace, according to their own self-interest because such free engagement amasses the greatest amount of knowledge necessary to ensure the greatest benefit to the most people. The constrained vision is aware of the fact that since we are constrained and limited, the culmination of all such actions will provide the most liberation for the most people, even in a broken world. Equal access, and fair processes will create the greatest concrete liberation.

In terms of the unconstrained vision, fundamental to this way of engaging the world is the idea that “The human person is not morally limited, and once given sufficient information and understanding, he will naturally intend to benefit others . . . Humans are generally other-centered

¹³⁰ Bradley, *Political Economy of Liberation*, 4–5.

¹³¹ See Bradley, *Political Economy of Liberation*, 22, where he quotes Sowell, saying, “Specks of knowledge are scattered through a vast emptiness of ignorance, and everything depends upon how solid the individual specks of knowledge are and on how powerfully lined and coordinated they are with one another.” In fact, numerous ideas are daily going through various “authentication processes,” where one “uses facts in reality to verify or deny ideas and assumptions about the world in its natural state.” His point is that the more people there are working with ideas, the better the overall solutions will be that are brought to bear on problems in a limited world.

. . . people should do what is right, just because it is right.¹³² The unconstrained vision seeks to locate decisions for the many among the elite, not among the masses, with a controlled view of the economy to ensure equal outcomes for all.

Sowell uses these “visions” to explain the logical consequences of competing social theories. Under the constrained vision, an indisputable component of the nature of the human person is that he or she has moral limitations—limitations that lead to a type of egoism that becomes increasingly self-interested over time. The human person is not essentially good and is usually self-interested, often at a cost to others. The impulse for concrete actions for liberation must account for the reality of the constrained human condition, “instead of attempting to dream of a possible world where humans are basically good natured and oriented toward the goodness of others, we need to consider how certain desired moral and social benefits could be produced in the most efficient way within that constraint.”¹³³ By attending to both the dialog about concrete realities of liberation and to the fundamental theological understanding of the human creature, Bradley’s critique of Cone offers both possibilities and limitations for constructing an LCMS urban missiological engagement.

The Possibilities of Bradley’s Work

Bradley’s analysis then leads to the question, “Which vision works in the real world?” In fact, when it comes to particular solutions to problems, the question best asked for concrete liberation is whether the solution sought is the “best” solution, or the “better” solution among many possible solutions and many possible tradeoffs.¹³⁴ Bradley notes:

¹³² Bradley, *Political Economy of Liberation*, 5–6.

¹³³ Bradley, *Political Economy of Liberation*, 4.

¹³⁴ In chapter 4, it will be shown how a Two-Kingdom theology can best deal with issues demanding the “lesser of two evils” action where there is no ultimate “right” answer, or action, but answers and actions must be

If humans are naturally disposed toward doing good, then issues such as poverty, war, crime, and the like, must have an external cause because these conditions stand in such contradistinction to the nature of the human person in the unconstrained view. However, if one believes that the human person has innate moral limitations—and that these limitations are coupled with his tendency toward egoism—at the heart of these types of problems then, there are required explanations in which regressive social patterns can be “avoided or minimized.”¹³⁵

Sowell further says,

While believers in the unconstrained vision seek the special causes of war, poverty, and crime, believers in the constrained vision seek the special causes of peace, wealth, or a law-abiding society. In the unconstrained vision, there are no intractable reasons for social evils and therefore no reason why they cannot be solved, with sufficient moral commitment. But in the constrained vision, what artifices or strategies restrain or ameliorate inherent human evil will themselves have costs, some in the form of other social ills created by these institutions, so that all that is possible is a prudent trade-off.¹³⁶

In view of the differing views of liberation, freedom, and dignity from the constrained and the unconstrained visions, it is helpful to revisit the 1969 LCMS convention resolution that affirms Black Theology but expresses the reality that such a liberation is one that must ultimately be attained by one’s own efforts in this temporal world, saying:

Whereas, Our black brothers (*fellow Lutherans*)¹³⁷ recognize also that secular dignity, unlike the dignity that is ours in the Gospel of Christ, cannot be conferred as a gift or by mere legal action but must finally be achieved by the black community for itself, and in that goal and endeavor *see the legitimacy*¹³⁸ of this concept of black power;

Resolved, That the Synod encourage and bless its black members, so minded, to return freely to that world in which they have so unique an opportunity of service and to use all wisdom and energy in love to work together with the black man in America, regardless of creed, toward fulfilling his hunger for dignity, identity, self-respect, and the respect of his fellowman, which is so vital to his life.¹³⁹

forwarded nonetheless.

¹³⁵ Bradley, *Political Economy of Liberation*, 7.

¹³⁶ Bradley, *Political Economy of Liberation*, 8.

¹³⁷ Addition mine, for clarification.

¹³⁸ Emphasis mine.

¹³⁹ Suelfow, *Heritage in Motion*, 268, Quoting from Document 15, “To Affirm Legitimacy of Black Power,” Convention Proceedings, 1969, Res. 9–22, 148.

In light of the Bradley/Sowell critique of Cone, it is apparent that a differentiation should be maintained between the dignity that comes from our relationship to God in Christ—one that attends to issues of racism, repentance, and reconciliation from the Gospel—and the dignity that comes politically and socioeconomically for the sake of actual, concrete liberation in this world. Whether such differentiation can be maintained in Bradley’s dialogue between Cone and Sowell will be attended to shortly. But, such a differentiation means that an LCMS missional engagement in the city will not merely attend to Cone’s racial delegitimation of the LCMS, it must also focus on the best solutions for the black, urban community it serves whether such solutions agree with Conian presuppositions and solutions or not.¹⁴⁰

Bradley/Sowell deconstructs Conian Black Theology as not dealing with the reality of the world as it is, thereby demonstrating its theological inadequacy for reconstructing black identity from the ontology of oppression, falsely narrowing the teachings of Christianity to merely concrete actions of political liberation. Bradley also demonstrates the practical inadequacy of Cone’s work in the community as well. He notes that a failure to attend to the reality of the world as it is, sinful and full of sinful human beings, while seeking a perfection of outcomes in society, doesn’t just fail to produce perfection, it more often fails to produce anything better as well.¹⁴¹ In providing a socio-economic analysis of Black theology,¹⁴² Bradley deals with the reality of

¹⁴⁰ Cone demands “Concrete liberation” for the oppressed black people of the community. But if freedom from oppression is “absolute,” or only measured when everyone in the world had the same outcomes in this life, such a solution is impossible. See Bradley’s summary, *Political Economy of Liberation*, 117-8, where he says, “If justice means equal results, it will never exist, apparently not even in heaven. However, if justice means securing the conditions for freedom in this world to embrace what God provides, it can be pursued, albeit, with unequal outcomes . . . Black Theology’s focus on economic results often misses what freedom entails. Freedom is not evaluated by social analysts because of what people have but rather whether people are freed to do as they ought.”

¹⁴¹ See Bradley, *Political Economy of Liberation*, 26, where he notes, “Sowell cautions, however, that a rejection of social optimum cannot mean that something *better* than this optimum will be achieved. It may mean that something far worse will result from a failure to recognize the inherent limitation of the situation—limitations of knowledge, resources, and human beings.”

¹⁴² See Bradley, *Political Economy of Liberation*, 34–39, where Bradley cites historical and economic data that calls into question Black Theology’s premise that all issues in the black community are the result of racism and

racism and the black experience, but also deals with the reality that Black Theology's proposed solutions often impact black people negatively rather than positively.¹⁴³ When examined socio-economically, even historically, Cone's proposed solutions often don't efficiently and comprehensively accomplish the main demand of his teaching, "the concrete liberation of the oppressed." In final analysis, Bradley writes, "The framework of Thomas Sowell describes the economic and political structures that contribute to human flourishing. . . . Cone's appeal to centralized economic planning¹⁴⁴ undermines the type of political and economic structures that will truly liberate and create the conditions for economic empowerment in the long run."¹⁴⁵

The Limitations of Black Theology in Delivering "Concrete Solutions" according to Sowell

One's presuppositions about human nature determine one's thinking in the realm of economics, ethics, and social justice.¹⁴⁶

The call for a "concrete Christological paradigm" of James Cone from any church that seeks to engage the black, urban community, is a just, publicly-righteous one. Issues of civil rights and access to education, housing, and various structures in society that were meant for all, was not the experience of Black citizens of America for much too long. Unfortunately, the

liberation is the oppressed overcoming oppressors. He says, "The economic conditions of all black Americans at the time of these requests for redistribution (reparations) were not solely the result of the economic activity of white Christians and Jews. However, according to black theology, the economic inequalities were the result of racism and oppression. Sowell, however, offers data that calls into question the absolutism of this black theology with respect to economics, 35." It is not within the scope of this paper to assess all the issues that pertain to this analysis. What is to be noted is that "economic justice" is more complex than merely attending to racial issues alone. The church repentantly attends to that matter, but seeks to empower the community it serves for the community's sake. As such, issues of family, culture, and politics present challenges to the church in seeking to be an encouraging voice in the community for the sake of the community and the Gospel.

¹⁴³ See Bradley, *Political Economy of Liberation*, 36–37, where he notes that market forces often provided opportunities for black people amidst racist structural evils while "preferential treatment programs" impacted the upward mobility of blacks.

¹⁴⁴ One could even note here, his politicization of all things liberating which assumes a heavy-handed role of the coercion of the state towards his idea of liberation outcomes.

¹⁴⁵ Bradley, *Political Economy of Liberation*, 138.

¹⁴⁶ Bradley, *Political Economy of Liberation*, xiv.

Conian/Black Theology response, while properly undermining the false “white theology” of America being the new Israel, or the New Zion, also created a false “Christianized, power” theology and false cultural expectation in reverse. The reversal of positions in terms of the binaries of black versus white, from oppressed to in-control/empowered, merely tends to create a new form of oppression in a sinful world.¹⁴⁷ It also conflates the universal freedom in Jesus with the demand and political expectation that the only legitimate freedom for this world is the absolute political, removal of all oppression of all people.

The black liberation vision, from Cone to Dwight Hopkins, still maintains this binary labeling of people as oppressors and oppressed, proposing solutions emanating from this absolute binary construction of the problem. Solutions, from a similar constructed zero-sum fallacy of wealth, namely that the poor are poor because the rich are rich proposes either/or solutions such as the wealthy must be divested of their wealth giving it to the poor as a matter of justice. Sowell’s work calls the whole premise into question as one’s wealth and poverty are determined by much more than the binaries of race. He says, “Human capital is more than just skills, for skills can be learned. Rather, personal and cultural habits toward life and world lead some cultures and groups to excel faster than others.”¹⁴⁸ Whereas for Cone, freedom is freedom

¹⁴⁷ See Bradley, *Political Economy of Liberation*, 111, where he summarizes the trajectory of Black Liberation theology saying, “Black power dominance would be no remedy for the past injustices of whites. For the oppressed to become the new oppressors exposes the morally relative grounding of black theology’s social prescriptions by some that have followed Cone. Christianity is uniquely situated to construct an ethical framework to move beyond the eye-for-an-eye form of retributive justice. The facts of sin and error (in people and in the world) has a profound effect on how we define oppression, economic empowerment, and social justice in what can then move the dialogue about liberation forward beyond the binaries of race and class.” See also Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation, Twentieth Anniversary*, 20, where he says, “Black thinkers are in a different position (oppressed). They cannot be black *and* identified with the powers that be. To be black is to be committed to destroying everything this country loves and adores.” For Cone, with everything defined politically in terms of the binaries of race, white versus black, Christ’s liberation is political and available only for some and not for others because God takes sides. Such liberation reduces the Gospel to political power, and it reduces political power to the destruction of one’s enemies. The natural extension of such thinking in a depraved world of sinful individuals is the reality of other sinners in power over the vanquished. Bradley, as well as the LCMS, hopes for a broader dialogue.

¹⁴⁸ See Sowell, *Basic Economics*, 194.

from oppression, for Sowell, freedom is the absence of coercion in the control of one's own destiny.¹⁴⁹ Sowell demonstrates the limitations of Cone's view as it pertains to the actual liberation of the poor and the oppressed. Bradley notes, "economic facts demonstrate that in open societies, as the rich create wealth, the poor also increase their standard of living. Wealth is a result of labor and production; it is not derived from the poverty of the poor."¹⁵⁰ From a different vision perspective, then, "Concrete liberation" has other potential solutions.¹⁵¹ For this dissertation, that means that there are more potential solutions to the issues that plague the black, urban community. And, for the community's sake, they must be explored.

Bradley further notes that Black Theologians are committed to a flawed anthropology in constructing a concrete liberation,¹⁵² and too narrowly committed to their misuse of Marx and the "means of production" fallacy which assumes that the means of production in an industrial society are controlled by white management in multinational corporations when

production is a function of the skill, ability, and intelligence of the laborers. . . .
Human capital is more than just skills, for skills can be learned. Rather, personal and

¹⁴⁹ See Bradley, *Political Economy of Liberation*, 20, where he says, "Overall there seems to be a genuine concern regarding freedom, although it is defined in totally different ways by Sowell, Cone, and Christian theology. Sowell sees freedom mostly in terms of being free from external coercion. Cone see it as freedom from the outright oppression of others. Christianity defines freedom more directly in terms of being freedom to do what one ought." To be noted here, For Cone, freedom is liberation from oppression, an equality of outcomes for all and, for Sowell, freedom is the absence of coercion in one's decision making of how to order one's life and seek one's welfare. In fact, Bradley says, 104, "Sowell encourages us to focus on freedom instead of focusing on equality of result in contradistinction to liberation theologians. Forced equality of results limits the freedom of individuals to use their gifts, which have been unequally given by God. A free context provides a platform for all to equally apply their gifts in an open and fair process."

¹⁵⁰ Bradley, *Political Economy of Liberation*, 104–5.

¹⁵¹ Bradley's dialogue between Cone and Sowell demonstrates that Black Theology needed a broader economic critique of American culture and theology than that of Marxism especially because Marxist solutions fail to take into account the sinfulness of humanity as a whole, and the depravity of people individually.

¹⁵² See Bradley, *Political Economy of Liberation*, 114, where Bradley says, "If the fall did not occur—if the human person were not prone to sin and error—a Marxist system could possibly work." Maybe this explains its enduring temptation.

cultural habits toward life and work lead some cultures and groups to excel faster than others—as was the case in comparison between the Irish and Italian immigrants.¹⁵³

And,

Socioeconomic disparities have always been commonplace among peoples. . . . However, this should not imply, as many liberation theologians maintain, that these disparities always have been—and continue to be—the result of oppression. For example, though it is true that discrimination and bias have resulted in inequalities, it is not always true that discrimination or bias can be inferred from statistical inequalities when applied to individuals.¹⁵⁴

Sowell also notes the false underlying assumption of Marxist social critique, that absent discrimination and bias of individuals and structures, the world would be an equal place. Such a view fails to account not only for human limitations, it also fails to account for initiative, drive, creativity, and talent in the differentiation and disparity of outcomes.

For an example, Bradley discusses a commonly perceived solution to the issues of slavery and the continuing perceived racial privilege, income redistribution. Among other mitigating factors, such as the non-inheritability of structural guilt, the difficulty in assessing the true nature of damages by whom, to whom, and the limited power of a society to actually rectify present problems that happened in the past, such a solution ignores certain economic facts—namely, that income is not distributed in the first place. It is not the case that income is found in one place and is simply handed out randomly in higher quantities to whites than to minorities. Bradley says income, is

paid directly for services rendered, and how much is paid is determined jointly by those individuals rendering the service and those to whom it is rendered. . . .

Redistribution would create a whole different way of exchange with a third party required to determine quite arbitrarily what someone else's work is worth, and this would require incredible knowledge, arrogance, and confusion.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵³Bradley, *Political Economy of Liberation*, 47.

¹⁵⁴Bradley, *Political Economy of Liberation*, 103.

¹⁵⁵Bradley, *Political Economy of Liberation*, 103.

He also notes that the term wealth distribution,

conceals the crucial fact that most income is not distributed, either in capitalist, socialist, feudal, or most other economic systems. Wealth, rather is amassed because of production. People are paid for services rendered to their employer over a specified time and an agreed upon price. . . . The crucial question is not what should be distributed, but rather who decides what that distribution should be. Ultimately the issue is a conflict between two sets of decision-makers.¹⁵⁶

From Bradley's perspective, locating the power to determine prices, costs of labor, and the worth of one's talents in a central ruling body of certain elite people, limits the liberative potential and possibilities of the very people Cone wishes to serve. In this case, as in many others, Bradley/Sowell and others would argue from a black perspective that there is a "better" way.¹⁵⁷

Secondly, Cone's unconstrained vision of humanity, according to the Bradley/Sowell critique, actually limits the possibilities of "concrete liberation" for black people by seeking to build a "freedom" that seeks ultimate liberation and freedom in the political realm and discounts the personal issues of bondage and liberation that are due to the sin of individuals before God. As Bradley says,

The early developers of black theology linked black oppression and white racism causally and used them as pillars on which to construct an entire theological discipline. As a result, black theology is decidedly human-centered, focusing on social and structural issues rather than on personal ones. Sanctification involves embracing black humanity, while redemption involves, in part, freedom from white

¹⁵⁶ Bradley, *Political Economy of Liberation*, 25–26.

¹⁵⁷ In discussing issues of justice such as income redistribution, or affirmative action, or minimum wage declarations, or any variety of such issues that are often posited as solutions to racism and economic justice in America, the issue again is not which "solution" is the correct one in the left-hand kingdom, but what solutions are being offered and what are the trade-offs in applying those solutions. For in a sinful world, there will always have to be uncomfortable trade-offs to be endured. In fact, the goal for concrete, temporal liberation in a sinful, limited world, from a sinful-human standpoint would be to seek "solutions" that afford the least painful tradeoffs etc., delivering the most freedom and opportunity for the black, urban communities served. The goal of an LCMS engagement would seek to create, or at least host a dialogue that would "de-racialize" issues of communism/capitalism, minimum wage/market prices for labor and goods; public education/access to education (choice), poverty/welfare programs/the stability of the family etc. so that actual, concrete, liberation could be measured and received.

oppression. These oversimplifications lead to misunderstandings of both Christian anthropology and soteriology.¹⁵⁸

Such oversimplifications can also lead to limited perspectives concerning possible concrete, liberative solutions to very complex problems and it can also neglect the long-term solutions and costs associated with engaging the problems black people face in the urban context. For Bradley,

Black Theologians tend not to incorporate the aspects of classical Christian anthropology and fail to ask which economic environment—given the faces of sin and error—is most appropriate for producing the best possible results in the long run.”¹⁵⁹

Finally, Bradley/Sowell’s critique is that Cone’s unconstrained vision of humanity actually limits the possibilities of “concrete liberation” for black people because of its insistence that concrete liberation must be a political-economic-equality of outcomes. Again, such a demand for liberation fails to understand the true capability/limitation of human beings to solve complex issues and problems, and fails also to understand how and why economics works. Bradley summarizes:

In the unconstrained liberationist vision, not only is the human person capable of foreseeing the social consequences of his decisions, but both the individual and society are causally and morally responsible for the social results of those decisions In the alternative vision offered by Sowell, the application of equal processes for a just society are critical for employing justice. Just social processes are crucial in the constrained approach because the complexities of the human community are too vast and too great to attempt to prescribe specific social results. In other words, in the constrained approach, with the limits of human knowledge and the inequality of individual giftedness we can ensure just processes but not equalized results.¹⁶⁰

Cone’s demand for equality of results, especially from a political-economic perspective, fails to integrate the basic realities and processes of the creation and distribution of wealth. In the end, because of the limits of people, of the world in which we live, and the complexity of the

¹⁵⁸ Bradley, *Political Economy of Liberation*, 32.

¹⁵⁹ Bradley, *Political Economy of Liberation*, 115.

¹⁶⁰ Bradley, *Political Economy of Liberation*, 99.

problems that face us, all that can be “concretely” accounted for is the fairness and free access to fair processes, not results. Cone’s demand for the equality of results creates an unrealistic expectation of what results can be achieved for all based on sinful humanity’s best efforts while and potentially delegitimizing any missiological engagement that doesn’t meet that expectation.

Liberation theologians tend toward visions that, in the end, reduce blacks and other minorities to low positions and induce them to accept that image of themselves. The vision requires a new approach to applying the Gospels and social justice that deals with the reality of social inequalities and sin while maintaining a helpful theological framework for long-term social and economic progress. Such an approach requires a new dynamism that gives theologians freedom to return to classical doctrines of the Christian faith for new applications beginning with human anthropology and the Fall.¹⁶¹

Cone may have done well “demanding” political recognition and civic freedoms long-deserved for black people in America, but by focusing on a liberation that assures “equal results for all people” and not on equal access and fair processes, Cone virtually denies people’s responsibility in making their lives what God intended them to be.

Bradley posits a better framework for liberating solutions. He notes that “Sowell encourages us to focus on freedom instead of focusing on equality of results in contradistinction to liberation theologians. Forcing equality of results limits the freedom of individuals to use their gifts, which have been unequally given by God.¹⁶² A free context provides a platform for all to equally apply their gifts in an open and fair process which in a world of temporal tradeoffs does more to ensure “concrete liberation” for all people, including black people who have suffered injustice in the American culture.

¹⁶¹ Bradley, *Political Economy of Liberation*, 105.

¹⁶² Bradley, *Political Economy of Liberation*, 104.

Engaging Cone’s “Concrete Christological Paradigm”: Bradley’s Evangelical Reconstruction

Bradley’s corrective reconstruction of Cone addresses the theological limitation that Cone creates for black identity and liberation. His challenge to Black Theology and to Sowell’s critique of Black Theology as well, is to look to a liberation and redemption that is beyond the limitations of sinful humanity, yet still capable of dealing with the concrete issues involved in the black community. Bradley says,

Where black theologians and Sowell both fall short, however, is in their failure to ground ontological anthropology in the *Imago Dei*. Black theology chooses to ground anthropology socially with “blackness” while Sowell grounds it politically and economically. Both however, lack a telos initiated by Creation and ending in the cosmic redemption of all things under the lordship of the Davidic son as promised in the formation of the covenant community.¹⁶³

While Sowell’s perspective lacks transcendence, Cone’s perspective limits the horizon of liberation of black people. He does this by rooting black self-identity ontologically in victimhood, diminishing black people’s ability to finally address the pathologies of racism, irrespective of white response, binding them to an endless cycle of the despair of victimhood. The loss of the Scripture as an authoritative voice, not only creates an ill-advised notion of the possibility of absolute-concrete liberation in a sinfully, limited, constrained world, but it also fails to deliver the eternal liberation that comes in fully realizing one’s humanness in the *Imago Dei*. Ultimately, this diminishes the significance of Christ’s eternal gift of being a redeemed child of God by limiting such work to temporal, political-economic liberation.

The biblical view of identity, self-worth, and liberation posits the foundational anthropology that makes possible true liberation, in that it teaches both the dignity of humanity and the fallenness of humanity. Though the fallenness of humanity is a reality that demands a

¹⁶³ Bradley, *Political Economy of Liberation*, 107.

constrained view¹⁶⁴ of the world and the impossibilities for self-salvation and ultimate liberation, the dignity of humankind as a creation of God, in God's image, is a foundational reality upon which all truly liberative polities are grounded. To lose the orthodox views of the Scripture with regard to human anthropology, sociology, liberation, and salvation is to put the whole project of liberation at risk. Concerning the issues of "being black in a racist society," one's human dignity is much better rooted in the *Imago Dei* and not the politics of victimhood or envy. Bradley says,

In terms of understanding the value and worth of the black person, to ground black worth in the acceptance of the white majority is to locate one's sense of dignity in the wrong place. A classical approach might have helped black theologians see that the Gospel is not commensurate with the achievement of black humanity; rather, the Gospel is commensurate with the full acceptance of the implications of the *Imago Dei* This perspective directs the attention to God rather than to what God has created. Black theology emphasizes the white acceptance of black humanity so much that racial reconciliation attempts have been difficult. The theological problem of white racists of the past was not so much that "blackness" was rejected, but, rather, that "blackness" was not believed to also be one of the images of God.¹⁶⁵

And, the return to the Scriptures gives a much more certain guide for potential solutions to temporal problems. The authentication process for analyzing the state of nature is found in the very revelation of the Scripture that explains why the world is the way it is. Bradley says, "The consensus approval of a few individuals hold no authority over Scripture to determine the 'oughts' of understanding human dignity in Christian social thought."¹⁶⁶

Cone, though, is critical of a classical evangelical theology that maintains the infallibility and inerrancy of the Scriptures, the creator/creature distinction, and the Scriptures as the final

¹⁶⁴ This dissertation is not identifying such a "constrained view" identically with Sowell. In fact, one could argue that Sowell doesn't go far enough in describing the total depravity that exists in every human heart and every human endeavor. But for the sake of delineating the possibility of a broader array of solutions possible in an LCMS missional engagement of the challenges endemic to the urban community, the implications of a "constrained view," even from Sowell's perspective, suffices.

¹⁶⁵ Bradley, *Political Economy of Liberation*, 32.

¹⁶⁶ Bradley, *Political Economy of Liberation*, 109.

authority in all matters of faith because, in his estimation, those positions fail to uncover issues important to the oppressed, the wretched of the earth. Revelation in the Conian framework, must be related to black liberation, or, “it has no value and is to be rejected.”¹⁶⁷ Bradley is empathetic towards that position. But coupled with the general abuse of the integrity of the Scripture, is the greater issue of the denial of the transcultural nature of the Scripture which not only resists abuse and misuse, but also establishes a better platform for concrete reconciliation and community, temporally and ultimately eternally.

Scripture provides an authoritative, unifying voice for all Christians. While Cone demands that Christians are to decide where God is at work so that they can join in the fight against evil, he provides no guide except the experience of the oppressed and the motivation/action to achieve liberation by any means necessary. Scripture itself is no ultimate guide to him. Because of this, “Christians are placed in an existential situation of having the freedom to decide what to do without having a guaranteed ethical guide. . . . Scripture’s authority cannot transcend the authority of black experience, history, and culture.”¹⁶⁸

Such a devaluation of Scripture, coupled with an over-valuation of the wisdom and capability of modern humanity, actually diminishes the possibility of “concrete liberation” for many. Bradley notes:

If human persons are morally deficient, with disordered passions, and disposed toward sin and error, this will have implication in evaluating injustice and seeing remedies. If the Bible is a non-authoritative source for ethical reflection and does not provide sufficient information for to determine the Church’s social role, what the Church does falls to the whims of the opinions of a few. For theologians to appeal to political ideologies grounded in the autonomous thinking of disordered humanity creates a decision-making unit which becomes an authority unto themselves and select themselves out of evaluation according to the self-disclosure of God. In fact, Christian social thought is built on a long tradition of reliance on the authority of the

¹⁶⁷ Bradley, *Political Economy of Liberation*, 12.

¹⁶⁸ Bradley, *Political Economy of Liberation*, 39.

Scriptures communicated through various creeds and confessions so that no one human person can presume to have the capacity to establish the “oughts” for the whole of Christendom.¹⁶⁹

The return to the Scriptures gives a much more certain guide for ultimate human identity, purpose, and liberation, as well as broader wisdom for potential solutions to temporal problems. Maintaining a fidelity to an orthodox understanding of the inerrancy and special revelatory nature of the Bible, provides a better, more inclusive foundation for building the reality of liberation, temporally and eternally, namely the “Imago Dei” of all people. This is a foundational view of humanity where blacks, whites, all people finally see themselves in their relationship to God and then to one another.

Cone claims that Black Liberation theology is biblical theology. Bradley maintains that “The primacy and authority of God’s revelation in the Bible texts, communicated within the context of the covenant community, must remain an unwavering position for a truly Christian vision of liberation.”¹⁷⁰ In doing so, Bradley demonstrates that Cone’s challenges can be engaged by those who maintain an orthodox view of the Bible and salvation, in spite of the misuse of the Bible to these ends in the past.

To regain the authority of Scripture is to regain the reality of human beings created in the “image of God,” which is a far more certain source of black identity and worth. Also, one regains the foundational principles upon which to build a temporal, civil society, along with the actual realities of the world in which we live, the demonstrable constraints of nature and human nature. One finds that Biblical theology seems to cohere more with the constrained view of Sowell, that “the natural world is limited, but it is also cursed and distorted by sin.”¹⁷¹ Missiologically, then,

¹⁶⁹ Bradley, *Political Economy of Liberation*, 108–9.

¹⁷⁰ Bradley, *Political Economy of Liberation*, 109.

¹⁷¹ Bradley, *Political Economy of Liberation*, 19–20.

in order to construct a temporal, concrete liberation that is just for all people, one must be aware of things as they are, as well as how they can be. Bradley says,

Anthropology is critical for understanding social ethics and public policy. . . . For Sowell, as for theologians, knowing the inherent nature of the human person profoundly affects not only one's interpretation of human action but also one's understanding of social problems.¹⁷²

And with a broad, biblical understanding of these issues, Black theology must have a social justice perspective, derivative of Christian anthropology and a classical Christian worldview to focus on equitable social processes,¹⁷³ not results.¹⁷⁴ Why? Because the trajectory of real freedom and the possibility of temporal social justice depends on it. Bradley says,

A results-based approach to social justice focuses on the results of people's choices and seems to ignore the fact that some basic social and economic results are the result of poor choices made over time. Securing just processes for the enhancement of human potential is the goal of deconstructing unjust social systems. Demanding equal social and economic results ignores several facts about the nature of God and the human person that are presupposed in Scripture.

1. Man is not created equal in terms of gifts and abilities
2. God does not distribute economic results of calling and giftedness equally
3. The contingencies of a disordered world of sin and error, joined with wage-related giftedness, make socioeconomic equality unexpected.¹⁷⁵

The trajectory of "freedom," and "social justice" is the movement from freedom from coercion to a freedom to engage in fair social processes, not the guarantee of equal concrete, outcomes.

¹⁷²Bradley, *Political Economy of Liberation*, 1.

¹⁷³ See Bradley, *Political Economy of Liberation*, 110, where he rightly cautions, "Although Scripture remains authoritative for knowing what is good, it does not prescribe specific actions in all circumstances, thereby leaving many social issues open to prudential judgements. Solutions to social problem proffered by theologians should be carefully designed to correspond to people's concrete lives and based on a prudential evaluation of each situation. With a keen knowledge of sin and error, we must prudently choose between certain social trade-offs with reference to long-term effects of chosen actions to address various social ills given the fact that perfection in society is impossible."

¹⁷⁴ Bradley, *Political Economy of Liberation*, 116.

¹⁷⁵ Bradley, *Political Economy of Liberation*, 117.

Bradley's work demonstrates that an orthodox view of the Bible does not diminish one's capability for engagement of Cone's demand for a "Concrete Christological Paradigm" for liberation. It actually establishes a more certain foundation for issues of black identity amidst the need for a proper anthropology for concrete liberation. The starting point for social analysis is anthropological, not utopian. In such a view, concrete liberation would fit very well in a dynamic, Two-Kingdom engagement of the issues endemic to the black community.

Bradley's *Political Economy*: Its Potential Solutions and Problems for a Concrete, LCMS Missional Engagement in the City

Bradley's work demonstrates that an orthodox view of the Bible does not diminish one's capability for engaging Cone's demand for a "Concrete Christological Paradigm" for liberation. It actually establishes a more certain foundation for issues of black identity (e.g., *Imago Dei*), amidst racism and racial injustice, as well as provides a more nuanced anthropology that helps build human structures that have more potential to provide opportunities for concrete liberation for all. Bradley's work provides a biblical foundation for human liberation and dignity in the created reality of the image of God and the redemptive reality of the sinful world in view of the work of Jesus Christ.

His Sowellian critique of Cone breaks down the binary "oppressed/oppressor" delegitimizing charge in culture,¹⁷⁶ which is helpful in legitimating the LCMS voice in the context of urban ministry. And his economic critique of Cone by Sowell, demonstrates that other

¹⁷⁶ See Bradley, *Political Economy of Liberation*, 70. In his critique of Cone's Hermeneutics of oppression, Bradley uses Cone's own criterion, of Christ coming for a people coming out of a history of poverty and oppression, combined with Sowell's international histories of poverty and oppression, to argue that the work of Christ cannot narrowly be applied to the descendants of African slaves or limited to Third World nations. The work of Christ must be applied to the descendants of Africa, Asia, Latin America, Western Europe, Eastern Europe, North America, and South America as well. In other words, if Cone seeks to limit the application of Christ's work to those who have been oppressed and their descendants, that group includes those who wrote "white theology."

voices, even voices that exist outside of the oppressed community, might have wisdom to share, or work that can be done, to bring concrete, liberating “processes” to bear on the issues of the urban community. Bradley also provides political, economic structure for the dialogue of how to engage the challenges of liberation with “concrete solutions.” He summarizes Cone’s prophetic challenge and Sowell’s critique, by stating his “fundamentals of Political Theology for Black Liberation” for “concrete engagement” of the issues of the black community in the city.

First, whether it is government officials or social services specialists, black liberation, virtuously formed, encourages a context where third parties are not making decisions for others. Bradley says, “What is needed is freedom, constrained by equally applied rules, that allow liberated blacks the freedom to do what is necessary to meet their needs and the needs of their families.”¹⁷⁷

Second, he notes that Black theology needs to move forward from Cone with “perspectives offered by Sowell and the classical Christian tradition that move us beyond the binaries of capitalism versus anti-capitalism found in the work of many black liberation theologians following Cone. To arrive at a sustainable solution black liberation theology needs a social ethics built on the scaffolding of human dignity, the nature of work, human solidarity, economic life and civil society.”¹⁷⁸

Third, human flourishing, the kind of “concrete liberation” that is possible in this world, depends on “basic protected rights that provide equal opportunities for people to obtain livable employment and provide entrepreneurs the freedom necessary to innovate and create those opportunities to meet the ever-changing needs of society . . . these economic opportunities are

¹⁷⁷ Bradley, *Political Economy of Liberation*, 119.

¹⁷⁸ Bradley, *Political Economy of Liberation*, 121.

not created in a vacuum but rely on the freedom of economic exchanges in the marketplace. Market transactions take place with a framework of rules that require someone with the authority to enforce those rules. Government is necessary to enforce contracts and other agreements among numerous parties' transaction with one another in an economy."¹⁷⁹ In fact, he says, "Economies cannot flourish without a strong rule of law."¹⁸⁰

Fourth, private property is a fundamental reality for any society seeking liberation for the common good. Bradley says, "It is fundamental for the autonomy and development of the person, and has always been defended by the Church."¹⁸¹ The rationale behind this fundamental right is the belief that "people are self-owners who have property in the free use of their time, abilities, and efforts . . . the moral right to control one's own labor power and to claim the fruits of one's labor."¹⁸² This is not to be confused with the selfish individualism of much of modern culture, but it is the notion that God created people to excel in their gifts in service to others. Such a view is to be differentiated from the notion that the common good is determined by a select few for the masses, a view which denies the uniqueness of each individual to participate in creating and maintaining of the common good to the glory of God.

And finally, concrete liberation is ultimately dependent on the institutions of civil society, rather than upon the coercive power of the state. It has been called "sphere sovereignty," which teaches that "the family, the business, science, art and so forth are all social spheres, which do not owe their existence to the state and which do not derive the law of their life from the superiority the state, but obey a higher authority within their own bosom, an authority which

¹⁷⁹ Bradley, *Political Economy of Liberation*, 123.

¹⁸⁰ Bradley, *Political Economy of Liberation*, 124.

¹⁸¹ Bradley, *Political Economy of Liberation*, 126.

¹⁸² Bradley, *Political Economy of Liberation*, 127.

rules by the grace of God, just as the sovereignty of the state does.¹⁸³

Bradley's work helpfully demonstrates the limitations of the state and the market to solve the big issues in society.¹⁸⁴ He says, "The government's role is to uphold the rule of law and establish the juridical framework that allows for the various institutions in society to make their own contributions to the common good in ways that are constituent with their nature and expertise."¹⁸⁵ He is fully aware that these groups and institutions, especially the family, are vital to issues of human dignity and liberation. There must be other mediating institutions that exist to fill in the gaps that the state and the market are unable to resolve. He says,

The complex issues that plague the liberation and economic empowerment of blacks in America are both moral and economic. While markets and governments can address opportunities and freedoms necessary for people to unlock the potential of human dignity to meet needs, they cannot address the complex and interrelated moral associations that keep people from developing into men and women who both display moral agency and self-efficacy in society. Agency and efficacy are moral issues that require moral solutions formatted from mediated institutions.¹⁸⁶

Exposing the reality that Cone's appeal to centralized economic planning actually undermines the type of political economic structures that will truly liberate and create the conditions for economic empowerment in the long run, helps churches like the LCMS deal with Cone's demand for "Concrete Liberation" and its delegitimizing charge to those who don't engage on his "concrete" terms. Ultimately, Bradley helpfully demonstrates the limitation of both Cone, Sowell, and others who offer critical and constructive perspectives: most fail to do the proper type of integration necessary for constructing a broadly biblical view of social justice. He says,

¹⁸³ Bradley, *Political Economy of Liberation*, 127.

¹⁸⁴ The states incapacity to actually deal with the complex issues of poverty, wealth, freedom is a theme of Hunter too, where he reminds us that these issues are ones that must be solved in a "new City Commons" by institutions outside the coercive power of the state.

¹⁸⁵ Bradley, *Political Economy of Liberation*, 138.

¹⁸⁶ Bradley, *Political Economy of Liberation*, 137.

James Cone and others offer some helpful observation about many of the issues and problems facing the church and the world. Thomas Sowell offers various contributions to social thought that, in the end, are closer to a Christian anthropology and worldview than what is found in black liberation traditions. . . . While black liberation theology lacks both fidelity to the classical theological conceptions of the redemptive story, and basic principles of economics, Sowell's work lacks any dimension of transcendence, even though his conclusions for political and economic liberation closely harmonize what the Scriptures describe about human dignity.¹⁸⁷

His work broadens the discussion and opens up space for an LCMS voice in the city.

The Limitations of Bradley's Work for an LCMS Missional Response

In final analysis, though, Bradley's work has limitations for the construction of an LCMS, urban missiology. He states up front that "his interest in the intersection of economics and theology comes from the black church where there was no distinction between the sacred and the secular."¹⁸⁸ His work demonstrates an aversion to "duality," where he laments Thomas Sowell's engagement as lacking transcendence, while James Cone speaks prophetically to America about the Gospel of Jesus Christ. While it is surely correct to denounce a duality of sacred versus secular concerning God's rule in the world, Bradley's work fails to clearly define the biblical differentiation of that rule. His continuing claim of Cone as a prophetic voice, supposedly of the Gospel, while characterizing Sowell as a voice of liberation lacking transcendence, belies the confusion. In fact, his view of Sowell as a "non-theological" voice tends to subordinate Sowell's social value in comparison to the concrete solutions demanded by Cone, due to his classification of Cone as a theologian and Sowell as an economist-sociologist-philosopher.¹⁸⁹ This distinction need not be made if one regards both Cone and Sowell as agents of God's work in God's left-

¹⁸⁷ Bradley, *Political Economy of Liberation*, 91.

¹⁸⁸ Bradley, *Political Economy of Liberation*, ix.

¹⁸⁹ The thesis of this paper is that both Cone and Sowell are potential voices of God's civil rule in the left-hand kingdom. A Two-Kingdom differentiation of God's rule compels a unique right-hand kingdom motivation to serve even those who don't have faith in Christ, while compelling a "dynamic engagement of left-hand kingdom issues," that is aware of the limitations of any civil solutions worked out by sinful human beings.

hand kingdom rule. By not differentiating God's engagement of the world via His Two-Kingdom reign, Bradley loses sight of God's work through Sowell as a means of His civilizing, protecting agency in the community. With Cone, such a lack of differentiation, tends to confuse Cone's demand for concrete liberation as an absolute extension of the Gospel in the world, which ultimately diminishes the Gospel message in the end as well.

Such confusion need not be. Concerning God's involvement in the world for its liberation, it is not a matter of dualism or monism, not a matter of transcendence versus immanence. Rather, the central issue is one of Law and Gospel, the differentiation of God's rule and engagement in the world, in His right-hand kingdom, the Church, and His left-hand kingdom, the public offices of law and order, especially the state. Simply stated, both Cone and Sowell are expressions of God's work in the left-hand kingdom through His law, written in the Scripture, yes, but written in peoples' consciences as well. Cone's prophetic critique of America, could have emanated from the Declaration of Independence, or the United States Constitution, as a shared morality written in the conscience of civil-humanity, reflected in the words of the Law in the Scripture. And, Thomas Sowell's reasoning of the methodologies needed to achieve freedom in a disordered world, while seemingly lacking transcendence in one sense, actually demonstrate the reality of a God-given, shared, moral reality in creation itself that orders the world, and protects the world from humanity's sinful inclinations. To dismiss this as "not theological" is to miss the wisdom of God in the left-hand kingdom ordered and guided by the temporal application of His Law. A Two-Kingdom re-ordering of Cone and Sowell, as well as other voices in the public realm, be they secular or theological, expands the "knowledge" necessary to enact just, temporal freedom, even to those who do not share the biblical inclinations of the Imago Dei, which we know root these issues even more certainly for those who believe, while proclaiming the ultimate

solution to a human being's problems in the good news of the Gospel of Jesus which is freely given by God, irrespective of a human being's works or station in life.

The charge of Black Theology that the message of the Gospel is about "concrete liberation," can be missionally engaged more effectively than from a Two-Kingdom, differentiating perspective that attends to concrete liberation issues from a civil-rights, equal processes, economic perspective, engaging the voices of Cone, Sowell, and others in a left-hand kingdom dialogue that can posit new, fresh, solutions to enduring urban problems. Dialogical space opens up for an LCMS missiological engagement to meet Cone's challenge because of the fact that Black Theology is in need of, "a more fundamental analysis of the social ethics of black liberation theology, in addition to the work examining the theology, to more closely test its usefulness for an ethical and economic perspective that both fit the classical picture of the human persona and the nature of the world."¹⁹⁰

Summary

In *The Political Economy of Liberation*, Bradley demonstrates a tensive unity of Cone and Sowell, both offering practical, liberating solutions to the reality of black people and other minorities in the American experience.

The implication for the black experience is that for blacks in America to be truly liberated from the shackles of white privilege and white supremacy they must be free to operate, on their own terms, within the bounds of civic virtue, for their own liberation and flourishing. Having surrogate decision-makers coerce and direct the bodies of black men and black woman does not constitute political, social, or economic liberation.¹⁹¹

¹⁹⁰ Bradley, *Political Economy of Liberation*, xiii.

¹⁹¹ Bradley, *Political Economy of Liberation*, 129.

Dialogue with Bradley opens up this discussion to the real-world challenges of missiology in the African-American context and, by extension, in the urban context. Within this discussion, the missiology of the LCMS can be differentiated from that of the conversionist methodology¹⁹² of the “white Church” to which it is often aligned with its personalistic emphasis of salvation which is often dissociated from concrete community concerns. It can also be differentiated from the faulty political engagements of both the Christian left and the Christian Right which overly politicize the Church’s public community engagements. Bradley helps prioritize and focus the missional discussion of any urban engagement of the black community. He rightly says,

Black liberation must include ways to build human dignity, strong marriages and families, protect human rights, promote moral virtue, and an expanded role of civil-society institutions and governments that uphold the law.¹⁹³

This dissertation hopes to build on Bradley’s momentum by recasting the Cone/Sowell dialogue as a “left-hand kingdom” dialogue of God at work in the world, which can effectively open up the discussion for more solutions to real world problems without compromising the central message of the Bible. This dissertation will seek to show that such a “left-hand kingdom” perspective of the dialogue calls all voices into the public square for the concrete, common good. Such a dialogue, spearheaded by an LCMS congregation, seeks to empower all the occupants of the urban neighborhoods it serves, whether they join the community of believers or not.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹² The “conversionist methodology” of dealing with racial issues would be that of Billy Graham and the Evangelical church as described in the previous section of the Proposal. The Two-Kingdom perspective will share some affinities with the idea of personal repentance and salvation as a means of dealing with racism, but it will also be able to dialogue with men like Sowell, even other secular voices of the structural or policy methodologies that might also be part of God’s work in the civic realm (left-hand kingdom).

¹⁹³ Bradley, *Political Economy of Liberation*, 138. See also, 127, his discussions of Subsidiarity—a community of higher order should not interfere in the internal life of a community of a lower order . . . and sphere sovereignty.

¹⁹⁴ Presently, this author sees Bradley’s work with Cone and Sowell as a very positive development. Holding Cone and Sowell in tension, in dialogue, seeing Cone’s work theologically and Sowell’s practically. Where an LCMS, Two-Kingdom perspective might be helping is locating the “concrete solutions” of both Cone and Sowell in a left-hand kingdom discussion of God’s work in the world. With that, a broader discussion of solutions is possible, and even the category of the “lesser of two evils” as a social reality for temporal solutions could be helpful in

Bradley's work reclaimed an orthodox view of Scripture and salvation in view of Black issues and concerns, further clarifying the issues for urban ministry and broadening the potential solutions. He rightly challenges,

The prophetic and needed voice of James Cone highlights a culture of white privilege and white supremacy within Christian theology and America . . . moving ahead we must ask better questions about the roles of the Church in aiding and sustaining the virtues that are needed to restrain injustice and provide the conditions for blacks to flourish spiritually and socioeconomically.¹⁹⁵

What remains to be done is to offer a dynamic, Two-Kingdom, LCMS missional response that incorporates the missional method and motivation of Hunter with Bradley's Evangelical, Conian/Sowell concrete-engagement of the issues of endemic to the Black community.

providing theological framework for real world solutions otherwise not possible from a Conian progressive perspective, or a mere common, informed wisdom perspective such as Sowell's.

¹⁹⁵ Bradley, *Political Economy of Liberation*, 120.

CHAPTER FOUR

A TWO-KINGDOM LCMS URBAN MISSIOLOGY: A THIRD WAY FORWARD FOR CONCRETE, CONFESSIONAL MISSIOLOGY IN URBAN AMERICA

[The paradoxical Lutheran vision for ecclesial public engagement] provides a valuable, if not indispensable framework for any adequate Christian public theology. This framework protects the radicality and universality of the gospel itself as well as the integrity of the church. . . . But in addition to protecting the Gospel, the paradoxical vision provides a framework that ought to condition Christian public theology's assessment of human nature, of God's governance of the world, and of the historical process itself (even it doesn't provide a substantive public theology of particular policy positions).¹

In this chapter, we will now construct a Two-Kingdom, missional framework that engages the challenges² of Cone's "Concrete Christological Paradigm" from an orthodox Lutheran perspective so that LCMS congregations might be more prepared to share the Gospel in the urban context. An LCMS engagement strategy will seek to synthesize the positive developments of the dialogue for the sake of offering an LCMS public voice that ultimately delivers a "concrete, Christocentric Gospel" for all people.

To construct an urban missiology that faces such a challenge, the LCMS as a church in the city must move beyond its missiological tendency to engage the community from a "personal evangelism strategy" alone, yet at the same time maintain its differentiation from the political pressures of the social justice movement's tendency to identify the Gospel with temporal liberation or the political pressures of evangelical engagement which seeks community

¹ Benne, *Paradoxical Vision*, 62.

² Cone's work exposes the reality of the American Christian churches' lack of an authentic theological and missional engagement with the concrete, liberating concerns and struggles of the black community. Such a lament also carries with it the potential charge of delegitimation for churches who seek to re-engage the city in mission.

transformation as a “charge of the Gospel” as well. Speaking therefore from its unique sociological position, the place of its own “cultural capital,”³ we will frame our urban-community-engagement in a Two-Kingdom framework that will seek to address the concerns of the black community in urban America while still maintaining an integrity to the ultimate mission of the church of proclaiming salvation by grace alone through faith in Jesus. The question of a church’s public theology is not one of “that” but “how” since the church is a creation of the God of the Scripture who is dynamically engaged in the world through his reign in the left- and right-hand kingdoms of His sovereignty.

To construct such a voice, this dissertation will engage Robert Benne’s work, *The Paradoxical Vision: A Public Theology for the Twenty-First Century*.⁴ Present ecclesial mission-strategies tend to address community and racial issues from a public theology that is “conversionist-individualistic” in its perspective⁵ or is “crusaderist, structural-change” oriented in its perspective.⁶ William Schumacher correctly notes that still today, “American Christians wrestle with the old alternatives of conquest or exile”⁷ in engaging cultural issues. Benne’s work

³ See Hunter, *To Change the World*, 88–92, where he describes Evangelical cultural capital, the ability to influence and direct cultural change, as weak and at the fringes of American cultural production. For the LCMS, which is at the fringes of such Evangelical influence, this is just another way of saying that the LCMS is really an “outsider” church, both in the city and in the political engagements of the churches in America. If the Evangelical church is a “weak” culture in America, with virtually no “cultural capital” to change public issues in society, the LCMS is merely a small, insignificant subset of that Evangelical reality. This reality goes to the issue of the charge of Racism, and delegitimacy in one sense, since there must be power to enforce one’s beliefs for racism to occur, and this goes to the more important issue of “cultural change,” and the potential to actually make a “concrete difference” towards a particular issue in society. Faulty expectations of real world solutions are part of the “grievance” narratives today that infect so much of our politics and socialization issues.

⁴ Benne, *Paradoxical Vision*.

⁵ See Hunter, *To Change the World*, 335n. 19, where he notes that a forum of Evangelical leaders who were gathered to comment on Christian Smith’s book *Divided by Faith*, and the positive cover story in the 2 October 2000 issue of *Christianity Today* that emphasized that solutions to racial issues needed to be more than having “a friendship with a person of another race,” and needed to deal with structural issues as well. The forum’s conclusions reverted back to the individualistic, rationalist mentality.

⁶ As demonstrated by Cone, black theologians, and progressive political engagement in America’s racial issues.

⁷William W. Schumacher, “Civic Participation by Churches and Pastors: An Essay on Two Kinds of

helpfully structures the uniqueness of a Lutheran church public engagement, differentiated as a “paradoxical”⁸ one that “provides a framework... elaborating a set of theological assumptions that stipulate how organized religion and publics ought to be related.”⁹ Such a framework holds that God is sovereign and at work in the world for the sake of the world through both the Church and the cultures of the world, in very distinct ways. As Gene Veith says,

Thus, God has a spiritual rule in the hearts and lives of Christians; He also has a secular rule that extends throughout His creation and in every culture. God reigns in the Church through the Gospel, the proclamation of forgiveness in the Cross of Jesus Christ, a message which kindles faith and an inward transformation in the believer. He reigns in the world through His Law, which calls human societies to justice and righteousness.¹⁰

Righteousness,” *Concordia Journal* 30 (July 2004): 171.

⁸ See Robert Kolb, “Niebuhr’s “Christ and Culture in Paradox” Revisited,” *Christ and Culture in Dialogue*, ed. Angus J.L. Menuge (St. Louis: Concordia Academic Press, 1999), 114, where he corrects or nuances Benne’s take on Luther’s Two-Kingdoms, saying, “Benne is not wrong when he reminds us that Luther’s vision of life in this world takes seriously those paradoxes and their implications in a unique way. However, in Luther’s view the basic structure of God’s design of human life in the two dimensions which parallel his two kinds of righteousness is not paradoxical. It is not a paradox when parents discipline a child at one point and dote on him or her with expressions of love at another. Different actions and different words are proper for differing situations. . . . These two words (Law and Gospel) are complementary when used for their proper purposes; The one to establish the identity of the children of God, the other to set in place God’s structures for their acting as children of God.” For our purposes, the emphasis will be “differentiation” which encompasses both Benne’s paradoxical view (Law/Gospel from our perspective) and complementary view (Law/Gospel from the Scriptural perspective), to ensure a proper motivation, expectation, and principled call to action in service to the mission of the Gospel.

⁹ Robert Benne, “The Paradoxical Vision: A Lutheran Nudge for Public Theology,” *Pro Ecclesia*, 4, no.2 (Spring 1995): 214. This perspective is not “for the sake of politics and society, but primarily for the sake of the Church.” The Two-Kingdom framework emphasizes God’s two-fold reign in/through society and in/through the Church.

¹⁰ Gene Edward Veith Jr., “Two Kingdoms under One King: Toward a Lutheran Approach to Culture,” in *Christ and Culture in Dialogue*, ed. Angus J.L. Menuge (St. Louis: Concordia Academic Press, 1999), 137. See Schumacher, “Civic Participation,” 165–66, where he adds another dynamic insight with regard to God’s Two-Kingdom reign in the world. Because of this view of “two, differentiated realms,” God’s involvement in His world is through two different kinds of righteousness. “The passive righteousness of faith depends entirely on the person and work of Christ; this alone establishes and determines our identity and righteousness before God. On the other hand, and at the same time, our righteousness in the world (*coram hominibus*) is active and not passive; it depends on the activities by which we fulfill our vocation and serve our neighbor. Luther’s right understanding of justification involved the insight that our own activity and works have no place in deciding our standing before God. Similarly, the preaching of the Gospel does not govern nations, feed children, build houses, punish criminals, etc. Both kinds of righteousness are God’s will, and both kinds are necessary for us to live in the world as fully human creatures restored in Christ.” For the purposes of this dissertation, humankind’s depraved anthropology must be understood in the promotion of the potential, active, civic righteousness of public society in which God still somehow rules and creates humane society despite our sinfulness.

God's twofold intervention into our world keeps in tension the uniqueness of the work of Jesus Christ for all people even as it calls for Christians and all people to be involved in the right ordering of society for the sake of temporal justice and peace.

To construct an LCMS, urban missiology, Benne offers a three-fold deliberation that will guide us: namely, the paradoxical vision's assessment of human nature, of God's governance of the world, and of the historical process of ecclesial engagement itself, delineating the uniqueness of the Lutheran voice of the Gospel for the sake of the city. First, such a deliberation will show how presuppositions, or visions of human anthropology and human nature impact potential solutions to issues pertaining to concrete liberation both temporally and spiritually. Second, a Two-Kingdom, differentiated understanding of God's activity in the world will better address¹¹ challenges for concrete liberation beyond the constraints of political policy and political liberation alone¹² as well as provide a corrective to the typical Evangelical engagements¹³ of racial issues in the American culture. Third, such a deliberation will explore the histories of present ecclesial engagement strategies as compared to that of the LCMS for the sake of demonstrating the missional uniqueness of the LCMS voice that has been "muted in its

¹¹ Two-Kingdom theology provides not only a better structure for community engagement for the sake of mission, but, as will be shown, it also provides proper motivations and expectations for an authentic LCMS Church engagement of the city for the sake of the Gospel as differentiated from other ecclesial engagements.

¹² A distinct limitation of Cone's social analysis is the binary framework of the race problem, namely "black/white, oppressed/oppressor." Also problematic are the binary solutions offered to the problems. Concrete, community solutions are presented in an absolutist fashion; socialistic versus capitalistic, Marxist versus middle class American values, black vs. white, etc. which tends to delegitimize the whole American cultural context as uniquely flawed in the world. Such analysis, in the end, limits rather than expands the potential, concrete solutions for the real-world problems of the urban community, as Bradley's work with Thomas Sowell demonstrates. A Two-Kingdom engagement of such issues, breaks through the limits of Black Theology's binary, either/or engagement strategy for the sake of the black and urban community.

¹³ A Two-Kingdom framework is also critical of the limitations of the personal/repentance-oriented strategies of much of evangelicalism, which rightfully is concerned with politicization of the Gospel, but is woefully disengaged with the structural issues and problems of the urban context. It is also skeptical, on the other hand, of the progressive, crusaderistic/transformationist evangelicalism and secularism strategies for engagement because the demand for human transformation of all such structures will always be outside of the control of even the most passionate practitioners of "Concrete Christology" in community.

privilege,” relatively powerless in culture, isolated from the urbanization forces of American culture (e.g., rural), and too often aligned with an evangelical missional methodology, and evangelical political engagement. With an awareness of the LCMS social location, with a repentant attitude towards our ethnocentric, often racist, disengagement of black issues in the past, and with a humility that comes from such a realization, a Two-Kingdom, third voice is offered as a way for LCMS congregations to engage the city for the sake of the city, for the sake of the Gospel.

An LCMS Public Theology of Human Nature: A Biblical Anthropology for the Sake of Concrete Freedom

Fundamental to an LCMS missiological engagement of Cone’s challenge of a “Concrete Christological Paradigm”¹⁴ for liberation is the need to address the challenge from a biblically informed anthropology. One’s anthropological presuppositions to the issues of concrete oppression and liberation actually determine the trajectory of real, concrete liberation in the real world. Bradley’s work, *The Political Economy of Liberation*¹⁵, demonstrates that presuppositions held before attending to the facts of a particular context are very important in regard to whether or not a public engagement of the urban community actually liberates or not. For this reason, it is important to consider the LCMS biblical anthropology and the way in which that anthropology differs from and dialogs with Cone in urban missiological engagement.

From an LCMS perspective, a necessary presupposition for a concrete, effective

¹⁴ Cone’s delegitimation/legitimation of American Christianity focuses on the praxis, the “concrete event of liberation of oppressed people” as part of any authentic engagement of the black community with the Gospel of Jesus. His charge is that American Christianity not only neglected the issues of the black community, but also their theology is part of black oppression in America. Concrete liberation of the oppressed is a necessary part then of any urban, missiological engagement in a milieu undergirded by Conian thought.

¹⁵ Bradley, *Political Economy of Liberation*.

engagement is the paradoxical, biblically-informed reality that human beings, though created in the image of God, are fallen, depraved, and bent towards their own self-interest. This biblical anthropology,¹⁶ the fallen aspects of which are sociologically demonstrable in the world in which we live,¹⁷ means that not only are people broken, sinful, and limited, but so also are the structures that we inhabit and create, as well as the solutions that we proffer. Benne's paradoxical vision¹⁸ for Lutheran public theology is not only built upon the paradoxical reality of human nature, it is also built upon the paradox of salvation. As Benne says, "God's salvation of the rebellious world is wrought through the life, death, and resurrection of an obscure Jewish figure, Jesus of Nazareth."¹⁹ In other words, "Universal salvation—ultimate, enduring freedom and life—is not earned or deserved by the works or status of any persons of sinful humanity, but is offered to all solely through the person and work of Jesus Christ, His life, death, and resurrection, alone. Therefore, there remains a qualitative distinction between God's salvation and all human efforts."²⁰

¹⁶ See Bradley, *Political Economy of Liberation*, 107, where he rightly says, "Where Black Theologians and Sowell both fall short is in their failure to ground ontological anthropology with the *Imago Dei*. Black theology chooses to ground anthropology socially with "blackness," while Sowell grounds it politically and economically. Both however, lack a telos initiated by Creation and ending in the cosmic redemption of all things under the lordship of the Davidic son as promised in the formation of the covenant community." We would add, "differentiated by God's active rule through His left-hand, right-hand kingdoms to deliver that ultimate created/redeemed *Imago Dei* to all who believe."

¹⁷ Bradley's use of the works of Sowell and Cone demonstrates his commitment to black, concrete and spiritual liberation, with his wide-ranging, sociological, economic analysis attending not only to issues of structural sins, but personal sins and limitations for the sake of liberation. As such, Sowell's perspective with respect to the challenges of Cone is one that correlates with a more biblical understanding of the "constraints of human beings and human structures," providing more concrete solutions and liberative possibilities for the issues that black Americans and minorities face.

¹⁸ See Benne, *Paradoxical Vision*, 65, where he says, "A paradox refers to two statements that apparently contradict one another but are ultimately true." This paper will use the word paradox in this sense. It does not imply duality. It does not demand synthesis. Paradox calls for differentiation.

¹⁹ Benne, *Paradoxical Vision*, 64.

²⁰ Benne, *Paradoxical Vision*, 69. Lutheran Theology describes this in terms of "Two Kinds of Righteousness," the Righteousness of God which is a gift of grace offered to the world through the person and work of Jesus, and the righteousness of human beings to one another, the civic righteousness of outward peace and civility."

In this regard, the LCMS would missionally appropriate Cone's call for concrete, liberative praxis here on earth not as the Gospel of Jesus Christ²¹ but as God's concern for order, civility, and humanness even among the vocations and efforts of inherently, sinful people. The LCMS would properly differentiate God's work in the world, His temporal work from His eternal work, offering a distinctly unique Gospel—a concrete, eternal reality of liberation and salvation made possible by Jesus Christ's work in the world alone, given and received freely by the gifts of His grace through Word and sacrament—even as the church and its people engage the public moral and political issues in the community with empathy and service. Indeed, all temporal notions of liberation and freedom outside the unique freedom offered in Jesus Christ alone, are to be relativized. As such, there may be “better” political and economic freedoms, but there will never be perfect freedom arising from the efforts of sinful people.

After clarifying the proclamation of the gospel as distinct from temporal acts of liberation, the LCMS biblical anthropology guides further reflection on how one approaches issues of peace and justice. An LCMS, biblical anthropology teaches that all human beings are created in the image of God, yet all human beings are completely sinful and total depraved in their relationship to God and to each other due to humanity's fall from grace. As such, human beings still maintain a unique status among the other creatures of the world, namely, they are still created in God's image, but, because of the fall into sin, all human beings have forfeited the capacity to act the way they were created to be. In fact, we are presently bent in on ourselves, depraved by nature.²² Even for the Christian, one who has come to faith in Jesus and received His righteousness and

²¹ See Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 1. In all of Cone's work, concrete, temporal, political, economic liberation is equated with the Gospel and the poverty of blacks and other minorities marks them as those whom God favors and for whom God advocates.

²² See Steven Mueller, ed. *Called to Believe, Teach, and Confess* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2005), 149–50, where depravity is described as “innate corruption, hostile to God, unable to ultimately do what is good, in fact, disposed to inevitably do what is evil.”

salvation as pure gift, one remains, again paradoxically, “*simul justus et peccator*, simultaneously justified and sinner, even after faithful response to God’s Word. Transformation of the self is never complete.”²³ This is the paradoxical reality of the human nature of the actors involved in culture building in one’s society.

The implications of the reality of the created, yet fallen natures of all people—Christians and non-Christians—are vital to constructing a public voice in service to the Gospel and to the community in which the church lives and serves. While notions of constructing utopic solutions to sinful humanity’s problems are rightly viewed suspiciously by Lutherans, issues of human dignity and human brotherhood are deeply rooted beyond sinful humanity’s efforts. In fact, they are fixed in the words and actions of God in history for all. Issues of personhood and brotherhood are to be sought in the reality of humanity created *Imago Dei*, “in God’s image.”²⁴ Such reality yet posits a tempered hope for temporal justice and peace, because an LCMS understanding of human nature notes that even after the fall into sin, human beings still retain certain aspects of their being “created in the Image of God.” Benne says:

They still long for wholeness and completion but cannot heal or complete themselves. Our longings for something beyond ourselves—God and the companionship of others—do not disappear, but rather are misdirected to the (false) gods we cling to. Indeed, our rationality, though fallen, can help us to discern what is right and just behavior with regard to our fellow human beings. We are capable of “civil righteousness.” By “we” I mean all human beings, whether Christian or not. Luther believed that non-Christians were as capable as Christians in the areas of life that demanded human rationality and prudence.²⁵

²³ Benne, *Paradoxical Vision*, 77.

²⁴ See Mueller, *Called to Believe*, 129–33, where the “Image of God” is delineated as human kind (men and woman) being created as intelligent and moral beings, with intelligence, morality, relationality and immortality as essential to human nature. Mankind’s fall into sin caused a “loss” of this image insofar as a human beings ability to act the way that we were created to be. In the broader sense of being human in the “image of God,” we are not animals. But in the narrow sense, we also have lost the ability to truly, perfectly act as we humanly should act.

²⁵ Benne, *Paradoxical Vision*, 77.

Coupled then with the common dignity of all humanity, *Imago Dei*, is the ultimate human dignity arising from the biblical teaching of the universality of undeserved, unearned redemption in Jesus Christ for all. The very dignity of being “human” is centered in the fact that God not only created human beings with a unique relationship to Him as well as to His creation, but, even after humanity fell into sin and rebellion, God still sent His Son, Jesus Christ, ‘in human flesh’ to redeem and restore fallen humanity to Himself. This ultimate dignity remains to be received by grace alone through faith for those who believe, but it speaks to the dignity and worth that God places on human beings as those who are objects of His grace and love.

James Cone rightfully calls for temporal liberation for blacks in America amidst the history of slavery, racism, and segregation. His work challenges all public Christian theologies by bringing to their attention themes often neglected, issues concerning the poor, racial justice, and economic self-determination. But his diminution of the Gospel to temporal liberation alone,²⁶ his reduction of God’s revelation to the experiences of the temporally oppressed, and his notion of black humanity rooted in racial, temporal liberation actually diminishes the possibility of temporal and eternal liberation and dignity for blacks and for all.

Rooting human dignity in God’s creative and redemptive activity for all humanity is the better way for the LCMS to publicly engage Cone and the black community for the sake of mission. First such a view of humanity, calls the church, indeed all peoples to repentance who would practice a racial degradation of any human being to less than human status since such a view is biblically an offence to God and a rejection of one’s own humanity from a biblical point of view. Notions of white supremacy and America’s millenarian, manifest destiny were

²⁶ See again, Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 81–82, where he says, “The hermeneutical principle for an exegesis of the Scriptures is the revelation of God in Christ as the Liberator of the oppressed from social oppression and to political struggle, wherein the poor recognize that their fight against poverty and injustice is not only consistent with the gospel, but is the gospel of Jesus Christ.”

aberrations of God's salvific work in Christ, often clothing modernist notions of progressive humanity in Christian garb. The LCMS rejection of modernism and secular humanism was an affirmation of biblical anthropology and the uniqueness of salvation by grace alone through Jesus Christ.²⁷ It would have been helpful to address modernism's philosophical underpinning of racism with a public theology for the sake of mission in that regard as well.²⁸

Rooting human dignity in God's creative and redemptive activity for all humanity is also the better way for the LCMS to missionally encourage the black community to root issues of one's dignity and identity beyond mere concrete, socio-political liberations in white America alone. Conian anthropology roots the dignity of black humanity in terms of concrete liberation from oppressive social structures from a Marxist point of view. For Cone, the classical view of anthropology and human nature, which focuses primarily on an individual's sinful condition/standing before God, is too limiting. He claims that the image of God, and issues of sin are more than that, saying:

The biblical concept of image means that human beings are created in such a way that they cannot obey oppressive laws and still be human. To be human is to be in the image of God—that is, to be creative: revolting against everything that is opposed to humanity. Therefore, whatever we say about sin and the human inability to know God because of the fall, it must not in any way diminish the human freedom to revolt against oppression.²⁹

But Cone's call for more attention to structural sins and oppressive law redefines both sin and the ability to root black human dignity in anything beyond temporal solutions to issues of justice and

²⁷ See a *Brief Statement*, <http://www.lcms.org/doctrine/doctrinalposition>.

²⁸ This paper seeks to do the latter, but the issue of the deconstructing of Modernism and its underpinning of racism and racialism remains to be done. Much of the issues involved in "white theology" are modernist issues recast in biblical garb.

²⁹ Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation: Twentieth Anniversary*, 93.

liberation. Sin, for Cone, is structural and communal in nature, less than what the Bible describes, not more. He says:

Sin is a theological concept that describes separation from the source of being. . . . It is a community concept. . . . To be in sin has nothing to do with disobeying laws that are alien to the community's existence. . . . Sin, ultimately, is a condition of human existence in which we deny the essence of God's liberating activity as revealed in Jesus Christ.³⁰

The concept of sin for Cone, involves political liberation, even revolution with no universal appeal to humanity before God. To be 'in sin' is to fail to identify with the oppressed and to fail to politically and economically participate in God's concrete liberating activity.³¹ In the limiting of his biblical theology to the Exodus as political liberation, Cone fails to see the more universal nature of God's "humanity restoring" covenant with Abraham in Genesis 12 and 15. Cone's revolutionary, political emphasis of liberation also fails to note the divergent biblical portrait of Jesus as the suffering Savior in sharp contrast to Barabbas, the zealot, the freedom fighter of Israel. Again, it is not that equality and justice are not temporal goals that are demanded of a civil society, but issues of human worth and dignity transcend issues of societal and individual performance and works, even sinful humanity's works of love and justice. When Cone says that dignity and freedom for blacks "is achieved only when racism ends but also when economic equality is a reality,"³² he roots black, self-worth in the notion of oppression and empowerment amidst the binary realities of black victimhood and white oppression, which, even in free societies have limitations because of the reality of individual, corporate, and structural sin and

³⁰ Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*. 103–6.

³¹ These notions of political and economic participation in Cone are always described in Marxist terms. As such, the notion of a sinful, depraved person is virtually non-existent, and notions of revolutionary revolt for structural change is posited as salvific. As Bradley has shown with the dialogue between James Cone and Thomas Sowell, such views of how things should work, in the end, don't actually liberate, but tend to empower smaller groups of people with the issues of the community left relatively unchanged, or changed for the worse.

³² James Cone, *My Soul Looks Back* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1986), 136.

depravity. An LCMS view of the common dignity of humanity in the creative and redemptive work of Christ roots one's self-worth in the teachings and the promises of God which are true irrespective of one's situation in life, while still compelling one to seek temporal justice, peace, fairness on God's terms irrespective of race, economic stature, or cultural status.

Ultimately, such limitations as found in Cone root black identity in the binary dialogues of victimhood and political liberation alone. Anthony Bradley rightly points out Black Theology's error in this regard noting that it resolves issues concerning black dignity and identity in the binary issues of racism and white supremacy, victimhood and political liberation alone³³ rather than in the more expansive reality of being human in God's Image with all the communal implications that result from that reality as well. For Lutheran Theology, that foundation of humanity as "created in God's image" is further rooted in God's loving redemption of humanity in the cross and resurrection of Jesus, forensically, declaratively, offered freely, delivered by Grace through faith.

Finally, a biblically informed anthropology provides a structure for LCMS public, missional engagement that ultimately creates the possibility for more freedom and more economic possibilities for the black and minority communities in the city. Such an LCMS missional engagement would seek the peace of the city, for the sake of the city by bringing together various voices for temporal, concrete, humane liberation in view of the common notion of *Imago Dei* of all humanity. It may sound counterintuitive, but the fact remains that a biblical, realistic depiction of the fallenness of human nature, in reality, creates the environment where

³³ See Bradley, *Political Economy of Liberation*, 32, where he says, "In terms of understanding the value and worth of the black person, to ground black worth in the acceptance of the white majority is to locate one's sense of dignity in the wrong place. . . . Black theology emphasizes the white acceptance of black humanity so much that racial reconciliation attempts have been difficult. The theological problem of white racists of the past was not so much that "blackness" was rejected, but, rather, that "blackness" was not believed to also be one of the images of God."

the best solutions can be attained for the sake of the common good.³⁴

Bradley's work demonstrates that the major tension between Cone and other Christians, black and white, centers on the basic view of the realities of what it means to be a human being.

Using a Sowellian framework of "Constrained and Unconstrained" visions of humanity,³⁵

Bradley demonstrates the relationship between those presuppositional visions and their trajectory for providing concrete, economic liberation for black people.³⁶ Bradley notes,

Centrally planned communities such as the ones suggested by black liberation theologians are rife with problems, the most important of which brings us back to Christian anthropology. To centrally plan an economy, one must have volumes of information about the connectedness of present and future contingencies of individuals and groups both near and far away. In other words, to centrally plan an economy, one must have highly specific and nearly exhaustive knowledge. This type of knowledge borders on the super-natural and is unattainable by the limited mind of the human person . . . With these limitations, centrally planned economies construct a

³⁴ See Bradley, *Political Economy of Liberation*, 113, where he says that "Given the fact of sin and error, however, one might find it surprising that black liberation theologians would be willing to entrust an entire economic system to only a few people, all of whom are prone to sin and error. Those making decisions regarding the distribution of resources are just as sinful and prone to error as everyone else; therefore, distributing power to as many people as possible limits any potential abuse of economic power."

³⁵ See Bradley, *Political Economy of Liberation*, 4–6, where he speaks about the impact of visions and one's presuppositions concerning human nature and their impact on issues of concrete liberation . . . With the Constrained vision, there is the "indisputable reality that human beings are limited, which leads to an egoism over time, so that a person normally doesn't act in the interest of others. In a broken world then one needs to consider how certain desired moral and social benefits could be produced in the most efficient way within that constraint . . . the constrained vision deals in trade-offs rather than solutions." Constrained vision solutions then involve the best use of knowledge to address problems and that better way is to have many actors, freely engaging in the knowledge of ideas and the free marketplace, according to their own self-interest because such free engagement amasses the greatest amount of knowledge necessary to ensure the greatest benefit to the most people. Liberative issues, from a constrained view, involve equal access, and fair processes. Concerning the Unconstrained vision, he says, "Fundamental to this way of engaging the world is the idea that the human person is not morally limited, and once given sufficient information and understanding, he will naturally intend to benefit others . . . Humans are generally other-centered . . . people should do what is right, just because it is right." The unconstrained vision seeks to locate decisions for the many among the elite, not among the masses, with a controlled view of the economy to ensure equal outcomes for all.

³⁶ See Bradley, *Political Economy of Liberation*, 25, where he notes that with an unconstrained view of humanity and the view that sinful structures are the sole impediment to individual freedom, "the distributive solution may, in the end, hurt the very people whom we originally intended to help." If Concrete Justice for the black community is a demand for determining an authentic, Christian voice in the community for the sake of the community, then all solutions must be vetted, not merely by their intentions, but by the reality of whether they provide actual concrete opportunities for freedom.

one-size-fits-all approach that, in the end, hurts the ones that the planning is intended to help.³⁷

The wrong presuppositions of human nature, of human anthropology adversely affect issues concerning the possibility of concrete human liberation for those oppressed, both temporally and eternally. In the temporal realm, views of human innate goodness tend to limit decisions into fewer and fewer hands for the sake of the majority. Bradley notes:

Central planning over the years has emerged as the desired economic system in the thinking of many black theologians as the best means to deal with the structural difficulties of the past . . . Centrally planned economies also squelch the freedom and the potentialities of the human person by controlling the opportunity for some to fully explore the possibilities of meeting the needs of others. Planned economies concentrate power among a few surrogate decision-makers. Those with power, then, control the options and choices for the masses. In large-scale economies, because of sin and error, this had led to oppression for the poor and wealth for those in control.³⁸

From an LCMS, biblical perspective of human dignity and depravity, people and structures are sinful, but public structures ordained by God, exist to mitigate the effects of sin in society³⁹ while providing fair and equitable processes that guarantee freedom and justice for the sake of all. The key for concrete liberation is creating a structure that guarantees the most freedom for the most people in a world that is sinful and prone to oppression. Public structures exist then to deal with a world that has “innate moral limitations—coupled with this tendency to egotism . . . requiring explanations of ways in which regressive social patterns can be “avoided or

³⁷ Bradley, *Political Economy of Liberation*, 113.

³⁸ Bradley, *Political Economy of Liberation*, 114. Bradley notes that if the Fall did not occur—and if the human person were not prone to sin and error—a Marxist system could possibly work . . . As history has proven, over and over, these types of economies keep the poor in poverty while economically benefiting those in power. Throughout history, there has not been a country that has flourished in the long term under the regime of a centrally planned economy. On the contrary, central planning, which resists free choice, tends toward oppression.

³⁹ See Rom. 13:1–6, In a Lutheran, Two-Kingdom structure of God’s engagement in the world, even secular, non-Christian vocations are ways which God acts in the world for the sake of the world, not to save it, but to mitigate evil and violence, even promoting a common good. To willfully rebel against proper authority as a rule, is to rebel against God at work in the world.

minimized.”⁴⁰ Bradley’s work argues persuasively that “equal access to social processes that contribute to one’s freedom, will in the end produce more concrete liberation for all.”⁴¹ He also notes:

Basic principles of political economy could serve to open new possibilities for black liberation theologians to apply the principles of human dignity to unlock black identities and potentialities in a global context. Using Sowell’s analysis, it is possible to redefine liberation beyond the terms of white oppression to also include oppression by surrogate decision-makers who prevent blacks from making their own decision about the direction of their lives. Whether it is government officials or social service specialists, black liberation, *virtuously formed*, encourages a context where *third parties are not making decisions for others*. What is preferred is freedom, *constrained by equitably applied rules*, that allow liberated blacks the freedom to do what is necessary to meet their needs and the needs of their families. . . . Black liberation will advance as it situates its understanding of oppression, economic, and social justice in *light of incentives* that govern how people behave in the real world.⁴²

It is ironic that those who believe in structural sin, often emphasizing the innate “goodness” of humankind, are the same people who most easily practice the “hermeneutic of suspicion” and societal control.⁴³ Such a hermeneutic has created utopian goals with deconstructing strategies of suspicion, all designed to delegitimize those who disagree, while often failing to liberate those for whom they advocate. It is precisely here where a Lutheran, Two-Kingdom voice informed by

⁴⁰ Bradley, *Political Economy of Liberation*, 6.

⁴¹ See Bradley, *Political Economy of Liberation*, 4, where he says, “In the final analysis, under the unconstrained vision, social problems result not from inherent flaws in human nature but from human institutions that need to be controlled. The unconstrained vision is most concerned with social results, regardless of the unintended costs to other, while the constrained vision is concerned with process characteristics which include the reality of trade-offs.” See also, 105, where he says, “Liberation theologians tend towards visions that, in the end, reduce blacks and other minorities to low positions and induce them to accept that image of themselves.”

⁴² Bradley, *Political Economy of Liberation*, 119. Emphasis mine.

⁴³ See Benne, *Paradoxical Vision*, 208, Benne warns that a Church’s direct intervention into cultural issues, “the churches articulation of its conscience should not be diluted by systems of representation based primarily on sex, race, or ethnicity. Nor should that conscience be formed by those who pain quotient is somehow claimed to be higher than others. The credibility of the church’s conscience is diminished by the all-too-frequent capitulation to current “hermeneutics of suspicion.” Contemporary experience, even if refracted through the eyes of the oppressed, ought not to be the norm for church pronouncements Indeed, a number of church statements that have been developed under the “hermeneutics of suspicion” scheme have radically departed from the moral traditions of those bodies.” Benne’s suggestion to the Church is to engage culture from its well established, historical tradition to enrich the public dialogue. This paper seeks to do that, while addressing Cone’s delegitimation charges from the other end of the spectrum.

a biblical anthropology is needed to hold in tension the need for temporal liberation and justice, with the ultimate proclamation of Freedom in the Gospel. Benne says,

The older cultural coherence is gone. New interest groups practice their hermeneutic of suspicion on whatever is left of it. Individuals are free to find their own way in this confusing maelstrom of possibilities. In this context, religious traditions are called to find their public voice. Their public theologies must articulate their vision of the human good, not only for the sake of their own communities, but also for the sake of an unraveling public world.⁴⁴

While a biblical understanding of human nature helpfully directs the conversation, an LCMS Two-Kingdom perspective will seek to engage and go beyond mere political liberation, engaging cultural issues to that end as well, ultimately rooting discussions of freedom and hope in the common dignity of humanity *Imago Dei*. Herbert Schlossberg says of temporal liberation:

If such factors as work, stewardship, an orientation to the future, the honoring of contracts, respect for the property of others, investment, saving and the control of consumption, the integrity of the family, mutual respect for exchanges, and similar factors are essential ingredients in a healthy economic system, then it is clear that *culture* is central to the whole process.⁴⁵

For our missiological purposes, the LCMS must be aware of the fact that the American progressive and pop culture, especially in the urban context, is at odds with, even resistant to, these basic biblical presuppositions towards reality and the solutions proffered from that broader discussion. Such a challenge needs to be engaged, if only to provide a broader view of possible solutions to the problems of the urban context and to demonstrate a vested interest in the issues of the community as one there to be a blessing. If striving for concrete liberative solutions demonstrates an authenticity for mission in the city, then notions that prohibit such liberation must also be called out. The notion that human beings are innately “good,” coupled with an

⁴⁴ Benne, *Paradoxical Vision*, 25.

⁴⁵ Schlossberg, “The Controlled Economy,” *Freedom, Justice, and Hope*, 112. See also, 115, where he speaks about the breakdown of the family and the ensuing chaos that happens for a community, pathologies multiply and oppressions increase. Culture issues need to be addressed for the sake of basic freedoms as part of a missiologically engagement of the urban community for the sake of the community and for the sake of the Gospel.

overwhelming confidence that education and government planning provides the means to solve virtually any problem, in the end, tends to create unrealistic notions for absolute solutions to very complex problems, even limiting good solutions as well. Pinnock says:

Many modern prescriptions for social reform borrow much from utopian thinking. They are often based upon an anthropology that lacks the richness and realism of the Biblical doctrine of man. Rather than recognize that God created us in His image, and that this image is marred by our sin, these theories often assume that we're automatons, obediently responding to whatever manipulation of the environment our betters plan for us.⁴⁶

Missionally, the LCMS has an opportunity then to engage community issues from a perspective that seeks to root anthropology in the biblical realism of creation, the fall, and redemption, an engagement that can bring more voices to the table for solutions, while still offering a human dignity rooted in the saving work of Jesus irrespective of political influence or economic gain. Such a missional engagement would seek the peace of the city, for the sake of the city by bringing together various voices for temporal, concrete, humane liberation in view of the common notion of *Imago Dei* of all humanity.

Cone's demand for concrete liberation for black people in the American culture is a legitimate demand from a community that has been particularly ostracized from the basic civil rights and basic human ideals that the American culture claims to embody. Unfortunately, Cone's solutions flatten the Gospel into a political liberation that not only fails to concretely liberate the poor, but also locates the ideals of "being human" in political, economic processes rather than the creative, redemptive work of God in Christ through the cross and resurrection. Missiologically, the church is called to engage the issues at large in the urban community for the sake of the Gospel. An LCMS, Two-Kingdom public engagement, in full view of a classical,

⁴⁶ Herbert Schlossberg, "Imperatives for Economic Development," *Freedom, Justice, and Hope*, 102.

biblical view of anthropology and human nature, does that.

An LCMS Public Theology of God’s Governance of the World: A Dynamic, Differentiated, Two-Kingdom Theology for the Sake of the Gospel and the Community

There is a duality but not a dualism at the heart of the Christian vision. . . . We are caught in two realities that must be taken seriously. . . . Each reality is under the governance of God but in sharply different ways. God governs the “kingdom of the Left” with His Law and the “kingdom of the Right” with His Gospel.⁴⁷

An LCMS Two-Kingdom public engagement posits a better way for missionally engaging the concrete challenges of the urban community, by proclaiming the absolute distinction of the Gospel of Jesus from any human efforts of liberation as well as by differentiating God’s activity according to the Bible’s two-pronged focus of God’s work in the world. God himself is at work on the one hand, creating and sustaining temporal peace and justice through the various created vocations of His making—held by Christians and non—which are in operation and accountable to His moral direction. And, God is at work, through His ultimate, eternal work of justification, offering life and salvation as a gift through the person and work of Jesus uniquely located and offered through His Church, through the public proclamation of the Gospel alone.

Such a distinction of message and differentiation of action addresses the challenges of concrete temporal liberation, while not rooting people’s ultimate sense of their dignity and worth merely in the political and economic actions of sinful people, no matter how liberating at any moment in time. For example, a left-hand kingdom structure provides a way of merging the voices of James Cone, Martin Luther King, Malcom X, and Thomas Sowell as voices of God’s common grace, His common morality in dialogue for the preservation of the world, even for the temporal blessing of the world. Such a re-placement of all these voices in the left-hand rule of

⁴⁷ Benne, *Paradoxical Vision*, 81–82.

God, spiritualizes Sowell's perspective even as it secularizes Cone's for the sake of "concrete" liberation and the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Such a Two-Kingdom view addresses the challenges of the "Concrete Christological Paradigm" of Cone without politicizing the Gospel itself.

A Lutheran understanding of Two-Kingdoms then, is that God is immanently at work in the world – differentiated through "two realms" to preserve and ultimately save the world. The kingdom of His left-hand rule is through His Law/Power to curb evil and promote outward good for the sake of peace. In this sense, God is at work through all people who are engaging in their vocations, especially those that have to do with family, economies-work, and government, compelling people to a sense of duty and honor that befits being a human being for the sake of others. A biblical and an LCMS emphasis is that God is doing this kind of work through people, even people who do not believe in Him.⁴⁸ This work is a preservative one whereby God provides peace and stability, curbing humankind's sinfulness and rebelliousness for the sake of the message of the Gospel.

God also engages the world through His work of the Gospel. This rule in His right-hand kingdom is vastly different than His rule in the left. In this kingdom, God rules through the message of the Gospel, the declaration of the justification of all sinners in the world through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. God rules this kingdom by freely offering this status of Grace through the concrete gifts of His Word and Sacrament. God is at work through His Church, as Scharlemann says,

The church on the other hand, consisting as it does of the company of the redeemed, has functions quite different from those of the state. Its primary task is to proclaim the

⁴⁸ Benne, *Paradoxical Vision*, 84, where he says that God operates through "masks" to get this work done. Many of these masks are not recognizably Christian or even religious. Secular persons, with their capacities for civic righteousness, can be the mask of God to promote His law. Thus, the operation of the law in both negative and positive aspects can be performed through unlikely agencies.

good news of God's grace. As it goes about its work, it calls men out of this world to serve the God of promise, and so it develops in the individual Christian a loyalty that is focused on the heavenly city. By proclaiming the World and administering its sacraments, the church gathers a people destined to lives with God eternally under conditions that will not require the restraining hand of government.⁴⁹

The state is a temporal agency, dealing with temporal solutions to temporal issues. The Church is an eternal institution, dealing with eternal solutions to eternal questions. The state can compel its citizens to do what is demanded; the church can only persuade, not coerce.⁵⁰

In this regard, Cone's charge against white theology not living up to the "Christological" expression of human freedom, actually confuses temporal issues with ultimate, eternal issues. His call for a "concrete, Christological paradigm" admits no distinction of the Gospel message and political liberation, and it posits no differentiation of God's immanent engagement of the world for the sake of the world. Engaging Cone from a left-hand kingdom perspective can still meet his challenge for the sake of the community without politicizing the Gospel as a result.

With a Gospel message of liberation distinct from all human liberation efforts, an LCMS dynamic, differentiated engagement of public issues within the community addresses the charge against Lutherans that they are quietists⁵¹ or even worse, supporters merely of the status quo. James Cone says as much when he accuses Luther's stance against the peasants in the peasant's revolt as "Luther's identification with the oppressors in society,"⁵² merely concerned for "law and order"⁵³ for the sake of the oppressors. Cone even asserts that Luther could not "hear God's liberating word for the oppressed because he was never a victim."⁵⁴ Instead of seeing the tension

⁴⁹ Scharlemann, "Scriptural Concepts of the Church and State," 35.

⁵⁰ Scharlemann, "Scriptural Concepts of the Church and State," 40.

⁵¹ See Benne, *Paradoxical Vision*, 61, where he says that the authentic Lutheran "reticence to go public" because of its awareness of God being at work in both the church and the state, is often caricatured as "quietism."

⁵² Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation: Twentieth Anniversary*, 33.

⁵³ Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation: Twentieth Anniversary*, 34.

⁵⁴ Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 184. Luther's whole life was not only the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus

between God's work of curbing evil in the world and God's distinctly, unique work in Jesus Christ on the Cross for the eternal liberation of all people beyond temporal politics, Cone caricatures Two-Kingdom theological engagement as a benign dualism whereby Christians are passively "obedient in culture, (God) sustaining them in the context of its corruption."⁵⁵

Missed in Cone's caricature of Luther and Two-Kingdom theology is what I call, "Reformation Restraint,"⁵⁶ the awareness of the folly of a sinful, human being's radical, revolutionary tendencies and short-sighted, leadership arrogance as compared to a humble obedience to the reality of God at work in His ways for the ultimate liberation and salvation of humanity in the person and work of Jesus on the cross. Reformation restraint, therefore, demands that Christians struggle with the reality that it is God at work through the public vocations, through the leadership even of sinful people, believers and non-believers, to maintain temporal but imperfect peace, and temporal but imperfect justice. Restraint from emotive, aggressive, public engagement understands the ultimate difference between God's temporal work and His eternal work in Jesus while struggling with the truth that God is ordering both realms towards His end. Reformation restraint, Lutheran Two-Kingdom differentiation is not publicly/politically separated (e.g., quietism) and not joined (e.g., activism) but differentiated so that the church maintains its supportive and prophetic role in relation to the state and the community, always for the sake of the Gospel.

Christ as pure gift of Grace, but one of service to all members of the community as teacher, a judge, a friend. Such a caricature of Luther is historically inaccurate and unfair.

⁵⁵ Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 80.

⁵⁶ Reformation Restraint is the awareness that God's work in Jesus Christ is the ultimate, certain work of God to save the world through the cross and resurrection of Jesus alone, and therefore the message that the Church must diligently work to keep clear and bold. Therefore, even when dealing with important, public issues of temporal freedom and justice, restraint is merely asking the question, "How does dealing with this issue impact or detract from the ultimate work of the Church?" Cone obviously disagrees because "political, economic liberation" is the ultimate work of God in Christ.

Such “restraint” was evident in Luther’s life, at a pivotal point in Reformation history. At a time when Luther could have commandeered armies to his cause, he deferred to the work of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and yes, did become a victim of the powers of society, a declared “outlaw.” Even in that vulnerable status, Luther would later risk his life for the sake of civil calm in the community when the radical reformers were wreaking havoc among the people in Jesus’ name. Luther, in his most critical hour at Worms withstood the temptation to head a popular national resistance to Rome, saying:

I did nothing; the Word did everything. If I had wanted to start a bloodbath, Yes, I could have begun such a game at Worms that the emperor himself would not have been safe. But what would that have been? A fool’s game! I did nothing, but left it all up to the Word.⁵⁷

Therefore, Cone’s challenges are noted for the sake of addressing the false caricatures of Two-Kingdom theology as being, in essence, quietistic, culturally-disengaged, or statically dualistic. For Luther, as for the LCMS, Two-Kingdom theology is a dynamic theology of God at work in the world. It is “differentiated” in God’s two realms, or two ways because of God’s design and order, not the Church’s.

Such a dynamic, differentiated engagement also exposes that Cone’s challenge to Two-Kingdom theology is not ultimately a political one, but a biblical one, emanating from his unorthodox, limiting use of the Bible as merely “one witness of many” to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Concerning revelation, Cone says:

By focusing on the black tradition, we not only receive a check against the inordinate influence of the “classical” tradition but also gain a fresh perspective for interpreting Scripture in light of Christ. The black tradition breaks down the false distinctions between the sacred and the secular and invites us to look for Christ’s meaning in the spirituals and the blues, folklore and sermon . . . this is the context for a black analysis of Christ’s meaning for today.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Spitz, “Impact of the Reformation on Church-State Issues,” 70. Also WA 10 III, 19.

⁵⁸ Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 105. Actually, as this dissertation will argue, Cone’s reduction of the Gospel

Cone's use of the Bible merely as a witness allows him to limit his interpretation of the Gospel of Jesus to "concrete political, economic liberation of oppressed people" alone.⁵⁹ Bradley's engagement with Cone demonstrates that an orthodox Christian view of the Scripture and the Gospel can still engage the issues of the black community concretely for their sake, while, at the same time, rooting a person's identity and eternal destiny in the Gospel of justification by grace through faith in Jesus, alone. A Lutheran, Two-Kingdom view, proclaims then, the dynamic nature of the Bible's view of God's two-fold, differentiated engagement of the world even as it struggles to hold God's "two ways," in tension for the sake of the Gospel itself.

A Biblical, Lutheran view then affirms the unity of God's work in the world distinctly in His love,⁶⁰ even as it differentiates the way God works according to His Word of Law and Gospel. For Cone, the Gospel is not distinct from human, concrete efforts for liberation. And Conian ecclesial engagement of the issues of the community understands no differentiation of God's work in Two-Kingdoms. A Lutheran missional strategy proclaims the absolute uniqueness and distinction of the Gospel of Jesus from any human efforts of liberation, while also proclaiming the reality of God's differentiated engagement of the world in the two realms of His rule, His left-hand kingdom of concrete Law and order, justice and peace, and His right-hand

to only the concrete, political, economic, liberation of the oppressed, denying God's differentiated, Law/Gospel engagement of the world for the sake of the world, not only loses the Gospel's eternal significance for Black people, it also limits the practical, concrete liberative possibilities as the dissertation hopes to demonstrate.

⁵⁹ See Bradley, *Political Economy of Liberation*, 70, where he says, "Using Cone's own criterion, of Christ coming for a people coming out of a history of poverty and oppression, combined with Sowell's international histories of poverty and oppression, it seems that the work of Christ cannot narrowly be applied to the descendants of African slaves or limited to Third World nations. The work of Christ must be applied to the descendants of Africa, Asia, Latin America, Western Europe, Eastern Europe, North America, and South America as well . . . even including those who wrote 'white theology.'"

⁶⁰ In reality, a dynamic, differentiating engagement of the world is God's Love in Action — differentiated to bless. In Acts 17, Paul says that God has located people in the places and lands of His choosing "so that they might seek Him." From a Two-Kingdom perspective, culture functions as a Law orientation, so, even when done, it will tend to move people to ask, "Is this all there is? There must be more!"

kingdom of Grace alone through faith in Jesus concretely offered and receive through Word and Sacrament.

**An LCMS Public Theology amidst the Historical Processes of Ecclesial Engagement:
Reformation Restraint for the Sake of the Gospel and Confessional Boldness for the Sake
of the Community**

While an LCMS, Two-Kingdom theology⁶¹ differentiates Lutheran public theology from Conian Black theology, it also differentiates Lutheran public theology from an evangelical, public theology. Benne notes that Lutheran, Two-Kingdom public theology is “not a Lutheran idiosyncrasy in the realm of public theology, but it is a relatively undervalued way of theological, public engagement due to the hegemony of Calvinist . . . methodologies in the American culture.”⁶² For this reason, it is helpful to pursue Benne’s third framework of analysis: articulation of how the LCMS’s public theology assesses the historical process of ecclesial missional engagement, itself. From such an analysis, one will see the distinctiveness of the LCMS voice that is too often confused with an evangelical missional methodology and political engagement. By recognizing this distinctiveness, the LCMS will be able to practice both a “reformation restraint” for the sake of the gospel and a “confessional boldness” in its unique confession of the faith as it engages in urban missiological activity not in the way of others but with its own unique historically situated voice.

⁶¹ See Benne, *Paradoxical Vision*, 89, where he notes that Jesus proclaimed, “The kingdom of God is in the midst of you” (Luke 17:21), even as he warned, “My Kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36).” The kingdom has come in Christ, and it will come in the future. These paradoxes condition the Christian view of history.

⁶² See Benne, *Paradoxical Vision*, 91, where he says, “The paradoxical vision affirms a permanent (this side of the eschaton) duality in God’s relation to the world and history. God’s twofold rule will not be overcome by human efforts that will make it obsolete. This view stands in contrast to Reformed views in which God relates to the world and history in essentially one way: God’s redemptive action runs through all events . . . historical liberation is nearly equated with salvation. . . . The Catholic attitude leads to similar problems through a different route. Catholics believe that the duality in history can be overcome by humankind, directed by the synthesizing capacities of the church. The Church in its wisdom and power aims at a synthesis of culture.” In both ways, and that would include Cone’s black theological adaptation of evangelicalism, the Gospel is turned into a new Law.

Historically and practically, the Conian ecclesial engagement of culture is that the Gospel is not-distinct from concrete, communal liberation and that God's actions in the church and the public realm are not-differentiated, ultimately politicizing the Gospel as engaging temporal liberation for the oppressed. In comparison, the Evangelical ecclesial engagement of culture is that the Gospel is distinct from socio-political liberation and yet God's actions in the public realm are not differentiated, as though God engages the culture transformationally through the church.

Evangelical theology maintains the distinction between the proclamation of the Gospel, the forgiveness of sins before God because of the person and work of Jesus, and the proclamations of governments and other public entities other than the church. Joel Nichols, referencing the Lausanne Covenant as a summary of Evangelical views concerning evangelism and social action, says:

Evangelism itself is the proclamation of the historical, biblical Christ as Savior and Lord, with a view toward persuading people to come to him personally and so be reconciled to God. Essentially evangelism is proclamation. Social action is not evangelism. Nor is political liberation. . . . Although sociopolitical involvement is mentioned, it is not defined as part of evangelism, but rather a separate duty of Christians.⁶³

For Evangelicals, the Gospel is distinct from social action or liberation. What is unique to Evangelical public theology is its transformational impulse, defining the purpose of the believer, the one transformed by the Gospel, as being a transforming agent of society in Christ's name. In essence, the justification and sanctification of the sinner in Christ, moves out into society with the same sanctifying perspective, the Christianizing of culture.

⁶³ Joel A. Nichols, "Mission, Evangelism, and Proselytism in Christianity: Mainline Conceptions as Reflected in Church Documents," *Emory International Law Review*, 12, no. 1 (1998): 596–97. Nichols references the Lausanne Conference and covenant as a fair representation of the conservative, Evangelical perspective of Christianity in America. It was a conference called together by Rev. Billy Graham, hosting various church leaders from evangelical denominations throughout the country.

For Lutherans, this understanding of public theology, while maintaining a distinctness of the Gospel message, comports an impulse to transform society that is at odds with the biblical differentiation of how and why God engages the world. Benne says,

It has been argued conclusively, I believe, that the spirit of American religion and of America itself, insofar as it has been penetrated by religious themes, has been thoroughly Calvinistic, rather than Catholic, sectarian, or Lutheran. One of the essential themes of that Calvinistic spirit holds that the kingdom of God will come in history. At its best, the kingdom is purely God's work and will come with judgment as well as affirmation of the American project.⁶⁴

Also,

The American experiment did have a major flaw . . . the overestimation of humankind's sanctification in the building of a Christian community of believers and non. At the root of the Protestant mainstream's problems, however, was not simply an inaccurate assessment of American possibilities, but rather a theological flaw.⁶⁵

A Lutheran, Two-Kingdom public theology differentiates itself from the Evangelical politicization of the Gospel and its crusaderistic tendencies,⁶⁶ which emanates from the Calvinist teaching of the congruity of personal sanctification of the believer in Jesus with the possibility of similar structural, societal transformation.

In comparison to Conian black theology and Evangelical, public theology, LCMS public theology and public engagement is then a third, albeit small, voice⁶⁷ in the city for the city. An

⁶⁴ Benne, *Paradoxical Vision*, 27.

⁶⁵ Benne, *Paradoxical Vision*, 42.

⁶⁶ Benne, *Paradoxical Vision*, 29. Benne notes this American, cultural characteristic that "intends to transform society as an analogy to the transformation of the soul. Thereby God's kingdom in the individual's soul is translated into God's kingdom in society. . . . The crusading mentality has been constant" (29). To be noted, much of the LCMS' struggle with community engagement today, is a struggle with the crusaderist engagement as an extension of the work of the Gospel, both ecclesial and secular, that has its roots in the puritan-Calvinist-revivalist traditions.

⁶⁷ Benne, *Paradoxical Vision*, 121, says, "Lutherans as a church body in this country continue in anonymity. On the one hand, Lutherans have been ignored because they do not belong to the more familiar and established Anglo-Saxon heritage and its churches. Nor are they Catholic, part of a huge and vaguely "threatening" church, at least in the eyes of the secular media. Lutherans have shared in the treatment accorded all religious groups by the secular elite—uninterest or lightly disguised contempt. On the other hand, they themselves are a diffident lot, not particularly aggressive in calling attention to themselves or their accomplishments."

LCMS ecclesial engagement of culture maintains that the gospel is distinct from all human liberation movements and teachings and God's actions in the public realm are differentiated from God's actions in the church, so that God works in the world according to the two Kingdoms.

In this LCMS engagement framework, the church maintains that God involves himself in the world in two distinct ways. In the left-hand kingdom, He involves Himself through the vocations of people and structures in society to maintain outward, temporal peace, justice, and order. In this realm, his Law mainly becomes a coercive power to mitigate outward evil due to the sinfulness of humanity. Benne says,

Law is the instrument God uses to shore up the fragile covenantal structures of creation." The state—legitimate government—is one of these special covenantal structures, along with the family, the economic sphere, and the church. All of them are ordained by God from the Creation to give order to human life, to give us a place to be and work to do."⁶⁸

The enduring tension in this biblical differentiation of ecclesial public engagement is the struggle to clarify the faithful versus the unfaithful ruler, one exercising "godly" authority—even if an unbeliever—for the sake of civic order and the tension of the call for the church to properly be supportive or prophetically critical role as a response. Underlying such tension is the biblical reality that God is involving himself and ruling this world through His left-hand kingdom for the sake of all.

Therefore, though the coercive power of the state is ordained by God for the sake of civil righteousness, justice, and peace, a Lutheran perspective would tend to see the state as a secondary structure to the church in God's engagement of the world due to its coercive nature, its temporal relevance, and the inherent limitations of sinful humanity. In fact, biblically, the state serves as a secondary structure even in comparison to the family, deriving its authority from the

⁶⁸ Benne, *Paradoxical Vision*, 82–83.

family rather than the other way around. The state has a subordinate, but nevertheless, important function—to establish a peaceful and just order, ultimately for the sake of God’s greater work in Christ through the preaching of the Gospel, the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation.

Properly understood, then, the sphere of the state has limitations with respect to its purpose in society.⁶⁹ “The action of law in the world is non-redemptive . . . It makes the world a better place to live but does not complete it or fulfill it.”⁷⁰ Church engagement of issues in the temporal realm is likewise ordered, remaining a secondary, though still important issue in comparison to its ultimate purpose which is to proclaim the Gospel, the free gift of God’s grace in and through the work of Jesus on the cross.

Due to the pre-eminence of the Gospel as the ultimate, distinctive work of the Church, Lutherans practice a “Reformation restraint” when it comes to official church involvement in public affairs. Reticence for direct, public, political engagement is a Lutheran disposition because ecclesial engagement which involves the coercive power of the state can run the risk of politicizing the message of the Gospel and making the Gospel a new law, or a new human endeavor to bring about God’s justice and peace.⁷¹ Reformation restraint tends to be, then, the more typical Lutheran first response to issues in the public realm, because God’s Word teaches that God is at work through the public vocations of fathers, mothers, teachers, police, government officials and the like, for the sake of good order, temporal justice, and peace. Public engagement in direct opposition to properly ordered, public authorities who are acting within

⁶⁹ This emphasis properly deals with Hunter’s assessment of modern, public culture, “with its “tendency toward the politicization of nearly everything.” Hunter, *To Change the World*, 102.

⁷⁰ Benne, *Paradoxical Vision*, 85.

⁷¹ See Hunter, *To Change the World*, 173–74, where he notes that the tragedy of the church’s public engagement, both conservatives and liberals, is that such engagement has become solely political with the very message of the church being reduced in many people’s minds to the political issues it advocates. In some ways then, our political engagements have created the notion that such issues are the primary emphasis of the church.

their biblical defined boundaries, is to oppose God in His temporal justice work through the vocational “masks” of his creation.

Again, this teaching is one that needs to be considered carefully when dealing with issues such as systemic racism, for the line between what one might call “God working through his ordained masks” and what another might call “the sinful oppression of others through the misuse of the powers that God has granted” is sometimes hard for institutions and the people involved in them to discern. Because of the biblical anthropology through which the church views structures of the social order, the church always needs to stress its dual roles, both as servant and as prophet, in relation to the public realm. This will be considered more fully later in discussing a spectrum of action for churches, moving from indirect to direct involvement.

Thus, a public theology that analyzes the historical process of the church’s engagement helpfully differentiates the LCMS from other Christian forms of engagement. For the LCMS, the Church and its people are dynamically engaged in the world, though not of the world, serving vocationally, and at times prophetically. In addition, this analysis of the historical process of engagement also helps the LCMS articulate its own unique voice, where “Reformation restraint” meets “confessional boldness.”

While often labeled as evangelical, both sociologically and missiologically,⁷² the LCMS’s actual, more narrowly defined sociological position in the American context, as well as its unique history concerning its own Americanization, and its unique engagements concerning issues of race and racism in America, contribute to the distinctiveness of its voice in the city for the city as well.

⁷² See Chapter 1, where it was demonstrated that the LCMS is an “ethnocentric, Fundamentalist” church in American culture, while at the same time, a powerless “Outsider-insider” Evangelical Church that tends to deal with racial issues from a “conversionist, personal evangelism” perspective.

First, in public, urban-community engagement, the LCMS can speak and act with an attitude of empathy. For an effective missiology the LCMS must accept and put to work its unique sociological, cultural location for the sake of the gospel.

It seems arguable that the Lutheran Tradition in America has precisely the combination of a sect-like and church-like characteristics that will make it a fit participant in such a renewal of American religious life. . . . Theologically, the paradoxical vision emphasizes the sharply “other” character of the gospel and of the way of being in the world that the gospel elicits. At the same time, it has a theological warrant for vigorous worldly engagement with losing that “otherness.” Christians are to be “in” but of “of “the world.”⁷³

In chapter one, this dissertation wondered if the LCMS was positioned for any meaningful engagement with the urban community. Now, such ethnic isolation, as well as its own challenging assimilation, coupled with the uniqueness of its compelling sacramental-Gospel word for mission, might actually be a blessing to the church in its engagements with the black, urban community. This unique LCMS experience with respect to its assimilation in the American context, provides a perspective that can be helpful in dealing with issues of race and racism as an advocate for those whose cultural assimilation was not merely called for, but publicly coerced and demanded both for the sake of one’s citizenship in the United States and one’s participation in Christ’s Church. Historically, the demands that were experienced in the LCMS’ own struggle for assimilation can deepen the churches empathy for other cultures as they too embrace the challenge of becoming a “good American,” differentiated from being a child of God in the Church of Jesus Christ.

Second, while the LCMS has its own unique, historical relationship to the American culture in terms of assimilation and Americanization, it also has its own history of dealing or not dealing with racism and issues particular to Black and other minority communities in America.

⁷³ Benne, *Paradoxical Vision*, 228.

In Chapter 2, a historical critique of the LCMS was offered that laid bare the church's successes and failures with regard to race and racism. With a repentant-humility, the Church can embrace its own history, eager to engage the urban environment again. Acknowledging such realities in repentance then, as a muted third voice in the city, is an opportunity for the LCMS to become another voice of the Gospel in the city, one that has learned in its own history what it means to be a 100% sinner, saved by grace alone. Such learning also entails the on-going necessity of discerning the church's dual roles of servant and prophet in speaking to the cultural setting and the political powers in regard to social engagement on behalf of others.

Third, in addition to being empathetic and repentant, the LCMS can speak authentically from its own experience about the difficulty of faithfulness in the American context. The review of LCMS history in chapters one and two uncovered its isolationism, persecution, and coerced assimilation in the American context. This history was referenced as a possible way for the church to be empathetically missional to other minority groups in the culture. Such a moment in LCMS history was an opportunity lost in black and urban mission. Because of its history as an isolated-outsider church in much of its relationship to other churches in the American culture, and because of its a germane understanding of similar shared struggles associated with the process of Americanization, the church can speak of the blessings and the challenges involved in Americanization from its own experience. Such a voice would be able to attend to diverse matters throughout the spectrum that extends from the limitations of its own ethnocentrism to the dangers of the complete Anglicizing of its own heritage.

Presently in the American culture, then, the LCMS is not evangelical, nationalistic, or millenarian. It is not Utopian Christologically. Instead, it is a Two-Kingdom voice of the Gospel that speaks with a "tempered hope" for temporal blessings and peace, calling all people to their

shared *Imago Dei* in service to one another as human beings even as it offers each person the eternal reality of being a child of God redeemed by Jesus Christ alone. Its theology, its social location, and its own history in America can all be used in service to sharing the Gospel in the urban community. Even now, the LCMS is a relatively, powerless church in a culture of white privilege. The historical look backwards at the LCMS through Conian eyes, creates a humility that helps the LCMS authentically move forward in service to the urban neighborhoods with an empathetic confidence at the congregational level in the missional power of the Gospel through broken vessels. Again, with its muted voice culturally, its sectarian relationship to the power structures due to the unique issues of its own ethnic assimilation to Anglo America, and its Two-Kingdom perspective on the issues James Cone demands be addressed, the repentant LCMS can offer a unique 3rd voice in service to the black, multi-cultural communities it seeks to serve in the city.

An LCMS missional engagement addresses Cone's demand for a "concrete liberation" by locating the discussion and the action in the left-hand kingdom of God's work in the world, allowing more voices to be brought to the table to bless the community. An LCMS missional engagement seeks such solutions with a Reformation restraint that honors God's unique work in both His left-hand and right-hand kingdom through His Law and His Gospel differentiating the Church from the public, crusaderistic, transformational tendencies of the Evangelical church in America. What remains to be done is to explicate how the church, from a biblical anthropological perspective, actually engages issues of public concern, especially racial issues, for the sake of the community as well as for the sake of the Church in its proclamation of the Gospel for those it serves.

An LCMS Practical Theology of Public Engagement

As one moves from theological foundations to missional practice in the formation of an LCMS urban missiology, two basic dynamics are important: the nature of the Church's public involvement, whether it is indirect or direct; and the nature of the public issues confronting the Church, whether they are short term issues of crisis or long term structural and cultural issues. In assessing the level of LCMS-Church involvement in these two basic dynamics, Benne's work offers a helpful framework. It enables one to develop a practical theology of public engagement that fosters faithful, Two-Kingdom missiological engagement for the community in general as well as the proclamation of the Gospel in that same community.

Indirect and Direct Influence

Concerning the nature of the Church's involvement in public, even political issues, Benne structures such involvement on a spectrum of practice moving from indirect influence (the most typical way of public engagement) to direct influence (for those times when the state oversteps its God-ordained boundaries and purpose). He says:

So the crucial question is not *whether* theology ought to and will become public; rather, it concerns *how* religion and public life ought to be related. . . . The typology breaks into two parts—indirect and direct connections. “Indirect” means that the church as an institution does not get involved in public theology; it does not become a public actor as an institution. Rather, it relies on indirect modes of influence and action through its laity or through independent associations organized by its laity and/or clergy. . . . In contrast, “direct” means that the church as an institution becomes a public actor. The formal institution itself *directly* engages society—its politics, economics, and culture.⁷⁴

Benne describes the preferential way of engagement then as “indirect and unintentional” where the church influences society because it has “shaped the hearts and minds of its people . . .

⁷⁴ Benne, *Paradoxical Vision*, 182–83.

. according to the core religious and moral vision of a religious community.”⁷⁵ People act in accordance with how they believe and think, and the effects of such actions affect their spheres of influence, be that in the family, at work, or in public service. Such examples might be the “protestant work ethic,” or “the democratic ideals of the West.” These were not stated goals of the church, but many church people, committed to the teachings of the Scripture acted as change agents within their sphere of influence unintentionally, just because it was the way that they were committed to live. Benne says,

Among the family of Lutheran churches, the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod represents this mode well. As we have seen, it rarely makes public policy pronouncements, it carries on few “advocacy programs, and it certainly does not claim to have special wisdom about worldly affairs . . . Yet it continues strongly to form the hearts and minds of its people.”⁷⁶

This is the first version of the church’s indirect public influence. Here, the church’s influence occurs through its people living faithfully in their callings and their communities. In such an indirect and unintentional way, “the paradoxical vision has become publicly relevant, but the church had little conscious intent in producing such an effect.”⁷⁷

An LCMS Two-Kingdom engagement understands God’s work through the vocations of His creation in the public realm. As such the church would honor the ideas of “Subsidiarity” and “Sphere Sovereignty” as the general way of God’s ordering society for its public benefit and peace. Subsidiarity, expressed in the Catholic social teaching formulated in the words of Pope

⁷⁵ Benne, *Paradoxical Vision*, 185. This notion of indirect/unintentional reflects Hunter, *To Change the World*, 95, and his notion of “faithful presence” as a response to the overly politicized ecclesial public engagements. LCMS churches would be identified generally with this engagement strategy. To be noted is that this strategy is the least effective strategy in actually influencing change in the culture. To begin to create cultural change, the church would need to couple the empowering of the average church goer with the strategy of having such empowered people in the places of cultural creation and change, namely places like Ivy League schools, the government, and the media. More representation in places of influence as those who embody their core moral and religious vision, would be a start.

⁷⁶ Benne, *Paradoxical Vision*, 188.

⁷⁷ Benne, *Paradoxical Vision*, 188.

John Paul II, is the principle whereby:

A community of a higher order should not interfere in the internal life of a community of a lower order, depriving the latter of its functions, but rather should support it in case of need and help to coordinate its activity with the activities of the rest of society, always with a view to the common good.⁷⁸

Such a principle is concerned with those non-political, public entities that are part of the fabric of a community for the sake of justice, order, and peace. Subsidiarity is “concerned that when government manages the economy by intervening directly it can deprive society of its responsibility leading to a loss of human energies and an inordinate increase of public agencies, which are dominated more by bureaucratic ways of thinking than by concern for serving their clients.”⁷⁹ Sphere sovereignty would state a similar idea that vocations of father, mother, teacher, pastor, businessperson, police officer, etc., “every good sphere of society is created by God and is accountable to God alone, not the state.”⁸⁰ Such ordering is helpful in keeping primary efforts for civil order rooted in their most effective sphere of influence. The coercive power of the state would then be seen as a last resort for peace and justice when spheres such as the family and the community fail their God-given duties. Bradley notes:

These principles have proven to be helpful categories for Christians for a couple of centuries in discerning how to order society in light of human dignity, the face of sin and error, and the need for sustainable economic empowerment.⁸¹

Again, LCMS public engagement honors the created vocations of God rooted in the fourth commandment, “Honor your Father and your Mother,” as well as His ordering of such vocations in the community for the sake of the community. In fact, an LCMS public, missional engagement would tend not to start with a generic “idea” of justice and peace, but with a “concrete” neighbor

⁷⁸ Pope John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, 48, as quoted by Bradley, *Political Economy of Liberation*, 127.

⁷⁹ Bradley, *Political Economy of Liberation*, 127.

⁸⁰ Bradley, *Political Economy of Liberation*, 127.

⁸¹ Bradley, *Political Economy of Liberation*, 127.

who has “concrete” issues and concerns. Dr. Leo Sanchez notes that the Lutheran tradition seems suitable for promoting a neighborhood-oriented approach to justice, where the Lutheran emphasis of vocation focuses deeds of love, service, and justice on the concrete neighbor that God brings into our midst.⁸² A Lutheran, public engagement of the community for the sake of the Gospel would typically prioritize neighborhood people, families, and businesses rather than overarching issues removed from the influence of its churches unless a public issue went to the heart of the moral vision of the Scripture.⁸³ Indirect or unintentional public engagements, then, would start more narrowly focused first on the family, then the church, then the neighborhood, then outward to the community at large. Benne says,

The paradoxical vision also leads to a preference for indirect modes of the church expressing itself in society. . . . Therefore, the church should only infrequently comment on social affairs, at least in relatively “normal” times.⁸⁴

The second version of the Church’s indirect influence is more intentional. This public engagement would be in things like Bible Classes and seminars where moral foundations of the Scripture would be laid out and then particular issues or problems would be discussed and debated. Again, the church would not prescribe community action, it would speak about the foundations of Christian moral thought, ultimately leaving the community engagement to its formed and well-informed parishioners acting out their citizenship for the sake of the community. Benne says, “Our parish, for example carries on adult education programs on social

⁸² For a fuller discussion, see Leopoldo A. Sanchez, “The Human Face of Justice: Reclaiming the Neighbor in Law, Vocation, and Justice Talk,” *Concordia Journal* 39, no. 2 (Spring 2013): 117–32.

⁸³ See Hunter, *To Change the World*, 253, where he posits a similar understanding of engagement that will undergird one’s authenticity of witness in a neighborhood. He says, “I would suggest that a theology of faithful presence first calls Christians to attend to the people and places that they experience directly. . . . For most, this will mean a preference for stability, locality, and particularity of place it needs. It is here, through the joys, sufferings, hopes, disappointments, concerns, desire, and worries of the people with whom we are in long-term and close relations—family, neighbors, coworkers, and community—where we find our authenticity as a body and as believers.”

⁸⁴ Benne, *Paradoxical Vision*, 102.

issues. Christian involvement in particular issues share how their thinking through the Christian vision leads them to particular opinion and attitudes.⁸⁵ This methodology would be indirect, leaving the actual decision for civic engagement up to the individual parishioner, while providing more focused, biblically-based, moral and ethical teachings to be considered when engaging the particular issues present in the community at the moment.

Benne warns that even with such indirect strategies, the church and its people need to be skilled presenters⁸⁶ who can make clear distinctions between the core religious and moral convictions of the church and those issues that are morality based, but debatable applications and extensions of those views in the public square. This author would call that “learning to speak a left-hand kingdom language concerning these moral issues,” rather than saying, “Thus saith the Lord.” Benne also notes that:

The Church should spend much more time, energy, and creativity on these more indirect and intentional strategies. Rather than rushing to judgment, the church should encourage genuine religious and moral reflection among its laity . . . This would take the kind of care and restraint that is rare among the church but would be well worth the effort.⁸⁷

Such an emphasis would clearly demonstrate that, while cultural engagement is necessary, because we desire temporal peace, justice, even prosperity for our community and fellow citizens, it is still not the ultimate work of God in the world, which is the eternal work of God in Christ. To that end, the church can never be distracted, no matter what level of chaos it finds itself in a particular community or country.

⁸⁵ Benne, *Paradoxical Vision*, 192.

⁸⁶ See Benne, *Paradoxical Vision*, 193–94, where he discusses these challenges at length, warning that confusion in such differentiation and lack of ability to speak precisely in this regard can be perilous. On non-core issues, the spirit of such discussions should grant, as he says, “Permission to disagree on the applications of fundamental values” and that “A proper balance of commitment and tolerance of diversity is the goal at which to aim.” Key to such balance, from this author’s perspective, is learning to engage public issues with a “left-hand” kingdom perspective and language.

⁸⁷ Benne, *Paradoxical Vision*, 194.

It should also be noted that in both of these indirect engagements of the public realm, church efforts in the community are morals/ethics-based, not Gospel centered.⁸⁸ People often claim that the church is legislating its beliefs, when it is not. It is merely exercising its right to debate a civic morality that promotes civility, justice, and peace for all people in the community. Lutherans differentiate the essence of the faith, the Gospel, from any outward, moral efforts of societal transformation. The Gospel is the proclamation of God's redeeming love, offered to all by grace alone through faith in Jesus Christ, as its core teaching that can never be legislated, or coercively offered.⁸⁹ The essential teachings of the church are gifts offered by Grace through Christ alone. But, when it comes to civil engagement, all civil engagement is law based, morality based. The only question is which vision of morals, ethics, and actions serve the greater good, allowing for the most temporal freedom, justice, and peace. As such, all civil engagement is morality based, for Christians, non-Christians, religious, and non-religious people with just laws and just punishments for the sake of all.

What about the proclamation of the gospel? The Lutheran emphasis of indirect influence maintains an emphasis on the gospel by highlighting public service for the sake of the community, for the sake of sharing the Gospel, not for the sake of transforming society or establishing the power and prestige of the church. Hunter rightly says:

Let me finally stress that any good that is generated by Christians is *only* the net effect of caring for something more than the good created. *If there are benevolent*

⁸⁸ It is morals-based because morality is shared by all human beings and all human beings are called to a humane, civility. That said, the Gospel is the motivation for the Christian to engage in the left-hand kingdom effort.

⁸⁹ See Jesus' teaching in Matt. 5:38–39, where He says, "You have heard that it was said, 'An Eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also." Too often people assume that Jesus is saying, 'An eye for an eye' is wrong, and 'turn the other cheek' is right, as if the latter is the correct morality for both the left-hand kingdom and the right. This passage is better understood from a Two-Kingdom perspective, namely, You have heard it said, 'An eye for an eye, you know, let the punishment fit the crime' . . . and that is correct in Caesar's kingdom. . . . But I say to you, in my kingdom, 'if anyone slaps you on the cheek, turn to him the other as well.' My Kingdom is in this world, not of this world."

*consequences of our engagement with the work, in other words, it is precisely because it is not rooted in a desire to change the world for the better but rather because it is an expression of a desire to honor the creator of all goodness, beauty, and truth, a manifestation of our loving obedience to God, and a fulfillment of God's command to love our neighbor.*⁹⁰

The typical Lutheran engagement operates from that same spirit because it maintains God's differentiation of His work in the world, seeking to be faithful to His directives in that regard. Motivated by God's mercy received, we seek to bless our neighbor as God has blessed us. As theologian Gustaf Wingren says, "God does not need our good works, but our neighbor does."⁹¹ In fact, the main reason to dispense with the typical Lutheran reticence concerning community engagement is for the missional purpose of demonstrating Christ's love through our love for the urban community and the issues that are pressing upon its people, whether they join the church or not.

In chapter three, it was noted that Hunter's "faithful presence" sounds very much like the indirect influence of the Lutheran Church, engaging the culture through the various vocations and free associations of its people. But, there are times when merely living out our indirect strategies is not possible and direct, social engagement is not only warranted but necessary. Missionally, indirect influence alone is insufficient as an urban strategy because of the American Christian Churches' historical reticence to engage issues of race and racism in American history. In this context, indirect influence could be viewed as sinful acquiescence. Or, silence could be taken as tacit approval. There are times when more direct engagement is called for, not in the evangelical or even secular-progressive, transformational mode, but in the mode of being a more "public actor as an institution in society"⁹² for the public good.

⁹⁰ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 234.

⁹¹ Gustaf Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press; rpt. Evansville, IN: Ballast, 1994), 10.

⁹² Benne, *Paradoxical Vision*, 201.

In direct engagement of the culture, the “church (as an institution) attempts to affect society through its formal institutional statements and actions.”⁹³ This engagement has to do with the use of public power. In “Articulating corporate Conscience,”⁹⁴ the church responds to particular issues or problems with “social statements” applying biblical morality to specific issues and the reasons why such a moral stance is best for all. When acting in a direct and unintentional way, the church applies no “coercive or lobbying power” towards the government in hopes of coercing public policy. Issues are addressed directly, in a prophetic voice, calling for the state to exercise faithfulness in its proscribed sphere of influence as well as in its moral directives.

The more controversial public engagement of the church in the public affairs of the state is that of the direct and intentional exercising of power towards governmental change. The previous three positions relied on persuasion. “In this approach, the church no longer relies on the persuasiveness of argument or example; it commits its funds, political weight, and people-power to pressure decision makers to move towards a well-defined policy objective.”⁹⁵ Benne listed examples such as the churches of Germany acting in solidarity with its citizens to bring down the Berlin wall. Other examples include church work in Latin American countries with communist governments and Methodist support of Liberation groups in the Philippines.

Generally speaking, a Two-Kingdom approach would discourage such intervention. It would more typically practice a “Reformation Restraint,”⁹⁶ the wisdom to resist the temptation to

⁹³ Benne, *Paradoxical Vision*, 201.

⁹⁴ Benne, *Paradoxical Vision*, 201.

⁹⁵ Benne, *Paradoxical Vision*, 215.

⁹⁶ See again Luther’s quote, cited in Lewis Spitz, Jr., “Impact of the Reformation on Church-State Issues,” 70. Also WA 10 III, 19. Luther says that he had the opportunity to bring Europe to its knees, but what “folly” would that have been. He let the Word of the Gospel do its work. To primarily differentiate the preaching of the Gospel from such a potential transforming of society is an example of “Reformation restraint.” The Gospel, and the promise of a new heavens and new earth, these are the primary proclamations of the Church of Christ.

use force to empower the church's position in society. Such a posture resists the conflating of the Gospel with the coercive power of the Law, which might be temporally beneficial for a time, but never salvific when it matters. Here Thomas Sowell's wisdom of tradeoffs in a "constrained, limited world" as opposed to the notions of solutions, should be heeded, since present solutions often create tomorrow's problems. Or, one should remember the oft proven idea that in a sinful world the desire of the perfect often destroys the possibility of the good. Benne says,

Such direct action threatens to instrumentalize and secularize sacred symbols of the church in pursuit of very secular, partisan agendas. The church loses its needed distance from all political action; its claim to point to transcendence collapses if it draws too close to a political program of action.⁹⁷

If such direct influence is necessary, Benne notes that advocacy would be a better form for the action. Such a methodology would make lawmakers and public leaders "aware" of the church's stance on an issue, but without the muscle and pressure exerted to coerce action on the church's behalf. Advocacy, at its best, would be advocating for others as a voice of the voiceless, rather than merely advocating for the church's self-interest. The advocating church identifies with the struggles and the successes of the community in which it lives. Benne calls the church to be more concerned with "calling attention to injustice rather than to calling the shots."⁹⁸ He challenges the church to be a prophetic voice, dealing with sinful extremes as necessary, while leaving the great middle ground of politics and policy to the people entrusted with such things.⁹⁹

Whenever direct and intentional church action is engaged in the public realm, the church

⁹⁷ Benne, *Paradoxical Vision*, 217.

⁹⁸ Benne, *Paradoxical Vision*, 221.

⁹⁹ See Benne, *Paradoxical Vision*, 222, who advises the church to deal with what I call "transgressing Sphere Sovereignities," not making Policy Prescriptions. He recommends that the church "Focus on extremes but leave the great middle ground alone. . . . The church should be able to bring its prophetic concerns to bear on behalf of those person who are experiencing great suffering. The church will be most effective at this task if it can speak of that suffering firsthand from its ministry to suffering persons. Likewise, the church should provide a vision of the common good that is both hopeful and realistic, but it should not propose to identify the particular policies that will contribute to that vision."

must realize that its work is now beyond the persuasive and prophetic, and has entered the arena of the coercive, which is alien to the church's ethos as a public institution of the Gospel. It is more-often better suited to be a mediating influence, empowering the means of dissent through God's ordained structures, providing knowledge to its people acting through their vocations. But, if direct, intentional response is needed because of State's abuse of power, either to the nation's citizens or against the church's core teachings, the church should exercise this action as a last resort to empower more voices, not less.¹⁰⁰ Such engagement needs to continually learn to speak about public issues in terms of the "often foreign" left-hand kingdom language that is common to all and not particular to the church.

Benne's structure for public engagement is very helpful in that it makes the church aware of the possibilities and challenges associated with being a public voice in general. It also provides a structure that will be helpful for the LCMS in missionally engaging urban issues for the sake of sharing the Gospel to black and minority communities in the city. It also undergirds the proper expectations of what the church can and cannot do in the public realm. Richard John Neuhaus, a neo-conservative public voice of the Catholic Church rightly warns, "When it is not necessary for the church to speak, it is necessary for the church not to speak."¹⁰¹ And, the Reformation Restraint and Reticence is to be practiced, not out of fear of public engagement or fear of suffering, but because the solutions of sinful human beings always solve some problems while creating a new set of problems due to the "built in" inadequacy of humanity's best efforts.

¹⁰⁰ Direct action, policy engagement must rise to the level of foundational issues, foundational moral issues with a clear biblical injunction that needs to be argued on behalf of all people, not partisan on behalf of some. In the face of injustice and disorder, the church should be a guarantor of order by calling the government to its task as a prophetic voice for the peace, order, and freedom that God desires in the public, left-hand kingdom realm.

¹⁰¹ Benne, *Paradoxical Vision*, 214. When it does, speak out of its own tradition, not merely aligned with interest groups.

Long Term and Short Term Issues

The Two-Kingdom structure, not only differentiates between God's engagement strategies in the left-hand and right-hand kingdoms, and between indirect and direct public engagement, it also realizes that left-hand kingdom issues confront the community with trade-offs, not solutions and time-frames associated with faithful engagement. Benne's paradoxical vision provides helpful direction in assessing how the church can respond to the challenges that it faces in the context in which it serves.

The paradoxical vision understands public, ecclesial engagement as generally indirect and long-term. More importantly, the paradoxical vision understands that long term, deep rooted issues in the community require thoughtful, long term actions that seek to undergird fundamental relationships and structures. The biblical picture of such engagement would be something akin to the people of Israel in exile in the book of Jeremiah. As such, the picture is painted of a people who are "in the culture, but not of the culture," but are called to engage the culture, as God's people, for the sake of their blessing as well as the culture's blessing. Jeremiah 29 reads,

Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon, "Build houses and live *in them*; and plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and become the fathers of sons and daughters, and take wives for your sons and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters; and multiply there and do not decrease. Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf; for in its welfare you will have welfare."¹⁰²

Such a perspective attends to those "structures of creation," that will bless the people of Israel themselves, structures like the family, the extended family, and the exercise of their own labor.

But, such a "modeling of God's blessing," was not the only directive for God's people. They

¹⁰² Jer. 29:4-7.

were also to be engaged in the community for the sake of the community, one that was benign at best, or hostile at worst.

With a preference for an indirect engagement, the church will do well to deal with community issues from an informational, character-forming, supportive, service-offering perspective for the issues that are of concern in the community. Such a posture affirms the fact that God is at work in the community for the sake of the community through the vocations of Christians and non, to do His will.¹⁰³ The Church most properly helps when it informs such work in reference to the Law of God and His desire that people be blessed.

Attending to long term issues with long-term strategies and actions will typically cause the church to address these issues through the various vocations of its people. Issues of racial inequality, poverty, joblessness, violence, family breakdown, law and order, the role of the police in the community, etc. are issues that the church can address among its members and community alike. As such, the church can be a resource for stability and positive change. It can be a warehouse of knowledge and practice for the sake not only of its members but a resource of that teaching and practice for its community. Modeling one's behavior as an extension of one's faith is a powerful way to be of service to one's neighbor.¹⁰⁴

Engaging long term issues, means engaging the struggles of the community with a broader, left-hand kingdom voice. The church should gather various perspectives together, encouraging

¹⁰³ See Gene Edward Veith Jr., *God at Work: Your Christian Vocation in All of Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossways, 2002), 41, where he describes the dynamism of God's preserving activity in the world through vocations, saying, "From the beginning, God put us in families, tribes, societies. God ordained that we be in relationships. He ordained that we need each other. . . . But if it is true that we are supposed to be dependent on other people, it is also true that other people are supposed to be dependent on us. This is no passive, lazy, welfare-state dependence, but an active exchange: my gifts for yours; my vocation for your vocation. This is why St. Paul could make the seemingly harsh statement, 'If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat.'"

¹⁰⁴ But, again, it should be noted that, due to the issues of Ressentiment, delegitimation, and the dominance of the progressive worldview, such modeling is not missionally sufficient for the church and its people in urban ministry.

free associations of service groups in the community that seek to bless and empower communities, not through the coercive power of the state, but through the mutual interest, willful service, and a desired compassion of its members toward others and towards the community at large. Here, the LCMS Two-Kingdom view will be better than other efforts at expanding voices from within the black community and white towards the issues of the urban community. This is true because the LCMS Two-Kingdom engagement recognizes that God is indeed at work through His Law and the various vocations in the community, not just the church. For this reason, it encourages public participation—in America that would be active citizenship—as the way God engages the world through people in the community, church people and non.

With long term issues as well as short term issues, it must be stated repeatedly that the reality of the world and its people is that it is sinful, depraved, limited, and ultimately incapable of saving itself. At the same time, these same, sinful human beings can still exercise a basic level of righteous, *coram mundo*, that can be humane and civil, desiring and maintaining temporal peace and justice. Devoid of the notions of utopian ends, such a perspective would emphasize equality of access to basic things like education, housing, work etc. but not the possibility of equal results, knowing that results are determined by more than fairness, education, and access. The uniqueness of people, their particular gifts, their personal drives, dreams, and expectations, coupled with the particular realities one's life, sins, decisions, and even opportunities, all play a part in potential outcomes outside of the control of coercion and legislation.

Long term issues require not only critical thinking about complex issues, but challenge the Church to be a caring community that believes that it exists within a particular community not merely for its own sake, but for the sake of the neighborhood as well. As such, in the urban context, the Church especially needs to be an embodiment of racial reconciliation, a body that

sees itself as one in Christ no matter our ethnic or socio-economic peculiarities, one that also is concerned for the unique struggles of people, both in our midst and in our community.

While it has been demonstrated that the church's proper engagement of the community is most often indirectly and long-term. Missionally, there are times when direct engagement is demanded of the church as a caring voice in the community in the middle of struggle. As always, the goal is not ultimately political, but a public engagement for the sake of the Gospel. Indirect engagement better maintains the integrity and mission of the church for the sake of the community. But in crisis, or in public political realities that engage both the church and the community, there are times when congregations, even the Church at large, must engage the community for the Church's and community's sake.

In short-term issues especially, the Church should always remember to "speak only when it is necessary to speak, and to be silent when it needs to be silent."¹⁰⁵ It should also be the one organization that is concerned for the truth amidst the passions, the politics, and the problems. A Reformation restraint should not prohibit the church from engaging issues that threaten to destroy the community or undermine the civility that reflects the will of God for all. Again, a healthy "tradeoffs" view even amidst potential solutions should be part of the church's voice in the community when issues are pressing because there is always the "built in" inadequacy of humanity's best efforts, not because of the inadequacy of laws, customs, and policies, but because of a human being's sinful dispositions, personally and structurally, towards even the best of such things.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ Benne, *Paradoxical Vision*, 214. In that regard too, it should speak as a voice that coheres with its own tradition, not merely as a voice aligned with particular interest groups.

¹⁰⁶ This author argues that the uniqueness of the American culture in its abilities to allow its citizens the most freedom and prosperity of any culture in the world has nothing to do with American's "uniqueness" morally or ethically, or even intellectually and entrepreneurially (Though there are cultural patterns and habits that surely helped in its industrial successes etc.). What makes this culture different is its realistic view of human nature, the

Such direct engagement of short-term issues would most likely deal with the abuses of sphere sovereignty and subsidiarity, in other words, the usurpation of the agents of the Left-hand Kingdom in the sphere of the Right, or vice-versa. The Church would also most likely engage the powers of the state publicly in the transgression of foundational moral principles that either threaten civic justice and peace, or demand the church disobey its core beliefs as a means of societal participation. Typically, very few issues would rise to such a level of such a transgression. But there are times when they do. Issues like the murdering of innocent life, government-institutionalized racism, or the restructuring of foundational relationships in society, would be examples that demand the church's response both for the sake of its own integrity as well as its concern for the community at large. Also, state abdication of its role as protector and maintainer of civil order, justice, and peace, would require the church's prophetic, direct engagement to the state, demanding that it fulfill its God-given, society-affirming role. Such engagement of the Church with the coercive powers of the state, would carefully make the church and its people aware of the fact that an integrity of its witness might demand that the church and its people be willing to suffer for the sake of the truth, for the sake of righteousness, and for the sake of others.

Cone's realization and prophetic rebuke of the neglect in America—on the part of its Churches, its citizens, and its governing authority—not only of Black peoples' basic rights in the American experiment, but of the other powerless communities of the urban poor, is a helpful

founders believed that people were sinful; its willingness to bind the coercive powers of government; and its willingness to seek to create the most free, peaceful, civil communities by freeing the Christian-informed, Christian-practicing citizen to seek one's own interest, one's own family interests, and the interest of the community on those first amendment terms. That, coupled with an inclination to the free market, whose benefits are felt because the system curbs one's self-interest by pitting all the self-interest desires of each person in the community against/for each other, allowing for the greatest benefit to be received by the greatest amount of people, not the least common benefits to be received by all.

corrective especially to those who seek the blessing of their communities in the Name of Jesus. Such a view finds a partiality to the poor, the innocent (publicly), and the powerless, as a place of the church's primary, though not exclusive concern.

In dealing with short-term issues, direct action and policy engagement must concern foundational issues, yet even here the church's efforts must be clearly differentiated from the church's main purpose of preaching the Gospel of Christ. Foundational moral issues are issues that affect all people, threatening the humanity of a given community. Direct actions concern issues then that have a clear "biblical moral mandate" which is to be argued on behalf of all people, not partisanly on behalf of some. Even in the Church's engagement of the powers of the State, it must not seek to usurp the role of the state, with its manifold vocations, as God's coercive agent for temporal peace and justice. Especially here, the church must be able to articulate its moral position as one that is best for all, or best for the community at large.

A dynamic, paradoxical Two-Kingdom public engagement of the challenges of Black Theology addresses Cone's challenge for a "Concrete Christological" liberative engagement. By locating Cone's call for liberation in the temporal, left-hand kingdom sphere of God's reign,¹⁰⁷ it increases the voices and the solutions possible for the liberation that Cone seeks. Gene Veith says:

The doctrine of the two kingdoms is thus radically affirmative of the diverse cultures of the world. Since culture is not religious as such, but human institutions through which God works, it is transient and cannot be absolutized.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ A Lutheran Two-Kingdom engagement is one that overcomes the dualism of the sacred and the secular by differentiating God's work in the world through Law and Gospel, emphasizing God's civilizing action through vocations in the world common to believers and non. It also distinguishes itself from the one-kingdom notion of God in the world which ultimately politicizes or moralizes the Gospel, which is no Gospel at all.

¹⁰⁸ Veith, "Two Kingdoms under One King," 139.

Similarly, a Two-Kingdom view brings to the left-hand kingdom, other voices like that of Thomas Sowell. Sowell's constrained vision of the world and the limitations of individual's capabilities also argues for more decision makers at the table in politics, economics, and community affairs, exercising their wisdom and self-interest, rather than centralized decision makers on behalf of all. The Two-Kingdom view of public engagements also seeks God's moral wisdom at work in the world even in cultures and peoples very different than ourselves, again, seeking more solutions for the complex problems of poverty, homelessness, racism, and violence.

A dynamic, paradoxical Two-Kingdom public engagement of the urban community also roots such engagement not in the need to coercively transform the community through politics, but to exercise public service for the sake of civility, justice, and peace, for the sake of the community. Such an engagement not only tempers transformative expectations, but it roots the motivation for public engagement in the Gospel as well. A dynamic right-hand kingdom engagement, offers a concrete, sacramental gospel as the foundation for identity, purpose, and life rather than merely concrete, temporal liberation.

Summary: The LCMS' Public Theology; A Sacramental, Two-Kingdom Engagement in Urban Mission

Cone challenges the Church to engage the black, urban community with a "Concrete, Christological" political liberation, but such a challenge actually limits the potential solutions for liberation for black communities by conflating issues of socialism, capitalism, and the Gospel. What is also lost is the uniqueness of rooting the identity of people in the black community in the person and work of Christ, rather than in the temporal realities of sinful humanity, whether in

poverty or privilege.¹⁰⁹ The Lutheran proclamation of God's concrete engagement of the world through the differentiated realms of His left hand and right hand rule, provides for concrete liberation in the temporal realm in view of the common *Imago Dei* of all people, but even more importantly, the Lutheran proclamation speaks of the Concrete, Christocentric liberation offered to all people through God's concrete gifts of Word and Sacrament, an LCMS, sacramental perspective on the Gospel.¹¹⁰

An LCMS, Two-Kingdom public theology paradoxically "affirms a permanent (this side of the eschaton) duality in God's relation to the world and history."¹¹¹ Concerning temporal issues, it seeks to gather as many voices at hand for the sake of concrete solutions for the issues endemic to the urban communities of American culture, issues such as racism, poverty, crime, violence, joblessness, family breakdown, single parent homes, morality, access to and quality of education etc.,. Such a dialogue would be done in full view of the personal depravity and sinfulness of all involved as well as the limitations of any proposed solutions to actually "solve the problems," when it can only mitigate issues at best. With a "trade-offs" mentality incumbent upon all involved, discussions of temporal concrete liberation would not only include potential policy perspectives, but discussions for concrete ways to build human dignity, strengthen marriages and families, protect human rights, promote moral virtue, and expand the role of civil-society institutions and governments that uphold the law.¹¹² Within the Two-Kingdom structure for

¹⁰⁹ The story of the "Rich man and Lazarus" in Luke 16, defines the issues of poverty and privilege from an eternal perspective, not merely a temporal one. There is no doubt that the church engages the community for the sake of the temporal blessing of the community as much as it is able to affect that, but one's identity and eternal destiny are never determined by man's particular treatment of each other, either for good or for ill.

¹¹⁰ See Piepkorn, "The One Eucharist for the One World," 101, who discusses the eternal offer of eternal freedom in Jesus Christ and the temporal concerns of liberation for all people this side of heaven. Concerning the "real" presence of the body and blood of the cosmic Christ in the sacrament Piepkorn says, "Because we eat the body and drink the blood of the cosmic Christ, we are bound to His concerns."

¹¹¹ Benne, *Paradoxical Vision*, 91.

¹¹² Bradley, *Political Economy of Liberation*, 138. See also, Bradley, *Black and Tired*, xiii. Where he

engagement, Cone and Sowell, as well as a host of other voices from within the black community, as well as those people groups who seek to serve the urban community, can be brought to bear on the concrete issues that need to be addressed for the sake of just and peaceful communities for the sake of the residents who live and work there. From an LCMS, missional perspective, the church needs to engage all these potential voices in service to its neighborhood as a contextualized voice for the sake of the Gospel. God, then, is at work through His Law in the left-hand kingdom through the created structures of family, economy, and state, through Christians and non-Christians, with clearly defined presuppositions to human achievement of “justice” through law, even by sinful individuals.

Yet, in this Two-Kingdom structure for public engagement, the LCMS must never forget that its ultimate work, the proclamation of the Gospel in the right-hand kingdom for the sake of the community is sacramental¹¹³, that is, “concrete.” . In fact, the *concrete* offer of God’s grace through Word and Sacrament is the ultimate certainty for liberation for those who believe in the Gospel. The proclamation of the Gospel, while not reduced merely to a concrete, political liberation, is none-the-less concrete, in that God himself delivers the benefits of the work of Jesus Christ through spiritual-physical means that can be concretely received.

Cone’s concrete challenge to the church is not merely about “concrete liberation”

reiterates these broader principles necessary for concrete liberation to include “The dignity of the Person - the human person created in the image of God is individually unique, rational and the subject of moral agency; The social nature of the Person - people were meant to act not only for self-interest but also for the interest of others; The importance of Social institutions - especially the family as foundational to society; Human action and the need to act to actualize one’s potential; Sin - Although created in God’s image, sin is pervasive and a reality; The Rule of Law and the Subsidiary Role of Government; the Creation of wealth, property rights and its positive relationship reducing poverty; Economic liberty, rights and duties; Economic Value; The Priority of Culture - moral culture that embraces the truth of the transcendent origin and destiny of the human person.” xiii-xvi.

¹¹³ The word sacramental pertains to the Lutheran Teaching that the Gospel event of Jesus life, death, and resurrection in the flesh is delivered by Christ’s “means of Grace,” to the hearts, souls, and minds of people, creating faith in people’s hearts as a gift of God’s grace by the power of the Spirit. The Gospel then, is not merely a principle on a page, it is not some religious moral teaching, it is a proclamation of a reconciled status with God because of Jesus’ work on one’s behalf, concretely delivered through words, water, bread and wine.

politically, it is also about the social location of the saving work of God. As such, his concerns challenge the LCMS to speak about its unique emphasis of the Gospel as a concrete answer to share with the urban community. Jesus Christ is present in His Word and sacraments for the sake of the concrete salvation of people. The message of the Gospel is not “religious teaching” emanating from neutral cultural constructs but an encounter with the living God who has spoken in history. Arthur Carl Piepkorn goes further, speaking of the concrete salvation that comes through the concrete gifts of Jesus Christ for a person’s life and salvation. He explains that through Christ’s gifts to the church, especially His gift of Holy Communion, there is an extension of His incarnating presence to His Church for the certainty of their salvation, making us human again. He says,

This Christ, bodily and if you will, bloodily present in the Sacrament of the Altar, is not merely a human being. He is *the* human being, the model, the standard, the blueprint, the die that determines what authentic humanity is, from the first human being to the last. We human beings—all of us—have not only our salvation but our very humanity from Christ.¹¹⁴

Such a concrete presence is dependent on God’s activity alone for the sake of everyone in the world. Piepkorn goes on:

We have already stressed that the Sacrament of the Altar is a making present again of God’s act in Christ, His nativity, His baptism, fasting, and temptation, His perfect life of obedience, His rejection, His last supper, His agony and bloody sweat, His Betrayal, His arrest, His cross and execution, His precious death and burial, His glorious resurrection and ascension, and in anticipation and in vivid hope His self-disclosure to vindicate and liberate His church and His creation at the great *palingenesis*. All this is made present before God and before us.¹¹⁵

Such a “concrete” Right-Hand engagement of God in the world, offering His grace freely, uncoerced, with the eternal promise of justice, mercy, and peace, roots one’s identity in the

¹¹⁴ Piepkorn, “The One Eucharist for the One World,” 96–97.

¹¹⁵ Piepkorn, “The One Eucharist for the One World,” 97.

creative and redemptive work of God on people's behalf. As such, it calls all people to repentance, it calls all people to an undeserved salvation, and it provides power to overcome human weakness and division in the enduring work of Christ for us, in us, and through us. Only the Gospel of Jesus in the right-hand kingdom can compel us with the truth, "Because we eat the body and drink the blood of this cosmic Christ, we are bound in Him to His concern."¹¹⁶

Cone's demand for a concrete Christology challenges the Lutheran church to speak even more boldly about a God who has spoken, and has still located Himself on His own terms in a place where He can be found, received, and believed in. He is not merely here or there, He is located in His own witness of Himself, in the words of Scripture, the waters of Baptism connected to His Name, and the bread and wine and body and blood of His Supper, so that people might "concretely" receive him. Herman Sasse says,

He, the *Deus incarnates*, who for our sake took flesh and blood, stoops down to us so low that He not only lives among us but in us, and we can do nothing else than speak the words of the centurion with the old liturgies of the Lord's Supper: "Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof."¹¹⁷

The public, missional implications of this proclamation of a "concrete Christology" in dialogue with Cone become obvious. An incarnate, sacramental Lord is knowable and receivable with concrete applications not only for an individual before God, but also for the community as well. For the believer, a sacramentally delivered, sustained faith in Christ also motivates and

¹¹⁶ Piepkorn, "The One Eucharist for the One World," 101. He goes on to say, "Because He is preeminently the man who is the model of all men, nothing human is alien to him. Everything in history, everything in the present, and everything in the future is part of the experience of Him who is the same yesterday, today, and forever. There is no achievement of the human spirit that is not His triumph; there is no disaster that involves human beings that is not His grief. By the same token there is no achievement of the human spirit that is not our triumph, and there is no disaster that involves human beings that is not our grief. The difference is that our time-frame is our short life, our scope the limited personal universes of which we are a part . . . we do not all have the same vocational responsibility, the same financial resources, the same opportunities, the same information, the same expertise, the same capacity for accurate evaluation, the same ability to foresee the results of various action." But we are called to "Be ourselves in Christ for others," for their sake, and for the sake of the mission of the Gospel.

¹¹⁷ Herman Sasse, *We Confess Anthology* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1985), 2: 96.

encourages “concrete Christological service” towards one’s neighbor as an extension of “Christ at work through His people” in their various vocations in life. Piepkorn ferrets out the implications of this “concrete” Gospel towards one’s neighbor, saying:

The Christ who in His lifetime manifested Himself as the sworn enemy of injustice, of disease, of prejudice, of discrimination and of exploitation is calling us to an imitation of Himself in these areas also. He calls upon us to use His gifts of creation with reverence. . . . He calls us to a concern for minorities, the underprivileged, the disenfranchised, the handicapped, the ill, the lawbreaker as well as the administrator of the law, the perpetrator as well as the victim of violent, the people who rank as our political foes as well as those who rank as our political allies, and for have-not nations as well as for have-not individuals. He calls us to a concern for good government, for peace, for public decency and order, for integrity.¹¹⁸

Piepkorn unfortunately wrote these words at a time when the LCMS was embroiled in its fight with modernism within its midst. Therefore, the concrete application of the sacramental, saving presence of Christ lived out in full view of the challenges of race and race relations in America was sublimated to the identity crisis within the LCMS itself. Beyond those battles in the 1970s is another opportunity to faithfully share the Gospel as a servant-voice in the black, urban communities of America today.

A dynamic, Two-Kingdom differentiation of God’s activity in the world for the world, then, properly sorts these issues out for the sake of temporal justice, temporal peace, and the ultimate work of God in the world, eternal life and salvation, the ultimate gift of one’s humanity redeemed and restored as only Jesus the Christ can and does. God saves individuals, not nations,¹¹⁹ and no one community/culture in the left-hand kingdom can claim to be a perfect reflection of God’s liberating presence in the world. But the Church, as people responding to God’s undeserved grace, can be a place where such liberation is concretely received and shared

¹¹⁸ Piepkorn, “The One Eucharist for the One World,” 102.

¹¹⁹ Veith, “Two Kingdoms under One King,” 135.

while motivating believers to a more determined engagement of the community on God's terms for the community's sake.

LCMS, Two-Kingdom missional practice is sacramentally motivated and dynamically engaged in the community in practice primarily through the vocations of its people. Vocation-driven, community engagement that is biblically informed, seeking to serve the neighbor to glorify the God who has saved and redeemed us, is a powerful way to connect to the community with its unique challenges and struggles. For the LCMS, this engagement remains the most typical way for the Church to be involved in the community for the community.

But there is more to an LCMS urban missiology. Vocation-driven methodologies may be the norm for Two-Kingdom missional practice. But social justice issues in modern, American culture demand more of the church. Faced with sinful, racist issues that are personal and structural, the Church will at times need to address the corporate challenges for civil society as an active participant. Such engagement will not be political, or apolitical, but dialogical. And, in terms of justice, it will not be "retributive, or distributive,"¹²⁰ but in terms that Dr. John Nunes describes as, "contributive."¹²¹ Contributive justice is people acting with the capacity that they have, accountable to others involved, from the location that God has placed them to "rectify situations of injustice."¹²² It means:

Doing justice . . . directing your God-given resources and energies according to your vocation and station in life, in a manner that contributes sustainability to the full human flourishing of your family, your neighbors, and fellow-humans. Contributive

¹²⁰ See John Arthur Nunes, "Does Contributive Justice Have a Future?" *Concordia Journal* 39, no.3 (Summer 2013): 215n 1–2, where he describes Distributive justice as a "rights-based analysis of whether a society has a fair and equal allocation of goods and services and what should be done to remediate cases of inequality." Whereas Retributive justice refers to "a wide range of situations, including whether the punishment meted out fairly matches the crime committed or whether reparations are required to compensate for historic imbalances, oppression, or genocide."

¹²¹ Nunes, "Does Contributive Justice Have a Future?" 208.

¹²² Nunes, "Does Contributive Justice Have a Future?" 212.

justice, thus, invests its activities in God's goal for humanity: fullness of life (Jn. 10:10).¹²³

Honoring the “tradeoffs” challenges and reality of doing temporal justice, “contributive justice engagement” would therefore span the whole gambit of LCMS, Two-Kingdom engagement, indirect-direct, long-term and short-term actions with a “contributing” mindset that challenges each person to put their vocational gifts to work, valuing the work of God in the left-hand kingdom on His terms, each one making the most of our opportunities to love others in His name. In this regard God's people of faith, rich and poor alike, those in need and those with abundance, will dedicate themselves to community engagement for the sake of others, with a supportive, encouraging spirit that at times is prophetically critical to the powers that be as well as advocating for those in need, all in service to one's neighbor in view of God's mercy received.

Nunes also notes that contributive justice includes “sustainability,” namely that,

Giving to others might be best thought of as two-way investing—rather than as one-way charitable exchange where standards of accountability, checkpoints, benchmarks, and mutually agreed-upon expectations are built best in relationships in which money, time, energy, or talent stand the best chance of being valued. This value is further enhanced when group or individual sacrifices for others can be experienced first-hand.¹²⁴

Such a perspective on justice demonstrates again that there are things that need to be done in community for the sake of the community that cannot be legislated or coerced. Such a contributive justice calls believers to be the neighbor to others that Christ is to us and to treat that calling as a God-given task that flows from one's faith. In this regard, the church can be a mediating structure like no other.

In fact, a Two-Kingdom practice then, would also have a healthy suspicion of any ultimate,

¹²³ Nunes, “Does Contributive Justice Have a Future?” 210.

¹²⁴ Nunes, “Does Contributive Justice Have a Future?” 213.

coercive, bureaucratic solutions for the complex problems associated with racism, poverty, violence, crime, etc. along with a hopeful disposition towards such challenges due to the biblical reality that God is at work still in people and the structures of culture for the sake of the community as well. Because of that reality that “God is at work” in various vocations and people, the church as well as its people is called to “contributive engagement,” that undergirds the leaders of the community with our support and our prayers, promotes good government, and is actively involved in people’s lives as we are able, and in things that matter in our community.

Finally, a Two-Kingdom perspective, as already discussed, creates certain attitudes. Being the bearer of such a differentiated, Two-Kingdom voice by grace alone, a voice that holds in dynamic tension the concrete liberation in God’s left-hand kingdom and concrete liberation and salvation offered through His right-hand kingdom, the Gospel calls forth from “simul iustus et peccator”¹²⁵ disciples attitudes of empathy, repentant-humility, even tempered hopefulness in God’s left-hand kingdom work all in service to the Gospel and the community in which it is called to serve.

Conclusion

Benne’s structure for Two-Kingdom engagement not only directs and tempers public dialogue for the public good, it calls for the church to see itself as a helpful mediating structure in society that can provide the context for serious discussion of permissible moral options on social issues. “Conscience can be formed without the churches hastening to premature

¹²⁵ This biblical teaching is very powerful when it undergirds action in the community for the sake of others. The teaching states that believers are “100 percent sinners and 100 percent saints” (at the same time sinner and saint) because the righteousness that makes believers saints is Christ’s righteousness which God gives as a gift to all who believe. As such, even as believers striving to follow Christ, we possess the same struggles and sins common to the people in the community we seek to serve. We are bonded negatively to our fellow human beings in our common depravity even as we seek to share with them a bond of forgiveness and grace that can overcome the divides that we create and selfishly maintain.

commitment to specific policy positions.”¹²⁶ And a church that is able to critically engage such issues not just for their own benefit, but for the benefit of their community, models the kind of deliberation and action that make civil life possible, just, and peaceful. Such modeling also proclaims that the ultimate solutions to the problems we face are not government oriented, not even free society oriented, they can only happen when hearts are changed by the Gospel and motivated by grace to serve others in Jesus Name.

The LCMS may have failed to explicate the benefits of a Two-Kingdom engagement of the public realm for the missional purpose of sharing the sacramental Gospel of Jesus Christ in response to challenges of Black Theology. From the uniqueness of the LCMS position in American society, its Two-Kingdom voice, and the repentant awareness of its historical failures in effectively engaging cultural issues for the sake of the communities it wishes to serve, the Gospel compels the Church towards a more dynamic, Two-Kingdom engagement of the issues of race and racism for the sake of its Gospel witness in the city. As such, with a Reformation restraint, an awareness of God’s work through the structures and vocations of people in the realm of His left-hand rule, and the tempered yet hopeful expectations of what can be accomplished in the civic realm, the LCMS can be a voice for the community and the Gospel.

¹²⁶ Benne, *Paradoxical Vision*, 195.

CHAPTER FIVE

FERGUSON CASE STUDY: A TWO-KINGDOM PERSPECTIVE FOR THE SAKE OF THE COMMUNITY AND THE GOSPEL

In order to demonstrate an LCMS urban missiology in practice, this chapter will summarize the basic principles of such a missiology and apply those principles to a concrete, urban case study, the civil unrest in Ferguson, MO. This chapter will analyze the LCMS reaction to the Michael Brown shooting by Officer Darren Wilson, August 9th, 2014 and the ensuing reaction in the city. It will also reference other ecclesial engagements from an LCMS, Two-Kingdom perspective. It is to be noted that this paper will not provide an exhaustive investigation of the issues and events at Ferguson, but will reflect on the event in Ferguson as an example of how an LCMS missional engagement did look or might have looked at the time of the event. The Ferguson unrest is chosen due to the highly political nature of the event, the politicization of many of the solutions, and the proximity of the whole affair to St. Louis, the epicenter of LCMS Lutheranism. Finally, the chapter will posit issues for further study and engagement that would benefit an LCMS missiological practice in places like Ferguson and elsewhere.

An LCMS, Two-Kingdom engagement hopes to provide a framework of engagement that can offer direction for the church in two particular areas: it can help the church serve as a mediating presence in the unfolding of public events so that the work of the church is useful to the civil demands of the moment; and it can also help the church provide potential solutions to the community that are uniquely offered in a Two-Kingdom dialogue for the sake of the community and the Gospel.

The Basic Principles of Lutheran Urban Missiological Engagement: A Summary of the Principles for Public Theological Reflection and Possible Engagement

Any public engagement of any public issue by the LCMS or its churches is an engagement compelled by the Gospel and guided by God's unique, differentiated work in the world through His Left-hand and Right-hand rule.¹ The preaching of the Gospel (right-hand kingdom work) is the church's primary mission in the world. But such a dedication to preaching the Gospel always occurs within particular contexts that demand ecclesial, missional engagement of the issues in a community (left-hand kingdom work) as part of being God's people for others. This is most especially true with regards to an LCMS missiology in the city for the city.

There are several principles then that will guide such an LCMS engagement.² The most important of which are:

1. **Public Engagement:** the Church is called to engage public issues both for the sake of its witness of the Gospel, but also for the sake of undergirding God's work in the community from a left-hand kingdom perspective for the civic righteousness and peace of the community. This engagement seeks the good of the community, whether people in the community come to faith in Jesus or not. (Jer. 29; Gen.12; Acts 17).
2. **Reformation Restraint:** the Church is called to engage such issues with tempered expectations and an attitude of "reformation restraint." With a biblical understanding of God's left-hand kingdom engagement in the world through His Law, such a restraint recognizes one's own sinfulness and limitations, honoring the fact that God engages the temporal world through various public vocations³ that He has created to restrain humankind's predilection towards sin and evil, compelling a basic outward righteousness by all for the community's temporal blessing and peace. The church practices such a restraint with regards to public proclamations of policy or public

¹ Benne, *Paradoxical Vision*, 81–82, summarizes, "There is a duality but not a dualism at the heart of the Christian vision. . . . We are caught in two realities that must be taken seriously. . . . Each reality is under the governance of God but in sharply different ways. God governs the 'kingdom of the left' with His Law and the 'kingdom of the right' with His Gospel."

² For an exhaustive list of the principles that flow from these foundation points, please refer to the appendix at the end of the dissertation.

³ Such vocations are not unique to the Church, but are part of the sociological-economic-political ordering of society for its temporal blessing of justice, civility, and blessing. Such vocation would include, but not be limited to the vocations of father, mother, husband, wife, family, law enforcement, politician, magistrate, businessperson, employer, employee, etc.

matters of adjudication or enforcement of outward behavior because it is not the only moral agent in the world,⁴ and it has not been tasked with the coercive role of ordering society for its temporal, civic good.⁵ The church's role in society is to undergird, inform, even educate those who are faithfully called into vocations to accomplish such things while maintaining its unique "reformation" role in the world of proclaiming eternal salvation for all as a free gift of God's grace through the person and work of Jesus Christ alone.

3. **Two-Kingdom Differentiation:** the church then is called to embody such a dynamic, Two-Kingdom engagement of the world, differentiating the method, the purpose, and the content of God's engagement in His left-hand kingdom work, for the sake of the community and for the sake of the Gospel, God's right-hand kingdom work.

Concerning the first principle, public engagement, the Church must work in the left-hand kingdom. Issues like crime, violence, poverty, joblessness, illegitimacy, illiteracy, single-parent households etc. need to be addressed by the Church for the community's sake as well as for the sake of the Church's witness of the Gospel in the community. The problem is that certain ecclesial views object to the notion of church engagement in things like politics.⁶ The other problem is that churches have abdicated their responsibility to engage in certain issues for a variety of reasons.⁷ One such "disengagement" is the church's relative silence concerning issues of race, racism, and bigotry in America. Chapter two was a delineation of the abdication of the LCMS' public role in that regard as well as a call to repentant, missional action in the black,

⁴ This view honors the fact that God's law is in the world, calling all people to civic righteousness as well as calling all people to repentance. See Rom. 2:14–16, where it says, "Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other times even defending them."

⁵ See Rom. 13:1–5.

⁶ See Hunter, *To Change the World*, 111–66, 213–24, for Hunter's fuller discussion of the Neo-Anabaptists, also, 175, where he says of them, "Theirs is a world hating theology. . . . Their dominant witness is a witness of negation . . . and they have little to say to those outside of their own particular community besides judgement," But also see, 281, his reticence even for Evangelical involvement in public issues, calling for the church to be "silent for a season," due to the caricature that now exists in culture about the church in the community as a moralistic, political voice alone. Cone would call for that silence for other reasons, as we have demonstrated.

⁷ See chapter two for a detailed discussion concerning the churches failures concerning racial issues in America, as well as its failure to address problems that were created by the racialization of people groups in America.

minority community for the community's sake as well as for the sake of the Gospel.

In the face of such problems, the first principle of an LCMS urban missiology affirms that the Church has public work to do. With repentance and a Two-Kingdom perspective, the church is called to humbly undergird the vocations properly at work within the community and to prophetically call to account those that are not acting competently, justly, or outside their proper sphere of accountability. The Church would also seek God's blessing of the city, not merely for the Church's survival, but because God has ordained temporal order and blessing for the sake of all, and the Church is called to support such orders that are duly ordered and faithful to their callings.

Concerning the second principle, any LCMS public engagement is to be attempted with tempered expectations and a Reformation restraint that is aware of the biblically (and sociologically/historically) defined limitations of sinful individuals and sinful structures to solve complex human problems. The problem is that there are ecclesial engagements that fail to recognize humanity's brokenness and depravity.⁸ A false anthropology, one which fails to recognize humanity's depravity and propensity towards ungodliness, personally and structurally, tends to promote a false triumphalism which equates the victory that Christ accomplished on the cross for the world with the political policies and liberative movements of sinful humanity in community. Practically, as we have seen, such a perspective can actually limit the possibilities for concrete freedom of oppressed peoples.

⁸ See Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*. 103–6, where he says, "Sin is a theological concept that describes separation from the source of being . . . It is a community concept. . . . To be in sin has nothing to do with disobeying laws that are alien to the community's existence. . . . Sin, ultimately, is a condition of human existence in which we deny the essence of God's liberating activity as revealed in Jesus Christ." Cone, *Black Theologians*, as well as many liberal, progressive theologians see structural sin which causes personal violence, but very seldom see personal sin as an issue to be considered. They borrow from Marxist utopian thinking in that structures are the things preventing the ultimate good of humankind.

In the face of such a perspective, an LCMS urban missiology practices a perspective of biblical restraint. In such restraint, the church is cognizant that God is at work in this sinful world through His left-hand kingdom rule, approaching complex, societal issues from a “tradeoffs” even a “lesser of two evils” mentality for solutions in the temporal realm. Such a restraint is confident that God is indeed at work through public vocations inhabited by Christians and non, to maintain basic civility, justice, and peace for the sake of all. With such a philosophy of Reformation restraint, control of outcomes, ultimate solutions, are beyond one’s individual, corporate, and ecclesial human abilities often compelling the church to advocate issues of “fair access” with regards to issues of justice, education, housing, etc. Such a perspective dispels utopian visions of grandeur, fully aware of human limitations in all public engagements, policy solutions, and public service.

A Reformation-restraint perspective also remains confident that God can maintain peace and civility through His law, tempering the full, destructive capability of a human being’s sinful heart through vocations such as fathers, mothers, extended families, business people, public leaders, magistrates, law-enforcement and other community structures in the neighborhood properly fulfilling their duties. Fully aware of its unique role in the world of preaching the Gospel, the church practices a reformation restraint that encourages godly, public solutions to community issues through those vocations and structures that God has ordained for the sake of temporal justice, righteousness, and peace. In view of public injustice or abdication of those roles, the church also seeks to become a clear, public, prophetic voice of critique when such vocations and structures fail their God-given duty in that regard.

Concerning the third principle, Two-Kingdom differentiation, the church will seek to embody a new way of being the church in and for the community, modeling a different strategy

of public engagement that is not rooted in the present strategies of resentment and negation, the politicization of all issues merely for the sake of power and control. Rather, it will exemplify a dynamic, Two-Kingdom differentiation of God's engagement of the public realm for the sake of the community and the Gospel. Such a divinely-appointed engagement of cultural issues/community issues is a left-hand kingdom, Gospel-motivated, but non-gospel principled, exercise of the law for the sake of temporal justice and peace.⁹ Such a community-engagement encourages believers primarily to exercise citizenship, as people exercising their faith in service to others in their vocations in the world which are morally, behaviorally focused, seeking common ground with others, even non-believers, in temporal matters. It honors the Sphere Sovereignty and Subsidiarity of the natural orders in the community as God's blessings, part of God's engagement of the community for its order and protection even as it strives to maintain its primary work of reflecting the sacramental, in flesh, nature of the Gospel in concrete, sacrificial acts of service in the community for the sake of its Gospel proclamation for all.

As such, the Church will always be motivated by the Gospel of Jesus Christ to serve one's community. But, in any ecclesial engagement in the public realm, the church will learn to dialogue with other left-hand kingdom structures with a left-hand kingdom language, namely a socio-economic, political, philosophical, scientific language, not merely as a way to speak the language of the community, but to honor the wisdom in the left-hand kingdom as God's wisdom in action in the temporal realm. The problem is that too often the church has engaged the world

⁹ Bible verses such as 2 Thess. 3:10, "If one is unwilling to work, neither shall he eat," which values the principle of work over sloth as an ordering of society rule. Also, Gen. 9:6, "Whoever sheds human blood, by humans shall their blood be shed, for man is made in the image of God." Let the punishment fit the crime, eye for an eye, such justice is not solution oriented, it is "last-resort" prevention oriented. This is the basic view of the state. For solutions to complex problems, we are to look to God and look to each other in service and love, something that cannot be "compelled" by a coercive structure like the state. This is one reason for "limiting" the state from a Two-Kingdom perspective. The reality of coercion always corrupts love and service.

from its own perspective, with its own language, failing to understand that it is called to engage the world in ways that the world can understand, both publicly and missionally.¹⁰ In addition, on the one hand, there are views of ecclesial engagement that falsely denigrate left-hand kingdom work as “less divine”¹¹ when it is more properly a differentiation of God’s Law work in the world¹² in contrast to His Gospel work in the world through the work of Jesus Christ. On the other hand, there are other views of ecclesial engagement that fail to differentiate God’s Two-Kingdom engagement in the world at all,¹³ falsely conflating the uniqueness of God’s Gospel

¹⁰ See Johnson, *Black Christians*, 196, where he describes this ethnocentric tendency even in the LCMS missional engagement of the black community. He says, “To put the matter differently, in its work in the black community, the Synodical Conference had attempted to convert black people to the German culture under the guise of bringing them the Gospel. Black congregations had to be organized like German Lutheran congregations. Black congregations had to sing German hymns as German Lutheran congregations sang them. Black Lutherans had to think in German theological categories as German Lutherans thought. All issues of church life had to be defined as German Lutherans defined them and thought about them. In order to be a “Good black Lutheran,” one had to become a “good black German.” One could not be authentically Lutheran unless he/she was authentically German.” But this tendency exists when Christians engage in community issues too. When a Christian says, about a community issue, “The Bible says . . . this or that,” they need to understand that others might not share that sense of the Word’s authority. Left-hand kingdom language will be able to articulate a moral, biblical perspective from a sociological, psychological, or political way that will be more persuasive in any left-hand kingdom dialogue.

¹¹ See Bradley, *Political Economy of Liberation*, 138, where he says, “James Cone and others offer some helpful observation about many of the issues and problems facing the church and the world. Thomas Sowell offers various contributions to social thought that, in the end, are closer to a Christian anthropology and worldview than what is found in black liberation traditions. . . . While black liberation theology lacks both fidelity to the classical theological conceptions of the redemptive story, and basic principles of economics, Sowell’s work lacks any dimension of transcendence, even though his conclusions for political and economic liberation closely harmonize what the Scriptures describe about human dignity.” Throughout his work, Bradley notes Sowell’s lack of transcendence, a diminution of Sowell’s work in comparison to Cone. But, the better solution would be to categorize both Cone and Sowell as potential, godly voices of morality in the left-hand kingdom for the sake of civil righteousness, justice, and peace. In this case, Sowell’s more “aligned with the Scriptures” social philosophy, spoken in socio-economic terms is very helpful for church’s engaged in left-hand kingdom dialogues for the sake of the community.

¹² By “Law Work,” this dissertation means God’s “curbing work of outward human sin” through His Law at work in various vocations in the community.

¹³ See Benne, *Paradoxical Vision*, 29, where he describes the puritan-Calvinist-revivalist traditions that “intends to transform society as an analogy to the transformation of the soul. Thereby God’s kingdom in the individual’s soul is translated into God’s kingdom in society.” Such a conflation of God’s Left-hand and Right-hand work emanates from the Calvinist teaching of the congruity of personal sanctification of the believer in Jesus with the possibility of similar structural, societal transformation. To be noted, much of the LCMS’ struggle with community engagement today, is a struggle with the crusaderist engagement as an extension of the work of the Gospel. It should also be noted that while Cone is certainly not an evangelical, his theology goes even further than the Calvinist tradition, completely flattening/conflating the Gospel into a political act of liberation in the temporal realm alone.

work to reconcile the world to Himself through the person and work of Jesus alone to His civilizing work in the world through His left-hand kingdom rule as well.

Embodying a dynamic, Two-Kingdom engagement of the community proclaims that God's engagement of the sinful world through His Law, while not for the sake of its ultimate salvation, it is nonetheless a divine, outward curbing of society's sinful inclinations and actions for the relative peace for all in the community at large. Such a view honors the divine work in the left-hand kingdom that promotes left-hand kingdom dialogue for temporal justice and peace, fully aware that such temporal principles and action will always be the "lesser of two evils," or the best solution with the least tradeoffs, ones that honor the sphere sovereignty of the family, the vocation of business/work, the free association of people to take responsibility of their lives and communities. Such a differentiation, also prevents any ecclesial engagement strategy of the false temptation to conflate God's left-hand/right-hand engagement of the world which not only confuses Law and Gospel, such a conflation ultimately leads to the politicization of the Gospel, diminishing the Gospel to a temporal, politic message devoid of any eternal ramifications.¹⁴

Therefore, when any LCMS public action is called for, even demanded by the community for the sake of the community, the Church will engage with a dynamic, Two-Kingdom mindset, seeking the truth with a listening spirit, so as to speak Christ's truth in love, with an awareness that God is already at work in the community through the vocations in creation that He has ordained for the sake of the community. Such a mindset is ready to act to undergird public vocations as well as honor people's grievances and experiences of injustice, prayerfully. Such an ecclesial call to action will encourage the magistrates, Mayor, Police etc. as well as defend those

¹⁴ In Matt. 4:8–10, Jesus is confronted with a similar temptation. The kingdoms of the world in "all their splendor" are offered Him if only He would avoid the cross. The temptation of foregoing God's eternal plan of salvation for temporal riches and prosperity will always be one of the greatest temptations that sinful human beings face in their earthly lives.

who are experiencing injustice or violence. It will advocate for those, in one's community, who have no voice as well as prophetically chastise all abuses of power. It will also repent of its own failings, misunderstandings, or misguided leadership in serving the community faithfully.

Urban America poses unique challenges for the LCMS church in mission. The church is confronted not only with the structural and the personal issues of the urban context, but also with America's racial issues, historically embedded and presently practiced: issues like Jim Crow laws, segregation, redlining, as well as poverty, violence, incarceration, and family brokenness. It also must deal with those issues as a church subject to the potential delegitimation of its message and involvement as a "white" church, a church that is often blamed for the issues that are present in the city. In such a situation, the LCMS engagement must not only be strategically structured from a Two-Kingdom perspective, but it must also be repentantly transparent concerning its own history regarding race in America. It will also be open to sharing lessons learned from its own ethnocentric struggle with regards to Americanization and the limitations and challenges that were imposed on its own mission work as it tried to become an American Lutheran Church, not a German-American Lutheran Church.

In an LCMS urban missiology, then, the church will be active in the community, working repentantly, humbly, with a Reformation-restraint mindset, as it differentiates the two kingdoms so that it works in the community both for the sake of the community and for the sake of the proclamation of the Gospel.

Case Study: The Application of These Principles to Analyze the Lutheran Response To Ferguson and to Assess Future Action

To organize the investigation of the events at Ferguson, MO, this chapter will use the basic

structure of Robert Osmer’s model¹⁵ for practical theology. Osmer proposes four tasks for the practical, theological investigation of particular events in society. This dissertation will use that structure to illuminate an LCMS missional engagement of the events of Ferguson, MO. Osmer says that there are four basic questions to be faced when dealing with events through practical theology. These questions guide our interpretations and responses to a situation: “What is going on? Why is this going on? What ought to be going on? And, How might we respond?”¹⁶ Osmer further says,

Answering each of these questions is the focus of one of the four core tasks of practical theological interpretation.

- *The descriptive-empirical task.* Gathering information that helps us discern patterns and dynamics in particular episodes, situations, or contexts.
- *The Interpretative task.* Drawing on theories of the arts and sciences to better understand and explain why these patterns and dynamics are occurring.
- *The Normative task.* Using theological concepts to interpret particular episodes, situations, or contexts, constructing ethical norms to guide our responses, and learning from “good practice.”
- *The pragmatic task.* Determining strategies of action that will influence situations in ways that are desirable and entering into a reflective conversation with the “talk back” emerging when they are enacted.¹⁷

With the *descriptive-empirical task*, this chapter will practice what Osmer calls “Priestly listening,” which requires that one hears, sees, and understand things from the perspective of others as much as one is able. For this case study, it is to be noted that during the events of Ferguson, it would have behooved the church to really “hear” things from the perspective of others, especially those unlike themselves. Talking with people on the street, understanding the emotions and pains of the victims, the police, and the community requires a listening that sees

¹⁵ See Richard R. Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008).

¹⁶ Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 4.

¹⁷ Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 4.

things as they are as much as one is able, rather than forming pre-conceived notions of what is happening and why. For the purposes of illuminating the uniqueness of an LCMS missional response, the dissertation recognizes that more work would need to be done to fully investigate the events of Ferguson. For now, newspaper articles from the New York Times and the St. Louis Post Dispatch will serve as the resources necessary to construct and empirically describe “what happened” as an act of priestly listening. Such an approach, while limited, does reflect one of the most common ways in which people start listening to discern what happened in an event.

With regards to the *Interpretive Task*, seeking to find out the “why” of these events, this chapter will investigate the narratives that are presently used to make meaning of the events of Ferguson. For this effort, various books and articles specific to the Ferguson event will be explored. The goal of this section is to lay out the differing perspectives concerning the events surrounding Ferguson in a way that fairly represents their viewpoints and potential solutions and articulates how this constellation of causes interact and shape the dynamics of this event.

Concerning the *Normative Task*, the event will be critically reflected upon through the lens of the urban missiology for the LCMS articulated by this dissertation. This LCMS, dynamic, Two-Kingdom voice will engage the various interpretations of “why” things happened in order to affirm, to correct, or to reject them for the sake of the church’s work in the community. The three principles for ecclesial engagement described at the beginning of this chapter will help guide reflection on what should happen, even as the church interacts with the various trajectories of action constructed by the various narratives that interpret the event.

Finally, concerning the *Pragmatic Task*, the chapter will assess LCMS proclamations and public engagements of the issues of Ferguson at the time of its occurrence, as well as posit other possible statements and actions that might have been offered in light of the missional principles

advocated by this dissertation. This section will delineate a concrete urban missiology that deals with the real-world issues involved in Ferguson from an LCMS, Two-Kingdom perspective, critiquing and highlighting actual LCMS actions with regard to Ferguson and positing other actions that could have been done as well. In addition, this section will consider future actions that speak of possible ways LCMS churches can be a continuing voice in the city for the Ferguson community. As such, LCMS competencies coinciding with the needs of the urban community will be explored for the sake of further study.

The Descriptive-Empirical Task

The Descriptive task seeks to define “What’s going on, what happened?” A missional engagement involves the act of “Priestly listening,”¹⁸ hearing the event(s) from the perspective of the people involved or affected by what occurred. It is important therefore, to really hear, understand, even empathize with things from the perspective of the people of the community as well as to “get the facts” as much as one is able. This challenge was never more apparent and necessary than with the issues surrounding the events of Ferguson, MO, August 9, 2014. The New York Times, March 4, 2015, reported this,

Michael Brown and Dorian Johnson walked down the middle of Canfield Drive, and Officer Darren Wilson arrived in his police vehicle. Speaking through his window, he told them to move to the sidewalk. He saw that Mr. Brown fit the description of a suspect in a convenience store theft, and he made a call to the dispatcher about the men. He positioned his sport utility vehicle to block them, and also blocked traffic.

There was an altercation between Officer Wilson and Mr. Brown, who was standing at the driver’s window. In testimony supported by physical and forensic evidence, Mr. Wilson and some witnesses said that Mr. Brown reached into the vehicle, and punched and grabbed the officer. The two men struggled over Mr. Wilson’s gun.

¹⁸ The term again is based on the idea that true intercessory prayer involves more than praying for people; it involves praying before God from their perspective which involves listening closely to what they are thinking, what they need, what they are concerned about, offering prayers to God on their behalf with their own voice as much as is possible.

Autopsy results and other evidence confirmed that a shot grazed Mr. Brown in the right hand at close range.

Brown Flees . . . Mr. Brown ran east, and Mr. Wilson pursued on foot. Investigators said there was no evidence that Mr. Wilson shot Mr. Brown while he was running away. An autopsy did not find gunshot entrance wounds on Mr. Brown's back, and there was not sufficient evidence to say what position Mr. Brown was in when he sustained two gunshot wounds to his right arm.

Brown turns back towards the officer . . . After running at least 180 feet from the S.U.V., Mr. Brown stopped and turned toward Officer Wilson, who also stopped. Mr. Brown moved toward Officer Wilson, who fired several more shots. Officer Wilson was between eight and ten feet away from Mr. Brown when he fired the last of the shots. Investigators said that credible witnesses gave varying accounts of Mr. Brown's speed as well as the position of his hands while moving toward the officer, but that accounts stating that Mr. Brown was surrendering were not credible. Mr. Brown was fatally wounded by a gunshot to the head and fell about 22 feet from where his blood was found on the street. That evidence was used to discredit accounts that Mr. Brown never moved back toward the officer after running away.¹⁹

Unfortunately, the Times summary, which was sourced by the Department of Justice investigation, bore little resemblance to the accounts of what many people thought happened, days and weeks after the shooting. In fact, days after the shooting, there were narratives that substantially differed with this final, exhaustive report of what actually happened. The reasons for this were many: false reports, false testimony, a failure of the police-force and the city government to release information in a timely fashion, as well as a history and context of injustice which may have caused a rush to judgment by many leaders that literally enflamed passions no matter what others would state were the facts.

This contextual reality obviously poses a problem for any who seek to be involved in their community when tragedies such as Ferguson occur. From an ecclesial, missional perspective, the church, its pastors and people, need to hear the reflections and accounts of the people of the neighborhood as a matter of course. Two overarching narratives, then, were immediately heard

¹⁹ https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/03/04/us/report-what-happened-in-ferguson.html?_r=0.

concerning the events in Ferguson from the initial reporting, though one was clearly preferred over the other. The two narratives were, 1) that Michael Brown was killed, even murdered by a racist policeman as another example of the injustices that black people endure in a racist society,²⁰ and, 2) that Michael Brown was killed while resisting arrest because he robbed a store and didn't want to get hauled in by the police . . . Or, that the officer did his duty, difficult as it was.²¹ From a priestly-listening perspective, both views would need to be engaged because both views were part of the events of Ferguson in the hearts and minds of the people and, in retrospect, each contained elements of truth.

With the LCMS not having any churches in the Ferguson area,²² a listening spirit with a reformation restraint was and still is called for. As the speaker of the Lutheran Hour, I was asked to make a public statement about Ferguson the day after the event. We did, as an organization,

²⁰ See books like Lean Gunning Francis, *Ferguson and Faith; Sparking Leadership and Awakening Community*. (St. Louis: Chalis Press, 2015), See http://www.stltoday.com/news/local/crime-and-courts/ferguson-day-one-wrapup-officer-kills-ferguson-teen/article_04e3885b-4131-5e49-b784-33cd3acbe7f1.html, the article in the St. Louis Post Dispatch the day after the shooting where the step-father of Brown, Louis Head, held a sign saying the police "executed my unarmed" son; See also http://www.stltoday.com/news/local/crime-and-courts/scholar-blames-ferguson-shooting-on-history-of-government-segregation-policies/article_5fe91ffa-9f0d-5e05-98d5-af979ad5f901.html, where Richard Rothstein blames the shooting of Michael Brown on the root causes of "white flight and private prejudice, namely "racially explicit, purposeful, federal, state, and local government policy that lasted over a century."

²¹ See books like Taleeb Starkes, *Black Lies Matter: Why Lies Matter to the Race Grievance Industry* (Politically Incorrect Publishing, 2016), 65, where he chastises the Black Lives Matter false narrative of Ferguson in comparison to the DOJ's report saying, "Instead of 'hands up, don't shoot,' the more fitting phrase is 'Assault a cop, he'll shoot!' But since hypocritical Oath maintains the lie of victimhood, 'hands up, don't shoot' will continue to be propagated and recited as if it's gospel." See also, Diana Klebanow, *USA TODAY Magazine* 145, Issue 2856 (Sept. 2016): 25, where she says, "The DOJ report is based on the sworn testimony of witnesses, cell phone videos, video surveillance tapes, and police recordings. This material was verified by comparing it to evidence that included physical, ballistic, forensic and crime scene evidence, as well as medical and autopsy reports . . . there is no evidence to indicate that Brown was shot because he was black. In this instance, it appears that Wilson would have acted the same way if his assailant had been white." See also, "Rudy Giuliani: Ferguson Police Officer Darren Wilson Should be "Commended," http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/03/12/rudy-giuliani-darren-wilson-commended_n_6857086.html. These perspectives were present in the Ferguson event from the start, but they were hardly voiced early on. It wasn't until after the DOJ's report that used forensics, video, and witness testimony to exonerate Wilson that such views were voiced. To be noted, Wilson, the Mayor, the police chief and others resigned over this event, and Wilson was stripped of his pension as well.

²² There were LCMS pastors who helpfully, with a listening spirit, did venture into the neighborhood, but they were from parishes nearby.

ask for prayers for all involved, but I deferred any other comments seeking to pledge my support to undergird the LCMS and its work in the city. To that end, I made myself available and prayed for the ongoing efforts of the LCMS in the community. My reasoning for this restrained view for myself, and for any who began posting on the internet etc. in our name, was that any engagement of the issues of Ferguson must first be rooted in the truth of what happened,²³ and that we should honor and support the work in the community, its churches, its leaders, and its citizens before positing any outside help on our terms. The various accounts of what actually happened were polarizingly diverse. It should be noted that one view was much more vocally represented on the street with the protesters, undergirded by the media as well.²⁴ The other was represented by the officers and those who tended to align with a law and order perspective,²⁵ which was less vocal possibly due to the present caricature that such a position is “racist” due to the racial history of the country at large.²⁶

²³ See Paul Cassell, “Do the Facts of the Michael Brown Shooting Matter?” *The Washington Post*, Opinion page, (November 24, 2014). When you see articles like this, with people’s minds made up no matter the evidence and the verdict, this cannot be a healthy way forward in working in the community for the sake of the community. Later results from Federal Department of Justice findings exonerating Wilson were even clearer resulting in articles like John Mcwhorter, “Ferguson is the Wrong Tragedy,” (*Time*. 12/15/2014, Vol. 184, Issue 23), or “Violent Crime Surge is Tragic Proof “Ferguson Effect” is real, (*Investors Business Daily*, 9/26/2016) that showed that dismissing the facts of a particular case in a particular community with particular issues in its context is never helpful in the long run.

²⁴ See “No. 2: The Activists protesters,” *Time*. December 22, 2014, vol. 184 issue 24/25, 113, where Attorney General, Eric Holder says, ““What happened in Ferguson could be one of those seminal moments that transform the nation.” This amidst the reality that the protests had turned violent with minority owned businesses looted and burned. Or, see Darlena Cunha, “Ferguson: In Defense of Rioting,” *Time.com*. December 2, 2014, or Alex Newman. “The Media encourage Rioting, Looting.” *New American*, September 21, 2015, 31 issue 18, 15–17.

²⁵ To show how broad this discussion can go, see Heilbrunn, Jacob, “The Culture War Returns,” *National Interest*. Jul/Aug2015, Issue 138, 5–8, Where he argues that the riots like Ferguson are being used by neocons to drive a wedge between Hillary Clinton and her working class white voters. In contrast, see William F. Jasper, “RIOTING FOR A REASON: Civil Unrest and Political Opportunity,” *New American*, January 19, 2015, 31 Issue 2, 17–19, where he argues that the media/culture is virtually blind to the reality that places like the Ford Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, the Soros Foundation are funding Marxist-Leninists, Maoists to fan the flame of racial division for the sake of undermining American society.

²⁶ Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation: Twentieth Anniversary*, 15, says, “The white view of black humanity also has *political* ramifications . . . Blacks live in a society in which blackness means criminality, and thus ‘law and order’ means ‘get blacky.’” See also, 33–34, where in discussing Martin Luther, the tradition of conservative Christianity, Law and Order, and the peasants revolt, he says, “Luther’s identification with the

One voice that went almost unheard amidst the tragedy in Ferguson was the voice of the business owners, many of them minority owned. Several were looted and burned. I personally witnessed a television report where the owner of one of the convenience stores narrowly escaped from the business mere moments before it was overrun by angry looters. Unfortunately, this and other related reports on the destruction of businesses were under-reported, reported mainly as an addendum to the larger issue of racism in the community. The owners were merely victims of justifiable rage. It would have been helpful to really “hear” the business-peoples’ perspective²⁷ on what was occurring in the community, since issues of economic-community investment, jobs, and entrepreneurship would surely be a part of any possible solutions to the issues in question. The peaceful protestors and the police both failed these innocent, business-bystanders and any discussion of community building after events such as those in Ferguson will need to attend to their concerns as well, since jobs and investment in the community are vital factors for the stability and potential prosperity of people in communities like Ferguson. As David Von Drehle and Alex Altman write,

With poverty rising steeply in nearly every neighborhood, Ferguson needs jobs. But what employer is now more likely to move to town? Ferguson needs the middle-class

oppressors in society enabled him to speak of the state as a servant of God at the same time that the oppressed were being tortured by the state. It is impossible for the oppressed who are seeking liberation to think of the state as God’s servant . . . Luther’s concern for “law and order” in the midst of human oppression is seriously questioned by black theology.” Personally, seeing the violence perpetrated upon the innocent store owners, it wasn’t a shock that Officer Wilson’s life was in danger. The narrative that he was a “racist” cop who had no problem shooting black people was completely undermined by the evidence of the day and the evidence of his work in the town of Jennings as a “cop in the neighborhood.” Yet, even after being exonerated in St. Louis and in Washington, DC, Wilson was removed from the police force and was dismissed without his pension.

²⁷ It was very ironic to me that the store owner of the store Michael Brown robbed was adamant that he did not call the police. (See D.L. Chandler, “Ferguson: Straight Facts On #MikeBrown Shooting Case,” *Nation*, <https://newsone.com/3047840/mike-brown-shooting-facts/> in an article favorable to Michael Brown where he notes that the owner didn’t report the robbery, others in the store did) . . . The point, There was some fear there, still is. (See the owners plea at . . . http://www.stltoday.com/news/special-reports/multimedia/ferguson-market-liquor/article_ead8b0f8-e91c-507c-a45f-7a53c574b75f.html) See also Jake Halpern, “The Cop,” *NEW YORKER*, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/08/10/the-cop>, where he notes that during the robbery, “A clerk tries to stop him, but Brown easily shoves him aside. Store employees later told federal investigators that Brown looked “crazy,” used profane language, and asked the clerk menacingly, “What are you gonna do about it?” . . . even Dorian Johnson, after the robbery, didn’t want to bring it up because he didn’t want to rub Brown, “the wrong way.”

and stable working-class families, black and white, who join the PTA and coach the basketball clubs and plant the flower beds. But those families won't soon forget . . . the feeling of being trapped in their homes while militants fire guns and police, in response, filled the night with tear gas.²⁸

It is evident, therefore, in coming to grips with “what happened?” for the sake of mission, there are more issues to attend to than merely the events that transpired at noon, on August 9, 2014. But, tending to the facts of what happened is vital to moving forward in discussion of those other issues as well. Historical issues of racism, poverty, and social justice are themes present throughout the accounts of the Ferguson shooting as well as present issues of crime and gang-violence coupled with the political delegitimation of the police²⁹ and non-progressive

²⁸ David Von Drehle and Alex Altman, “The Tragedy of Ferguson,” *Time*, September 1, 2014, 184 Issue 8, 25.

²⁹ See articles like Christian Schneider, “Consider the Black Police Officer,” *USA TODAY*, August 16, 2016; or Ron Hosko, “Ferguson one year later: It is now fashionable to vilify the police regardless of the facts,” August 07, 2015, <http://www.foxnews.com/opinion/2015/08/07/ferguson-anniversary-where-do-go-from-here.html> ; or the Associated Press, August 20, 2014, “Ferguson shooting: Darren Wilson, cop who shot Michael Brown, stays underground amid protests.”

solutions³⁰ for urban issues that don't fit a certain template for engagement.³¹ The question remains as to whether those are helpful perspectives for what actually happened in Ferguson and whether or not they positively impact solutions moving forward for the sake of the community. It is into this situation that an LCMS, missional engagement seeks to come to grips with such issues for the sake of its community, in service to the needs of the community, as it also seeks to share the Gospel with those in need.

³⁰ Note, virtually all the discussions of solutions for Ferguson centered on the police, i.e. more training, wearing body cameras, hiring a black police chief, and limiting police with regards to raising revenue. (See Kevin McDermott, "Ferguson, One year later: From a City to a Symbol," *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, August 2, 2015, http://www.stltoday.com/news/special-reports/multimedia/ferguson-one-year-later-from-a-city-to-a-symbol/article_9869eee5-e3ea-5e9d-810c-8b383d91c41c.html. . . . See also Michael Eric Dyson, *Is Bill Cosby Right? Or Has the Black Middle Class Lost its Mind?* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2005), xiii-xiv, for the roots of such delegitimation where attempts to offer law and order, entrepreneurial, cultural changing solutions (The essence of the Cosby discussion) are delegitimated as discussions of morality/education and entrepreneurial based solutions for the rebuilding the black, urban community as a class struggle of the "Afristocracy against the Ghettoocracy." Dyson's perspective is much like Cone's and others, a Marxist, progressive view not only of the issues, but of the solutions, racially delegitimizing those that disagree. Dyson's beef with the Afristocracy has merit, namely that they are out of touch with some of the issues in the urban community, but he fails to see the uniqueness of the black middle class in America as a solution to his binary view of class.

As one who grew up in the same Detroit, in a blue-collar family whose father attended night school for his college education at DIT to help break out of the bind of merely being dependent on the unions or management, Dyson fails to note the destructive policies that helped create the carnage that presently exists in Detroit as if more of the same will create change. His views seem to be formed by the fact that he was a "teen father, fending off welfare . . . working in the factory . . . getting a strong dose of Marxism. (xxvi)." Again, for a dialogue to bless the community, the issue is not Marxism versus capitalism, or free Markets, entrepreneurialism, versus government jobs and redistribution, bring all views to the table. The issue is that none of these solutions should be branded "racist or not" and presently some are, some aren't. All should be discussed from a left-hand kingdom perspective that values principles of hard work, sexual discipline, building strong families, education etc., strategies that seek to empower the urban poor rather than making them more and more dependent on others.

³¹ Most economic solutions are Marxist in general with political notions of distributing wealth as poverty's solution. Other solutions offered dealt with police brutality and the unjust use of force with solutions for disciplining the police, training them to deal with "black/white" issues better etc. Other issues/solutions contributing to the reality of Ferguson/Michael Brown are facts like Brown being from a broken home (not living with his father), being involved in a strong-arm theft of a local business with no apparent respect for the business owner or Officer Wilson, and doing poorly in school. These deeper issues are part a larger narrative of how to empower the community, but are seldom spoken about as a part of a solution for positive change.

For the larger conversation into which the Ferguson discussion fits, see Anthony Bradley, *Keep your Head Up: America's New Black Christian Leaders, Social Consciousness, and the Cosby Conversation*, 203, where he notes, "They (the voices of the Afristocracy) know that something is wrong with the black poor and that something should be done about them. Until Cosby gave his speech at Constitution Hall, these feelings (the pathologies and lack of social values of the urban poor) were rarely aired in public." This dissertation is concerned with the unwillingness to deal with those foundational issues, but even more so, it is concerned with the unwillingness to see other potential solutions to the issues that presently plague urban American culture, especially as it pertains to black Americans.

The Interpretive Task

The interpretive task, seeking answers to the question of “why did the events of Ferguson happen,” are more daunting to delineate. This is due, in part, to the early distortions of what actually happened,³² and also because the events of Ferguson were almost immediately overwhelmed by the larger narratives of race, issues of the police “use-of-force” in minority communities, and the passions connected to these broader discussions. A young high school student exemplified the difficulty. Clinton Kinnie, from Lutheran North, St. Louis, Mo, and a protest organizer noted that he is “often confronted by white classmates who don’t understand the issues in Ferguson.”³³ Different vantage points and different contexts brought various perspectives to the actual events that transpired in Ferguson. Such perspectives were evident in people’s assessment of “why” Michael Brown was shot by Officer Darren Wilson.

In the midst of these discussions, there are two main overarching viewpoints³⁴ that seek to explain “why it happened.” One view (seen as the liberal/progressive view) is that these events happened and still happen in America because of racism and the racialization of Law-

³² It should be noted that Michael Brown’s body laid in the streets for hours. That, along with a police chief’s reticence to set forth information quickly, caused many in the community to believe that a cover up was underway. Ironically, the same chastisement to the police chief for waiting too long with initial reports, fueling the fire that something was being concealed, that same feeling was not evident with the DOJ report concerning the releasing of its findings. Many urged the DOJ to take its time to get it right. After reading newspaper accounts of protests happening almost immediately at the scene of the shooting which were based on false information claiming that officer Wilson gunned down, even executed Brown, one should note the irony that in all these events people may have taken way too long to get things right. And, unfortunately, that made things very much worse.

³³ Robert Samuels and Wesley Lowery, “Hope and Anger grapple in Ferguson,” *The Washington Post*, March 15, 2015.

³⁴ See Boyd Cathey, “Ferguson raises some deeper issues,” *CDN*, Aug 23, 2014, at <https://www.commdiginews.com/politics-2/ferguson-raises-some-deeper-issues-24363/#6iOo8rOj3oQJ7JQt.99> where he summarizes, “There are two distinct narratives emerging from the events in Ferguson, Missouri. The first, which surfaced within hours of Michael Brown’s death at the hands of police, posits that “the gentle giant” was shot six times by a police officer when he had his hands up and was either leaving the scene or attempting to surrender. This is a narrative of police brutality and the continued violation of civil rights of black citizens, especially of young black malesThe other narrative is that Brown had just robbed a convenience store, had been using marijuana, had been stopped by Officer Wilson and struggled with him, inflicting an eye injury on Wilson that required a trip to a local hospital. When Brown left the police car after striking Wilson, he was ordered to stop, he turned around, and advanced aggressively towards Wilson. Wilson then fired at Brown, first to stop him, then to drop him.

Enforcement in the black community. The other view (seen as the more conservative, law and order perspective) is that Michael Brown was a criminal who was shot because he resisted arrest and put a police officer's life in danger.

Concerning the first viewpoint, such a view maintains that Darren Wilson was a racist cop and that his shooting of Michael Brown was just another example of policemen unjustly targeting young black men. Consider the following statements from various articles which said, "Why did they leave Brown's body lying in the street for hours? That's so disrespectful," or "Why did the officer have to shoot so many bullets?" or "He was trying to surrender." Again, there are many articles and books that undergird questions like these,³⁵ rooting this present event of the shooting of Michael Brown to racist activity in America's past, akin to lynchings, Jim Crow Laws, and the propensity for politicians to use police force to enforce the status quo.

In the book *Ferguson & Faith*, author Leah Gunning Francis notes that these events were continuously reflected upon in a broader discussion of white privilege and black poverty. Events like Ferguson were immediately referenced as examples of brutality and the maintenance of the status quo, with calls for law and order deemed racist in intent and action.³⁶ According to Anthony Bradley, this broader discussion of white privilege and black poverty undergirds black

³⁵ See Wesley Lowry, *They Can't Kill Us All*, (New York: Little, Brown, 2016), where he argues that what happened in Ferguson parallels what happened in Harlem, March, 19, 1935, when Lino Rivera was caught stealing a pen in a store in Harlem. The owner called the police, but both he and the police decided to let the boy go, ushering him out the side entrance. Somehow word falsely got out that had been killed for stealing candy. And rioting and looting ensued. See also Marc Lamont Hill, *Nobody*. (New York: Atria Books, 2016), where he argues that the present issues of police mistrust and violence, poverty, joblessness etc. are merely reincarnations of American's original sin of racism, Jim Crow, and segregation in another form. See Also, Chuck Rassch, "Scholar Blames Ferguson Shooting on History of Government Segregation Policies," Nov. 13, 2014, http://www.stltoday.com/news/local/crime-and-courts/scholar-blames-ferguson-shooting-on-history-of-government-segregation-policies/article_5fe91ffa-9f0d-5e05-98d5-af979ad5f901.html.

³⁶ See Christine Byers and David Hunn, "Ferguson mayor asks where National Guard was; Gov. Nixon pledges more," Nov 26, 2014, http://www.stltoday.com/news/local/crime-and-courts/ferguson-mayor-asks-where-national-guard-was-gov-nixon-pledges/article_343a2224-4d61-54fb-b5ac-a13ea99951f7.html, where it is clear that the Governors inaction was political, leaving the businesses and the community to fend for themselves until the violence got out of hand.

theology's social-reordering solutions to issues like Ferguson: Bradley summarizes the work of Dwight N. Hopkins, a disciple of Cone, by saying, "When social arrangements are reordered by race and class, authentic liberation occurs. In order for liberation to happen, whites must redistribute wealth and intellectual property and raise the standard material prosperity of all peoples in order to maintain true equality. Otherwise, blacks will remain victims."³⁷ Events like Ferguson, then, appear to be part of the continuing reinforcement of a system of white privilege and black poverty. The book, *Ferguson & Faith*, exemplifies this underlying view with quotes from clergy and protestors who say, "it could have been any of us,"³⁸ or "'here we go again'-- meaning more typical police violence against innocent black citizens."³⁹ Protest, then, is more than a reaction to the shooting of Michael Brown. It is a justifiable and, for the faithful, a godly response to a corrupt public system. For this reason, clergy and other church workers involved in the protest at the police station felt no tension between their absolute demonization of the police, the leaders of the community, and the elevation of Michael Brown to martyr status. Rather, the feeling among them was that God's demand for action was clear. One said, "I just felt God's presence and meaning in that moment."⁴⁰

These views led to an increased politicization of the issues surrounding Brown's shooting by Officer Wilson. From marches organized by Black Lives Matter, to events by "Occupy St. Louis," a group that began to take the protest to area Universities, to "Moms on the Move," a

³⁷ Bradley, *Liberating Black Theology*, 31.

³⁸ Leah Gunning Francis, *Ferguson and Faith*, 31.

³⁹ Leah Gunning Francis, *Ferguson and Faith*, 24.

⁴⁰ Leah Gunning Francis, *Ferguson and Faith*, 17. Interesting to note, many of the clergy were white but uttered no perspective that undergirded the police in any way. Since the facts of the case would later support officer Wilson's account of what happened, one wonders how the ecclesial-protest-engagement strategy really "helps" the residents of Ferguson. Books like Steele, *White Guilt* and commentaries like Lt. Col. Allen West's, "Post-Ferguson Murder and Mayhem: US Descending Into Mobocracy?" at <http://www.cnsnews.com/commentary/allen-west/> would argue that they actually do not.

group of suburban mothers who also organized marches with the mantra “praying with our feet until there is no more blood in our streets,” the notion was that social, structural racism was the fundamental cause for what happened to Michael Brown, and structural, societal change in politics, with the police force, and with other white structures is the solution. Black Lives Matter, at the urging of Oprah Winfrey, did finally present a list of demands towards that end. Their demands included, “Police cameras, police training, police review boards, as well as different ways of directing public funding.”⁴¹ Again, their demands, to be engaged later, demonstrated clearly that the “why” of the event was a corrupt public system, sustained by societal racism and bigotry in the police force.

The second public viewpoint, though more muted in the media and in the political dialogue that ensued, was that the policeman was just doing his job and Michael Brown was killed tragically because he threatened a police officer after a strong-armed robbery at a convenience store. This Law-enforcement friendly viewpoint was often voiced as “The police were just doing their job, the policeman should be commended, the issue was a violent exchange between a policeman and a criminal.”⁴² These views were not the popular views in print, but they were typical of many citizen’s responses when violence erupted amidst protests, when roads were

⁴¹ See Sandhya Somashekhar, “Oprah says protesters lack clear demands. Here’s what they do want.” *Washington Post*, January 6, 2015, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-nation/wp/2015/01/06/oprah-says-protesters-lack-clear-demands-heres-what-they-do-want/?utm_term=.879bd4da2bfa.

⁴² See Maxwell Tani, “Rudy Giuliani: Ferguson Police Officer Darren Wilson Should Be ‘Commended’ For Shooting Michael Brown,” http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/03/12/rudy-giuliani-darren-wilson-commended_n_6857086.html ; Doug Wyllie, “Why Officer Darren Wilson wasn’t indicted” <https://www.policeone.com/ferguson/articles/7782643-Why-Officer-Darren-Wilson-wasnt-indicted/> ; Erik Eckholm and Matt Apuzzo, “Darren Wilson is cleared of Rights Violations in Ferguson shooting,” *New York Times*, March 04, 2015, https://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/05/us/darren-wilson-is-cleared-of-rights-violations-in-ferguson-shooting.html?_r=0 All perspectives exonerated Wilson. Most of these views were not expressed at all at the time of the shooting. Later, they did provide a sense that justice had been done. But, Wilson, ironically was still released by the police department without pension as a response to the further protests in the community. See Steve Giegerich, “Ferguson mayor announces plan to increase minority hiring; no severance for Wilson,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, Nov. 30, 2014. http://www.stltoday.com/news/local/crime-and-courts/ferguson-mayor-announces-plan-to-increase-minority-hiring-no-severance/article_7c27e9b4-fdb5-5f8d-9ee9-6d571d82fd82.html.

blocked off, when rush hour traffic was interrupted, and when protestors felt the moral right to make others “feel their pain.”⁴³ Such a perspective would clearly side with the position that Michael Brown was a criminal who resisted arrest and was shot because of his aggressive engagement with Officer Wilson that day.

In fact, asking the question “what should a police officer do?” demands that one knows the questions they must face before going “into action.” One writer sought to demonstrate the tensions involved in truly coming to grips with “why” things like Michael Brown’s shooting happen. In the article, “Consider the black Officer,”⁴⁴ Christian Schneider recounts the issues and tensions involved in even being a black officer in the black community today with a role and expectation that is unfairly demanded of such officers. In his account, Schneider recognizes the tension of being part of the community ravaged by racism and injustice and yet being called to act in complex, even potentially violent situations, for the sake of betterment of the community and justice. He writes,

Maybe this is your neighborhood; perhaps you grew up in one just like it. Nobody knows better than you how important aggressive law enforcement is to protect the law-abiding residents of black neighborhoods. You’re well aware of the decay that has led to fatherless young men to roam the streets, terrorizing other African Americans. You know that society has called upon you to clean up the mess cause by broken families, inadequate educational systems and rampant unemployment. The frustration felt by the African-American community has many causes—but you are the one left to deal with its effects.⁴⁵

⁴³ See Leah Gunning Francis, *Ferguson and Faith*, 62–63, where the role of the church is described as being “Jesus in the streets,” a revolutionary, siding with people who don’t look like you or talk like you, becoming the church of Jesus in protest in the parking lot of the police station in Ferguson.”

⁴⁴ Christian Schneider, “Consider the Black Officer,” *USA Today*, August 16, 2016.

⁴⁵ Schneider, “Consider the Black Officer.”

But, he also delineates the debilitating awareness and public consequences that more often come should your fulfillment of the duties of a police officer involve the death of “a young man pointing a gun at you.” He writes:

If you end this young man’s life, elected officials could fail to back you up, instead making vague calls for “justice,” assuming you share equal blame for what happened. Your congresswoman will issue a statement blaming the incident on the “Hostile environment cultivated by the flagrant racial inequality and segregation that has plagued Milwaukee for generations,” not on a criminal brandishing a gun while trying to evade arrest.⁴⁶

For Schneider, systemic racism cuts both ways and your position is even more complicated because of your race. On the one hand you suffer community dismissal, even derision because you are a police officer. On the other hand, you experience and even suffer from the same discrimination that many in the community experience as well. He notes:

Special enmity could be hurled your way because of your own race. You likely grew up feeling the same sting of bigotry and segregation that led others to choose lives of lawlessness. Nevertheless, members of your community may continue to see you as a traitor for wanting to impose law and order in a black neighborhood. White do-gooders may blame you for the high incarceration rate for young black males.⁴⁷

Caught within this complex web of social forces, complicated by issues of racism and justice, you make decisions in 25 seconds that could change or end a life, including your own. “All you ever wanted to do was make the city a safer place.”⁴⁸

Such is the mindset of many police in the community, that in the face of such complex, life

⁴⁶ Schneider, “Consider the Black Officer.”

⁴⁷ Schneider, “Consider the Black Officer.”

⁴⁸ Schneider, “Consider the Black Officer.”

and death realities, they are just trying to do their jobs.⁴⁹ In fact, the article, “Cop,”⁵⁰ painted this picture of Darren Wilson, rather than the media version that he was a racist. In that account, these dynamics were basic to Darren Wilson’s understanding and explanation⁵¹ as he reflected back on that day in August. To those who maintained a “Law-enforcement” supportive point of view, the issue comes down to the notion that officers need to protect citizens and businesses, that’s why they exist. And, when a person is suspected of a crime, that person’s response to an officer of the law is to answer the officer’s questions and do what they say, pure and simple. Some even expressed that Michael Brown would be alive today if that were the case. Of course, this all works well until you face a policeman who may not be honorable. Or, if a person has suffered from continued run-ins with policing that has other motives than to preserve peace and protect law-abiding citizens.⁵²

⁴⁹ It should be noted from a contextual point of view, the kind of random gun violence described Schneider’s article is endemic to the city of St. Louis. As an example, a particularly violent episode occurred in St. Louis where two men openly car-jacked a vehicle on 11th street. One man pulled the woman driver from the car and shot her in cold blood on the street. The other pulled a pregnant passenger out of the passenger side and threw her to the ground. The baby of the driver was in the backseat when the two criminals took off with the car. They threw the child to the curb a few blocks down. In the end, they drove the car around for a bit, then abandoned it. This crime shocked for a moment, but with killings virtually every other day and gun violence a common occurrence, it faded from the news cycle fairly quickly. These incidents tend to be perpetrated by young, black men in their teens and early twenties. This is the reality that faces police, black and white, with the white policemen subject to the community’s wrath in an even more pointed way as experience by Officer Wilson in the Michael Brown shooting. See also Jake Halpern’s, “The Cop,” *New Yorker*, August 10, 2015, where he notes that Wilson received death threats almost immediately, though twice exonerated of criminal activity. Also, though considered by training officer McCarthy to be “the best officer he ever trained,” wanting to be a good cop especially in the black community, Wilson was relieved of his duties and denied his pension as a policeman.

⁵⁰ See Jake Halpern, “The Cop,” *The New Yorker*, August 10, 2015, issue 23, where he notes that Wilson was actually well trained and well-respected in the black community. Wilson’s field Training officer, also a well-respected officer in the black community of Jennings, MO, said, “Darren was probably the best officer that I’ve ever trained, just by his willingness to learn (that learning had to do with earning the respect of the black people he served in Jennings).”

⁵¹ See Halpern, “The Cop,” where Halpern asks Wilson if he thought Brown was truly a “bad guy,” or just a kid who had got himself into a bad situation. Wilson responded, “I only knew him for those forty-five seconds in which he was trying to kill me, so I don’t know.” Later he added that he was just doing his job that day, difficult and tragic as it was.

⁵² The same DOJ report that exonerated Wilson cited the Ferguson police force for system racism with regards to moving violations, tickets, and issues of resisting arrest which were punitive to the people, and a revenue stream to the city government. It is fairly well known that I-70, east and west of the airport is a “speed trap,” supporting little towns like St. Ann and Ferguson. Until the Michael Brown shooting, most of us in St. Louis

Why did it all happen? One view rooted it all in the narrative of police violence and racism against black citizens, while another view rooted it in the difficulty of policing neighborhoods of violence and crime. Altogether though, the painfully slow process of establishing the truth via testimony and forensics, led to increasingly more speculative discussions of racism that may or may not have had anything to do with the shooting of Michael Brown.

One final viewpoint as to “Why it all happened?” remains. It was the typical, though surprisingly apolitical, Evangelical response.⁵³ It did not support the police in any public, definitive way, though people like Cone would point out that they don’t have to, since the police are merely an extension of their white rule. Nor did they definitively support the protesters, though they did vaguely call for justice to be done. The evangelical response can be found in an extensive article by Dr. Ken Davis and Dr. Charles Ware, “Ferguson: How Should the Church Respond?”⁵⁴ Here, a typical personal repentance response to Ferguson was seen in Pastor Voddie Baucham of Grace Family Baptist Church in Spring, Texas: he called for the black community to take responsibility for the fatherlessness of its community and for its leaders to be as concerned about these issues as the shooting of Michael Brown.⁵⁵ Ben S. Carson, in an article in the Washington Times entitled “A problem bigger than Ferguson: Defiant black youth tangling with cops often come from fatherless families,” says,

thought of these places as blue collar towns, not black or white towns. And, of course, you watched your speed when you went through them.

⁵³ Again, the evangelical viewpoint tends to deal with race and racism in personal, evangelistic, reconciliation-relationship terms, not in terms of structure. The conversionist methodology for social change focuses on the transformed human heart which can then transform society.

⁵⁴ Ken Davis and Charles Ware, “Ferguson: How Should the Church Respond?” *Journal of Ministry & Theology* 19, no. 1 (Spring, 2015): 5–58. The article seeks to bring a black and white perspective to the things that happened at Ferguson, evaluating the Evangelical response to the shooting, while offering suggestions of their own due to years in urban ministry.

⁵⁵ See Davis and Ware, “Ferguson,” 15–16, where Pastor Voddie Baucham also says that Michael Brown, “reaped what he sowed.”

Regardless of one's position on the political spectrum, we can all agree that this was a horrible tragedy and needless discarding of a precious life. How could this have been avoided? . . . Why are there so many young black men in the streets of America with defiant attitudes that frequently lead to incarceration or death? Could it be that a large number of black men grow up without a father figures to teach them how to relate to authority and teach them the making of personal responsibility?

Overall, the views expressed in Davis' and Ware's article acknowledged that these things happen because of cultural and personal sinful factors, which includes racism, but also much more. The enduring question then is how all these factors relate to one another. To this, the Evangelical response was often vague and unclear. How did the evangelicals explain the "why" of Ferguson? It could be bad cops, it could be fatherless households, it could be poverty, it could be a culture of lack of discipline and violence, or it could be all of the above.

The Normative Task

To engage the Ferguson event for the good of the community for the sake of the gospel, the church must approach the Normative task, the question of "what ought to be done." Here, the principles of urban missiology that have arisen from this dissertation's dialog with Cone are important. They prevent the church's work from being subsumed into larger narratives of race and police relations and enable the church to manifest its Two-Kingdom dynamic engagement in a specific way.

When trying to address "what ought to be done," the issues are multi-faceted and complex. Unfortunately, the narratives interpreting the event tended to oversimplify the complexity and limit the avenues for engagement. You were either "for the poor community against the cops," or "for the cops in their tough job in the city." Very few voices sought to articulate both the history of racism and punitive policing and the social and cultural problems present in the urban-black-community context. To ascertain "what to do," one must first acknowledge that there are issues

of structural racism and injustice, but there are also pathologies in black-American urban culture and the growing problems associated with them (e.g, fatherlessness, single-parent homes, poverty, lack of education, lack of discipline, moral restraint, etc.). To advocate an exclusive viewpoint tends to limit possible solutions to the issues in Ferguson. In all of this, the evangelical perspective was even less definitive, leaving the questions of “what to do” vaguely answered in an effort to be apolitical.

Into such a divided spectrum of voices, the church is called to speak and act. The urban missiology advocated by this research encourages the church to proclaim that God has indeed 1) called the church to engage in such public issues with a 2), Reformation-restraint and a 3), dynamic, Two-Kingdom differentiation of the issues and solutions, for the sake of the community and the preaching of the Gospel. The question is what does this look like in action.

First, consider how a Lutheran urban missiology would engage the public that was radically divided in response to Michael Brown’s death. Part of this public would argue that events such as Ferguson happen because of racism and the racialization of Law-Enforcement in the black community. In the case of Ferguson, this perspective bred a protest mentality that sought to lay siege on the police station until things changed. In the book *Ferguson & Faith*, author Leah Gunning Francis notes how protesting the notion of excessive violence of the police with regards to Michael Brown was not merely a political gesture, it was an ecclesial engagement as an extension of her faith, and the faith of the clergy in St. Louis, in action. She says, “As a woman of faith, I did not separate my actions in pursuit of justice for Michael Brown from my faith. Instead, I understood them as an expression of my faith.”⁵⁶ Throughout the book,

⁵⁶ Leah Gunning Francis, *Ferguson and Faith*, 3. Again, it is clear that the shooting of Michael Brown was a tragedy of the highest order. The question of whether justice demanded Officer Wilson being charged, jailed, or exonerated, was not so easily related to one’s faith in action. The convenience store owner was robbed, the policemen was attacked, the policeman and the store employees described Brown as terrifying, and Michael Brown

various protestors and clergy are interviewed, and this progressive perspective leading to actions of protest is uncritically maintained throughout. Such a view would call for solutions like police retraining, community policing, video cameras, etc.⁵⁷

Here, an LCMS urban missiology would be open to the church participating in public action, but calling it to do so with a distinction between the two kingdoms and Reformation restraint. For example, if the church would be involved in action, even in protest, it would do so from a Two-Kingdom perspective. Such a response would not tend to lay siege to the police. Romans 13 describes the peace-keeping role of the state as God's work in community. Even in the midst of this tragedy, a Reformation-restraint would be called for to ensure justice and peace for all. The ecclesial-protest-disposition in response to Ferguson could have rightly rooted this tragedy in the broader issues of race in America, but it could just as easily have created a "rush to judgment" leading to other problems or even to confounding other solutions for the sake of the community. The fact that businesses were burned and violence ensued, all for a cause that was later found to be at odds with the Department of Justice Report, meant that much of the community destruction occurred because of a rush to judgment which in the end was very destructive to the community and its residents. A restraint mindset would have held in tension feelings of holding wrongdoers to account with a patience for seeking the truth of the event, correlated more with facts. In fact, such restraint should be a motivation for all involved. It seeks to acknowledge the sinfulness of those involved in these matters and the need to be judiciously

was shot and left on the pavement much too long. Such a pietism of response only seems to complicate a neighborhood's ability to deal with such issues.

⁵⁷ See again See Sandhya Somashekhar, "Oprah says protesters lack clear demands. Here's what they do want." *Washington Post*, January 6, 2015, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-nation/wp/2015/01/06/oprah-says-protesters-lack-clear-demands-heres-what-they-do-want/?utm_term=.879bd4da2bfa where she calls for "Police cameras, police training, police review boards, as well as different ways of directing public funding."

humble in pursuing justice. It seeks to root one's actions in the truth amidst the passions and struggles of race in the urban context. Shelby Steele says,

Restraint should be the watchword in racial matters. We should help people who need help. There are, in fact, no races that need help; only individuals, citizens. Over time maybe nothing in the society, not even white guilt, will reach out and play on my race, bind me to it for opportunity.⁵⁸

Such restraint would seek to engage then with a Two-Kingdom perspective that would ask, "Are there other responses to the issues of Ferguson that should be engaged, seeking to prevent such tragedies in the future?" Ironically, other, non-progressive voices would not be totally averse to issues restraining the police per se. With a Two-Kingdom engagement, the church could surely support prophetic rebuke of police abuses of power. But it would also be concerned with other social issues that may not be attended to if all attention is focused on restraint of the police. For example, even a full acquiescence to the demands of "Black Lives Matter," would not deal with the underlying issues of family breakdown, extreme violence, and criminality that plague the inner cities of many American cities. Since the Ferguson tragedy, homicides are up in St. Louis, as well as violent crime.⁵⁹ A continued monitoring, even controlling of the police works if individuals in the neighborhood are capable of self-governing. Otherwise, such policies may make it easier for criminals to disrupt the social order that benefits all the law-abiding citizens, black and white. The goal for any public, ecclesial engagement in the city would first and foremost be for the temporal peace of the neighborhood and the just protection of its citizens, churches, and businesses. Again, these issues have personal, communal, and political

⁵⁸ Shelby Steele, "The Age of White Guilt: and the Disappearance of the Black Individual" *Harper's Magazine*, November 30, 1999, <https://www.cir-usa.org/1999/11/the-age-of-white-guilt-and-the-disappearance-of-the-black-individual>.

⁵⁹ See Joel Currier and Christine Byers, "St. Louis homicides up more than 30 percent in 2014 to highest total since 2008, *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* December 31, 2014, http://www.stltoday.com/news/local/crime-and-courts/st-louis-homicides-up-more-than-percent-in-to-highest/article_1fedee5e-71df-5b12-8f1b-69ab62aab352.html. Some of the crimes are brazen yet all too common in the St. Louis area.

aspects, all which need to be engaged. A dynamic Two-Kingdom engagement that is respectful of sphere sovereignty does more than favor the progressive political response. It also engages the urban, cultural pathologies (including the realities of potential delegitimation⁶⁰) for the sake of the community. The impact of broken, fatherless families and its relationship to crime and violence⁶¹ are also needed as a part of Ferguson's reconstruction and the church has a public role it can play in such matters as well.

While one public approach emphasized this event as evidence of the structural racism in our society, another public approach sympathized with Wilson and the job he had to do that day. From this approach, there were calls for peace and patience while the public structures of the courts and the federal government did their job. This view called for restraint. When the authorities had done their job, Officer Wilson would either be indicted and put on trial, or exonerated and go back to work, tragedy notwithstanding. How would a dynamic Two-Kingdom missional engagement relate to this approach?

⁶⁰ Here again, the LCMS needs to be aware of the challenges of delegitimation in seeking to deal with these underlying issues. See Shelby Steele, *White Guilt*, 121, where he notes the delegitimation of Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan and his study, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*. He says, "There no longer serious debate among scholars on Moynihan's broad finding—that children from single-family, female-headed households have more, and more serious, problems than do children from two-parent homes. But Moynihan had not accounted for the ascendance of white guilt and for the fact that his white skin—once a source of impunity—now robbed him of authority in racial matters . . . In this context, whites simply could not criticize black life without being seen as a racist . . . He was made an object lesson for America's intellectual class: castigation and disregard await all white scholars who see black poverty outside the context of victimization." He further says, "Thus poverty came to be seen as a condition unrelated to the dysfunctions of those who suffer it, and always treatable by the "interventions" of government and other institutions."

⁶¹ See Anthony Bradley, *Black and Tired*, 22–23, where he says, "Living with married parents profoundly affects a black child's quality of life. Marriage reduces the odds that a mother and child will live in poverty by more than 70 percent. Sadly, over 80 percent of long-term child poverty occurs in broken or never-married families. Even more alarming pathologies result from out-of-wedlock births. Black children from single-parent homes are twice more likely to community crimes than black children from families with resident fathers. Seventy percent of juveniles in state reform institutions come from single-parent homes." Such issues are manifest in Ferguson, even in the life of Michael Brown and no police-enforcement strategy will overcome this. Churches like the Black church, the LCMS, and others must create dialogues that establishes one's sense of individual dignity and discipline (as a free, self-governing citizen, and, in the church's proclamation, rooted in the nature of being a created/even redeemed child of God), not only for a person's individual esteem, but also for the dignity, discipline, and commitment to raise families as foundations of stable communities.

A Lutheran urban missiology would acknowledge that this engagement strategy shows a proper restraint and a desire to know the truth, but it would also argue that this strategy fails to account for the greater historical context of racial violence in American culture, a context that is still more than a memory in many black American households. An LCMS ecclesial engagement would stress that it is important for any missional engagement to really try to understand the present-day role of police⁶² in the poor, black communities of the cities in America. But, it would also be cognizant of the reality of the enduring context of the racialization in this regard too. It is unfortunate that officer Darren Wilson's excellent training,⁶³ his desire to be a good cop in the black community, and generally good record in that regard, did not prevent what happened in Ferguson. But the Ferguson event cannot be separated from the larger historical context in which it occurred and an LCMS urban missiology, because of its ability to distinguish between the two kingdoms and consider both short term and long term strategies would be cognizant of how it engages in particular concrete action while remaining aware of and responsive to the larger historical situation.

For example, consider one pastor's account that was quite different than the others in Gunning Francis' book. Pastor Willis Johnson of Wellspring United Methodist Church was able to engage in "short-term" action in a way that would allow for (rather than cut off) more "long-

⁶² An issue that has never been talked about concerning Ferguson and places like it, is that Ferguson was basically a small town in St. Louis. It didn't have many resources. It was hostage to the events that began to occur like the businesses and the citizens of the area. When I lived in New York, there were times when there were controversial protests, events that could have escalated into violence. I noticed several times how the police set up a perimeter, making sure that protests had their say but didn't get out of hand, and counter violence was avoided as well. They literally would lock the city down until things calmed down. Ferguson, even St. Louis, has not ability to defend itself, protect itself and its businesses from what descended on them. As such it sadly has become a caricatured narrative even to this day. The question remains, "how can the community begin to heal when such forces overtake a community, black and white?"

⁶³ See again, Halpern, "The Cop," where Wilson's field Training officer, a well-respected officer in the black community of Jennings, MO, said, "Darren was probably the best officer that I've ever trained, just by his willingness to learn (that learning had to do with earning the respect of the black people he served in Jennings.)."

term” strategic approaches. From a “short-term” engagement perspective, Johnson clearly embodied a healthy way forward through the Ferguson unrest. His account was community focused, somewhat restrained because the facts were still unknown, sympathetic to both Brown and the officer, and focused on maintaining a dialogue between the police and the protestors, while seeking to maintain a civility that would serve the community. He said,

I don't live too far from the Ferguson police station. . . . (I went to the police station) . . . For about three hours, I stayed with young people who were obviously upset, frustrated, and angered. The group of young people wanted to get some answers, and they were really going to rush the police station. And I'm sure I was not the only person there that said, "Well, maybe that's not the best of ideas." (I further said to them). "I live here. I pastor the church down the street. Not that I'm important but I think maybe I can go into the police station . . . (I did). They (the police) buzzed me into the station because somebody at the front desk knew who I was. And I said, "Hey, I know this is a very, very tense situation and you all have a group of folk out here who are demanding answers. . . . I know that you probably can't talk to them. But is there any way I can talk to somebody here and explain the situation?"⁶⁴

With that, Pastor Johnson brokered a discussion with three of the protestors and the police captain in Ferguson, avoiding an even more dangerous, potentially violent confrontation of those young people that evening with the police. Johnson demonstrated a restraint that would prove helpful not only that evening, but in dealing with the issues surrounding the Michael Brown shooting, in the days to come. In essence, Pastor Johnson's account is one which a Two-Kingdom engagement could strive to emulate or expand by actually getting to know the police and the leaders in the community, engaging in action, sympathetic to the members of the community, but also respecting God-given authorities and seeking to preserve the foundations for future restorative action.

Having considered how an LCMS urban missiology would respond to the two main voices that divided appeals for public action, there remains the question of how an LCMS urban

⁶⁴ Leah Gunning Francis, *Ferguson and Faith*, 21.

missiology would be differentiated from the view of the Evangelical church at large. One aspect of the evangelical view sought to remedy tragedies like the shooting of Michael Brown by calling urban, black residents to face up to the pathologies that are rampant in the community.⁶⁵

This view is often associated with a personal sin and repentance, ecclesial strategy.

Unfortunately, stating the reality of the problem, even owning up to the pathologies of the community, does not fully address the urban challenges and the solutions necessary to overcome them.

In response to this voice, the LCMS urban missiology will begin by being humbly repentant. As noted earlier, the LCMS suffers at times from this perspective when it comes to the structural challenges associated with overcoming the racial challenges in America, especially in the city. In 1969, when the Synod responded to the Black Power movement with a convention overture, that overture called on the Synod to affirm black power and black separatism as “valid responses to white racism which, it was asserted, prevailed in the church and nation.”⁶⁶ While it is true that the kind of political freedom being expressed in this overture cannot be fully achieved unless the black community takes responsibility for such actions itself, it is not as if churches like the LCMS had no role in creating the problem or had no role to play in making this overture

⁶⁵ See William Julius Wilson, *More than Just Race*, (New York: Norton, 2009), where he says, “The weight Americans give to individualistic factors persists today. A 2007 survey by the Pew Research Center revealed that “fully two-thirds of all Americans believe personal factor, rather than racial discrimination, explain why many African Americans have difficulty getting ahead in life; just 19% blame discrimination.” Nearly three-fourths of US whites (71 percent), a majority of Hispanics (59 percent), and even a slight majority of blacks (53 percent) believe that “blacks who have not gotten ahead in life are mainly responsible for their own situation.” While the author laments this finding, stressing more structural government solutions for the deeper issues, he also references a study by Orlando Patterson of Harvard on page 82 that undergirds a refocused return to studying cultural factors for crime and poverty in the black community. This study found that there is a “‘cool culture’ in black, urban communities, that eschews education, hard work, and community to family in lieu of hanging out on the street, shopping, dressing sharply, sexual conquests, party, drugs, hip-hop, . . . with a masculinity that is expressed in impregnating woman but not raising the children.”

⁶⁶ Suelflow, *Heritage in Motion*, 255.

become a reality.⁶⁷ So, the LCMS urban missiological response would begin with repentance. Then it would move into humble concrete action.

Black evangelicals like Thabiti Anyabwile acknowledge these personal issues in culture, namely “fatherlessness, black-on-black crime, black community apathy, and the caricature that it’s not “racist, it’s sin,”⁶⁸ but warns the church to see such issues in the broader context of structural racism in public institutions and policy which contributes to the hopelessness that makes such problems overwhelmingly difficult to overcome. For evangelicals, the cultural issues are clear, but the solutions, both structural and personal, are vague.⁶⁹ Unfortunately then, issues like fatherlessness, joblessness, urban violence and crime are either spoken of simplistically or not at all. And, the various progressive solutions to such issues, solutions such as gun control, welfare, increased taxes for education, police review boards etc., become the dominant proposed solutions as if there are no other ways to address these problems.⁷⁰

In their article, Davis and Ware listed a litany of actions that the evangelical church should

⁶⁷ Again, it is true that there were LCMS attempts to deal with “black issues,” issues of fair housing, education, and poverty, but such attempts tended to be sporadic at best. It should be noted that while issues of “equal outcomes” are often suspect for various reasons, the LCMS could whole-heartedly support many “equal access” issues that would provide more opportunities for those who have been historically aggrieved by racist laws and structures.

⁶⁸ Thabiti Anyabwile, “Four Common but Misleading Themes in Ferguson-like Times,” *Pure Church*, (November 27, 2014).

⁶⁹ This may be due to the fact that white guilt is fairly wide spread in academic and ecclesial circles today, preventing voices other than the common, social-justice solutions that are presently proffered. See the destructive prevalence of this silence or acquiescence in Steele, *White Guilt*.

⁷⁰ By progressive solutions, this author means the propensity to see government policy and government spending as the main solutions to urban problems. Other solutions would be more business and market focused. See Larry Elder, *The Ten Things You Can’t Say in America*, 35–36, where he says, “For all the justified black anger against Jim Crow laws, private bus companies initially refused to enforce them. They wanted black trade and for their black customers to be comfortable. Only after authorities boarded buses and began arresting bus drivers did private carriers start enforcing racist Jim Crow laws . . . also, before the imposition of minimum wage laws, black teens were more likely to be employed than white teens. . . . Milton Friedman finds that the minimum wage law to be one of the most anti-black, if not the most anti-black laws on the statute books.” The point, market forces and business were very often the solution to black, minority discrimination issues long before any governmental intervention.

take in response to the racism of American culture, the structural racism in black, urban, poor communities, with very little response to how to mitigate such issues, or address the underlying cultural issues that plague any sustained drive towards liberation and empowerment. The list included things like, “Pray sensitively; Model Repentance; Give hope; Preach the word of concerning interpersonal/racial reconciliation, racism and justice; Care for the poor and disadvantaged; Practice an All-Nations Ministry; Build Ethnic Relationships, Pursue Justice; and Explore Urban partnerships.”⁷¹ Typically, the section on racial justice tended to leave the discussion very vague, chastising the church for inaction because of worries of “big government” or an unwillingness to protest racial issues when regularly protesting issues like abortion, same-sex marriage, euthanasia, etc.”⁷² providing no real directions for constructive, public solutions.

It is here then, where the LCMS can add a third voice that honors both the individual cultural issues that are endemic to black empowerment, while also noting the very structural issues that are destructive to black empowerment as well. The LCMS can venture out into the community as a third voice, expanding beyond the helpful, but limited resolutions on racial issues in its 1965 Detroit LCMS Convention, which voted:

- For open congregations and an end to “negro missions.”
- For staying in changing communities
- For fair housing and employment practice and removal of all restrictive clauses or tacit understandings in congregation and their communities.
- That all synodical schools and publications teach truths about race that according with sound theology and science and that interracial education be supplied for pastors, teachers, and leadership.
- That districts anticipate and plan a community-based future with their inner-city parishes, and that all parochial schools be open to neighborhood children and be strengthened in areas of racial unrest.
- That seminary students be assigned for their experiential year to inner-city parishes.
- That cooperation with the poor, nonwhite, and Native Americans be made mission

⁷¹ See Davis and Ware, “Ferguson,” 35–47.

⁷² See Davis and Ware, “Ferguson,” 46.

priorities and a focus of expenditures.

- That support be given to organize efforts in minority communities.
- That members who have engaged in demonstrations for furthering racial justice be commended and encouraged.
- That church schools and church publications adopt this stand, and that these resolutions be implemented by those in authority at every level.⁷³

Such work addressed racial issues from the perspective of assimilation and integration within LCMS congregations. But such an effort still suffered from an unwillingness to address the deeper concerns and issues in the black community at large from the community's perspective. Today the LCMS can push the limits of its own service to the community. Now, with a dynamic, Two-Kingdom voice, humbly seeking to engage urban issues not from afar, but from within the community, it can bring more voices to bear for the solutions the community desires and needs.

I saw the power of this empathetic, differentiation in my work in New York City. To deal with the issue of homelessness in the neighborhood, which was often an issue that divided people, the church had to not only get close to the problem, it had to deal with the problem "two ways." Some thought that giving street people money, housing, and education would solve the problem. Others felt that there were personal, moral issues at work that keep many of the homeless on the street and that personal responsibility was the only long-term solution to the issue. The problem, however, was that both were right. There were some people on the street due to forces beyond their control. There were others on the street because of their unwillingness to conform to any of society's norms. How do you know the difference? By being involved in the lives of the people on the street. A one-size-fits-all process treats both types of people on the street the same, which often fails to help either type of person. Government, one-size-fits-all solutions fail to get close enough to the situation to differentiate, to empathize with the truly

⁷³ Luecke, "Themes of Lutheran Urban Ministry," 140-41.

downtrodden, or to chastise the gamer on the street. With urban issues, the church needs to get closer to the problem to have an “empathetic, relevant” voice to the personal problems in the black community, to be supportive of the civil engagement that is helpful in addressing the problem, and to prophetically critique the public solutions that seem to be exacerbating the problem, rather than providing paths for solutions. The vague notions of “social justice” from afar confound rather than clarify ways forward. An LCMS, left-hand kingdom voice, seeks to engage community issues with a Reformation-restraint that undergirds the God-ordained work of the state to maintain the peace, while encouraging and promoting strong families and free-enterprise solutions within the community for the community. Such an engagement would call for exploring voices in the community for black empowerment, investing more efforts in the discussions of these potential long term solutions, providing a moral structure for citizenship and community cultural engagement, and demonstrating empathetic engagement.⁷⁴

Concerning Ferguson then, most perspectives pointed to structural racism as the cause of the Michael Brown shooting, and the pathologies that are rampant in black communities in the cities of America. Most progressive solutions focused on “police retraining, body cameras, racism in the community, etc” with very few discussions about how the urban centers of America have culturally decayed in the years “Post-civil rights.” Very few articles involving Ferguson dealt with any of the issues systemic in the urban communities in general, but especially problematic among black people particularly. The LCMS needs to be such a voice that expands

⁷⁴ In describing those “voices” the questions that need to be answered would be, “How do the participants benefit from black empowerment, not black dependency?” and “What are the general principles for success and individual liberation that are missing in black culture and how can those traits reemerge from a black perspective?” Issues like school choice in education, empower black families and children making them less dependent on government, one-size-fits-all education. Issues like entrepreneurship and personal ownership of homes and businesses is foundational to the health and wealth of any community. Making those possibilities possible is the essence of any general community engagement.

the dialogue for black empowerment, encouraging it to address both the issues of “driving while black,” over-policing, brutality, and enduring racism and the issues of broken families, poor education, violence, poverty, joblessness, etc. Such a voice would seek to bring a variety of market-driven, business-driven, even policy driven solutions to bear on those problems from a variety of voices with no “vested interest,” but a keen desire for the thriving of black, minority, urban neighborhoods.

In trying to ascertain “why and what ought the church do,” this dissertation has attended to Cone’s charges openly and honestly for all the reasons presented in chapters one and two. At the same time, the church, especially the LCMS, must have courage not to shrink back from the fact that many of Cone’s solutions are not, in fact, liberating the black community either. An LCMS, urban missiological endeavor is not engaged for the purpose of pointing out “others’ sins.” The goal of any community involvement is to be part of the solution in that particular community. The goal is to seek to understand why these things are happening, and present them, face them, and embody the truths that will bless the black community on its own terms. It is not a matter of “fixing blame,” but of dealing with reality for the sake of liberation. Issues of Michael Brown’s crime at the convenience store merely ten minutes before his engagement of Wilson, where he manhandled the store owner and threatened him as well, speaks to issues of disrespect for authority not just disdain for the police.

Facing cultural issues like this as they pertain to tragedies like Ferguson are difficult. They are often called the “Cosby conversation,”⁷⁵ and rather than being humbly engaged, dialogues

⁷⁵ See Bill Cosby and Alvin M. Poussaint, MD, *Come on People: On the Path from Victims to Victors*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007). The viewpoint became associated with Cosby due to the influence of the Cosby Show in changing the image of black people in the American context, but moreso because of his “Pound Cake Speech” at the May 2004 NAACP awards dinner honoring the 50th anniversary of Brown v. the Board of education. There Cosby refocused the discussion of crime, poverty, and joblessness in urban America to cultural issues. Such a radical refocusing of the discussion caused a firestorm. Cosby and Poussaint would continue to give lectures in this

such as this often end up being caricatured, delegitimated as “blaming the victim” and missing the point.⁷⁶ What is missing, however, is a dialogue that faces both the cultural pathologies and the structural racism in a way that honors God’s active involvement in His left-hand kingdom rule. Such a conversation will be supportive of a larger conversation that attends to institutional racism but also attends to the good of institutions, as God works through the public vocations of law-enforcement, business leaders, church leaders, politicians, and others who have a vested interest in seeing any of our urban poor have more than a chance at a “liberating life that seeks to give God glory and serve one’s neighbor in His Name with the skills and vocation that God intends them to exercise.”

Such an urban missiology definitely engages the community’s lack of trust with the police and the abusive Law-enforcement policies of “raising tax revenue through traffic stops and other law-enforcement citations which were more heavily directed towards its own people, especially black people.⁷⁷ It empathizes with Rev. F. Willis Johnson, pastor of Wellspring Church, who said, “The ultimate concern is this: under no pretense does someone deserve to lose their life, and in this case to have innocence stripped.”⁷⁸ But, it also calls the community to account when it fails to teach its sons and daughters respect for the Law, putting police officers in the no-win situation of being the “father” in the community as well as the enforcer of the rules, remedying

regard, finally putting the “Cosby conversation” arguments in written form.

⁷⁶ See for example, Michael Eric Dyson, *Is Bill Cosby Right? Or Has the Black Middle Class Lost Its Mind?* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2005), 183, where he explains the rift between Cosby and the poor as the seething class warfare in black America and America at large. He also complains that Cosby leaves white people off the hook.

⁷⁷ See Mark Berman and Wesley Lowery, “The 12 key highlights from the DOJ’s scathing Ferguson report,” *Washington Post*, March 4, 2015. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-nation/wp/2015/03/04/the-12-key-highlights-from-the-doj-s-scathing-ferguson-report/?utm_term=.9c565f5e5665.

⁷⁸ “Ferguson-area Churches offer Aid after Police Killing,” *Century News*, September 17, 2014, 14.

what our pathologies have caused.⁷⁹ A Two-Kingdom engagement addresses these issues from both perspectives, bringing more choices to those who seek to achieve and exercise their liberation faithfully for others.

The Pragmatic Task: What Did We Do?

In reacting to the events of Ferguson, the LCMS had and still has two major challenges. First, it has no congregational presence within the community itself. Second, as a conservative church, it would be identified as a “white” church amidst the racial issues involved with the shooting of Michael Brown. Because of those challenges, the church would have to deal with the events in Ferguson both with a short-term and long-term strategy. Short term, it would have to engage the issue as best as possible, facing the challenge as a disconnected but interested and empathetic voice in the greater St. Louis area. Long-term, it would need to strategize how to be more connected to communities like Ferguson, to be voice of blessing within the community for the sake of the community and the Gospel.

Concerning its initial short-term engagement, the church needs to be aware of its present caricature as a delegitimated, white church, disconnected and unconcerned about issues prescient to the black, minority communities in the city. It needs to be aware of how its engagement can be subsumed into the “black/white” narrative that is so prevalent in our culture today. As such, it did not help the image of the LCMS to post an article on its own news feed about two newlyweds who endured the riots in Ferguson, only to move out from their apartment with fear,

⁷⁹ See “Milwaukee officials plead for calm after police shooting sparks violence,” *Fox News*, August 14, 2016. <http://www.foxnews.com/us/2016/08/14/milwaukee-police-in-standoff-with-crowd-after-fatal-shooting.html>, Where the mayor of Milwaukee is pleading with the parents of the rioting teens “to get them home right now.” It is a bit absurd to say such a thing when fatherless homes is the rule and the problem in the black, urban community. Ironically, Sheriff David Clarke, who is black, was calling for a more forceful response to the violence and destruction, which the Mayor did not heed.

never to return. Their account, though helpful in delineating the very plausible view that “continuing lawlessness came from outsiders from everywhere but Ferguson,”⁸⁰ still painted that picture in black versus white terms that problematically affect all discussions of race and violence in the city.

In terms of Two-Kingdom engagement, the LCMS would have a reticence for any immediate “demonstration impulse.” This would differ from the compulsion to protest that was monolithically expressed by the ecclesial engagement described in *Faith and Ferguson*. Even though the church would support a thorough investigation of the event, even to the point of the federal investigation that was carried out by the Obama administration, the primary task of such an investigation would not be to support one of the two biases that were present in the radically divided public sphere. Instead, it would be to honor God at work in the vocations of the political, the legal, and the law-enforcement realm, prophetically holding each to their proper tasks, while praying for all involved.

To that end, President Matthew Harrison’s statement on behalf of the LCMS, was well crafted and to the point. He identified the reality of the “fear, anger, animosity between races and a general nervousness in Ferguson as one more tragic result of a world where sin and death continue their regime.”⁸¹ Here, one sees how the church enacted a Reformation restraint,

⁸⁰ <https://blogs.lcms.org/2014/ferguson-unrest>, to state that this article was not helpful in no way is meant to diminish the terror that the couple experienced those nights in Ferguson. It most definitely was real. St. Louis has a violence problem in general, and there were surely people out those days who would have had no problem hurting the couple if there were found to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. But the setting of the article as a white couple fearing for their lives, never to return to Ferguson unfortunately plays into the narrative of white flight, white guilt, providing a false justification for the violence the community experienced in the aftermath of Brown’s shooting. This author believes that much of the violence was perpetrated by outsiders and criminal elements from the city at large, not the residents of the community. Similarly, in my work in Los Angeles, an officer told me that the violence during the Rodney King riots were generally led by gang members and criminal elements in the community, with residents, black, white, and Hispanic, often staying indoors until the violence had passed.

⁸¹ <https://blogs.lcms.org/2014/prayers-for-ferguson>.

recognizing the importance of acknowledging sin even as one approached forming a response to the event. Harrison also proclaimed “Christ’s word of peace, despite sin’s turmoil,”⁸² and asked for prayers for “St. Louis and Ferguson community, the Brown family, the law officer involved in the shooting and his family, the churches of Ferguson as they seek to be instruments of peace, and the work of the LCMS in the urban areas.”⁸³ While not referencing racial issues *per se*, Harrison’s statement did demonstrate a compassion for all involved, honoring the various perspectives that were prevalent in the community, even as it properly awaited the results of the investigations that were to follow. Such a viewpoint could have spoken in a more clear, left-hand kingdom way. For example, Harrison’s statement⁸⁴ could have called for justice in a way that honored the work of God in the vocations of the community’s officials, even as it acknowledged that, in the end, it might need prophetically to hold them to account if injustice was indeed done. When all is said and done, one’s community engagement and voice within the community are key to not only being a part of the conversation, but also a part of the solution in the community amidst issues like Ferguson.

In terms of public action, the LCMS did concretely get involved by sending in several pastors as empathizing agents for the community. The church initially provided \$25,000 to a group of pastors who walked the Ferguson neighborhood to “reach out to anyone in need—residents, business owners or first responders.”⁸⁵ It was described as a ministry of presence, a listening presence. “The six Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod pastors from the International Center and St. Louis-area congregations, and a vicar, who also serves a congregation as a student

⁸² <https://blogs.lcms.org/2014/prayers-for-ferguson>.

⁸³ <https://blogs.lcms.org/2014/prayers-for-ferguson>.

⁸⁴ This critique is made in the reality that, having made public statements like this, I am fully aware of their limitations to communicate from afar all the issues involved an explosive issues such as those in Ferguson.

⁸⁵ <https://blogs.lcms.org/2014/mo-district-plans-in-ferguson>.

at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis—listened . . . a ministry of presence.”⁸⁶ They noted the theme that was heard among the protesters that this was “racial, that police seem to shoot to kill blacks, and that this seems to keep happening.”⁸⁷ Rev. Mark Koschmann, assistant pastor at Chapel of the Cross Lutheran Church, St. Louis, said being among Ferguson protestors “definitely opened my eyes to their frustration, believing the anger is larger than one incident—it’s just a symptom of some real deep hurt and rawness.”⁸⁸

Such an engagement was laudable, but the voice of the protestors was only a fraction of the many voices of the community. A dynamic, Two-Kingdom engagement strategy builds on the biblical notion that God indeed calls the church to action in the community for the community (Jer. 29:11). It also notes that we are to “give to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s (Matt. 22:21).” Such a missional call to “engage as a blessing,” means that the church needs to recognize the variety of vocations of God’s left-hand blessing and rule in the community as it attends to its left-hand kingdom responsibility to be attentive to the broader voices that make the community work as God’s encouraging agent in their midst. It would have been helpful to hear the struggles of the business owners who truly suffered amidst the violence and crime that surrounded the protests. Again, there was pressure via news reports to adopt one particular narrative of the Michael Brown shooting and that pressure must be avoided until the facts are known, otherwise the church is not doing the job of “listening” and “honoring” that it is

⁸⁶ <https://blogs.lcms.org/2014/pastors-visit-ferguson>.

⁸⁷ <https://blogs.lcms.org/2014/pastors-visit-ferguson>.

⁸⁸ <https://blogs.lcms.org/2014/pastors-visit-ferguson>. While this perspective is empathetic, it assumes that this incident is one that is a natural consequence to race as if racism is the cause of these events. For example, Christine Byers, “White officers slower to shoot black suspect, new study finds,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, Feb. 1, 2016, references a study that suspects “holding guns in more realistic simulations, the same officers were faster to shoot whites,” which demonstrates that officers, even if biased to think that black Americans are more violent, have a built in hesitation to shoot based on the reality of the societal pressure that will be exerted on their decision to shoot.

called to do. In this way, the church can unfortunately develop too narrow of a perspective on the problems and the solutions that are needed in the community.

In terms of Reformation restraint, the church would recognize the need to engage the situation through various vocations and with tempered expectations. This means that the church would be generally suspicious of the immediate adversarial nature of the protestors towards the police and surely would seek clarity as to whether such voices were representative of the city of Ferguson, or voices from the community at large. Hearing the various voices from various vocations would contribute to the task of engaging the community for the purpose of the common good. To that end, it is helpful to avoid extreme characterizations of the situation, driven by anger or adversarial rhetoric, and to engage those who offer fuller depictions of the problem so that positive steps can be taken for addressing a resolution. For example,

In 1999, the *Los Angeles Times* reported a federal study asking people whether they support the police in their own neighborhoods. Nationwide, 85 percent of all respondents agreed. They broke down the survey city by city. In cities like Knoxville and Chicago, there was a disparity between the way whites and blacks perceived the police. In Knoxville, 91 percent of whites were satisfied with the police and only 63 percent of blacks agreed. In Chicago, 89 percent whites, 69 percent blacks. But in many other cities, the numbers were nearly equal. According to the study, 86 percent of all Angelinos support the polices. Whites support the police at 89 percent. And blacks? They support the police at 82 percent.⁸⁹

Contrary then to the narrative that all black people are suspicious of the police, this study suggests that most of the urban communities nationwide have a positive view of the police, whether they are white or black. To seek longer term solutions, deeper issues may need to be addressed with an open mind to how people actually see the problems and the potential solutions to be explored for the sake of their community. But, the general maintenance of law and order in the community through legitimate leaders is to be undergirded since generally that is how God

⁸⁹ See Elder, *What's Race Got to Do With it?* 164–65.

works to bless in the left-hand kingdom and it is vital to the concrete temporal, liberty and freedom of all people.

Where the real work will begin for the LCMS in places like Ferguson, will come concerning long term issues. It is here that the voice of a conservative, white, albeit politically-powerless church will face its greatest challenges. Many solutions for urban issues today have to do with financing and empowering governmental agencies tasked to solve urban issues. Welfare agencies, public school bureaucracies, and other governmental programs, treat the symptoms rather than the problems associated with poverty, crime, and violence. Whether the correct argument is that poverty causes crime, or crime causes poverty, there are cultural issues that exacerbate the problems either way. The empowering of the black, urban community must not begin with the disempowering of the role of fathers, mothers, and children and the dignity that comes from first taking care of one's own family financially through work. The LCMS' own struggles with its ethnic assimilation to American culture positions the church to speak to alternative solutions that arise from its own experience. The LCMS and its people were known for their self-sufficiency, their commitment to family and to education, and their empowerment of their people. With schools, universities, hospitals, publishing houses, investment cooperatives, banking entities, faith-based insurances, and retirement resources, the church honored the work of all its people through all the God-given vocations in its midst as it sought to empower its own. As an ethnocentric community within the American experiment, this was an effective strategy for cultural survival. Even though, as a missional strategy for sharing the Gospel in America, it was not helpful. LCMS' successes and failures in this regard can be a helpful tool for missionally engaging the black community for its own journey to freedom, politically and spiritually.

To that end, the church must become more engaged in the "public listening and public

dialogue” surrounding the issues of concern in the community. Here a Two-Kingdom effort demands that the church, especially the pastor, is indeed a community person. A Two-Kingdom commitment to the community means that the Church actively seeks to bless and undergird God’s work in the community through the vocations of leadership in the public, political, law-enforcement, and business realm. One of the ways that I sought to accomplish this in Tampa and also in New York City was simply to visit Law-Enforcement agencies in the neighborhood, to visit and get to know the business leaders in the community, the church leaders, the community-assistance leaders, as well as the political leaders. In Tampa, I went on ride-alongs with Tampa PD officers in the congregation. In New York, my wife took our Girl Scout troop to the neighborhood police precincts. Another pastor that I know became a Police Department chaplain to see an officer’s work from their point of view. Other necessary public engagement entailed visiting neighborhood businesses and business leaders and carrying on a “prayer effort” for their work. The goal was to get to know them and to demonstrate that the church was in the community for the community’s sake as well. The Church in general would also need to be a present-entity at community, public meetings, known to the neighborhood, the public officials, and those of law-enforcement enforcement as well. Such efforts may not be taught at seminary, but they are essential in developing and positioning the church as an empathetic and prophetic voice in the community. Such efforts in the neighborhood assured them that we had a vested interest in the neighborhood for the neighborhood’s sake as well as in their leadership and welfare, as well.

In this regard, the issue of being an “official” church representative can be a challenging one. For the purposes of introductions and listening, I believe that the pastor can represent the church without confusing left-hand, right-hand kingdom issues. If particular policy or direction is

being argued, here the church does well to notify its people and allow individual representation to be the church's public face, rather than one particular, policy viewpoint. This, of course, could change, depending on the gravity and extent of the issue, since there are fundamental issues, such as life issues, marriage issues, and sovereignty issues that have clear biblical testimony. Again, the goal would be to engage in public dialogue, using a Scriptural view, from a left-hand perspective.

In relation to the Ferguson event, the long-term issues of the city might indeed be the ones that the LCMS can engage most successfully from a Two-Kingdom perspective for the sake of the community. With a notion of "contributive justice,"⁹⁰ one that seeks for each participant in the justice equation to put to work the vocational responsibility that is theirs to exercise, the church and its people can engage the community's needs from the church's strengths and gifts. For example, the LCMS is a church dedicated to education. Education is one of the core issues, both as an inner-city problem and an LCMS potential solution. UCLA public policy Professor emeritus James Q. Wilson states, "You need only to do three things to avoid poverty in this country. Finish high school, marry before having a child, and produce that child after the age of twenty. Only 8 percent of families who do this are poor; 79 percent of those who fail to do this are poor."⁹¹ The LCMS, with its history in education, at all levels, would be well-positioned to find creative ways to engage the community with its schools which not only emphasize academic excellence, and a social dignity which comes from the principles of hard work and discipline, but

⁹⁰ See Nunes, "Does Contributive Justice Have a Future?" 212 who says, "Contributive justice is people acting with the capacity that they have, accountable to others involved, from the location that God has placed them to "rectify situations of injustice." And, 210, where it is Contributive Justice is defined as "Doing justice . . . directing your God-given resources and energies according to your vocation and station in life, in a manner that contributes sustainability to the full human flourishing of your family, your neighbors, and fellow-humans. Contributive justice, thus, invests its activities in God's goal for humanity: fullness of life (Jn. 10:10)."

⁹¹ Stephen Moore and Julian L. Simon, *It's Getting Better All the Time* (Washington, DC: Cato Institute, 2000), 74.

also the dignity that comes from knowing God as creator and Savior.

Present missional, outreach strategies that focus only peripherally on literacy, or safe-spaces for at-risk children still allow the more complex issues to remain. Issues involving education must go deeper. The deeper issues such as social/personal identity, family involvement in education,⁹² and the dignity and sanctity of life cannot be delivered adequately in after-school programs or outreach programs alone. They must be part of a deeper commitment to dedicate our educational resources to the urban community for its sake. Political issues such as parental choice are a part of such a deep strategy for the community. The LCMS could lead the way, adopting new partnerships with schools and businesses to bring quality, principle-driven education back to the inner city.⁹³

Other issues that intersect the urban community and the LCMS as a church body are issues of pro-life and marriage that are foundational to any community's spiritual and communal health. Here, advocacy could take the form of "health care clinics,"⁹⁴ where assisting girls in need would take priority, but classes on parenting, marriage, and personal-hygiene and health would be

⁹² See Bradley, *Black and Tired*, where he notes that "most children in non-intact families are at an educational and social disadvantage compared to children from traditional families . . . To increase student performance, both parents, whenever possible, must challenge and support their children to achieve scholastic excellence; more federal money, grade inflation, or social promotions are no the solutions. Parents must exercise self-sacrifice and the denial of immediate personal gratification. In others words, increasing student performance requires strong moral fiber." The church is well positioned educationally with its emphasis on excellence in education, commitment of parents and students to the cause, and the disciplines that allow good education to occur. Freeing up public funding to level the playing field educationally will benefit the inner cities the most.

⁹³ Before taking the position at the Lutheran Hour, I was working with the Charlie School Project, a Lutheran Charter School strategy that was funded by social investors on Wall Street. I think there is merit in trying to building a parochial/Corporate Business model too. That would take discussions with businesses like Walmart or Google or Facebook, entering into agreements where parochial, biblical themes would be honored in the educational partnership, allowing the corporate side to attend to civics, mathematics, and science etc.

⁹⁴ In NYC, Yvette and I were involved in "Crisis Pregnancy Centers" situated around the city. They were a Lutheran-Catholic partnership that provided pre-natal care and counseling for pregnant women in the city. The support would even extend to resourcing the woman throughout her pregnancy and birth with no expectation for the child to be put up for adoption, though that was a possibility as well. I was part of the board, raising resources for the centers. Yvette was part of the counseling that was offered in the center.

offered to the community as well. Lutherans have historically displayed an ethnocentric spirit that sought to care for members of its own community. Such a spirit built schools, hospitals, churches, a publishing House, an insurance company, bank, and now an investment company. Why did the church engage in such efforts? To ensure that its own people were cared for. In an LCMS urban missiology, that spirit can be turned outward upon the community as well. For example, the LCMS is presently building a “Hope Center” in Ferguson which will likely “offer this self/community reliant viewpoint as well as free groceries, job training, after-school tutoring, character building and DARE programs, and town-hall meetings as well as Bible studies, pastoral counseling and transportation to LCMS churches.”⁹⁵ The Hope Center will be part of an effort that seems to focus on the various symptoms of community brokenness in places such as Ferguson. It remains to be seen whether job-training, character building, and food banks alone can overcome the issues of family brokenness and the growing problem of violence and crime⁹⁶ that discourages economic and business investment in the community undergirding job growth and prosperity. But it’s a start and reflects the Reformation restraint that works with partial solutions in left-hand kingdom engagement rather than utopian visions.

Partnerships with urban entities of mutual interest that allow the church to proclaim the dignity of being God’s child, the foundational principle of the value of human life, and the dignity that comes from taking personal responsibility for one’s sexuality and one’s personal and parental responsibility can be a longer-term blessing of the church in the community for the sake of the community. The church can be a public advocate, direct but intentional, that fights for

⁹⁵ <https://blogs.lcms.org/2014/pastors-visit-ferguson>.

⁹⁶ See “For St. Louis Gangs, Ferguson has become a Recruiting Tool,” *Newsweek*, September 5, 2014 163, Issue 9, 46–50, and “Violent Crime Surge is Tragic Proof ‘Ferguson Effect’ is Real,” *Investors Business Daily* September 26, 2016.

family-centric legislation, not as a call for “America to be a Christian nation,” but one that seeks to rescue the community from the chaos that the proliferation of single family households, identity politics, and sexual liberation have left in every city. The church in partnership with other like-minded community organizations can help re-establish the notion that human beings are created and redeemed by God for the sake of real freedom. The Church and its institutions, churches, schools, and partnerships with other organizations must ultimately root black and minority identity in this freedom which transforms all others.

With an urban missiology, the LCMS can become a Two-Kingdom voice for the good of the city for the sake of the gospel. With issues of education, family stability, home ownership, and a basic level of law and order in the community, urban neighborhoods could take control of their own destiny, needing less and less the hand-downs that come from bureaucratic structures,⁹⁷ creating freedom and prosperity from below, family to family, neighborhood to neighborhood, church to church, community to community.

The LCMS, with its own particular self-reliant history and struggle for assimilation into American society as well as its resources in education and health, can become a transforming agent in the urban community to give encouragement as well as resources for black Americans to assert their own God-given liberty in service to their family, their friends, and their neighborhood. Most importantly, the church can repentantly become itself a transformed

⁹⁷ See Bradley, *Black and Tired*, 17 where he says, “Worst of all, Rosa Parks witnessed one of the worst methodological mistakes arising from the 1960s—namely, looking to government and politics as the primary means of social mobility. Historically, the most politically and economically powerful minority groups in the United States are those least enmeshed in politics. For example, Asians in America rarely run for office, yet they surpass all racial groups in terms of income and education attainment. In 2004, the poverty rate declined for Asians (9.8 percent in 2004, down from 11.8 percent in 2003) and remained unchanged for blacks (24.7 percent). The black America that focuses on financial independence, entrepreneurship, education, and a renaissance of black pastoral leadership will remain primarily outside of government control. Truly liberated blacks are those free to make their own morally formed choices without government involvement. To continue Park’s legacy is to free blacks disempowered by governmental surrogacy.”

community, black and white, created, identified, and sustained by the concrete, communal reception of the real-present, Jesus Christ who brings a freedom the world cannot bring. Human beings are created and redeemed by God for the sake of real freedom, but such freedom is to be undergirded and to be lived out to glorify God and to serve others. The Church and its institutions, churches, schools, and other organizations must root black minority identity in this freedom which transforms all others.

Conclusion

As the Ferguson episode endured, questions began to arise concerning initial demands for justice and retribution. As John McWhorter wrote, “Ferguson is the wrong Tragedy,”⁹⁸ namely, it wasn’t a black/white event at its core. And, there were other contextual issues that contributed to the tragedy. There was the increasing violence, often youth centered and gang related, on the streets of St. Louis.⁹⁹ There is joblessness and poverty. There is family break down and children running the streets. The challenges for concrete “liberation,” are more complex than one could imagine. Into this reality, the church is called to go, with its own unique history, sins and all, with its own unique gifts, vocations and all, with a motivation that comes from a God who has done all things well for us in the Gospel and a Two-Kingdom wisdom that honors the work of God in the left-hand kingdom through gifts of those in the community too.

The challenge of being the church in the community is hard enough. The challenge of being the church in the black, urban community, when you are perceived to be a “white” church of privilege, inherently racist, and a conservative church that is out of touch with modernity, can

⁹⁸ John McWhorter, “Ferguson is the Wrong Tragedy,” *Time*, December 15, 2014 184, Issue 23.

⁹⁹ See again “For St. Louis Gangs, Ferguson has become a Recruiting Tool,” *Newsweek*, September 5, 2014, 163, Issue 9, 46–50, and “Violent Crime Surge is Tragic Proof ‘Ferguson Effect’ is Real,” *Investors Business Daily*, September 26, 2016.

be even more daunting.¹⁰⁰ The LCMS may not be the “best” voice in the city to carry the dialogue for life-centered, family-centric, entrepreneurial solutions for the liberation in the urban community. But, it can be a useful, third voice that references others voices, empowering some common-sense solutions as “God’s” solutions via His left-hand kingdom rule. Presently, many of the progressive “concrete solutions” for liberation such as universal-publicly funded, monolithic education, state/federal sponsored welfare for single mothers, community/political oversight of police, etc. are failing the urban communities around America. The LCMS, as an ethnocentric church that often created its own structures of education, healthcare, and spiritual welfare, can share its own history as a way to participate in the blessings of the freedoms of America without losing one’s heart and soul.

To that end, our participation in the dialogues in the city will be as a third voice of faithful presence, that is able to engage political issues with a dynamic, Two-Kingdom perspective that undergirds other voices, bringing new and fresh ideas for “concrete, political liberation,” while inviting all at that table to a brotherhood and sisterhood that only comes as a gift from the real-present Lord Jesus who invites to a freedom that is beyond our best efforts. That call remains the church’s ultimate work. But the church is also concretely engaged in the community for the community’s sake, demonstrating that the church is willing to be a real-presence of the Good News of Jesus, embodying racial concern and reconciliation, resisting society’s politicization of such things, even as it points to the lasting freedom that only Jesus can bring. As Lance Lewis says well,

To put it another way, Jesus taught that His followers should *desire* an otherworldly satisfaction, *devote* themselves to a mission more significant than lifting the

¹⁰⁰ Ernest Cleo Grant II, :The Challenge of Defending the Faith in the Inner City, *Christianity Today*, November, 2016.

temporary fortunes of their people, and *determine* to seek a place more beautiful, peaceful, just, secure, and loving than any place this world has to offer.¹⁰¹

The LCMS, with a dynamic, Two-Kingdom engagement of the issues in the community can be that kind of church in the city, for the city. A dynamic Two-Kingdom LCMS urban missiology will seek to empower the individual, the family, the magistrate, and will undergird that work with a message of hope that exists not in our best efforts, but in God's work for us in Jesus Christ.

¹⁰¹ Lance Lewis, "The Church and the Community," in *Keep your Head up*, ed. Anthony B. Bradley (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 127.

APPENDIX

LCMS Two-Kingdom Urban Missional Engagement: General Congregational Motivations, Expectations, and Guiding Principles

Christian participation in the public realm is shaped by the prophetic stance. It means waiting for God in history, solitude and reflective action, attentiveness, and then availability for acting when the fitting time has come to fill the opening God has given. . . . All the human goods we long for—true freedom, equality, and especially community—are unreachable in our fallen history. They are tragic ideals. They are realizable only in God’s kingdom, which will come when God wills it. But these values are present proleptically in our history. We are called to strive for them in the way I outlined above.”¹

An LCMS engagement is Dynamic, Two-Kingdom Differentiated for the sake of Mission.

Establish Your Ears in the Neighborhood: Demonstrate that you are a listening presence. Contextualization is always a “street sport.”

- Prayer walks of the neighborhood develop a commitment to listen to the community and to pray for its welfare.
- Meet and Greet the businesses in the area as a normal part of being a part of the community, with the added twist of sharing with the people that you pray for their blessing regularly as you offer your card for more concrete prayer requests as you get to know your neighbors more concretely.
- Offer your church facilities as a place for the Community place in times of crisis, demonstrating hospitality as a natural extension of Christ’s love to the community.
- Hear both sides, both cries. Be a listening presence in the middle of real pain.
- Resist overarching narratives (General Statistics don’t prove/disprove what actually happens in a particular place and time.)
- Avoid the politicization of issues and concerns, if possible.
- Ask, “Who is most vulnerable at this moment?” and protect the vulnerable.
- For any action: Learn, know, and *then* respond with a left-hand kingdom voice.
- Find Ways To Demonstrate to the Community That the Congregation Is in This Place for the Community: Cone’s Call To Hear the Unheard, See the Unseen Because God Is Always Concerned about People, Places.

Honor the Structures of God’s Left-Hand Kingdom Engagement: Learn what is in place that serves the neighborhood.

¹ Benne, *Paradoxical Vision*, 168–69.

- Demonstrate a Reformation restraint towards public involvement that honors God’s activity for the sake of the community through various public vocations that He has established. (Rom. 13)
- Undergird Sphere Sovereignty – Become aware and intimately acquainted with the public structures in the neighborhood, police stations, social service agencies, hospitals, schools etc. Define their sphere of influence in the community and seek ways for the Church to be a blessing to their work.
- Subsidiarity – honor the hierarchy of accountability in public discussions concerning the individual, the family, and the state as it relates to public issues.
- Prioritize “person, family, community, then State, Nation” in terms solutions (Sowell structures) . . . from the biblical wisdom of the family as the foundational structure of society. Don’t immediately ramp up the “coercive” power solution of the state unless it is to curb violence and maintain civil order.
- Be able to engage these structures on their terms, left-hand kingdom language, for the sake of possible concrete solutions to community issues.
- Remember that such an engagement is always with a sense of hope even in the temporal realm because God is at work. It is also focused in its hope, valuing the vocations and even the neighbors God sends into our communities and lives!

Know the Particular Issues of Your Particular Neighbor: Avoid generalities if at all possible.

- Seek to engage particular issues from a perspective of the common shared humanity, rooted in the created dignity of the image of God.
- Learn and teach the congregation to engage public issues with a left-hand kingdom language that incorporates the language of politics, sociology, psychology, and science in service to the moral position being argued on behalf of all.
- Always maintain the tension of “Speaking the truth in love” . . . seeking the truth for the sake of the community, or the people to be served.

Seek What the Church and the Community Have in Common: Create resources, partnership, educational opportunities that engage community issues from a biblical, *Imago Dei* perspective that seeks to bless.

- With a renewed commitment to the city, the LCMS could gather various voices, in coalitions of people groups possessing a similar constrained worldview who seek to engage the issues of the community.
- With limited resources and limited opportunities, make the best of any similar concerns and resources that the church and the community have in common.
 - i.e. quality education and the Lutheran emphasis on education, Put our educational system to work again in the city (parental choice).
 - i.e. Family disintegration and the Church’s emphasis on strong families, good parenting,.
 - i.e. – *Imago Dei* issues centering on issues of human dignity, the value of work, the disciplines of virtue, and the freedom to serve reflecting of a healthy self- image.
- Offer left-hand kingdom oriented classes (World view classes), that bless both congregant and community, concerning issues like virtue, discipline, citizenship, from a Two-Kingdom perspective.
- In public issues share what’s common. Speak a common language of morality, or ethical

expectations, limitations etc. For the sake of the whole community with the motivation of love that comes from the Gospel of Jesus in one's life

Be Prepared for Public Caricature and Ressentiment: No matter how faithful and humble your ecclesial, public engagement is, be prepared for false caricatures.

- Overcome them with prayer and with a persevering love,
- Maintain a left-hand kingdom attention in the church of the concrete issues in the neighborhood
- Learn to engage community issues with left-hand kingdom speak, as an engaging, encouraging, even challenging voice in the city for the city.

Know the Uniqueness of the American Lutheran Experience: In general, and, specifically your congregation.

- Be prepared to deal with racial failures and bigotries that caricature the Church in the neighborhood
- Be prepared to relate our unique perspectives to issues of powerlessness, bigotry, as it relates to cultural tensions in assimilation and the faithfulness to sharing the Gospel.
- Be transparent concerning our theology as believers who are 100% sinners and saints, prepared to speak of the Gospel of Jesus Christ that saves sinners without exception of differentiation.

Be Committed To Move beyond LCMS Ethnocentrism: Note the tension of the sociological and missional perspective of this reality.

- Constantly Temper the Temptation towards security (which can lead to ethnocentrism and bigotry), makes our "form" of the Good News is the Good News
- Communicate the uniqueness of the Lutheran Confession of Jesus and His Gospel and be able to differentiate that from our particular ethnic encasement of His message in service to the neighborhood one serves.

Accept the Tension of Differentiation: Maintain a "trade-offs" view of temporal, concrete community engagement, not an ultimate-solutions view.

- Always be mindful of the tension that exists between temporal and eternal liberation, keeping in mind that such tension ultimately demonstrates an authentic, loving engaging (temporal blessing) for the sake of the gospel.
- Be aware of the short term and long term effects of any/all of your actions before acting.
- Be aware that "taking sides" in an issue before knowing what is going on, can conflate the message of the Church with the message of one side of a community debate.
- In any temporal issue . . . remember it is God who has structures, morals, and authorities in charge to deal with such things . . . In the American context . . . the citizen is one of those authorities.
- Ultimately strive to proclaim liberation that actually liberates . . . both in the left-hand kingdom and in the right-hand kingdom of God's work in the world! That's Matt. 22:21, Rom. 13; and Gal. 5.

Remember the Ultimate Purpose of All Community Engagement: The opportunity to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with those God brings into one's life.

- Earn the right to share that Message by engaging the above, and Be prepared to hurt with people, cry with people, laugh with people when temporal issues seem pre-eminent and outside of our grasp. Such frustration actually leads people to ask, “Is there more than this, can this be all there is?” In some ways, the church needs to be prepared to come alongside the community, not always to solve issues, or to be a Savior, but to be a fellow, broken sinner who is willing to walk with another until they see Jesus.
- Speak the Truth, in Love to others the way that Jesus Christ has spoken and served you.

In all things, a dynamic, Two-Kingdom engagement is anything but static, even though it may not always be policy-driven.

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