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Behind the Numbers: A Traditional Church Faces a New America

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BEHIND THE NUMBERS
A TRADITIONAL CHURCH FACES A NEW AMERICA

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A Dissertation
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By
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To Betsy with thanksgiving
for two generations
of olive shoots around our table (Ps. 128:3)

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PREFACE

"It is too light a thing that you should be my servant
to raise up the tribes of Jacob
and to bring back the preserved of Israel;
I will give you as a light for the nations,
that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."

—Isaiah 49:6[1]

"We might sometimes fancy that the Church grows younger as the world grows old."
—G. K. Chesterton[2]

To write about The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) is to write about my family. I was baptized at the font of an LCMS congregation. I attended an LCMS elementary school. I was a "Walther Leaguer" throughout my high school years. That's how it was for my family. Our parents were godly LCMS laity who had grown up in the Missouri Synod and never attended any other church. They were buried from their LCMS congregation. They encouraged my sisters and me to pursue church vocations, which we did. My sisters and I were trained to be LCMS teachers. I went on to become an LCMS pastor.

I love the Synod as I love my family. I do not criticize my family—at least not in a public way. So a part of me feels disloyal as I submit this dissertation, because it contains criticism of the church that I love—the church in which I have been nurtured in faith. But that same love compels me. We are not all that we can be or should be. We are too much like an insular family, too willing to close the doors and keep out all things strange and different—those who are not part of "our family." Too much like the Israel that often failed to be a light for others. The truth, however, is that only by welcoming those who are new will we become young again.

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[1] Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2007).

[2] *The Everlasting Man* (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, n.d.), 182.

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There are so many other people that encouraged me along the way that I cannot list them all. But I have to mention my sister, Sandra Pedersen, who is not only a sibling, but my oldest

friend. And I give my highest thanks to God for my wife and children. Betsy has stuck with me on a lifetime of ventures: to the Rosebud Reservation, to two seminaries, to Queens, NY, to Pennsauken, NJ, to St. Louis and now back to New Jersey. This dissertation was one of the ventures. Her help has always been practical—such as a regular reminder: "You've put too much time and money into this to give up." Add to that the gift of the three wonderful children she has borne: Jessamyn, Michael, and Dominica. Each of them added their own encouragement (Michael even read the manuscript!). Thank you! Thank God! How blessed I am!

<div align="center">Soli Deo Gloria</div>

ABBREVIATIONS

1DT	First Demographic Transition
2DT	Second Demographic Transition
ACS	American Community Survey
Ap	Apology to the Augsburg Confession
ARDA	Association of Religious Data Archives
BOC	The Book of Concord
CA	*Confessio Augustana* (Augsburg Confession)
CARA	Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate
Cat1912	*A Short Exposition of Dr. Martin Luther's* Small Catechism. English-German Edition. St. Louis: Concordia, 1912.
Cat1943	*A Short Explanation of Dr. Martin Luther's* Small Catechism: *A Handbook of Christian Doctrine*. St. Louis: Concordia, 1943
Cat1991	*Luther's* Small Catechism *with Explanation.* St. Louis: Concordia, 1991.
Cat2017	*Luther's* Small Catechism *with Explanation.* St. Louis: Concordia, 2017.
CCES	Cooperative Congressional Election Study
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CTCR	Commission on Theology and Church Relations
DT	Demographic Transition
DTM	Demographic Transition Model
EU	European Union
FC-Ep	Formula of Concord, Epitome
FC-SD	Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration
GFR	General Fertility Rate (measure of total births for all fertile women)
GSS	General Social Survey

K-W	Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church.* Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000.
LC	Martin Luther's Large Catechism
LW	*Luther's Works,* American ed. 55 vols. Philadelphia: Fortress; St. Louis: Concordia, 1955–86.
LCMS	The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod
MTD	Moralistic Therapeutic Deism
NMP	National Marriage Project at the University of Virginia
NPNF	*The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers.* Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996.
OED	Oxford English Dictionary
PCA	Presbyterian Church in America
PRB	Population Reference Bureau
PRRI	Public Religion Research Institute
RCC	Roman Catholic Church
SC	Martin Luther's Small Catechism
SSA	Social Security Administration
Tappert	Theodore G. Tappert, trans. and ed. *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* Philadelphia: Fortress, 1959.
TFR	Total Fertility Rate (average number of births per woman in her lifetime)
USCB	United States Census Bureau

ABSTRACT

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The dissertation examines membership data for The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) from the mid-1970s to the present. It considers the analysis of LCMS decline by two scholars, George Hawley and Ryan MacPherson, who independently proposed that LCMS membership decline was internal in causation due to diminished birthrates and fewer young families. While acknowledging the reality of such internal decline, this dissertation argues that the lack of *external* growth is a greater cause for LCMS decline. Its lack of external growth is due primarily to the racial and ethnic homogeneity of the LCMS and its failure effectively to evangelize the increasingly diverse American population. This indicates a theological weakness: a failure to teach and emphasize the catholicity of the church adequately in LCMS catechesis and dogmatic theology.

INTRODUCTION

What Started at Pentecost

Since the day of Pentecost when Jesus' few disciples gathered in Jerusalem (Acts 2:1), the Lord has "added to their number day by day those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47). And, although the disciples at Pentecost were all Jews, the continuing addition of disciples has included people from all the world—the gospel has gone forth to all nations, just as the psalmist prayed (Ps. 67) and as Jesus promised (πάντα τὰ ἔθνη—Matt. 24:14). They have heard and believed the promise of repentance for the forgiveness of sins by the power of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19–20; Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8; 8:1–17; 8:26–39; 9:15; 10:1–11:18; 15:1–29; 16:9–15).[1]

The Mystery of Faith

Yet not all who hear believe. It is for God, not us, to resolve the mystery of why one person scorns, ignores, or simply disbelieves God's promises, while another trusts them in faith (Isa. 40:3; Acts 13:48; Rom. 9–11; Eph. 1). But we know this: for all who believe "faith comes by hearing" (Rom. 10:17) as the Gospel of life and salvation in Christ Jesus is taught and enacted baptismally (Matt. 28:19). The church[2] grew through the centuries because the Gospel was proclaimed to ever expanding numbers of people. However, at certain times and places, it has

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[1] On the growth of the church throughout the world, see Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity,* 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); *The New Faces of Christianity Believing the Bible in the Global South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); or Rodney Stark's fresh, data-driven insights into church history: *Cities of God: The Real Story of How Christianity Became an Urban Movement and Conquered Rome* (New York: HarperCollins, 2006); and *The Triumph of Christianity: How the Jesus Movement Became the World's Largest Religion* (New York: HarperCollins, 2011).

[2] The term church, lowercase, is typically used herein to refer to the population of individuals who profess to be Christians. So, "the church in the United States" here refers to self-identified Christians. This usage is more sociological than theological since it ignores the content of one's confession and therefore includes not only Christians whose beliefs are contrary to confessional Lutheranism, but also those who belong to heretical groups such as Mormons. When Church refers to the *Una Sancta,* or the "one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church," it is capitalized.

also declined.[3] Rather than letting this mystery tempt us to lethargy—"What do our actions matter?"—faithfulness calls the church to share the word of Christ generously and widely (Matt. 13:3–9, 18–23) in season and out (2 Tim. 4:2), trusting the Spirit to work faith "when it pleases God in those who hear the gospel"[4] and so increase his Church.

The mystery of faith also should not dissuade the church from learning all it can from Scripture and sound reason about how growth and decline happen in the church and what ought to be done to renew and strengthen the Christian church.[5] Pastors and leaders in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) have been among those who sought to discover the most effective ways to foster growth of the church, studying growing churches, exploring promising techniques and best practices, and analyzing sociological data about growth and decline.

Two Ways of Growth—Handing On and Handing Down

It is evident, however, that the church tends to grow numerically in two observable ways. First, it grows from within as the word is handed *down* to new generations. God gives children to parents. The church grows as Christian parents bring their children to Christ in Baptism, teach

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[3] Persecution, hostility, and oppression, for example, may certainly shrink the number of Christians. In extreme cases, the church in certain parts of the world suffered gradual annihilation. See Philip Jenkins, *The Lost History of Christianity: The Thousand-Year Golden Age of the Church in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia—and How It Died* (New York: HarperOne, 2008).

[4] *CA* V, Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000). 41 (K-W hereafter).

[5] Some of the more significant efforts toward the growth and renewal of the church have included such movements as Charismatic (Church) Renewal, the Church Growth Movement, the Emergent (Emerging) Church, House (Simple) Church, and the Missional Church. These movements are only examples and the literature on each of them is too exhaustive to document here. A few sources must suffice. For Charismaticism see Stanley M. Burgess and Ed M. Van der Maas, *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002). To understand the Church Growth Movement, the most necessary resources are from its founder, Donald McGavran, and especially his *Understanding Church Growth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970); helpful on the further development of the movement is Young-Gi Hong, "Models of the Church Growth Movement," *Transformation* 21, no. 2 (2004): 101–13, www.jstor.org/stable/43053123. For the Emergent Church Movement, the significant authors have been Tony Jones, Dan Kimball, and—most especially—Brian MacLaren. For a partial bibliography of works by these and other authors see Vic Froese, "The Emerging Church: A Select Bibliography," *Direction: A Mennonite Brethren Forum* 39, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 106–12, https://directionjournal.org/39/1/emerging-church-select-bibliography.html.

them in their household, and bring them up in the church. Although we may call this internal growth, it is not our doing. God is the creator and gives life through human procreation. He alone redeems those children he has created through water and the word.

Second, the church also grows from without as the word is handed *on* to new groups of people who have no connection to the Christian faith—that is, by evangelism or mission—so they too are brought to Baptism and hold the teaching of Christ. This also is God's doing as his Spirit impels and empowers the proclamation of the gospel. This type of growth is referred to as external growth in this dissertation.

Marks and Mission

From these twin truths comes an obvious inverse reality. The church will decline when fewer Christians are handing *down* the word of Christ by bearing (and adopting) children and nurturing them in the faith. Secondly, the church will decline when Christians do not hand the word *on* to unbelievers who do not know Christ and his promises. This description of Church decline is an uncomplicated, simple one—and perhaps risks being overly simplistic, especially with regard to specific church bodies or groups of Christians.[6] Nevertheless, it demands general agreement, and its truth is a corollary to the Lutheran understanding of the "marks" of the church. The Holy Spirit creates and sustains faith through the external Word of the Lord as the pure gospel is proclaimed and enacted in baptism and the Lord's Supper.[7] He does this as he

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[6] Michael Hout, Andrew Greeley, and Melissa J. Wilde suggest reasons for changes in the membership proportions and totals for individual churches—specifically, mainline Protestant churches compared to conservative churches. They include as reasons for proportional decline: (1) switching to non-mainline churches, (2) having fewer children, (3) making fewer converts, (4) apostasy from Christianity, and (5) a growth rate lower than wider population growth. However, their additional reasons are ultimately different ways to categorize internal and external growth. See "The Demographic Imperative in Religious Change in the United States," *American Journal of Sociology* 107, no. 2 (September 2001): 469, https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/324189.

[7] On the church's "marks" or "signs"; see *CA* VII–VIII, Ap VII, VIII 3–7.

wills, but where the marks are, we can be confident the Church is there also and, without presuming to know the heart, we count those who are themselves "marked" by their receptivity to the gospel as indicated by baptism and participation in the assembly of "believers and saints."[8] Thus we see references to such counting as a regular element in the book of Acts (see Acts 1:15; 2:41; 4:4; 5:14; 6:7; 19:31; 11:21; 12:24; 14:21; 16:5; 17:4, 24; 18:9–10; 19:7; 28:24, 30–31).

Just as it is theologically necessary clearly to understand the marks or signs by which the Church (*Una Sancta*) is found, it is also theologically legitimate to describe the church as an entity or institution—the human assembly gathered around the marks. This description gives necessary attention to such things as demographic traits, geographic locale, economic and social status, and other matters of context. Unlike faith's mysterious reality, the mundane realities of churches, preaching stations, missionaries, ministers, church members, baptized and confirmed persons, and so forth may be the subject of observation and study. Social scientists track and analyze changes in the numbers of Christian "adherents" just as they also consider the rise and fall of adherents of other religions. Such studies do not, of course, resolve the mystery of the working of the Spirit through the word (John 3:8; Is. 55:11; Luke 8:3–8, 19–23). Nevertheless, they may be of value as Christians faithfully seek to hand *down* and hand *on* the word of Christ.

Movement toward People

We cannot ignore the obvious: the church's mission is directed toward people—all people. The story of that mission, as Luke narrates it in Acts, is one of Christians sharing the Gospel with people who do not know it. Consequently, the mission requires movement beyond those who already believe toward those who do not believe. The 120 disciples of Acts 1:15 were

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[8] *CA* VIII 1 (German), K-W 42.

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empowered to speak to thousands of those who were not believers (Acts 2). Believers continue their outreach to others in Jerusalem as the number of believers swells (see Acts 4:4). Silence is not an option even when they are ordered to stop teaching the faith to others and sharing the testimony that the crucified Lord Jesus has risen to God's right hand (Acts 5:29–32). When opposition to the gospel becomes violent, even that fails to stymie missionary movement and stimulates it instead (Acts 8:1–8). Philip is moved from Jerusalem to Gaza to make an Ethiopian disciple, and from there to Azotus and then Caesarea (Acts 8:26–40). Peter must move "from place to place" for the sake of the mission (Acts 9:31–36). Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch are stops on the missionary movement to yet other peoples and places. All this takes place under the forceful hand of the Holy Spirit using persecution, hardship, and martyrdom to compel the mission's centripetal moves. Finally, the Spirit's instructive voice is heard in Antioch where the church responds proactively rather than reactively, ordaining Saul and Barnabas to move out toward others in the mission (Acts 13:1–3). And it will take still another push by the Spirit to move the mission from Asia Minor to Macedonia and its first foothold in Europe (Acts 16:6–10). And as Luke's story ends in chapter 28, the unmistakable fact is that the mission's movement has by no means ended just because it has reached Rome. In the face of those Romans who spurn the gospel's message comes this promise: "Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen" (Acts 28:28).

It is appropriate that this movement toward the Jesus way of salvation (Acts 16:17) should take "the Way" as its earliest name (Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22). The church's life is one of a movement along the way from those who know to those who do not know their Savior, a gospeling journey toward ever new hearers. Luke's missionary narrative in Acts emphasizes new people in new places hearing the new message of Christ—handing *on* the faith. But Luke does

not neglect the fact that it is also handed *down* as he speaks of household conversions wherein the faith of the head of the family is handed down to those under his or her responsibility (Acts 2:38; 10:1–2; 11:13–14; 16:14–15; 16:27–31; 18:8).

We must take the obvious a step further. Since the church's mission is toward people, it is also obvious that where there are no people there is no mission. And where populations are shrinking, the mission is shrinking. Thus, the church needs to pay close attention to movements, shifts, and changes in population—to a new environment marked by striking diversity.

C.S. Lewis reminds us that the diversity of the church is no mere coincidence, but instead reveals something inherent about the church in the world that God has created.

> It takes all sorts to make a world; or a church. This may be even truer of a church. If grace perfects nature it must expand all our natures into the full richness of the diversity which God intended when He made them, and Heaven will display far more variety than Hell.[9]

The rich diversity of humanity is a work of God. From the moment God made man both male *and female,* and then said, "Be fruitful and multiply," human diversity was destined (Gen. 1:27–28). It would be the difference between male and female, then between Cain and Abel, then generations of men and women ever after: tall and short, swift and slow, smart and dull, darker and lighter, and so forth. Yes, the Fall was a factor from Cain's animosity to Babel's confused speech. But if God has made me and all creatures and given to each of us not a generic but a particular body and soul, with particular eyes, ears, and other bodily members,[10] then even in a fallen world, human diversity is of God. Pentecost would begin to heal certain divisions, but it changed no one's skin tone or sex or even their language. The church would be a holy nation (1

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[9] C.S. Lewis, *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, & World, 1963, 1964), 10. Of course, Lewis was not, strictly speaking, referring to the ethnic, cultural, or racial variety of humanity. Rather he was chiding his friend Malcom for having too narrow a view of prayer practices.

[10] Martin Luther, *Luther's Small Catechism* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1986), in *Luther's* Small Catechism *with Explanation* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2017), 16. Abbreviated as *CAT2017* in future references.

Peter 2:9) made of *many* nations—diverse and glorious (Rev. 7:9).

Such is the church, so when individual churches fail to reflect this multi-faceted glory, would they not long for it just as we long for it, as Paul longed to be with Christ (Phil. 1:23)? Is that not the trait of heaven that Lewis describes? The LCMS reflects the variety of the communion of saints in many ways—but it also fails to reflect the church's diversity in other ways. We are largely colorless—unlike the population of our country. Yet, I think—better, I trust—that the Synod wants to be a church for all nations, not just middle-class Whites. This dissertation seeks to encourage us in that goal.

The Thesis

After experiencing marked numerical growth through the middle of the 1970s, LCMS membership began a steady decline. In their analysis of that decline, George Hawley and Ryan MacPherson independently proposed that declining *internal* growth, that is, diminished birthrates and fewer young families, is the primary cause for membership decline. Their logical encouragement to restore stronger marriage and family trends proposes a beneficial internal solution that is, nonetheless, too narrow to address the problem fully. This dissertation proposes that, as significant as the Synod's lack of *internal* growth is, its lack of *external* growth is a greater cause for LCMS membership decline. Specifically, the dissertation will show that the homogeneity of the LCMS as a largely non-Hispanic White church body is its greatest barrier to membership growth within an increasingly heterogeneous North America.

Support for the Thesis

The dissertation will contrast the homogeneity of the LCMS population with the increasing numbers of racial and ethnic minority populations in two particular church bodies, the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) and Presbyterian Church in America (PCA). These denominations'

healthier demographic profiles reflect their intentional, effective efforts to incorporate non-White populations into their membership.[11] As a result, the Roman Catholic Church has managed to counterbalance enormous membership losses thanks to the incorporation of Hispanic members and members from other ethnic and racial minorities. The PCA, which began as a completely southern White denomination in 1973, has in successive years intentionally focused mission efforts in the whole of the country, increased its church planting in major cities, and become much more racially and ethnically diverse. As a result, it has increased its membership in almost every year since its inception.

The dissertation intends to show that a failure to emphasize outreach to and inclusion of minority populations is not only sociologically problematic, it is theologically troubling. The dissertation will respond to a sociological or demographic analysis of the Synod by means of an ecclesiological proposal that prioritizes the transcultural or catholic dimension of the one holy Church—the *Una Sancta*. It will argue that the decline in the LCMS is, in part, the result of an ecclesiological approach that has often failed to emphasize the church's universality or its catholicity as an essential element of the true Church. Horizontal catholicity—that is, inclusion of the many peoples God has created—is of the *esse* of the true church because the true church comes "from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages" (Rev. 7:9). The *Una Sancta* is *catholic* both in faith or doctrine (vertical catholicity in the sense of the Athanasian Creed), and *catholic* in the proclamation of the gospel to the whole world (horizontal catholicity since the gospel is a *catholic,* universal message).[12] The horizontal dimension of catholicity

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[11] The RCC in the United States has declined in terms of its share of the US population, but not nearly to the degree one might expect given the priest-abuse scandals and its enormous losses among non-Hispanic whites. The PCA has grown numerically in all but two years since its inception in 1973 and increased its level of diversity from 0 percent to nearly 20 percent.

[12] Catholicity will be considered in two dimensions herein, as both vertical (the Church's catholic doctrine,

requires the true church to proclaim the gospel to those nearby and most like "us," *and* with those who are far off, who are, to our eyes, "aliens and strangers" (Eph. 2:19). Such a catholic ecclesiology remains grounded in the Lutheran tradition, even as we are informed by insights from outside our tradition. This intentional move toward horizontal catholicity will encourage revisions both to LCMS mission priorities and to our catechesis—revisions that are responsive to the challenges of the new demographic realities of North America.

The Approach

Richard Osmer suggests four questions that any practical theological endeavor must answer: (1) "What is going on?" (2) "Why is this going on?" (3) "What ought to be going on?" (4) "How might we respond?" [13] In order to support this thesis, several steps are necessary. In Chapter One this dissertation will describe in general detail the "big picture" demographic changes that are taking place in world population by unpacking the first demographic transition (DT or 1DT) of declining average birth rates and increasing average life spans ("What is going on?"). After a look at the 1DT as a global phenomenon, the focus will shift to the US population which has completed the 1DT and is now experiencing the "second demographic transition" (2DT). The chapter will also explore the primary and secondary effects of the DT before shifting the discussion to whether and how select countries and regions are responding to the DT.

Chapter Two is focused on how demographic change is changing the religious landscape and is therefore addressing both Osmer's first question and second question ("Why is this going

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extending from the apostolic era onward) and horizontal (its universality). Patrick Henry Reardon describes this nicely, referring to the "ample sense" of catholicity, so that it both references "the *catholic* faith" and "the Church's role as the proper home of all the nations." See *Christ in the Psalms* (Ben Lomond, CA: Conciliar Press, 2000), 171.

[13] Richard R. Osmer, "Introduction: Four Tasks of Practical Theology," in *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), "Introduction," Kindle.

on?"). It includes an overview of how demographic change and religiosity correlate world-wide before shifting to a focus on US Christianity. The changing demographics described in Chapter One are having a particular effect on Christianity throughout North America. The well-documented rise of the "nones" is one of the more apparent results. Not only America's mainline churches, but nearly all US denominations have experienced marked numerical declines in recent decades. While parts of evangelicalism have fared better—namely nondenominational churches and Pentecostal church bodies—even there demographic effects are evident. The chapter illuminates the fact that the demographically healthiest churches are marked by either one or both of two particular traits: a high rate of fertility or a high level of racial and ethnic diversity (the percentage of non-White or immigrant members). To illustrate this fact the chapter concludes with a portrayal of the Roman Catholic Church in the US and the Presbyterian Church in America. These two church bodies show the importance of diverse membership and of ministry in locales marked by diverse populations, specifically, in urban America. The RCC is the single US denomination with the greatest ethnic diversity (largely but not exclusively because of the significant concentration of Hispanics). The PCA is a denomination that mirrors the LCMS in terms of a steadfast theological conservatism. However, the PCA has become significantly more ethnically diverse than the LCMS and much more invested in cities. Of the two, more attention will be given to the PCA because of its theological similarity to the LCMS and its record of missions in North America over the past fifty years. The chapter moves toward an answer to Osmer's third question ("What ought to be going on?") since it explores how different churches provide at least partial examples of effective ways to face numeric decline.

From this picture of the results of demographic change on American Christianity, Chapter Three turns to the LCMS. The chapter includes data on the membership of the LCMS drawn

from statistical reports and from research conducted by George Hawley and Ryan MacPherson. Both scholars give heavy attention to the birthrates and aging in the LCMS population and offer essentially natalist recommendations for the LCMS to address its lagging membership. The chapter moves from a description of their work to an analysis of it. It offers evidence that the disparity between the racial and ethnic composition of the LCMS and the rest of the country is the most significant reason for LCMS membership decline. It thereby also helps to fill in the answers for all four of Osmer's questions with respect to the LCMS.

Chapter Four explores LCMS decline from a theological standpoint, giving particular attention to the importance of the doctrine of the catholicity of the church. It seeks a theological rather than a merely sociological answer to the LCMS' demographic dilemma. Included here will be consideration of various resources both from within the LCMS theological tradition and from outside us that can aid in our understanding of the church's mission.

Lastly, Chapter Five will move toward a constructive, multi-faceted proposal for LCMS missionary prioritization and growth. The purpose of the chapter, therefore, is to complete the task defined by Osmer, who notes:

> The use of theories from other fields like anthropology and psychology is an important part of practical theological interpretation. Such theories, however, can take congregational [or denominational!] leaders only so far. As members of the Christian community, they face further questions: What ought to be going on? What are we to do and be as members of the Christian community in response to the events of our shared life and world? These questions lie at the heart of the normative task of practical theological interpretation.[14]

The intent is to provide encouragement and direction as we face the question: How can the LCMS be more faithful and effective in the mission God has given to his people in our particular, rapidly changing, demographic environment?

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[14] Osmer, "Introduction," Kindle.

CHAPTER ONE

DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE IN THEORY, REALITY, AND APPLICATION

The Demographic Transition—A Global Phenomenon

Demographics Defined

Demography, or demographics, is the study of a population in order to describe it accurately, identify patterns and developments, and predict new social realities.[1] Demographers study numerous facts in populations: population size, rates of population growth or decline, sub-populations, birth rates (fecundity), death rates (mortality), sex ratios within the population, age structure, geographic density, migration, comparative economic well-being, and so forth.[2] For the purposes of this study, three particular demographic factors are of great significance: birth and death rates, age (and sex) distributions, and migration.

All populations are in constant change. Simply by virtue of birth and death, demographic change is a constant reality. Yet, demographic change can be more extreme in certain times and places than at others, and, therefore, of far more significance. One example is striking population growth of the sort that led to the term "population explosion" due to declining infant and maternal mortality. Another is population decline resulting from war and the resulting increase of single women and orphan children in comparison to the population during periods of stability and peace.

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[1] *The Oxford English Dictionary* gives as the first definition of demography, "a. The study of human populations, *esp.* the study of statistics, such as numbers of births and deaths, the incidence of disease, or rates of migration, which illustrate the changing size or composition of populations over time. b. The composition of a particular human population." *The Oxford English Dictionary* (OED Online September 2020), s.v. "demography, n.," https://www-oed-com.csl.idm.oclc.org/view/Entry/49775.

[2] Donald T. Rowland, *Demographic Methods and Concepts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 30.

The First Demographic Transition

This dissertation employs a particular technical term, "the demographic transition" (DT) which describes a population-wide demographic change affecting fertility, life spans, population growth, and population decline. The demographic transition is understood as a *model* that describes the phenomenon of a population that, over time, has lower rates of infant mortality, increased average longevity, and declining birthrates. Ronald D. Lee and David S. Reher describe the demographic transition simply: "The term 'demographic transition' refers to the secular shift in fertility and mortality from high and sharply fluctuating levels to low and relatively stable ones."[3] The basic demographic transition model involves four stages and is now often referred to as the "*first* demographic transition" (1DT) in contrast to a "*second* demographic transition" (2DT).[4] The 1DT describes the overall population trajectories of the developed world over the past two centuries, beginning, roughly, with the Industrial Revolution. It also, however, describes the current population trajectories of the rest of the world—the developing world.

The 1DT is a worldwide phenomenon. But the DT is not an instantaneous reality. The 1DT involves four critical components that occur over time. (1) *Declining mortality:* a population experiences an increasing average life span as a result of declining infant mortality and greater average longevity. (2) *Population growth:* as a result of declining mortality rates, the population increases as it experiences natural, biological growth through the births of children who survive, coupled with increasing lifespans overall. (3) *Declining fertility:* the population eventually

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[3] Ronald D. Lee and David S. Reher, "Introduction: The Landscape of Demographic Transition and Its Aftermath" in *Demographic Transition and its Consequences* (New York: Population Council, 2011), 1. Lee also provides a relatively brief overview of the DT in Ronald D. Lee, "The Demographic Transition: Three Centuries of Fundamental Change," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 17, no. 4 (2003): 167–90.

[4] Demographers sometimes use the shortened forms of FDT for the first demographic transition.

experiences declining birth rates as women, on average, have fewer babies. (4) *Population aging:* the natural growth rate of the population slows as fewer children are born and the average age of the population rises because of the declining number of youth.

One can also refer to the DT in terms of time periods, or stages. Again, the standard breakdown is fourfold. *Stage one*, pre-transition, describes the historical balance of populations as both birth rates and death rates are high.[5] This stage characterizes almost all of human history prior to the modern era. Population changes were minimal although, overall, the human population did grow slowly throughout recorded history. Many children were born, many infants and young children died (as well as women in childbirth) and average life expectancy was low.[6]

Change occurs in *stage two* of the DT. The two chief traits of the second stage are rapid population increase and a marked decline in the death rate. The decline in the death rate is primarily a result of decreasing infant mortality. As growing numbers of newborn infants survive into adulthood, this dramatically decreases the overall mortality rate and leads to a marked increase in overall average life expectancy. The decline in infant mortality is itself the result of improvements in medical care, nutrition, and sanitation. Such changes not only allow more

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[5] Birth rate has to do with fertility—the average number of children per woman in a population according to a set time. Total fertility rate (TFR) is the average number of children born per woman in her lifetime. The death or mortality rate is the average number of deaths in a population according to a set time. Higher mortality rates indicate lower average life expectancy in comparison to a population with a lower mortality rate.

[6] Ansley J. Coale describes the first or pre-transition stage of the demographic transition as follows:

Because of the scarcity of valid early data on births and deaths, the evidence that birth and death rates were nearly equal in the pre-modern experience of these countries is mostly indirect. The near equality is inferred from the impossible numerical consequences that would follow the continuation for several centuries of a modest difference between the birth rate and the death rate—an average annual rate of increase of only one-half of one per cent causes a population to be multiplied by a factor of more than 12 in five centuries. Only under special circumstances such as those enjoyed by the early European settlers in North America could a pre-modern society experience any such multiplication. Populations inhabiting limited territory for hundreds of years and employing a gradually evolving technology, were limited to a low average rate of increase. Estimates of the growth of population in England show that before the Industrial Revolution, the population doubled in two centuries (from 1541 to 1741), yielding an average rate of increase of 0.35 percent per year.

Ansley J. Coale, "Demographic Transition," in *Social Economics,* ed. John Eatwell, Murray Milgate, and Peter Newman (New York: Norton, 1989), 17.

infants to survive, but also enable adults to live healthier and longer lives.[7] Mortality and life

expectancy data from the UN indicates that every region of the world (and nearly every country)

is presently experiencing the DT up to the second stage. As a result world population continues

to increase. It does so, however, only because countries which are now in stage two of the DT

have not yet completed the third stage.

The chief trait of the *third stage* of the DT is that average total fertility declines.[8] In

general, average fertility will decline for a combination of two reasons—women are postponing

childbirth (due to later marriage or sexual activity) and/or they are preventing childbirth (by

means of some sort of birth control). Declining fertility does not mean, however, that overall

population declines in this stage of the DT. Rather, it continues to grow since mortality rates also

continue to decline and, more importantly, because the rapid increase in population from stage

two carries with it momentum for future population growth as a larger number of females who

survived infancy now reach child-bearing age.

In the DT's *fourth stage* changes are less dramatic. Birth rates decline slower and mortality

rates stabilize due to long term improvements in well-being and health. Recalling the UN life

expectancy rates noted above, the less developed world regions, which are in earlier stages of the

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[7] UN mortality studies document the dramatic increase in average life expectancy throughout the world. In 1960 the infant mortality rate for infants in less developed regions of the world was 137 per 1,000 births and for more developed regions it was 33 deaths per 1,000 births. The 2019 UN estimates of infant mortality are now only 32 deaths per 1,000 births in less developed world regions and 4 deaths per 1,000 births in more developed regions. The UN also shows a dramatic increase in average life expectancy throughout the world. In 1960 the average life expectancy in less developed regions was 46.18 years and in more developed regions it was 69.49 years. By 2019 the estimated life expectancy was 64.66 years in the less developed regions, an increase of more than 18 years for average life expectancy. For more developed regions life expectancy is now 79.24 years. United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2019). *World Mortality Report 2019*, *CD-ROM Edition - Datasets in Excel formats* (POP/DB/MORT/2019), https://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/Download/Standard/Mortality/.

[8] A helpful overview of fertility trends historically together with one attempt at discerning future rates is S. Philip Morgan, "Is Low Fertility a Twenty-First-Century Demographic Crisis?" *Demography* 40, no. 4 (2003): 589–603, http://www.jstor.org/stable/1515198.

DT, have had far more significant increases in longevity in the past half century or so than the more developed countries, even though longevity remains higher in more developed regions. By the end of the fourth stage birth and death rates are in comparative equilibrium. If this stage were to continue unabated from that point, a population would be stabilized with births and deaths balancing each other. These elements describe the "first demographic transition" (1DT).

The DT is a model not a law. For example, the US has followed the model, but not rigidly. Wars led to temporary population declines as young men were called off to fight, delaying marriages. Recession and the Great Depression also led to declining birth rates. However, after World War II, American couples made up for the period of decline with the result of the Baby Boom and a strong increase in TFR.[9] Despite such variations, however, the basic DT model has become a demographic assumption. The 1DT is illustrated in figure 1.
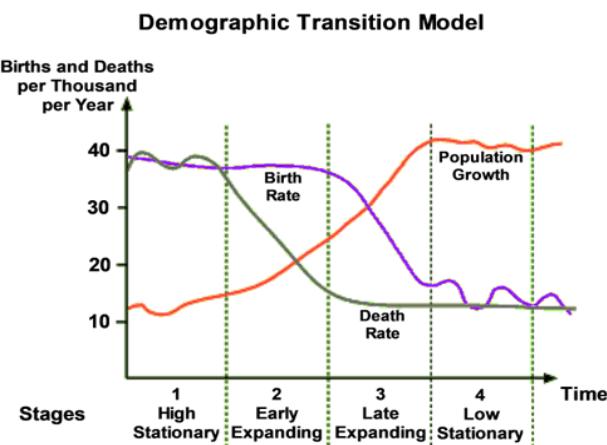
Figure 1. 1DT Population graph.[10]

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[9] The US DT can be dated to have occurred between about 1800 and 1940. The TFR per woman in 1800 the was about 7 children. By 1940 the rate had dropped to about 2 children per woman. In that same period the US population went from being primarily rural (about 94 percent) to primarily urban (only 43 percent rural). Jeremy Greenwood and Ananth Sheshadri, "The U.S. Demographic Transition," *American Economic Review* 92, no. 2 (2002): 153–59, https://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.297952

[10] Data from Barcelona Field Studies Centre, "Demographic Transition Model," accessed November 19, 2022, https://geographyfieldwork.com/DemographicTransition.htm.

Figure 1 illustrates the four stages as four quadrants. The first stage is the stage in which the DT is just beginning. In stage two, the most noticeable change is a plummeting death rate (blue line), which would occur due to the benefits of improvements in nutrition, sanitation (especially clean drinking water), and medical care. As a result, population will grow naturally (red line) as more children survive infancy and early childhood and fewer younger individuals succumb to infections and illnesses. Note that the pink line (birth rate) on the graph indicates insignificant fluctuations in the first quadrant (stage one) and throughout much of the second quadrant. In the first half of the DT the average number of children born to each woman in the population stays fairly constant with only a modest decline in the average as the second stage gives way to the third stage. In stage three, however, the birth rate shows a dramatic decline. The death rate also continues its decline, albeit more slowly in this stage. (Once infant mortality rates have dropped, continuing declining death rates are due almost entirely to longevity changes.) Population continues its rise.[11] The fourth stage is one of leveling. The arc of population growth begins to flatten, and birth and death rates stay close to one another.

The Second Demographic Transition

Many demographers once believed that after populations went through the DT, they would naturally settle into a replacement level of childbirth so that births and deaths would balance out. Recent facts do not corroborate that theory, however. "All told, some 59 countries, comprising roughly 44 percent of the world's total population, are currently not producing enough children to avoid population decline, and the phenomenon continues to spread."[12] The evidence is now

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[11] The period of growth between stages two and three is often called the "demographic bonus" or "demographic dividend."

[12] Phillip Longman, *The Empty Cradle: How Falling Birthrates Threaten World Prosperity and What to Do About It* (New York: Basic Books, 2004)*,* 26.

clear that as countries complete the fourth stage of the DT, fertility rates continue to decline,

leading to the "second demographic transition," since this follows directly on the heels of the DT

from high to low birthrates. It may be viewed as a fifth stage in the DTM. Its central trait is that

the TFR for women falls below 2.1 children.[13] If that trait continues the eventual result is that the

death rate exceeds the birth rate and the overall population begins to decline. Widespread

evidence is now showing that a fifth stage of transition is occurring throughout the developed

world. Note the following graph (fig. 2.).
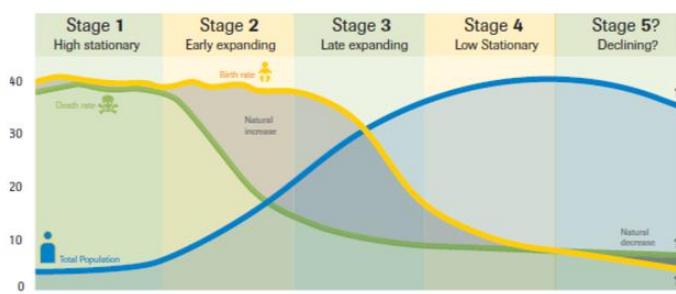
Figure 2. 2DT Population graph.[14]

The 2DT was a surprise—and, indeed, some continue to deny it. As late as the 1970s only a

minority of demographers were writing about declining fertility or population aging. Rather, on

the world and national level, many scholars were fixed on what seemed to be the looming

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[13] 2DT occurs when birth rates consistently fall below an average of 2.1 births per woman over her lifetime. The terminology of first and second demographic transition was first suggested by demographers Ron J. Lesthaeghe and D. van de Kaa in 1986. See Ron Lesthaeghe, "The Second Demographic Transition: A Concise Overview of Its Development," *Proceedings of The National Academy of Sciences of the United States* 111, no. 51 (2014): 18112–15 https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1420441111. Some demographers have questioned the notion of a second demographic transition. Lesthaeghe summarizes objections to the theory and answers them in Ron Lesthaeghe, "The Unfolding Story of the Second Demographic Transition," *Population and Development Review* 36, no. 2 (2010): 211–51, https://www.jstor.org/stable/25699059.

[14] Data from Edmund Scanlan, "2.5 The Demographic Transition Model," Fiveable.me (April 3, 2020), https://fiveable.me/ap-hug/unit-2/demographic-transition-model/study-guide/qsRzryeP7QdCmPtXs4Wd.

problem of too many people. In 1968 Paul Ehrlich published his best-selling work, *The Population Bomb,* predicting mass starvation and sky-rocketing deaths from famine in the following decade because of world overpopulation.[15] A few years later Donella H. Meadows published *The Limits to Growth* for the Club of Rome which predicted economic calamity in the 2010s and mass starvation in the 2020s.[16] The near panic that ensued in that period was comparable to earlier fears about nuclear bombs: the world was headed toward starvation and wholesale catastrophe because humans would not stop having babies.

World population *has* grown, but predictions by Ehrlich and the Club of Rome were wild exaggerations. Death rates *decreased* overall as did the percentage of people facing famine, and there was no widespread economic or political calamity based on overpopulation or food insecurity. Moreover, even as Ehrlich wrote, rates of population growth in the developed world were already slowing dramatically. Today Pew Research expects world population to peak by the end of the 21st century or perhaps before.[17] This prediction pairs with the United Nations Population Division's (UNPD) "medium-variant projection" that world population will peak at about 10.9 billion in 2100 before beginning to decline. The UNPD qualifies this statistically:

> This analysis concludes that, with a probability of 95 percent (referred to hereafter as the 95 percent prediction interval), the size of the global population will stand

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[15] Paul Ehrlich, *The Population Bomb* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1968).

[16] *The Limits to Growth: A Report for the Club of Rome's Project on the Predicament of Mankind* (New York: Universe Books, 1972); based on the Club of Rome think tank's global analysis in conjunction with MIT. The fear of population explosion continues to some degree among Meadows and others. See Donella H. Meadows, Jergen Randers, and Dennis L. Meadows, *The Limits to Growth: The 30-Year Update* (White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green, 2004), and Joel K. Bourne Jr., *The End of Plenty: The Race to Feed a Crowded World* (New York: Norton, 2015).

[17] Pew Research Center, "World's Population Is Projected to Nearly Stop Growing by the End of the Century," Anthony Cilluffo and Neil. G. Ruiz (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, June 17, 2019), https://pewrsr.ch/2WJzNHf.

between 8.5 and 8.6 billion in 2030, between 9.4 and 10.1 billion in 2050, and between 9.4 and 12.7 billion in 2100 (figure 1; table 1). [18]

The UNPD, however, also notes two other possible scenarios. In a higher variant, world population will grow to 17 billion by 2100 and continue to grow well beyond that date. A lower variant UNPD scenario is that world population will peak in 2050 (at about 8.5 billion).[19]

As a result of the change from forecasts of impending population explosions leading to catastrophe, it is now more common to see warnings of potentially catastrophic effects of declining birthrates and exploding older populations. Darrell Bricker and John Ibbitson, for example, warn of the economic and social results of population decline.[20] They are not alone. *What to Expect When No One's Expecting: America's Coming Demographic Disaster*;[21] *The Age of Aging: How Demographics Are Changing the Global Economy and Our World*;[22] *Tomorrow's World: A Look at the Demographic and Socio-Economic Structure of the World in 2032*,[23] and *The Empty Cradle: How Falling Birthrates Threaten World Prosperity and What to Do About It*[24] all warn of the dangers of widespread demographic decline. Each of these books acknowledges the twin realities of declining birthrates in the developed world coupled with a growing ratio of the population that is receiving old-age benefits.

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[18] United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs: Population Division, Population Facts, *How Certain Are the United Nations Global Population Projections?* no. 2019/6, December 2019, https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/publications/pdf/popfacts/PopFacts_2019-6.pdf.

[19] See Darrell Bricker and John Ibbitson, *Empty Planet: The Shock of Global Population Decline* (New York: Broadway Books, 2019), 42–45.

[20] Bricker and Ibbitson, *Empty Planet*, 93–104.

[21] Jonathan V. Last, *What to Expect When No One's Expecting: America's Coming Demographic Disaster* (New York: Encounter Books, 2013).

[22] George Magnus, *The Age of Aging: How Demographics Are Changing the Global Economy and Our World* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2009).

[23] Clint Laurent, *Tomorrow's World: A Look at the Demographic and Socio-Economic Structure of the World in 2032* (Singapore: Wiley, 2013).

[24] Phillip Longman, *The Empty Cradle: How Falling Birthrates Threaten World Prosperity and What to Do About It* (New York: Basic Books, 2004).

Such concerns were amplified by the results of the 2020 Census conducted by the US. Among its most important results was that the rate of decennial population growth was the lowest on record with only one exception—the dramatic Depression-induced decline of 1931–1940.[25] Three states lost population in the decade. Lower rates of growth led to a shifting of congregational representation, with California, Illinois, Michigan, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia all losing one congressional seat apiece, while Texas gained two seats and Florida, Colorado, Montana, Oregon, and North Carolina each gained one seat.[26]

A similar if not stronger impact may be seen based on the results of the 2020 census of the population of China. China's census notes that while overall population increased in the past decade, the rate of growth declined, with an imbalance in the ratio of males to females, and the older population increasing as a percentage of the whole.[27] The headline of a Reuters article was blunt: "China demographic crisis looms as population growth slips to slowest ever." The article notes that the TFR for Chinese women over the past decade is 1.3, well below replacement.[28]

Declining birthrates and aging are far more widespread than simply in the US and China. Darrell Bricker adds India "to the list of low-fertility countries, with a birthrate at replacement

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[25] The growth rate for the decade from 2010 to 2020 was 7.4%. United States Census Bureau (USCB), *The 2020 Census: Our Growing Nation*, by Ron Jarmin, USCB, Director's Blog, April 26, 2021, https://www.census.gov/newsroom/blogs/director/2021/04/2020-census-our-growing-nation.html. William H. Frey summarized the significance of the 2020 Census in "Census 2020: First Results Show Near Historically Low Population Growth and a First-Ever Congressional Seat Loss for California," Brookings (April 26, 2021), https://www.brookings.edu/research/census-2020-data-release/.

[26] Frey, "Census 2020." See also USCB, "Historical Apportionment Data Map," USCB Resource Library (April 26, 2021), https://www.census.gov/library/visualizations/interactive/historical-apportionment-data-map.html.

[27] The population grew by 5.3% over the decade, the ratio of male to female is 105:100; the youngest third of the Chinese population (0–14) grew by 1.35%, the middle third (15–59) grew by 6.79%, and the oldest third (60+) by 5.44%. Ning Jizhe, "Main Data of the Seventh National Population Census News Release" (May 11, 2021), National Bureau of Statistics of China, http://www.stats.gov.cn/english/PressRelease/202105/t20210510_1817185.html.

[28] Ryan Woo and Kevin Yao, "China Demographic Crisis Looms as Population Growth Slips to Slowest Ever," *Reuters* (May 10, 2021), https://www.reuters.com/world/china/china-2020-census-shows-slowest-population-growth-since-1-child-policy-2021-05-11.

rate (2.1)." He also includes Japan (1.3), Russia (1.6), Brazil (1.8), Bangladesh (1.7) and Indonesia (2.0).[29] Indeed, demographers have traced this demographic transition in Europe, North and South America, Russia, East Asia, Australia, and most of Southeast Asia.[30] The DT is reality for the entire "developed world."

The demographic transition overall is not exactly societal predestination. The transition develops slowly, often unnoticed. The rate of mortality and birth rate decline is not uniform. Nevertheless, the demographic transition model (DPM) is one of the most helpful ways to understand population conditions globally.[31] There is also a strong economic correlation with this transition. With few exceptions, aging nations tend toward prosperity while youthful nations in the earlier stages of the DT are poor.[32]

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[29] Darrell Bricker, "Bye, Bye, Baby? Birthrates Are Declining Globally—Here's Why It Matters," *World Economic Forum* (June 15, 2021), https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2021/06/birthrates-declining-global-fertility-decline-empty-planet-covid-19-urbanization-migration-population/. While Bricker acknowledges the benefits of lower fertility, he argues that the economic consequences are far more troubling.

[30] In Western Europe and the United States the process occurred over a couple of centuries, paralleling the rise of industrialization. Elsewhere (e.g., South Korea, Taiwan, China) the DT has taken less than a century.

[31] One can easily, for example, divide world regions into two categories: those who have completed the transition to low mortality and low birth rates and those who are at various stages within the process. Russia is an outlier. It has experienced a decline in infant mortality to sub-replacement levels, but longevity is not increasing because of high levels of substance abuse, smoking, chronic illnesses, AIDS, suicide, and other problems. See Murray Feshbach, "Population and Health Constraints on the Russian Military," and Murray Feshbach, "Chapter 4: Population and Health Constraints on the Russian Military," in Susan Yoshihara and Douglas A. Silva, eds., *Population Decline and the Remaking of Great Power Politics* (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2012), Kindle Chapter 4. It is noteworthy, however, that a recent trend in Russia toward more births is a significant move back to a more sustainable population. See Mark Adomanis, "'Dying' Russia's Birthrate Is Now Higher than America's," *Forbes,* (April 11, 2014), http://www.forbes.com/sites/markadomanis/2014/04/11/dying-russias-birth-rate-is-now-higher-than-americas/.

[32] On the one side, Europe has gone through the four stages and is now struggling to maintain its native populations. On the other, Africa has experienced certain elements of the DT without others—overall mortality is declining slowly (due to less infant mortality), but, while birth rates have declined about 20% in recent decades, they continue among the highest worldwide. Laurent, *Tomorrow's World*, 19. Tim Dyson notes that the correlation between economics and DT is not iron-clad: "There is no reason to believe that a major rise in per capital income is required for the constituent processes of the transition to unfold." See *Population and Development,* 5. See also Longman, *Empty Cradle,* 30. Longevity in Africa is also facing headwinds like AIDS, malaria, and significant deaths from violence and warfare. See Longman, *Empty Cradle*, 8–11. Longman theorizes that declining TFRs in the Mid-East have fueled fundamentalism because it is a byproduct of greater freedom for Muslim women, which is viewed as a Western evil imported to Islam.

Cause of the Demographic Transition

The cause of this transition is somewhat less evident than the phenomenon itself. The DT starts with declining mortality, which is the result of specific improvements in living conditions. The obvious necessities for human health are adequate nutrition and protection from diseases and other threats to life. Significant declining average mortality began to occur most clearly at the beginning of the 19th century in the West. This coincides with the beginning of the scientific and industrial revolution, which enabled more efficient and affordable agricultural implements (e.g., the metal plow), expanded farmland and productivity (in Europe, but even more in America), and stimulated significant migration from farms to urban areas because farms needed fewer workers. In the cities, industrialization not only provided jobs, but also enabled improved sanitation and water supplies (e.g., sewer systems coupled with reservoirs and piping for fresh water).[33] Medical advances enhanced this process further. The movement from farms to cities has an important result in thinking about children. With subsistence farming, children are an asset because they are a low-cost labor source. In a city, children have little benefit as unskilled labor. The availability and practice of birth control provides the means to limiting childbirth. Thus, declining birthrates inevitably follow the shift from rural to urban life. Along the way, more women seek vocations outside the home, requiring more education. All of this results in later marriages and delays childbirth, thus adding another factor that will suppress lifetime fertility.

Yet, while all of these are aspects of the DT, one might argue that none of them finally get at the underlying cause of the transition since they all deal with the DT on a societal level—in terms of a group's population traits. Ultimately, the DT is the result of countless changes in the

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[33] Dyson, *Population and Development,* argues that the DT depends heavily on the urbanization of the population in question.

lives of individuals such as the decision to move to a city, the decision to make education and work a higher priority than marriage and family, the decision to postpone or forego marriage and having children, and so forth. Frans Willekens offers this as the underlying reason for the DT:

> Demographic transitions are intertwined with science and technology, the economy, cultural change and social and political processes. The interaction between these processes take place at the level of the individual, not at the population level. The human desire for a long and fulfilling life is the main driver of demographic change.[34]

This factor—human desire—will figure significantly in further examination of the DT and its effects.

US Demographics

In recent decades the United States has experienced profound changes in the make-up of its population. Many of these changes are obvious and visible even to casual observers. A country that was once dominated by Whites of European descent, with one significant minority group—African Americans or Blacks of African descent—is today a diverse rainbow of colors with Hispanics now outnumbering Blacks and with Asians the most rapidly increasing population segment. Other changes may be less obvious—the changing age profile of the United States, for example, or the fact that there are far more unmarried adults now than in previous generations of Americans.[35] One of the more dramatic results of the 2020 Census was the fact that for the first time in US history the White population declined in number (see fig. 3.).

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[34] Frans Willekens, "Demographic Transitions in Europe and the World," Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research, MPIDR Working Paper WP 2014-004 (March 2014), 1, see also p. 3, https://www.demogr.mpg.de/papers/working/wp-2014-004.pdf.

[35] USCB, *Unmarried and Single Americans Week: September 18–24, 2022,* Press Release Number CB22-SFS.130, September 18, 2022, https://www.census.gov/newsroom/stories/unmarried-single-americans-week.html.

Figure 1. Decade white population growth rates, 1790-2020
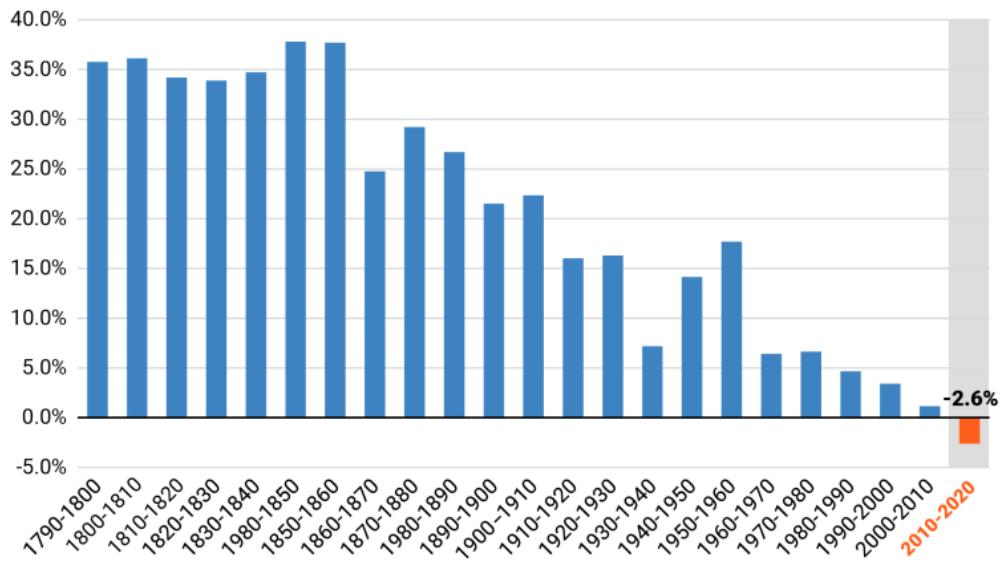
Source: William H. Frey analysis of 1790-2020 U.S. decennial censuses drawn from Census Bureau sources.
Note: Non-Latino or Hispanic whites from 1960-2020; all whites prior to 1960

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Figure 3. US White population growth rate by decade. [36]

The 2020 Census results are especially pertinent to two of the three demographic factors most important for this study: namely, birth and death rates and then migration. Both factors are directly relevant to population size. One of the more noticeable findings is that the US "grew more slowly in the 2010s than in the previous decade, and three states lost population—the largest number of such states since the 1980s."[37] The slower pace of growth has two principal causes: a continuing low TFR and declining immigration.

Internal migration, however, was the most significant political result of the 2020 census. As

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[36] Data from William H. Frey, "New 2020 Census Results Show Increased Diversity Countering Decade-Long Declines in America's White and Youth Populations," Brookings (August 13, 2021), https://www.brookings.edu/research/new-2020-census-results-show-increased-diversity-countering-decade-long-declines-in-americas-white-and-youth-populations/.

[37] Frey, "2020 Census Results."

noted above, congressional apportionment changed as a result of the census.[38] Not only has the

American population migrated away from some states and to others, but immigration patterns

also changed in the past decade as population growth from immigration slowed dramatically.

Immigration did not, however, cease. Despite debates over immigration, growth in

apprehensions and repatriation of undocumented immigrants during the Obama presidency,

significant limitations on the number of immigrants allowed during the Trump presidency, and

the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020, the percentage of foreign-born Americans still grew during

the decade, from about 13% in 2010 to 14% near the end of the decade.[39]

US birthrates, however, have continued their decline. The Census reports:

The provisional number of births for the United States in 2020 was 3,605,201, down 4% from 2019. The general fertility rate was 55.8 births per 1,000 women aged 15–44, down 4% from 2019 to reach another record low for the United States. The total fertility rate was 1,637.5 births per 1,000 women in 2020, down 4% from 2019 to also reach another record low for the nation. In 2020, birth rates declined for women in all age groups 15–44 and were unchanged for adolescents aged 10–14 and women aged 45–49. The birth rate for teenagers aged 15–19 declined by 8% in 2020 to 15.3 births per 1,000 females; rates declined for both younger (aged 15–17) and older (aged 18–19) teenagers. The cesarean delivery rate rose to 31.8% in 2020; the low-risk cesarean delivery rate increased to 25.9%. The preterm birth rate declined to 10.09% in 2020, the first decline in the rate since 2014.[40]

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[38] This internal migration is relevant to the LCMS, as will be explored further below. At this point it should only be noted that Illinois, Michigan, and Ohio have all had large centers of LCMS congregations and membership and have districts within them that are experiencing declining membership. While LCMS districts in Texas, Florida, and Montana are not growing numerically, one might assume that they are benefiting from this population shift.

[39] Jeanne Batalova, Mary Hanna, and Christopher Levesque, "Frequently Requested Statistics on Immigrants and Immigration in the United States," Migration Information Source (Migration Policy Institute, February 11, 2021), https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/frequently-requested-statistics-immigrants-and-immigration-united-states-2020. It should be noted, however, that after conducting "post-enumeration survey and demographic analysis," the Census Bureau estimates that it undercounted most minority populations, including "the Hispanic or Latino population." The Bureau says, "The Hispanic or Latino population had a statistically significant undercount rate of 4.99%," which suggests that the foreign-born population of the US would be greater than 13.7%. USCB, *Census Bureau Releases Estimates of Undercount and Overcount in the 2020 Census*, March 10, 2022, Release no. CB22-CN.02, https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2022/2020-census-estimates-of-undercount-and-overcount.html.

[40] Brady E. Hamilton, Joyce A. Martin, and Michelle J. K. Osterman, "Births: Provisional data for 2020," Vital Statistics Rapid Release; no 12 (Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics, May 2021), https://dx.doi.org/10.15620/cdc:104993.

None of this is surprising. Paul Taylor's 2014 study anticipated such a new America, emphasizing America's rapid graying and its changing racial and ethnic composition. He predicted that the "Next America" will be marked not only by "longer lives, fewer babies, more immigrants," but also by marked changes in how Americans view "race and religion," a "hollowing of the middle [class]," rapid changes in "culture, gender, marriage, family," and increasingly "polarized politics, partisan media."[41]

Effects of the DT

Primary Effects: Declining Births, Increasing Age

What is most relevant for our purposes is to realize the profound effects the DT has on a society. Great changes have already occurred due to the DT throughout the Western world, but future changes promise to be even broader. The DT began in the Western world more than two centuries ago, but it is a worldwide phenomenon. Charles Jones shows that the TFR for women in China has dropped from about 6 to less than 2 from 1950 to 2020. India's TFR has also seen dramatic decline in that period, from about 6 to just over 2.[42] Worldwide for that time, the TFR has dropped from about 5 to less than 3.[43] The 1DT is on target to be completed worldwide by 2100. World population will continue to grow until then, but it will be more the result of increased aging than childbirth.[44] The US is a case in point. Figures 4, 5, 6 are population

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[41] Paul Taylor, *The Next America: Boomers, Millennials, and the Looming Generational Showdown* (New York: Public Affairs, 2014). The indicated phrases are the subheadings of his first chapter, 1–15.

[42] The birthrate decline in India has come not only from contraception, but also from abortion. Sex-selective abortions have skewed the male-female ratio of children, although there is evidence that the ratio is now returning to normal. See Pew Research Center, "India's Sex Ratio at Birth Begins to Normalize: Son Bias Declines Sharply Among Sikhs, While Christians Continue to Have a Natural Balance of Sons and Daughters," Yunping Tong (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, August 23, 2022), https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2022/08/PR_2022.08.26_India-sex-ratio_REPORT.pdf.

[43] Charles I. Jones, "The End of Economic Growth? Unintended Consequences of a Declining Population" (Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research, 2020), DOI 10.3386/w26651.

[44] See Lee, "Demographic Transition: Three Centuries of," 167.

pyramids that indicate the DT's effects on the distribution of the US population by sex and by age. The y-axis of the figures labels ages in five-year increments. The x-axis shows the population percentage per cohort. in five-year age increments.[45]

The term "pyramid" is an apt description of the shape of the depiction of the age-sex distribution of the US in 1960 because the largest population groups (cohorts) are at the base of the figure which gradually shrinks toward the middle in its depiction of older population groups, forming a pyramidal shape. As is evident in figures 5 and 6, however, over the past 60 years the US population looks less like a pyramid until one gets to the higher age groups. In 1960 the largest age cohort was children between birth and four years of age. By 1990, that cohort was then 30–34 years of age and they were still the largest cohort, significantly larger than any younger cohort. By 2020, all the age cohorts between birth and 64 are fairly similar to one another and the only remaining visual "pyramid" is between ages 65 to 100.[46]

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[45] Population pyramids showing age-sex distribution were available for the years 1980 through 2060 online at the US Census Bureau, but are apparently no longer available. The source for the pyramids in figures 4, 5, and 6 is the website PopulationPyramids.net, which provides "Population Pyramids of the World from 1950 to 2100," and then for individual countries. See Population Pyramid.net, "United States of America, 1960," https://www.populationpyramid.net/united-states-of-america/1960/; "United States of America, 1990," https://www.populationpyramid.net/united-states-of-america/1990/; and "United States of America, 2020," https://www.populationpyramid.net/united-states-of-america/2020/. All were accessed on November 30, 2022.

[46] A background video with an animated population pyramid showing the changing age-sex ratio of the US over time is included in Pew Research Center's "The Next America," Paul Taylor (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, April 10, 2014), https://www.pewresearch.org/next-america.

	Male				Female
100+		0.0%	0.0%		
95-99		0.0%	0.0%		
90-94		0.0%	0.1%		
85-89	0.2%		0.2%		
80-84	0.4%		0.5%		
75-79	0.8%		1.0%		
70-74	1.2%		1.4%		
65-69	1.6%		1.8%		
60-64	1.9%		2.1%		
55-59	2.4%		2.6%		
50-54	2.7%		2.8%		
45-49	3.0%		3.1%		
40-44	3.2%		3.2%		
35-39	3.4%		3.5%		
30-34	3.3%		3.3%		
25-29	3.1%		3.0%		
20-24	3.1%		3.1%		
15-19	3.7%		3.6%		
10-14	4.7%		4.5%		
5-9	5.3%		5.1%		
0-4	5.7%		5.4%		

United States of America - 1960
Population: **186,720,570**

PopulationPyramid.net
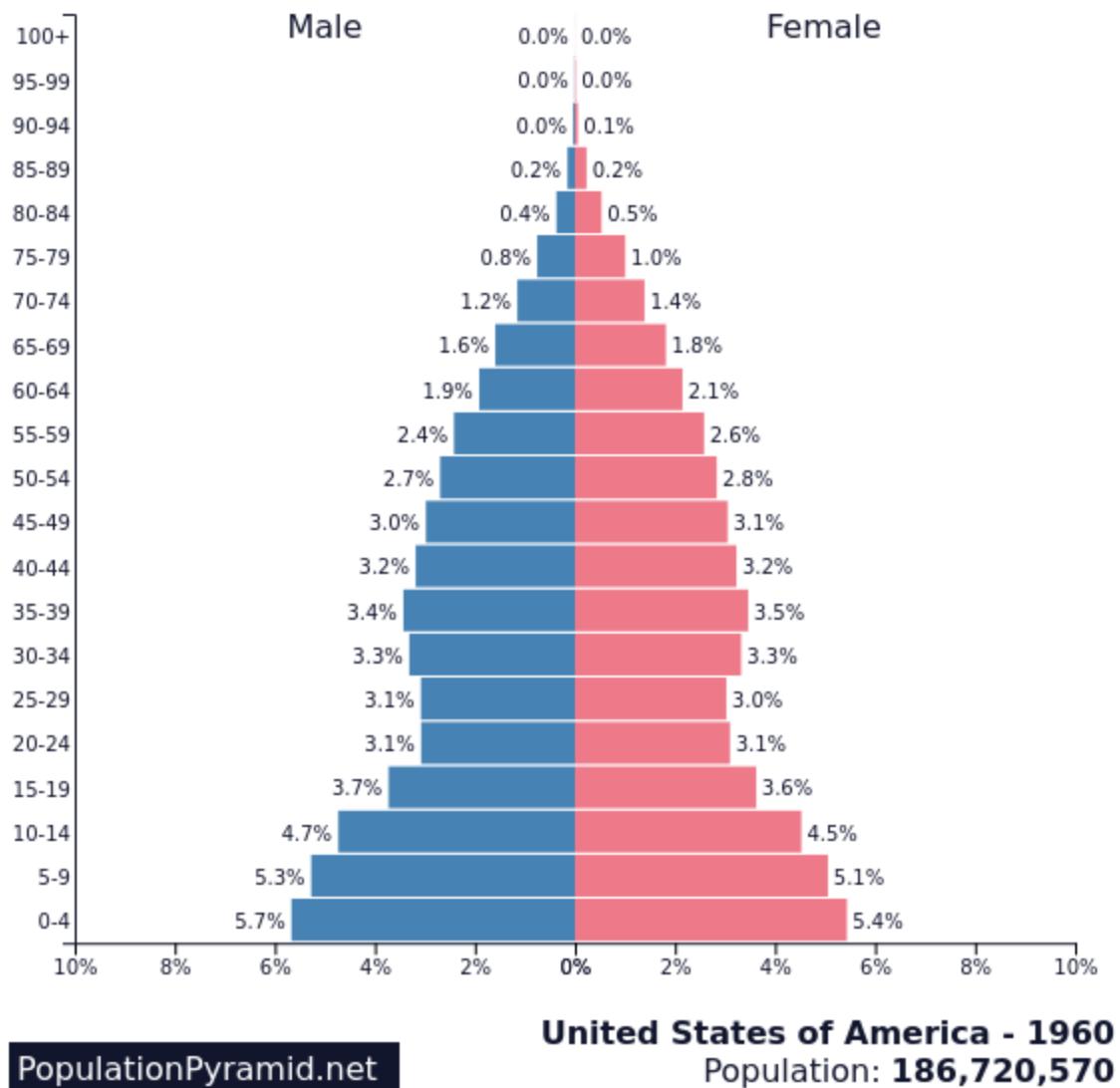
Figure 4. 1960 US age-sex distribution.[47]

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[47] Population Pyramid.net, "United States of America, 1960," https://www.populationpyramid.net/united-states-of-america/1960/.
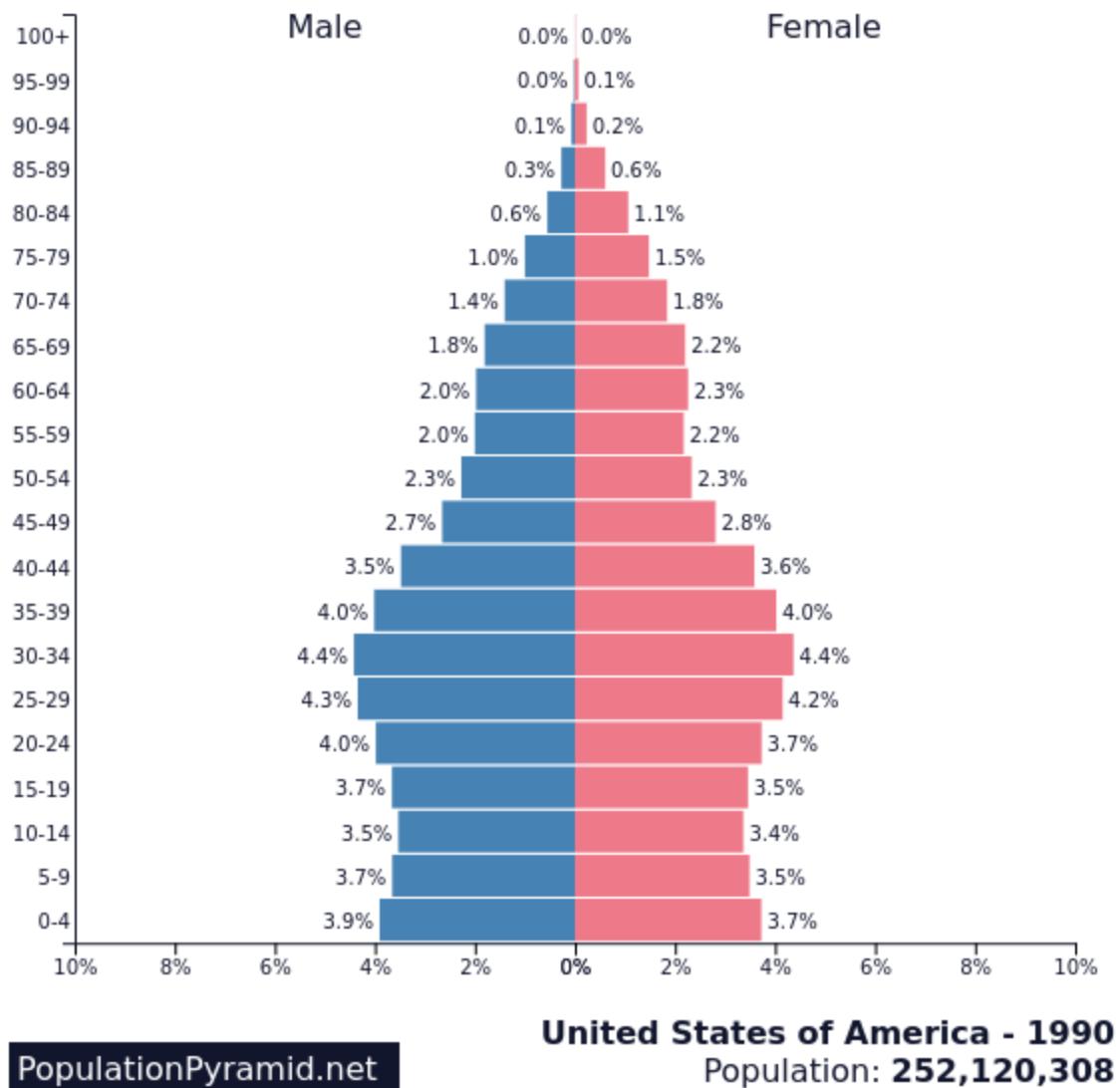
Figure 5. 1990 US age-sex distribution.[48]

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[48] Population Pyramid.net, "United States of America, 1990," https://www.populationpyramid.net/united-states-of-america/1990/.
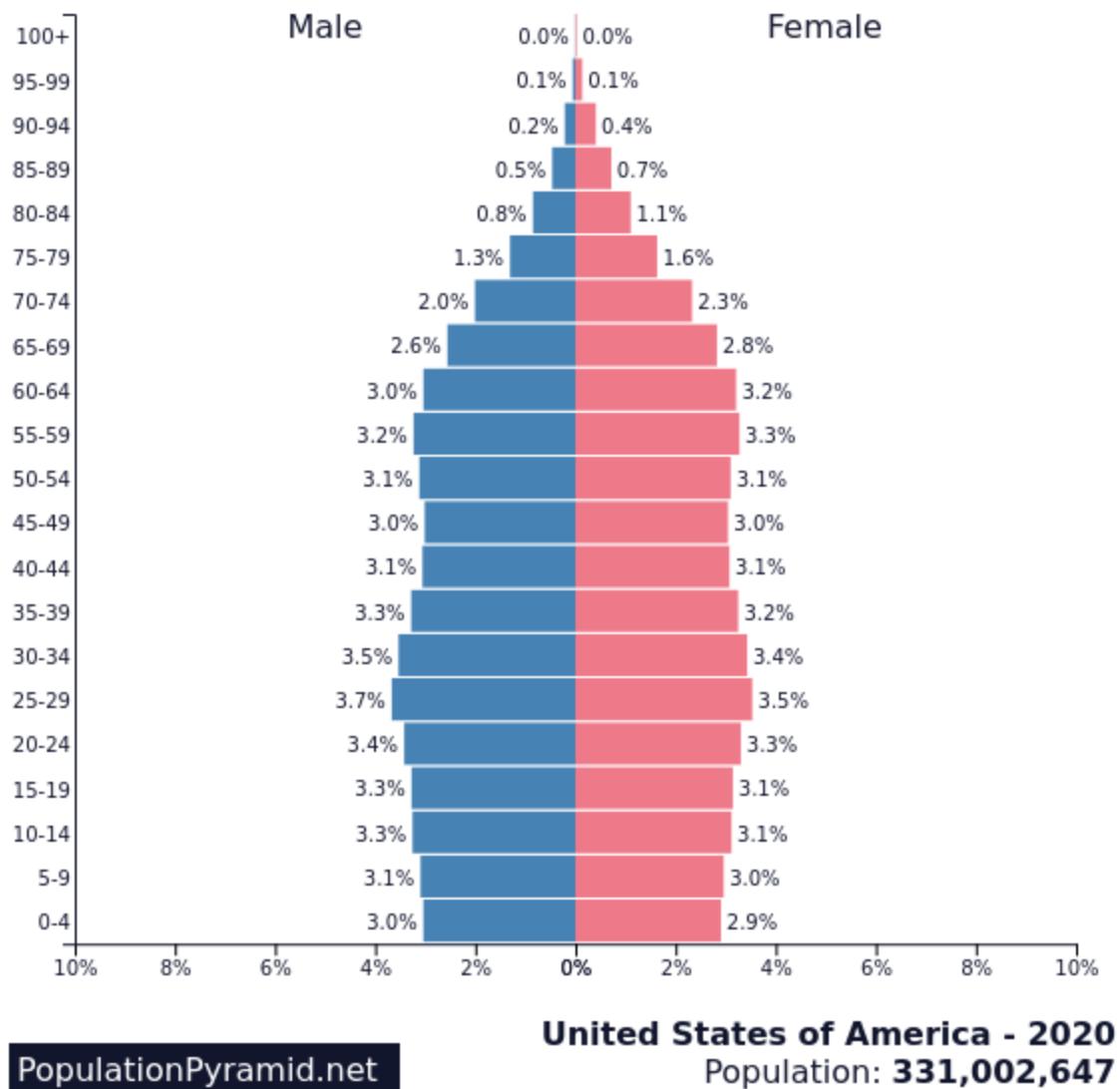
Figure 6. 2020 US age-sex distribution.[49]

The foregoing figures reveal the primary demographic effect of the DT. The population

moves from a wide youthful base to increasing percentages of older people because of declining

birth rates. And, along the way, two other notable changes occur. In 1960 the percentage of

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[49] Population Pyramid.net, "United States of America, 2020," https://www.populationpyramid.net/united-states-of-america/2020/.

people over 85 is so small they can hardly be seen on the figure. By 1990 the population figure

reveals significant numbers of people aged 85–90, and the number from 95–100 now resembles

the number over 85 thirty years before in 1960. By 2020 the increase in people above the age of

85 is even more noticeable. Indeed between 2016 and 2020 the number of Americans over the

age of 100 has increased from 82,000 to 92,000, a 12% increase in only four years.[50] A final note

about the age-sex distribution is also important. The figures for 1990 and 2020 indicate an

increasing imbalance between men and women, with women increasingly out-numbering men in

age cohorts from about age 55 and beyond.[51]

<p style="text-align:center">Secondary Effects: Changes in Female Life Patterns and Family Formation</p>

Discussion of the DT must go beyond declining births and increasing longevity to involve

additional elements that are not numerically quantifiable.[52] We may call these secondary or

indirect effects. Such changes are both economic and social (attitudinal). They take place on the

level of the individual. Willekens offers a persuasive argument as to how individuals change

their thinking and behavior in a way that both results from and produces the DT:

> Three preconditions need to be met for people to change their behaviour. First, people
> should be aware that they can influence the processes that affect them. They should
> have sufficient self-efficacy, i.e. the belief that they can succeed when they make an
> effort. If they believe that success is up to God or another authority, they are less
> likely to do things differently than their predecessors and their contemporaries.
> Second, intervention must be perceived to be advantageous. People should benefit

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[50] Statista Research Department, "Number of Centenarians in the U.S. 2016–2060," Statista.com (January 20, 2021), https://www.statista.com/statistics/996619/number-centenarians-us.

[51] The male-female ratio between the ages of 18 and 64 is roughly 1 to 1. After age 64 it changes markedly. There are only about 84 men for every 100 women between the ages of 65–84, and only about 56 men for every 100 women older than 85—and that actually represents an increase in life expectancy for men! Population Reference Bureau, "The US Population Is Growing Older, and the Gender Gap in Life-Expectancy Is Narrowing," (Washington, DC: Population Reference Bureau, 2019), https://www.prb.org/resources/u-s-population-is-growing-older.

[52] Please note that the intention in this section is to provide a descriptive analysis of patterns for female life and for family life. Its purpose is not to pass judgment on women, or on people who now live in different family patterns.

from taking control over processes. Third, they should have the instruments to exercise control.[53]

The 1DT is a result of human progress in terms of medical and scientific advances, improved sanitation, employment opportunities in cities, improved living conditions, and contraceptive availability and effectiveness. The demographic transition takes place as such achievements are employed by individuals—by individuals with growing confidence in medical doctors, by men that move from farms to cities seeking better jobs, by women who utilize contraception. In other words, the transition depends on an increasing exercise of *personal efficacy*—of the belief that their own decisions and actions are the critical factors in achieving a better quality of life, a more successful life. So, for instance, as increasing numbers of people decide that a smaller family can be supported better than a large family, this effect is felt throughout a population. Economically, as the percentage of younger people in a population shrinks the results may be instability in work forces, declining consumer demand for housing and goods, and unsustainable old-age social benefit programs (e.g., Social Security and Medicare) as fewer workers support growing numbers of dependent retired adults.

It is particularly important to see that all of this results indirectly in marked differences in the lives of girls and women. And, as women change, marked changes in family formation and marriage follow. Declining TFR, of course, means restricting childbirth and therefore results in a dramatically different course of life for women after the 1DT than for earlier generations of women. Since nothing is more gender specific than pregnancy and childbirth, as birth rates

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[53] Willekens, "DTs in Europe," 3–4. Willekens accepts the analysis posited by Ansley J. Coale, in a 1973 presentation to the General Conference of the International Union for the Scientific Study of Population. Dirk J. van de Kaa summarizes Coale's "three pre-conditions as "(1) The idea of fertility regulation had to become part of the "calculus of conscious choice"; (2) limiting the size of a family had to be perceived as being advantageous; and (3) people had to have the knowledge and means to practice contraception." See "'Ready, Willing, and Able,': Ansley J. Coale, 1917–2002," "Comment and Controversy," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 34 no. 3 (Winter, 2004): 509.

decline the average woman spends less of her life on pregnancy and infant child-care. Take two hypothetical women, one who has six children and one who has two. The first would spend a much larger portion of her life pregnant, nursing, and nurturing children than the second—about three times as much. Ronald Lee estimates that pre-DT women on average spend 70% of their lifespan nurturing small children, but after the DT only about 17%.[54] That's a sea change of difference in terms of sex-specific responsibility and largely describes the difference in life between American women today and one hundred years ago.

When the life of a women is no longer dominated with pregnancy, childbirth, and child-care, other priorities are possible: primarily further education and work outside the home. As this happens, the lives of men and women look more and more similar: childhood, education, career preparation, work. Somewhere in that pattern there may be marriage and children.[55] But now, for women as well as for men, sex is distanced from conception. Motherhood is viewed more and more as an option for a woman, not her destiny.

Declining TFR is, in large measure, a result of increasing access to and demand for contraception, although other forms of preventing birth have also been significant in the DT.[56] Contraception has more than a physical dimension, however. When sex is distanced from conception its primary purpose shifts from procreation to pleasure. The sex-conception divide in turn results in the divorce of sexual relationships and marriage. Widespread contraception makes

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[54] Lee, "Demographic Transition," 167.

[55] See Kirsty McNay, "Women's Changing Roles in the Context of the Demographic Transition," (Background paper prepared for UNESCO, *Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2003,* 4: Gender and Education for All: The Leap to Equality, pp. 1–29). See also Kirsty McNay, "The Implications of the Demographic Transition for Women, Girls and Gender Equality: A Review of Developing Country Evidence," *Progress in Development Studies* 5, no.2 (2005): 115–34; and Tim Dyson, "A Partial Theory of World Development: The Neglected Role of the Demographic Transition in the Shaping of Modern Society," *International Journal of Population Geography* 7, no. 2 (2001): 1–24.

[56] Restricting childbirth is not solely the result of contraception. Europe limited its TFR in the 19th and early 20th centuries primarily through coitus interruptus. See Lee, "Demographic Transition: Three Centuries," 174.

it easier to divorce sexual relationships from marriage. Marriage is often postponed or simply rejected in favor of other priorities.

Economic reality factors into all of this. In increasingly competitive economic environments, the majority of women are employed outside the home. The need for and access to female education rise. Despite inevitable "battles between the sexes," the overall societal effect toward women's autonomy is undeniable. The change can be slow and is always uneven, but eventually female autonomy approaches if it does not equal that of men. Such patterns in a culture then add even more to the reality of postponing marriage and childbearing and sometimes foregoing one or both entirely.[57]

The results of this for the family are striking. The table in figure 7 indicates the dramatic decline in US household patterns between 1940 and 2010.[58] In 1940 over 76% of all households included a married couple. By 2010 less than half (48.4%) of all Americans lived in a married household, and in those households, the percentage of married couples with children was halved. This is an obvious result of declining numbers of married couples. There are both fewer married couples (as a percentage) and fewer children living with married couples. However, while

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[57] Sara McLanahan, "Diverging Destinies: How Children are Faring Under the Second Demographic Transition," *Demography* 41 (2004), 607, notes: "The primary trends of the second transition include delays in fertility and marriage; increases in cohabitation, divorce, and nonmarital childbearing; and increases in maternal employment (Lesthaeghe 1995; Lesthaeghe and Surkyn 1988; Mason and Jensen 1995)." See also Longman, "The Return of Patriarchy," Taylor, *Next America,* 107–24, and Dyson, *Population,* 170–79.

[58] Figure 7 is the author's table based primarily on US Census Bureau data compiled by the Population Reference Bureau (PRB) for the years 1940–2010. See Linda A. Jacobsen, Mark Mather, and Genevieve Dupuis, "Household Change in the United States," PRB (September 25, 2012), https://www.prb.org/resources/household-change-in-the-united-states. See also Alicia VanOrman and Linda A. Jacobsen, "U.S. Household Composition Shifts as the Population Grows Older; More Young Adults Live with Parents," PRB (February 12, 2020), https://www.prb.org/resources/u-s-household-composition-shifts-as-the-population-grows-older-more-young-adults-live-with-parents/.

The data in the final column was first a projection based on 2019 ACS data as provided in an August 4, 2021 email to the author from Mark Mather, associate vice president of the Population Reference Bureau. The projection proved accurate as confirmed by USCB data published in 2022. See USCB, *Table HH-1. Households by Type: 1940 to Present* (November 2022), https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/families/households.html.

children living with a single parent increased for decades, that percentage has now also declined in the past decade. Nonfamily households now make up 35% of all households, compared to 1940 when they were only 10% of American households. This is primarily the result of the percentage of people living alone, although other nonfamily households have also increased. While people living with family members has declined by about 28%, nonfamily households have increased more than three-fold. Both the number of people living alone and the number of those living with nonfamily members have tripled. The data indicates that the period of time in which the greatest changes occurred in family life was from 1960 to 1980.

Household by Type	1940	1960	1980	2000	2010	2020
Family Households	90	85	74	68	66	65
Married Couples w/ children	43	44	31	24	20	18
Married Couples w/out children	33	31	30	28	28	30
Single Parents w/ children	4	4	7	9	10	8
Other Family	9	6	6	7	8	9
Nonfamily Households	10	15	26	32	34	35
One Person	8	13	23	26	27	28
Other Nonfamily	2	2	4	6	7	7
Percentages my not sum to 100 due to rounding.						
Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, decennial censuses through 2010; 2019 American Community Survey.						

Figure 7. Changing household patterns in the United States

All of this connects either directly or indirectly to the 1DT and its steep decline in birthrate. The huge increase in one person households stems from two factors, one a direct result of the 1DT and the other an indirect result. First, increasing longevity due to the 1DT results in a growing number of widows and other unmarried women (as women outlive men).[59] This is visualized in the population pyramid for 2020 (fig. 6) where the number of women significantly

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[59] However, there is some evidence that for older age cohorts, the female longevity advantage narrows. See Mark Mather and Lillian Kilduff, "The U.S. Population Is Growing Older, and the Gender Gap in Life Expectancy Is Narrowing," PRB (February 19, 2020), https://www.prb.org/resources/u-s-population-is-growing-older.

exceeds the number of men in all the cohorts beyond age 60. Second, as unmarried households increase, their relative instability in comparison to marital households results eventually in more individuals living alone.

Many of these indirect changes must be viewed positively. One can only rejoice in declining infant mortality and increasing longevity. That nonfamily living arrangements have increased may certainly have some economic benefits in allowing an improved lifestyle by having shared incomes. The lives of women are now certainly healthier, longer, and marked by opportunities that were seldom available to earlier generations of females. Opportunities for the education of girls no longer lag behind opportunities for boys in the US and throughout most of the world. Indeed, in the US, the ratio of female to male students in higher education is now about three to two.[60] All of society benefits from the well-educated women and girls whose contributions in a multitude of fields are legion.

Other changes are more troubling. Nicholas Eberstadt warns of a "global tidal wave away from early stable lifelong conjugal unions."[61] The flight from marriage creates diverse social problems—further indirect effects of the DT. To mention just one, consider the societal costs of children in a single parent household. Demographer Sara McLanahan argues that as the DT moves to sub-replacement birthrates it widens "social class disparities." This is a result not only

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[60] As Douglas Belkin notes, "Men are abandoning higher education in such numbers that they now trail female college students by record levels." See "A Generation of American Men Give Up on College: 'I Just Feel Lost,'" *Wall Street Journal* (Sept. 6, 2021, online edition), https://www.wsj.com/articles/college-university-fall-higher-education-men-women-enrollment-admissions-back-to-school-11630948233. [Title in the print edition: *'I Just Feel Lost.' Young Men Abandon College.*] There are slightly fewer college-age women (49%) than men (51%) which only heightens the enrollment disparity.

[61] Nicholas Eberstadt writes: "Perhaps more important than any of the other portents for future childbearing is what has been termed by demographic specialists 'the flight from marriage': the modern global tidal wave away from early stable lifelong conjugal unions." Nicholas Eberstadt, "Foreword," in Susan Yoshihara, Douglas A. Sylva, Nicholas Eberstadt, *Population Decline and the Remaking of Great Power Politics* (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2012), Kindle, "Foreword."

of birthrates themselves, but also the demographic effects on the lives of women.

> Children who were born to mothers from the most-advantaged backgrounds are
> making substantial gains in resources. Relative to their counterparts 40 years ago,
> their mothers are more mature and more likely to be working at well-paying jobs.
> These children were born into stable unions and are spending more time with their
> fathers. In contrast, children born to mothers from the most disadvantaged
> backgrounds are making smaller gains and, in some instances, even losing parental
> resources. Their mothers are working at low-paying jobs. Their parents' relationships
> are unstable, and for many, support from their biological fathers is minimal. [62]

The University of Virginia's National Marriage Project (NMP) further corroborates these

concerns in a report titled, *When Marriage Disappears*.[63]

> **In middle America, marriage is in trouble.** Among the affluent, marriage is stable
> and appears to be getting even stronger. Among the poor, marriage continues to be
> fragile and weak. But the newest and perhaps most consequential marriage trend of
> our time concerns the broad center of our society, where marriage, that iconic middle-
> class institution, is foundering.[64]

The "affluent" referred to in this quote are Americans with a bachelor's degree or better,

about 30% of those in the 25–60 age grouping. The likelihood of this group getting and staying

married today remains high. The "poor" are roughly 10% of the population—12% to be exact—

and most never finished high school. They continue in a pattern of not marrying and unmarried

childbearing. "Middle America" is the remaining share (roughly 60%) of the adult population.

Their trend lines are ominous, moving in the direction of the uneducated poor, not the affluent

30%. In comparison to the affluent 30%, Middle America is increasingly less likely to marry,

more likely to have children born outside of marriage, more likely to experience divorce when

they marry, and less likely to be happy if they remain married.[65]

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[62] McLanahan, "Diverging Destinies": 608**.**

[63] E. Bradford Wilcox, ed., *When Marriage Disappears: The New Middle America,* The State of Our Unions: Marriage in America 2010 (Charlottesville, VA: National Marriage Project [NMP], December 2010), in Executive Summary; accessed 9/5/2014 as e-book pdf download from http://www.stateofourunions.org.

[64] NMP, *When Marriage Disappears*, ix. Emphasis in the original.

[65] NMP, *When Marriage Disappears,* 13–16; 19; 20; 22.

Just as declining birth rates produce numerous secondary effects in a population, increasing longevity does as well. The concept of personal efficacy is important here, too. The longevity that marks the DT is the result of improved medical care and changing personal habits. Human advances and decisions are central. To quote Willekens again, longevity results as people no longer "believe that success [in the form of longer life] is up to God or another authority."[66] Increasing longevity therefore encourages more attention to be given to earthly life and less to be given to matters of life after death. Instead, life is increasingly focused on one priority—to keep living longer. Ephraim Radner argues that this has an important spiritual result:

> Our complacent expectation of life's longer duration breaks the body's bridge to eternity. We know that we will die, but our awareness of longevity shifts it from a present reality to a distant horizon. We push death to the margins. It comes "at the end." Life's duration becomes something we imagine to be valuable for its own sake.[67]

The broken "bridge to eternity" looks like this: priorities of a here-and-now life that is focused on longevity involve habits of health care rather than habits of spiritual care. The "key point," says Dyson, "is that mortality decline generates higher levels of confidence in society as regards the worldly future."[68]

Note well: it is the worldly future that consumes us, not the eternal life that Christianity confesses. Never missing a medication is more important than never missing church. Religious priorities diminish in the face of what is needed to keep living another decade. And then, when all our efforts to keep living have failed, the increasing preference is just to get rid of the body and its reminder that longevity has limits. One reason that cremation has skyrocketed may be that

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[66] Willekens, "DTs in Europe and the World," 4.

[67] Ephraim Radner, "Whistling Past the Grave," *First Things,* November 2016, https://www.firstthings.com/article/2016/11/whistling-past-the-grave.

[68] Dyson, *Population and Development,* 159.

it keeps us from having to deal with the dead, and therefore with death itself.[69]

John Lennon seemed to *imagine* the prevailing perspective of humans after the DT:

Imagine there's no heaven
It's easy if you try
No hell below us
Above us, only sky.
Imagine all the people
Living for today.[70]

Responses to Demographic Change

In 131 BC Quintus Caecilius Metellus Macedonicus was the senator with responsibility for the Roman census. He spoke about marriage, but his emphasis was actually on childbirth. He said, rather demeaningly, about wives: "Since nature has so decreed that we cannot manage comfortably with them, nor live in any way without them, we must plan for our lasting preservation rather than for our temporary pleasure."[71] Note that Quintus' option "for our lasting preservation" shows that he viewed wives as little more than a necessary evil. He was more concerned about the need for children in Rome than for marriage. He was convinced that Rome required more children to survive.

Many are recognizing that same problem today as all of the developed world faces an increasing problem with aging populations and declining percentages of younger cohorts to support them. Countries around the world are, bit by bit, starting to realize that even as world population grows, their national populations are either already in decline or soon will be. There will not be enough "human capital" (that is, young working people), to support the aging.[72] The

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[69] Karen Heller, "The Stunning Rise of Cremation Reveals America's Changing Idea of Death," *The Washington Post,* April 19, 2022, https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/2022/04/18/cremation-death-funeral/.

[70] John Lennon, "Imagine," © Downtown Music Publishing, 1971.

[71] Quoted in Longman, "The Return of Patriarchy," *Foreign Policy* (March/April 2006): 56.

[72] See Longman, *Empty Cradle,* 52–67; Yoshihara, *Population Decline,*

following pages examine some of the responses to the 2DT and the challenges it presents. After briefly looking at the ways that various countries and world regions are addressing the demographic transition toward aging populations, the focus will then narrow to the US.

Responses to the Demographic Transition: A Survey

The 2DT has elicited a significant response in economic and political circles throughout the developed world. The current focus for demographers is the recognition that population growth, worldwide, has leveled off and, in many places, is in decline. As birth rates decline, the percentages of those in older population cohorts increase. Increasing numbers of older people cause an increase in the number of dependents who are subsisting on ever-shrinking personal savings and the retirement benefits provided by governments. For these reasons, population decline is the demographic crisis of the near future if not of the moment. "For the first time in modern history, the world's population is expected to virtually stop growing by the end of this century, due in large part to falling global fertility rates," according to a Pew Research Center analysis of new data from the United Nations."[73] The UN data indicates that, of the world regions, only Africa is expected to experience significant continued population growth throughout the century. North America and Oceania are also projected to continue slow growth, but only because of immigration. Asia, South America, and Europe are all projected to be in population decline by century's end.[74] A brief survey of the response to the DT in several representative countries or geographic regions follows.

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[73] Pew Research Center, "World's Population Is Projected to Nearly Stop Growing by the End of the Century," Anthony Cilluffo and Neil. G. Ruiz, (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, June 17, 2019), https://pewrsr.ch/2WJzNHf.

[74] Pew, "World's Population Projected to Nearly Stop Growing."

China's Response to Demographic Transition

One of the clearest examples of the crisis presented by the 2DT is China. On a superficial

level, the perception may be that, as the most populous nation on earth, China's demographic

problem would be overpopulation. In point of fact, however, China has experienced a rapidly

declining birth rate. Its TFR in 1968 was 6.3 children born to an average woman in her lifetime.

By 1978, the number was more than halved, to 3.01, then dropped to 2.73 by 1988, and by 1998

it was below replacement level, at 1.62. It has retained a rate close to that up to the present time

with only a slight rise. In 2021 China recorded its TFR as 1.70.[75] As a result, while the older age

cohorts in China are growing larger by the day, the crisis is that the working cohorts that are

needed to support older dependents is shrinking. Nicholas Eberstadt explains the crisis presented

by population aging: "Left unaddressed, the mounting pressures that population aging would

pose on pension outlays, health care expenditures, fiscal discipline, savings levels, manpower

availability, and workforce attainment could only have adverse domestic implications for

productivity and economic growth in today's affluent OECD societies (to say nothing of their

impact on the global outlook for innovation, entrepreneurship, and competitiveness)."[76] Rather

than an Ehrlichian overpopulation bomb, China is one of the "Ten Countries at Risk of

Becoming Demographic Time Bombs" due to *underpopulation*.[77]

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[75] Macrotrends, "China Fertility Rate 1950–2022," Macrotrends.net, https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/CHN/china/fertility-rate#:~:text=The%20current%20fertility%20rate%20for,a%200.18%25%20increase%20from%202019. Yi Fuxian (or Fu-Xian Yi), a professor and Senior Scientist in obstetrics and gynecology, argues that China's population statistics are significantly and purposefully inflated. "China's Demographic Manipulation," Project Syndicate (August 5, 2021), https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/china-2020-census-inflates-population-figures-downplays-demographic-challenge-by-yi-fuxian-2021-08.

[76] Nicholas Eberstadt, "Growing Old the Hard Way: China, Russia, India Living Longer but Poorer," *Policy Review—Washington,* no. 136 (January 1, 2006): 16. OECD is the Office for Economic Cooperation and Development; see OECD, "About the OECD," accessed February 9, 2022, https://www.oecd.org/about/.

[77] Peter Kotecki, "10 Countries at Risk of Becoming Demographic Time Bombs," *Business Insider* (August 8, 2018), https://www.businessinsider.com/10-countries-at-risk-of-becoming-demographic-time-bombs-2018-8. See

China's one-child policy (in place from 1980 to 2016) contributed directly to the declining

numbers of youth as a percentage of its population. Not until 2016 did China end the policy.

Nevertheless, China's TFR has remained extremely low. China's "decades of messaging and

policies devoted to limiting family size to just one child has ingrained the viewpoint that having

one child is preferable."[78] China's 2020 census report tried to paint a rosy picture of its

population problems, stating that "The share of children rose again, proving that the adjustment

of China's fertility policy has achieved positive results."[79] While the decadal data might

substantiate that claim, the summary report failed to note that the total number of births had

declined each year from 2017 to 2020—a decline that continued through 2021.[80]

Moreover, China still suffers from a striking male-female ratio imbalance of 115 to 100

due to the number of females aborted during the one-child era in keeping with the traditional

priority given sons.[81] The resulting sex composition imbalance means fewer women of child-

bearing age today, at the very time China is attempting to boost its childbirth statistics. As China

attempts to address this problem, Ning Jizhe boasts, "The sex composition of China continued to

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also Feng Wang, "China's Population Destiny: The Looming Crisis," The Brookings Institution, Washington, DC, September 30, 2010, https://www.brookings.edu/articles/chinas-population-destiny-the-looming-crisis.

[78] Kenneth Pletcher, "One-Child Policy," *Encyclopedia Britannica Encyclopedia Britannica*, 15 September 2021, https://www.britannica.com/topic/one-child-policy. See also Emily Feng, "China's One-Child Policy Continues to Haunt Families," NPR.org (July 4, 2021), https://www.npr.org/2021/06/21/1008656293/the-legacy-of-the-lasting-effects-of-chinas-1-child-policy.

[79] Ning Jizhe, "Main Data of the Seventh National Population Census News Release," National Bureau of Statistics of China (May 11, 2021), http://www.stats.gov.cn/english/PressRelease/202105/t20210510_1817185.html.

[80] Liyan Qi and Fanfan Wang, "China's Population Stalls with Births in 2021 the Lowest in Modern History," *Wall Street Journal* (January 16, 2022), https://www.wsj.com/articles/chinas-population-barely-grew-in-2021-as-births-dropped-for-a-fifth-year-11642385947.

[81] See Yunping Tong, "Sidebar: Sex Ratios Around the World," in Pew Research Center, "India's Sex Ratio Begins to Normalize," (August 23, 2022), https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2022/08/23/sidebar-sex-ratios-around-the-world/. She writes: "An analysis of 2000-20 birth data from the UN shows that over these two decades, China and Azerbaijan had the most skewed sex ratios at birth, with an annual average of around 115 boys per 100 girls. In China, the government's decades-long enforcement of a one-child policy starting in 1980 and the spread of ultrasound technology led to a sharp increase in sex-selective abortions at the end of the last century."

improve." Even with that improvement from 2010 to 2020, the desire for boy babies continues, with 111.3 males born for every 100 females.[82] As part of its response, China has initiated a campaign to reduce abortions. The plan is much needed since, "In 2020, a year when China had 12 million live births, it recorded nearly nine million abortions, according to official data."[83]

The responses of China to demographic aging and declining child births are noteworthy. China's foremost response is an attempt to increase overall fertility rates, encouraging larger families (three children for each couple are now recommended) and discouraging abortion.[84] A second response is China's attempt to right the severe imbalance in sex composition, so that there will be increasing numbers of child-bearing women in the future. A third factor is at work in China: immigration. Immigration is occurring, but there is no evidence that China is intentionally encouraging immigration to meet its demographic challenges. Despite increasing numbers of migrants in China, only a small number become permanent residents. Many are employees of international companies (for example, Americans who work for General Motors who transfer to China for a certain time). Others come as teachers, housekeepers, and maids. But a number of people now come to work in China's industries and some evidently remain. The closest China comes to encouraging immigration to meet its demographic problem is the increasing number of immigrant women who are allowed to enter the country as brides for men who cannot compete financially for marriages to China's limited female population.[85]

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[82] Ning Jizhe, "Main Data."

[83] Liyan Qi and Fanfan Wang, "China Tries to Dial Back Its High Abortion Rate," *Wall Street Journal* (February 11, 2022), https://www.wsj.com/articles/china-tries-to-dial-back-its-high-abortion-rate-11644597797.

[84] Note the wide variety of policy changes attempting to boost birthrates. See "17 Chinese Govt Departments Issue Guideline to Boost Population Growth Amid Falling Birth Rate," *Global Times.* August 16, 2022, https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202208/1273160.shtml.

[85] Shen Haimei, "Inflow of International Immigrants Challenges China's Migration Policy," Brookings (September 8, 2011), https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/inflow-of-international-immigrants-challenges-chinas-migration-policy/.

Regarding China's responses to the demographic crisis, one searches in vain for any acknowledgement that its one-child policy had catastrophic effects, much less any acknowledgement of the policy's frequent brutality. Chen Guangcheng, an attorney who was incarcerated and abused so brutally that he was blinded, described one method of forced abortions: "The doctors would inject poison directly into the baby's skull to kill it." "Other doctors would artificially induce labor. But some babies were alive when they were born and began crying. The doctors strangled or drowned those babies."[86] It should be obvious that China's demographic problem stems from an ethos that is ruthless at its worst and only pragmatic at best. Yi Fuxian, a reproductive scientist from the US, identified the underlying problem in China. Its government does not have a moral system that values humanity. It does not "respect life" and develops policies based only on political and economic goals. Such callousness has trickled down to the population as a whole.[87]

Brazil's Response to Demographic Transition

Brazil's demographic transition has not been even, with a faster transition in the more urbanized south and southeast regions and a slower transition in rural areas. In overall terms, the DT in Brazil can be dated as beginning around 1950 with falling mortality rates. By the end of the 1960s birth rates began to decline.[88] Since 2007 the TFR for Brazil has been below

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[86] Emily Feng, "China's One-Child Policy Continues to Haunt Families," NPR.org (July 4, 2021), https://www.npr.org/2021/06/21/1008656293/the-legacy-of-the-lasting-effects-of-chinas-1-child-policy. Chen recorded interviews with hundreds of women and their families in Linyi Province. He eventually escaped from prison and was granted asylum in the US.

[87] See Liyan Qi, "China Is Trying to Reduce Its High Abortion Rate," *Good Word News* (February 12, 2022), https://goodwordnews.com/china-is-trying-to-reduce-its-high-abortion-rate/.

[88] Guilherme Fonseca Travassos, Alexandre Bragança Coelho, and Mary Paula Arends-Kuenning, "The Elderly in Brazil: Demographic Transition, Profile, and Socioeconomic Condition," *Rebep* 37 (2020), http://dx.doi.org/10.20947/S0102-3098a0129, accessed February 13, 2022. Available as pdf at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/345767144_The_elderly_in_Brazil_Demographic_transition_profile_and_

replacement value (<2.1)[89] and, as of 2020, the TFR stands at 1.8.[90] Consequently, as Jonas Simões das Neves Anderson and Sergio Schneider observe, the DT in Brazil has now attracted attention from "both researchers and the Brazilian state."[91] Attention there has been to the period between stages two and three in the DT (see pages 14–15 above) when there is a large supply of younger workers that provide an increase both in labor supply and consumption, thereby producing economic growth. But Anderson and Schneider warn that the bonus has not been managed effectively because of the level of "social inertia" on the part of youth, and that the rapid decline in fertility and increase in aging will present great challenges in the near future.[92] Brazil's elderly population is "more vulnerable to falling into poverty than other age groups."[93]

Brazil has attempted to address DT consequences. In 2019 it reformed its social security program to make it more solvent in the face of aging. Work requirements for benefits were increased, as were retirement ages, and benefits will be reduced for workers whose contributions do not meet minimum requirements.[94] Immigration, on the other hand, is evidently not in Brazil's tool box for addressing its graying population and declining birthrates. In the past Brazil has welcomed immigrants from around the world—hosting, for example, the largest Japanese population outside Japan itself—but present-day immigration policy debates have focused on

socioeconomic_condition/fulltext/5fad36c7a6fdcc9389ab578b/The-elderly-in-Brazil-Demographic-transition-profile-and-socioeconomic-condition.pdf.

[89] Andrė Portela Souza, "The Brazilian Demographic Transition: Features and Challenges," presentation to the Berlin Demographic Forum (March 19, 2015), graph 1.A.C., chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/viewer.html?pdfurl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.berlinerdemografiefor um.org%2Fwp-content%2Fuploads%2F2016%2F08%2FPortela_Presentation.pdf&clen=5456801&chunk=true.

[90] Travassos, et al., "Elderly in Brazil." 4.

[91] Jonas Simões das Neves Anderson and Sergio Schneider, "Brazilian Demographic Transition and the Strategic Role of Youth," Open Edition Journals, Part 1 §12, https://doi.org/10.4000/eps.5774.

[92] Anderson and Schneider, "Brazilian Demographic Transition," Final Remarks § 89. See also Travassos, et al., "Elderly in Brazil."

[93] See also Travassos, et al., "Elderly in Brazil," 13.

[94] Travassos, et al., "Elderly in Brazil," 13.

immediate national security concerns, not long-term economic and demographic needs.[95]

The European Response to Demographic Transition

In large measure the demographic transition model developed as a result of the study of the population changes that began in 18th century Europe.[96] Mortality began to decline in the 1800s in Europe. Technological and scientific advances resulted in better understandings of infectious diseases. Sanitation improved. Fewer infants and women died in childbirth.[97] Following the transition from high to low mortality came a fertility transition, beginning already in the 1790s in France, and extending to all of Europe by the end of the 19th century.[98] Eventually it led to "a decline of some 50% in the average number of children born per woman."[99] As the European Policy Research Center (EPRC) now reports:

> At EU level, both men and women saw their average life expectancy increase by over 10 years between the early 1960s and today, although women continue to live longer than men on average. Meanwhile, the number of children being born has fallen from an EU-28 average of around 2.5 children per woman in 1960, to a little under 1.59 today.[100]

The decline in births is severe. In July 2020 Eurostat reported: "The natural change of the EU 27 population has been negative since 2012, with more deaths than births recorded in the EU (4.7 million deaths and 4.2 million births in 2019)." Overall, the EU ratio of deaths to births was

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[95] Shari Wejsa and Jeffrey Lesser, "Migration in Brazil: The Making of a Multicultural Society," Migration Policy Institute (March 29, 2018), https://www.migrationpolicy.org/print/16152.

[96] Ansley Johnson Coale and Susan Cotts Watkins, *The Decline of Fertility in Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), xix.

[97] Willekens, "DTs in Europe and the World," 8–9.

[98] Willekens, "DTs in Europe and the World," 16–17.

[99] Ansley J. Coale and Roy Treadway, "A Summary of the Changing Distribution of Overall Fertility, Marital Fertility, and the Proportion Married in the Provinces of Europe," in Coale and Watkins, *Decline of Fertility in Europe,* 31.

[100] Monika Kiss, *Demographic Outlook for the European Union 2020*, (European Parliamentary Research Service, March 2020), https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2020/646181/EPRS_STU(2020)646181_EN.pdf, I.

53:47 in 2020 and sixteen of the 27 EU countries had more deaths than births. Of the five largest EU countries (Germany, France, Italy, Spain, and Poland), only France recorded more births than deaths.[101]

The EU does not have a singular cohesive policy for responding to its rapid aging and declining childbirths. No EU country has a replacement level birthrate and its working population is shrinking quickly as a proportion of the whole.[102] Its EPRC notes this demographic decline, but addresses it only by mentioning the possibility of policies that encourage childbirth, without recommending any, and also by briefly touching on the role that migration plays in helping to offset the EU's low birthrate.[103] But the absence of a singular policy for the whole of Europe does not mean the 2DT is being completed ignored. A Rand report notes that

> Recent years have been characterised by heavy investment in the family in a number of European countries, including Germany, Poland and the UK. Policies that reduce the opportunity cost of having children seem to have a greater influence on fertility than direct financial incentives.…
>
> [Nevertheless,] …the impacts of these family policy packages are, at most, mixed. [104]

The most significant change in the EU in the past decade was the withdrawal of the UK on January 31, 2021. But, while politically separated from the EU 27, England faces identical demographic challenges. Although the population of the UK continues to grow slowly at present, that growth is almost entirely the result of migration into England, as reported by the *Financial Times* early in 2022. The English birthrate continues to hover at about 1.5 TFR. As a result, "The

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[101] "EU Population in 2020," Eurostat News release 111/2020 (July 10, 2020), https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/2995521/11081093/3-10072020-AP-EN.pdf/d2f799bf-4412-05cc-a357-7b49b93615f1#:~:text=On%201%20January%202020%2C%20the,States%20on%201%20January%202019.

[102] See Kiss, *Demographic Outlook,* 11. As of 2020 France has the highest TFR in the EU at 1.90 and Malta the lowest at 1.26.

[103] Kiss, *Demographic Outlook,* 3, 14.

[104] Stijn Hoorens, et al., *Low Fertility in Europe: Is There Still Reason to Worry?* (Rand: Santa Monica, CA, 2011), xi–xii. http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG1080.

natural population of the UK will begin to decline by the middle of the decade, leaving the

country dependent on migration to increase the working-age population, according to new

data."[105] COVID-19 exacerbated the problem of declining birthrates in England so much that

proposals for encouraging childbirth are now under consideration.[106]

Certainly, immigration to Europe has had a significant effect on its demography. As

Eurostat notes: "The natural change of the EU population was positive—although decreasing—

until 2011, and then negative since 2012, with more deaths than births recorded in the EU." In

the period from 2011 through the end of 2020, EU population increased by 6.5 million, but that

increase was *entirely* due to net migration into the EU.[107] In 2011, Katya Vasileva wrote that,

"47.3 million foreign-born EU residents make up 9.4% of the total population of the EU."[108]

Such numbers have increased in the past decade. Extrapolating from the data provided by

Eurostat, 12%, or 53.8 million, of the total EU population of 447 million was foreign-born in

2020.[109] Percentages of immigrants vary among the EU 27, but the four largest countries all have

significant percentages of foreign-born residents. As of 2021 15.0 million residents of Germany

were foreign-born out of its total population of 83.2 million (18%).[110] The three other EU

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[105] "UK Natural Population Set to Decline by 2025," *Financial Times* (online ed., January 12, 2022), https://www.ft.com/content/7a558711-c1b8-4a41-8e72-8470cbd117e5.

[106] "UK Seeks Ways to Address the Falling Demographic Crisis," *TRTWorld* (July 7, 2021), https://www.trtworld.com/magazine/uk-seeks-ways-to-address-the-falling-demographic-crisis-48171#:~:text=In%20England%20and%20Wales%2C%20that,in%20the%20best%2Dcase%20scenario.

[107] Eurostat, "Population and Population Change Statistics" (July 5, 2021) https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Population_and_population_change_statistics#EU_population_shows_a_slight_decrease_in_2020.

[108] Katya Vasileva, "6.5% of the EU Population Are Foreigners and 9.4% Are Born Abroad," Eurostat (34/2011), https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/3433488/5579176/KS-SF-11-034-EN.PDF/63cebff3-f7ac-4ca6-ab33-4e8792c5f30c. Also quoted in Willekens.

[109] See Eurostat, "Population and Population Change."

[110] D. Clark, "Foreign-born Population of the European Union as of 2021, by Country," *Statista*, November 7, 2022, https://www.statista.com/statistics/549292/foreign-born-population-of-eu/. See also Statistiches Bundesamt,

countries with the largest populations also had high percentages of foreign-born residents: France, 8.5 million of its 67.4 million people (12.6%); Italy 6.2 million of its 59.6 million (10.4%); and Spain, 7.0 mllion of its 47.4 million (14.8%).[111] Among the immigrant populations of Europe, the largest and fastest growing segment is Muslim, although significant numbers of African Christians are also migrating to Europe. Female Muslim immigrants also have a higher rate of fertility than their Christian counterparts.[112]

While clearly a demographic boon in the short term, immigration to Europe is unlikely to resolve the problem of aging in the long run since "the fertility trends of many groups of foreign-born women tend to converge with the average of native women."[113] Therefore, although it is stated rather tenuously, Eurostat's population prediction for the EU seems undeniable:

> Since the number of deaths is expected to further increase because of the ageing population, and assuming that the fertility rate remains at a relatively low level, the negative natural change (more deaths than births) could well continue. In this case, the EU's overall population decline or growth is likely to depend largely on the contribution made by net migration.[114]

The North American Response to Demographic Transition

Closer to home, Canada has long recognized the serious challenge of a graying population. Canada's Standing Committee on Banking, Trade, and Commerce (BTC Committee) echoed the metaphor of an explosion in a 2006 report on demographic change titled, "The Demographic

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"Population by Migrant Status and Sex," Destatis.de, April 12, 2022, https://www.destatis.de/EN/Themes/Society-Environment/Population/Migration-Integration/Tables/migrant-status-sex.html.

[111] Statista, "Foreign-born Population of the EU."

[112] Morton Blekesaune, "The Fertility of Female Immigrants to Europe from Christian and Muslim Countries," *Journal of Religion and Demography* 7, no. 2 (2020): 222–37, doi: https://doi.org/10.1163/2589742X-12347109.

[113] Hoorens et al., *Low Fertility,* xi.

[114] Eurostat, "Population and Population Change." In their analysis from a decade earlier, Hoorens et al., had a similar although slightly more optimistic conclusion: "The outlook for fertility in the EU as a whole is better than it was a decade ago, but fertility rates in several countries are still alarmingly low." See *Low Fertility,* xiii.

Time Bomb: Mitigating the Effects of Demographic Change in Canada." The "time bomb" in question now was not surging population totals, but a drastically declining population. The report urges steps to address the combination of Canada's low birthrate and rapid aging.[115] More recently, Jake Fuss warned of sharp decline in Canada's labor force participation and its consequent threat to economic growth.[116] The TFR for Canada shows a steady decline over recent decades, but the five year period from 2016 to 2020 is illustrative (see fig. 8). It reveals a decline of nearly 12% in that five-year period.[117] It is important to note, however, that a population's TFR can fluctuate significantly in response to external conditions. It seems likely that Canada's steepest one year drop—from 1.47 to 1.40—is an example, since it occurred at the time COVID-19 introduced enormous uncertainty for all populations.[118]

Year	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
TFR	1.59	1.54	1.50	1.47	1.40

Figure 8. Canada's TFR, 2016 to 2020.[119]

The BTC Committee's recommendations to face the *Demographic Time Bomb* clearly identify the source of the problem—declining total fertility. But among the Committee's ten recommendations to mitigate the effect of aging, not one even hints at encouraging higher

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[115] The Parliament of Canada, Standing Senate Committee on Banking, Trade, and Commerce, *The Demographic Time Bomb: Mitigating the Effects of Demographic Change in Canada,* Jerahmiel S. Grafstein, Chair, June 2006, https://sencanada.ca/content/sen/committee/391/bank/rep/rep03jun06-e.htm.

[116] Jake Fuss, "Our Aging Population—A Serious Problem for Canada," The Frasier Institute Blog (October 15, 2020), https://www.fraserinstitute.org/blogs/our-aging-population-a-serious-problem-for-canada.

[117] Statistics Canada, Population and Demography Statistics, Crude Birth Rate, Age-Specific Birth Rates, and Total Fertility Rate (Live Births), Table: 13-10-0418-01 (release date September 29, 2021), https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1310041801.

[118] See Ana Fostik and Nora Galbraith, "Changes in Fertility Intentions in Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic," StatCan COVID-19 (release date December 1, 2021), https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/45-28-0001/2021001/article/00041-eng.htm.

[119] Author's chart from Statistics Canada, Fostik and Galbraith, "Changes in Fertility Intentions."

fertility nor is there any recommendation to provide economic incentives for families with larger numbers of children. In addition, there is no reference to the potential benefit of immigration as a way to address the problem of aging. Instead, the report quotes Canada's auditor general: "*there is little we can do to reverse or even slow the ag(e)ing of Canada's population over the coming decades.*"[120] Perhaps because the Committee deals with purely economic matters, it confines its recommendations to steps that will encourage people to work longer, defer Old Age Security (Canada's version of Social Security), and so forth without recommending any explicitly pronatalist or pro-immigration policies.

Beyond these recommendations to address the 2DT, Canada's most significant response to the transition has been in the area of immigration. Canada has no stated national governmental policy that encourages immigration as a means of addressing the country's declining birthrate and its growing percentage of aged dependents. Nonetheless, Canada's demography has benefited significantly from the immigration of largely youthful people with a significant work life ahead of them. In "#ImmigrationMatters: Canada's Immigration Track Record," the Canadian government lauds the benefits of immigration in five points:

- Immigrants contribute to the economy and create jobs for Canadians

- Immigrants deliver and improve our health and social services

- Immigrants are thoroughly screened and respect our laws

- Immigrants settle in communities across the country

- Immigrants integrate fully into Canadian society[121]

There are other Canadian voices urging immigration for just such reasons. Writing in 2019,

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[120] BTC Committee, *The Demographic Time Bomb,* 1. Emphasis in the original.

[121] Government of Canada, "Immigration Matters: Canada's Immigration Track Record," modified February 11, 2022, https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/campaigns/immigration-matters/track-record.html.

Jasmine Gill takes heart from the number of recent immigrants to Canada, but she also warns

that such a growth in immigration must be sustained *and increased*: "We are a decade away from

a true demographic pressure point. At that point our aging population will mean a decline in

workers, increases in health care costs, and other challenges to our economy and standard of

living, because there will not be enough workers to pay for all of our social programs." She then

endorses the Century Initiative, a nonpartisan proposal arguing that a Canadian population of 100

million is needed by the year 2100 for economic stability and adequate support of its social

programs.[122]

It is also worthwhile to note that one Canadian province, Quebec, has addressed the

problem of declining fertility.

> In 1988 Quebec introduced the Allowance for Newborn Children, which paid up to
> C$8,000 to families after the birth of a child. The incentive was large and rose with
> family size. Because the other provinces did not have similar policies, the study could
> compare people eligible for the benefit in Quebec with a control group of Canadians
> outside Quebec with similar characteristics who were not eligible for payments.
> Fertility rose an average of 12% among those eligible for the program and rose to
> 25% for those eligible for the maximum benefit.[123]

The program continues to the present time in Quebec but is now called the Family Allowance.

Here in the US, in the annual reports of the Social Security and Medicare Boards of

Trustees there is a perennial prediction of the depletion of the trust funds from which Social

Security and Medicare benefits are paid. The 2022 annual report summary of their Boards of

Trustees warns that "Social Security and Medicare both face long-term financing shortfalls."

Indeed, "The Old-Age and Survivors Insurance (OASI) Trust Fund, which pays retirement and

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[122] Jasmine Gill, "Canada Needs a Lot More People, and Soon," Policy Options (November 6, 2019), https://policyoptions.irpp.org/magazines/november-2019/canada-needs-a-lot-more-people-and-soon/.

[123] Elizabeth Brainerd, "Can Government Policies Reverse Undesirable Declines in Fertility?" *IZA World of Labor* (May 2014): 8, https://wol.iza.org/uploads/articles/23/pdfs/can-government-policies-reverse-undesirable-declines-in-fertility.pdf,

survivors benefits, will be able to pay scheduled benefits on a timely basis until 2034, one year later than reported last year. At that time, the fund's reserves will become depleted and continuing tax income will be sufficient to pay 76% of scheduled benefits." The previous prediction, that the trust fund's reserves would be adequate only until 2033, was based on the effects of COVID-19 and the 2020 recession coupled with "reductions in immigration and childbearing in 2021–22 from the levels projected in the 2020 reports." Medicare's funding dilemma is even more extreme. As a result, "the Trustees predict that it will be able to pay full benefits until 2028," after which it will cover only a portion of the claims against it.[124]

The US government has not ignored the demographic transition and its twin factors of rapid increases in older, dependent citizens and prolonged decreases in youth, although its focus is on the funding of Social Security and Medicare. A listing of some 163 different proposals to stabilize and secure the SSA pension program, going back to 1993, is provided by the SSA's Chief Actuary page under the heading: "Office of the Chief Actuary's Estimates of Proposals to Change the Social Security Program or the SSI Program."[125] The Actuary's analysis of each of the proposals focuses primarily on its potential effect on the Old Age, Survivors, and Disability Insurance (OASDI) trust fund, the reserves from which Social Security and SSI checks are issued each month. The most recent proposal is H.R. 5050, the Social Security Enhancement and Protection Act of 2021, which Representative Beth Moore (D-GA) introduced on August 17, 2021. Overall some eight different proposals were introduced in 2021. None, however, has had any more success than the 155 proposals which preceded them since 1993. It is also apparent that

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[124] Social Security Administration Office of the Chief Actuary, "Status of the Social Security and Medicare Programs: A Summary of the 2022 Annual Reports," by Janet Yellen, Xavier Becerra, Martin J. Walsh, Kilolo Kijakazi, and Scot L. Frey, accessed November 29, 2022, https://www.ssa.gov/oact/TRSUM/.

[125] Social Security, "Office of the Chief Actuary's Estimates of Proposals to Change the Social Security Program or the SSI Program," accessed November 20, 2022, https://www.ssa.gov/oact/solvency/index.html.

all of the proposals address the matter of funding by choosing one or more of three most common approaches: (1) end the payroll tax maximum so that individuals must pay the same SSA percentage on all earned income (for 2023, income over $160,200 is not taxed by Social Security); (2) increase the payroll tax percentage (currently at 12.4% of income); (3) increase the age for full retirement benefits.

While each of these approaches would improve the long-term outlook for the SSA, none of them addresses the critical problem of fewer numbers of working people trying to support increasing numbers of retirees. Arguably, of course, the US does encourage fertility by means of policies such as tax credits and other benefits for dependent children. There has, however, been no noticeable attention given to any explicit pronatalist policies. The UN noted this fact in a 2017 report on fertility policies around the world. As one might expect, countries with high fertility often have governmental policies that seek to reduce fertility. Alternatively, even more countries with fertility levels below replacement value have governmental policies that seek to increase fertility. Globally, among those countries with fertility levels below replacement value, 62% have policies encouraging more children.[126] But neither Canada (with a TFR 1.5) nor the United States (with a TFR 1.7) has a national policy to encourage fertility.[127]

There is a deeper problem than a lack of governmental attention to the problems of growing numbers of dependent elderly and declining working-age populations. The more worrying problem is an apparent decline in the desire—or at least the intention—to have more children. According to Pew Research, decreasing numbers of Americans between the ages of 18–

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[126] United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs: Population Division, *Population Facts*, No. 2017/10 (December 2017), https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/publications/pdf/popfacts/PopFacts_2017-10.pdf.

[127] The fertility rates are as of 2022, by the World Population Review, "Total Fertility Rate 2022," World Population Review, accessed November 20, 2022, https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/total-fertility-rate.

49 say that they are likely to have more children. Pew found that from 2018 to 2021, the number

of current parents who intend to have more children dropped from 28% to 25%. And, among

those without children, the number who intend to have children dropped from 61% to 55%.

Moreover, among non-parents, a 56% majority say that children are not just unlikely for them,

but undesired.[128]

Immigration, which provides significant numbers of working age and youthful members to

a society, has become a policy lightening rod in the US. Anti-immigration rhetoric, border walls,

claims of immigrants abusing welfare and medical programs—all of that has tended to minimize

the attention given to the fact that immigration provides much needed demographic dividends.

Yet, as noted earlier,[129] more than any other fact immigration is the reason the US population

overall has a sustainable fertility rate.

The State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration gives the following

as the US policy on population:

> The United States supports the Program of Action of the 1994 International
> Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), which was negotiated and
> accepted by 179 governments. The ICPD sets out many principles that form the basis
> for international discussion and action on population issues. These include the
> promotion of human rights, gender equality, strong families, care and protection of
> children, the right of all couples and individuals to decide freely and responsibly the
> number, spacing and timing of their children and to have the information and means
> to do so free from discrimination, coercion or violence, as well as family planning
> activities that adhere to the principle of voluntary choice.[130]

The State Department's Office of International Migration (PIM) "works to promote well-

managed, legal forms of immigration through bilateral and multilateral diplomacy and targeted

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[128] Pew Research Center, "Growing Share of Childless Adults in US Don't Expect to Ever Have Children," by Anna Brown, (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, November 19, 2021), https://pewrsr.ch/3DAU3RR.

[129] See below, subsection New America: Greater Diversity, 59–69.

[130] US Department of State, Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, *Population*, accessed June 6, 2022, https://www.state.gov/other-policy-issues/population/.

capacity-building programs."[131] While warning of the dangers of illegal immigration, PIM notes

> The United States hosts more immigrants than any other country, with more than one million people arriving every year as permanent legal residents, asylum-seekers and refugees, and in other immigration categories. In addition, hundreds of thousands of foreign-born individuals become naturalized U.S. citizens every year. The total across these categories, coupled with the United States' openness to people of all races, ethnicities, and religions, makes the United States the world's most generous country for immigration.

All in all, responses to the second demographic transition have been somewhat underwhelming, even though it has affected all of the developed world as well as much of the developing world. With the exception of Africa, the world is facing rapid aging and a declining pool of young people. Despite some voices raising alarms about population decline and pro-natalist policies in some countries, several things must be noted in summary about the overall response to aging and declining birthrates. First, while many countries in Asia and Europe recognize this problem, their efforts to increase birthrates have been minimally effective at most. Second, while immigration has certainly improved the demographic outlook in some places, such as the US, it is likely not able fully to address the long term need for an increasing percentage of youth, since birthrates for immigrant groups decline rapidly in developed nations. Third, immigration is viewed as a threat by many—as one can see in both North America and Europe, where immigration has produced political and social tensions, and in Asia, where ethnocentrism creates widespread opposition to the whole idea of immigrants.

The Changing Demographic Profile

Paul Taylor has summed up the dramatic change in the profile of the US population:

Demographic transformations are dramas in slow motion. America is in the midst of two right now. Our population is becoming majority non-white at the same time a

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[131] US Department of State, Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, *International Migration*, accessed June 6, 2022, https://www.state.gov/other-policy-issues/international-migration/.

record share is going gray. Each of these shifts would by itself be the defining demographic story of its era. The fact that both are unfolding simultaneously has generated big generation gaps that will put stress on our politics, families, pocketbooks, entitlement programs and social cohesion.[132]

New America: Older and More Female,

The DT is reshaping the world: "for the first time ever, there are already more people of pensionable age than there are children under 16 years—and the difference is going to increase over the next 20 to 30 years."[133] This is a direct result of declining birth rates in the US, which reached an all-time low in 2018.[134] The reality is far-reaching. As America ages another result of the DT is that it becomes more female. Males outnumber females from birth to age 17 (about 104 to 100), but after that age, females increasingly outnumber males as the population ages. If one looks at Americans between the ages of 65 and 84, women outnumber men with a ratio of 100 women for every 84 men. In the cohort age 85 and up, the ratio is 100:56.[135] That trend will not change because the momentum of the US population is toward aging, not youthfulness. Taylor explains that soon we will "have almost as many Americans over age 85 as under age 5."[136]

New America: Greater Diversity

The other factor that Taylor mentions—the move toward a non-White majority—is just as important as aging. The 2020 US Census shows a total population of 331,449,281. The racial categories employed in the Census were White, Black, Asian, American Indian/Alaska Native,

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[132] Pew, "The Next America."

[133] George Magnus, *The Age of Aging: How Demographics are Changing the Global Economy and Our World* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2009), 3.

[134] "Is US Fertility at an All-time Low? Two of Three Measures Point to Yes," Gretchen Livingston. FactTank (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center May 22, 2019 [update of a post originally published February 24, 2015]), https://pewrsr.ch/2WYw6hP.

[135] Mather and Kilduff, "US Population Growing Older," PRB (February 19, 2020).

[136] Pew, "The Next America".

Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, Some Other Race, and Two or More Races. Race was further

developed by three qualifications: Race Alone, Race in Combination, and Race Alone or In

Combination (see figures 9 and 10 below).

Figure 2.
Percentage Distribution of Race Groups: 2010 and 2020

Note: Data users should use caution when comparing 2010 Census and 2020 Census race data because of improvements to the question design, data processing, and coding procedures for the 2020 Census. Information on confidentiality protection, nonsampling error, and definitions is available at <https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/decennial/2020/technical-documentation/complete-tech-docs/summary-file/>.
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 Census Redistricting Data (Public Law 94-171) Summary File; 2020 Census Redistricting Data (Public Law 94-171) Summary File.

Figure 9. 2010 and 2020 Census race groups by percentage.[137]

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[137] Jones, et al., "Racial and Ethnic Composition."

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As for ethnicity, 61.6% of the US population is White alone (204.3 million), a decline from 223.6 million and 72.4% in 2010.[138] Blacks who self-identified without any other racial combination increased slightly in number between 2010 and 2020 (from 38.9 to 41.1 million), but declined very slightly as a percentage of the population (from 12.6% to 12.4%). The Asian alone population of the US increased both numerically and proportionately. In 2010 14.7 M (4.8%) Americans identified as Asian alone. In 2020 that number swelled to 19.9 M (6%). The American Indian and Alaska Native alone population increased from 2.9 M (0.9%) to 3.7 M (1.1%) in 2020. Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders continued at 0.2% of the US in 2020, as it did in 2010, while it increased numerically from about 540,000 to 690,000 people. Lastly, those who identified as Some Other Race alone grew from 19.1 million (6.2%) in 2010 to 27.9 million (8.4%) in 2020.

Group	2010 Population	2010 Percentage	2020 Population	2020 Percentage
White alone	223.6	72.4%	204.3	61.6%
Black alone	38.9	12.6%	41.1	12.4%
Asian alone	14.7	4.8%	19.9	6.0%
Am.Ind./NativeAlas.	2.9	0.9%	3.7	1.1%
Nat.Haw./Pac.Isl.	0.54	0.2%	0.69	0.2%
Some Other Race	19.1	6.2%	27.9	8.4%
Population in millions				

Figure 10. Comparison of populations by race alone. [139]

The table in figure 10 charts the figures from the previous paragraph detailing the statistics

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[138] USCB indicates that changes in the White population were related to question design, emphasizing "how people prefer to self-identify." Jones, et al., "Racial and Ethnic Composition." See also Eric Jensen, et al., "2020 US Population More Racially and Ethnically Diverse Than Measured in 2010," (August 12, 2021), https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2021/08/2020-united-states-population-more-racially-ethnically-diverse-than-2010.html. See also Hansi Lo Wang and Ruth Talbot, "This Is How the White Population Is Actually Changing Based on New Census Data," NPR (August 22, 2021), https://www.npr.org/2021/08/22/1029609786/2020-census-data-results-white-population-shrinking-decline-non-hispanic-race.

[139] Author's table with data from Jones, et al., "Racial and Ethnic Composition."

for Americans who identified as a single race alone. A quick summation of the percentages, however, indicates an important fact. In 2010 about 97% of the population identified themselves as a single race, but in 2020 only about 90% of the population identified themselves by one race alone. This is arguably the most significant change in the 2020 census. It indicates that increasing numbers of Americans are identifying themselves as "two or more races" (multiracial, or one race in combination with another race). The Bureau reports:

> The Multiracial population has changed considerably since 2010. It was measured at 9 million people in 2010 and is now 33.8 million people in 2020, a 276% increase. The 'in combination' multiracial populations for all race groups accounted for most of the overall changes in each racial category.[140]

Note that the foregoing summary focused on race more than ethnicity. For example, the USCB does not indicate how Hispanic or Latino persons fit into the categories provided in the graph in figure 10. This is not because the Census did not gather data on the Hispanic population. Rather, questions about race were distinguished from those about Hispanic identity since Hispanics may be of any race. The Hispanic or Latino population grew from 50.5 million or 16.3% of the population in 2010 to 62.1 million (18.7%) in 2020, an increase of 23%. The distinction between race and ethnicity with regard to Latinos helps to explain the significant increase in the measurements of both the Some Other Race alone and Multiracial (Two or More Races) populations. It is evident that respondents often did *not* distinguish between race and ethnicity, since many who identified as Some Other Race, Two or More Races or as a single race "in combination" with another race did so because they considered their Hispanic identity a matter of race. For example, out of the 27.9 million people who identified as Some Other Race, 26.2 million did so as Hispanic/Latino. This was also a factor with regard to Two or More Races

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[140] Jones, et al., "Racial and Ethnic Composition." Note that one reason for the enormous spike was changes in how the census asked about race and ethnicity.

or one race in combination with another (since it was common to include White and Mexican as individual races). At any rate, considered as an individual group, Hispanics now easily comprise the largest of all minority groups in the US.

The factors of aging and growing diversity are linked. Aging is most evident among the non-Hispanic, native-born White population. If one looks at America's immigrant population, the profile is different. Immigrant Americans are certainly experiencing the DT, but the effect is less pronounced for immigrants than for the native US population. Immigrants also tend to be more youthful than the existing population and therefore likelier to be child-bearing age. [141] The results of immigration on the US population profile are evident. The US was about 85% non-Hispanic White in 1960.[142] By 1990, however, the US was just under 76% non-Hispanic White.[143] And today the American population is less than 60% non-Hispanic White.

The racial and ethnic shift in the US population is most pronounced in children. In 2018 Child Trends researchers noted the marked change over time:

> From 1980 to 1999, the proportion of non-Hispanic white children in the U.S. population fell from 74 to 63 percent. From 2000 to 2010, the percentage of children who were non-Hispanic white only (following the classification system first used in the 2000 decennial census, in which respondents were given the option of identifying

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[141] Advocates for low immigration argue that immigrants to the US soon mirror the prevailing low-fertility patterns of the native-born population and therefore will not solve the problem of aging in the US. There is some truth to this claim, since the trend toward lower TFR is a world-wide pattern and there is virtually *no known national population that is experiencing an increase in birthrate*. However, research from the Center for Immigration Studies (an example of such an organization) corroborates two facts: (1) that immigrants continue to have higher birthrates than the native population, and (2) that on average immigrant populations are younger than the native US population, resulting in more women of child-bearing age. So, while immigration will not magically create a youthful US population, it most certainly slows the aging of America. Steven A. Camarota and Karen Ziegler, "Fertility Among Immigrants and Native-Born Americans: Difference between the Foreign-Born and Native-Born Continues to Narrow," Center for Immigration Studies (February 16, 2021), https://cis.org/Report/Fertility-Among-Immigrants-and-NativeBorn-Americans.

[142] The full "1960 Census of the Population" report from the US Census Bureau, dated March 31, 1961, may be downloaded at https://www.census.gov/library/publications/1961/dec/population-pc-a2.html.

[143] See Campbell Gibson and Kay Jung, *Historical Census Statistics on Population Totals by Race, 1790 to 1990, and by Hispanic Origin, 1970 to 1990, for the United States, Regions, Divisions, and States*, USCB, Population Division Working Paper no. 56 (September 2002), Table A-1 [pages are not numbered], https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/working-papers/2002/demo/POP-twps0056.pdf.

multiple race categories) declined from 61 to 54 percent. This proportion continued to decrease through 2016, reaching 51 percent, and is projected to fall slightly further by 2020, to 50 percent.[144]

Percentage Distribution of Children under Age 18, by Race and Hispanic Origin: 2000, 2010, and Projected 2020

■ 2000 ■ 2010 ■ 2020
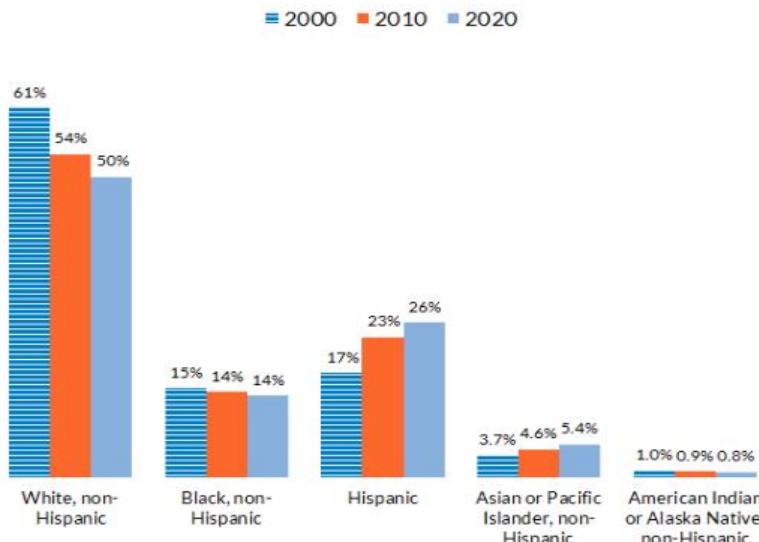
Note: Data reflect new race categories from the 2000 decennial census and only include those respondents who identified with a single race. Children of Hispanic origin may be of any race.
Source: Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics. (2017). America's children: Key national indicators of well-being, 2017 [Tables POP1 and POP3]. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from

childtrends.org

Figure 11. Distribution of children under age 18 by race and ethnicity.[145]

Using data from the 2020 Census, the Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family

Statistics corroborates the Child Trends projection at ChildStats.gov.

In 2020, 50% of U.S. children were White, non-Hispanic; 26% were Hispanic; 14% were Black, non- Hispanic; 5% were Asian, non-Hispanic; and 5% were non-Hispanic "All other races." This population is projected to become even more diverse in the decades to come. [146]

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[144] Child Trends. "Racial and Ethnic Composition of the Child Population," (2018), https://www.childtrends.org/indicators/racial-and-ethnic-composition-of-the-child-population.

[145] Figure from Child Trends, "Racial and Ethnic Composition."

[146] Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, *America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-being, 2021,* (US Government Printing Office, 2021), xv, https://www.childstats.gov/pdf/ac2021/ac_21.pdf.

The US census has reported on race and ethnicity in a variety of ways historically and has

continually sought to improve the accuracy of its reporting.[147] The 2020 Census also sought to

report on race and ethnicity more precisely than in previous censuses.[148] One result of this is

improved data on the multiracial population.[149] The US Census Bureau is required to adhere to

standards about race from 1997, identifying five general categories: White, Black (or African

American), American Indian (or Alaska native), Asian, and Native Hawaiian (or other Pacific

Islander). The Bureau uses self-identification by individuals and individuals may now identify as

more than one race, a practice that began in the 2000 census and has continued through the 2020

census.[150]

As a result, comparing the data for the non-Hispanic White population in the 2020 census

to the data in the 2010 report does not give a precise, "apples-to-apples" look at changes in the

US population. The 2020 census asked not only about a person's race, but also asked for the

country of origin: for example, under "White" examples were "German, Irish, English, Italian,

Lebanese, Egyptian, etc." and under "Black" examples were "African American, Jamaican,

Haitian, Nigerian, Ethiopian, Somali, etc." In addition, the census tried to take into account the

number of individuals of mixed race or ethnicity more fully than the 2010 census. One result of

these change is that it invites respondents to provide a more expansive description of their

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[147] Pew Research Center, "The Changing Categories the US Census Has Used to Measure Race," by Anna Brown (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, February 25, 2020), https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/02/25/the-changing-categories-the-u-s-has-used-to-measure-race/.

[148] See USCB, *Measuring Racial and Ethnic Diversity for the 2020 Census*, Eric Jensen, Nicholas Jones, Kimberly Orozco, Lauren Medina, Ben Bolender, and Karen Battle, (August 4, 2021), https://www.census.gov/newsroom/blogs/random-samplings/2021/08/measuring-racial-ethnic-diversity-2020-census.html. Note especially the sub-section titled "Measuring Diversity Then and Now."

[149] See Nicholas Jones, et al., "Racial and Ethnic Composition of the Country."

[150] USCB, *About the Topic of Race,* (Topics, March 1, 2022), https://www.census.gov/topics/population/race/about.html.

ancestry, thereby expanding the number of people who now identify as multi-racial and decreasing the number of those who simply identify as Black or White. The Census Bureau has therefore stated: "It is important to note that these data comparisons between the 2020 Census and 2010 Census race data should be made with caution, taking into account the improvements we have made to the Hispanic origin and race questions and the ways we code what people tell us."[151] Indeed, questions (and criticisms) have resulted.[152]

A population's children are of obvious importance to the demographic future.[153] Despite the caveat noted in the preceding paragraph, it is almost certain that, given the current data trends, the child-bearing population of the US will be less than 50% non-Hispanic White in the very near future, further increasing the racial and ethnic diversity of America. USCB data indicates that the White-only population will peak in ten years and then begin to fall in totality and as a percentage of the total US population. At the same time, while the Black population will grow slightly; Asians and Hispanics will grow much more significantly. While actual numbers will no doubt vary, what the Census Bureau predicted already in 2012 is almost certain:

> The non-Hispanic white population is projected to peak in 2024, at 199.6 million, up from 197.8 million in 2012. Unlike other race or ethnic groups, however, its population is projected to slowly decrease, falling by nearly 20.6 million from 2024 to 2060. Meanwhile, the Hispanic population would more than double, from 53.3 million in 2012 to 128.8 million in 2060. Consequently, by the end of the period, nearly one in three U.S. residents would be Hispanic, up from about one in six today. The black population is expected to increase from 41.2 million to 61.8 million over the same period. Its share of the total population would rise slightly, from 13.1

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[151] See Jones, et al., "Racial and Ethnic Composition." As a result, the widely reported decline in the percentage of "White only" Americans may be somewhat exaggerated.

[152] Justin Fox, "Are You White? It May Depend on How You're Asked," Bloomberg Opinion (August 17, 2021), https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2021-08-17/white-americans-counted-in-more-ways-than-one-in-2020-census. See also the comments of Ellis Monk as reported in the *Harvard Gazette*, Nikki Rohas, "2020 Census Racial Data Lacks Nuance, Sociology Professor Says" (September 17, 2021), https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2021/09/harvard-sociology-professor-weighs-in-on-census-flaws/; and see Wang, "2020 Census Likely Left Out People of Color."

[153] Nicholas Eberstadt, "The Demographic Future: What Population Growth—and Decline—Means for the Global Economy," *Foreign Affairs*, no. 6 (2010): 54–64, https://www.jstor.org/stable/20788716.

percent in 2012 to 14.7 percent in 2060. The Asian population is projected to more than double, from 15.9 million in 2012 to 34.4 million in 2060, with its share of nation's total population climbing from 5.1 percent to 8.2 percent in the same period.[154]

An increasing number of immigrants is nothing new for the US. Current *percentages* of immigrants are similar to those from the 1850s to the 1920s, but *the source countries for U.S. immigrants have changed markedly*. Today's immigrants are largely Latino, Asian, and African rather than European.[155] Overall, immigrant growth is most evident in cities, in the coastal US, and along the southern border. The table in figure 12 identifies the ten US states with the largest percentages of immigrant populations presently.

California	27% immigrant
New Jersey	23% immigrant
New York	22% immigrant
Florida	21% immigrant
Hawaii	19% immigrant
Nevada	18% immigrant
Massachusetts	18% immigrant
Texas	17% immigrant
Maryland	16% immigrant
Connecticut	15% immigrant

Figure 12. Ten States with highest immigrant populations (2022).[156]

One might suppose that the change in the race and ethnicity profile of the US occurred because of much higher birthrates for the people of color in the native-born population of the US. It is true that racial and ethnic minority groups "are responsible for all national growth" in the

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[154] US Census Bureau Projections Show a Slower Growing, Older, More Diverse Nation Half a Century from Now (December 12, 2012), https://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/population/cb12-243.html.

[155] Pew reports that the Latino percentage of immigrants has been declining while Asian immigration has increased. The drop in Hispanic immigration as a percentage of immigrants coincides with recent economic decline and increasing focus on border security. Pew Research Center, "The Rise of Asian Americans," Social and Demographic Trends. April 4, 2013, http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2012/06/19/the-rise-of-asian-americans/.

[156] Data from "States with the Most Immigrants 2022," World Population Review, accessed November 21, 2022, https://worldpopulationreview.com/state-rankings/states-with-the-most-immigrants.

past decade.[157] But the non-Hispanic Black population of the US, the largest native-born

population group beside non-Hispanic Whites, has a TFR of 1.775, only slightly higher than the

non-Hispanic White population's TFR of 1.610. Moreover, at 1.775 this TFR is well-below the

replacement level of 2.1 births per woman.[158] That clearly indicates that Black Americans are not

the racial minority responsible for national population growth.

The continued growth of the US population is due to immigration rather than to immigrant

birth rates. While over half of the largest minority population in the US, the Hispanic population,

is native-born, Hispanics make up fully 50% of the US immigrant population. Asians are another

28%. African, Middle-Eastern, and other immigrants make up an addition 9% of the immigrant

population. All-in-all, the foreign-born US population in 2018 was nearly 14% of the total US

population and their second-generation children were an additional 12.3% of the total

population.[159] This means that fully 25% of the current US population is the result of immigration

and that the changing racial-ethnic profile of the US is due almost entirely to immigration in

recent decades. As Taylor puts it: "Immigration is driving our national makeover."[160]

Note, it is immigration, not birthrate, that is the central factor in the demography of the

"New America." Immigration, and the changing racial and ethnic makeup it has produced in

recent decades, is therefore also the most prominent demographic factor that churches ought to

address as they seek to reach out to the US population now and in the foreseeable future.

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[157] William H. Frey, "All Recent US Population Growth Comes from People of Color, New Census Estimates Show," Brookings Report (June 23, 2021), https://www.brookings.edu/research/all-recent-us-population-growth-comes-from-people-of-color-new-census-estimates-show/.

[158] "Total Fertility Rate in the United States in 2019, by Ethnicity of Mother," Statista (March 2021), https://www.statista.com/statistics/226292/us-fertility-rates-by-race-and-ethnicity/.

[159] Pew Research Center, "Facts on US Immigrants, 2018," Abby Budiman, Christine Tamir, Lauren Mora, and Luis Noe-Bustamante (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, August 20, 2020), https://www.pewresearch.org/hispanic/2020/08/20/facts-on-u-s-immigrants/.

[160] Pew, "Next America."

CHAPTER TWO

THE DEMOGRAPHIC CHALLENGE AND RELIGION

Demographic Change and Religiosity—A World Tour

The DT is having a direct effect on religious adherence—and specifically on Christianity. While overly simplistic, it is generally true throughout most of the world that where populations are growing significantly, the church is also growing. Conversely, where populations are aging or even shrinking, the church is in decline. The best support for these general rules are Europe, Africa, North America, and, to a lesser extent, South America. Asia, however, makes its own rules with regard to the relationship of population and religion.

DT and Religion in Asia

As noted earlier in "China's Response to Demographic Transition" (pp. 42–45), China's low fertility persists despite the government's abandonment of the one-child policy. It persists because it has become the will of the people themselves. As Helen Gao describes it: "China's Generation of Only Children Wants the Same for Their Kids." The one-child policy set the pattern for family life for many Chinese citizens. One child is just right.

> Inside China, my generation did not know a time when the one-child family was not the social norm in cities. In the countryside, families were allowed a second child if the firstborn was a girl. But for urban kids, siblings were almost unknown unless the family was exceptionally rich and powerful. Growing up as single children impacted us deeply—and we carry that stamp even today, especially in our own childbearing decisions.[1]

While China's one-child policy has been absorbed subconsciously by millions, not

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[1] Helen Gao, "China's Generation of Only Children Wants the Same for Their Kids," ForeignPolicy.com (November 12, 2021), https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/11/04/china-one-child-policy-fertility-rates/. Personal note: A few years ago, I was asked to lead a Bible study for Chinese students at the University of Missouri, Rolla. The invitation came from my wife's sister, who was the host for the study. She had mentioned to study participants that she had five siblings. The dozen or more students were fascinated and begged for the chance to meet at least one of her siblings. None of the students had a sibling. Genesis 1:28 was the theme verse for the evening.

everyone in China has adopted the values and teachings of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). David Aikman, a *Time Magazine* China correspondent and frequent resident of China, shocked the West with his 2003 book, *Jesus in Beijing*.[2] In it he exposed the growth of Christianity in China, despite decades of persecution. Contrary to expectation, after foreign missionaries were sent home and indigenous leaders were imprisoned, the church had quietly grown, not died. Two versions of Christianity had grudgingly been permitted by the CCP: a Protestant version called the Three-Self Patriotic Movement, later under the oversight of the Chinese Christian Council (CCC), and a Catholic version, the Catholic Patriotic Association (CPA). Both were headed up by men who were nothing but puppets under CCP control, but the local Three-Self and Catholic churches quietly evangelized, baptized, and nurtured Christians whose first loyalty was to Christ.[3] Even more surprising was Aikman's reporting on the stunning growth of house churches, local assemblies started by individual Christians who invited others to hear him—and often, her—speak about Jesus Christ. These churches were not part of the CCC or CPA. They were independent and clandestine gatherings. Their roots went back to the days of the Cultural Revolution and its fierce oppression of Christianity when Christians either had to forsake the faith or go underground, meeting in subterfuge, often without any Scripture but memorized verses that they shared with one another. Even after the repudiation of the Cultural Revolution, the small-group house churches continued and, with them, came an explosion of growth.[4]

Although China faces the 2DT with imminent population decline, the Christian church has

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[2] David Aikman, *Jesus in Beijing: How Christianity Is Transforming China and Changing the Global Balance of Power* (Washington, DC: Regnery, 2003, 2006). In 2006 a paperback edition followed the 2003 hardcover edition. It contained an additional chapter on developments after 2003 and several appendices. References herein are to the 2006 paperback edition.

[3] Aikman, *Jesus in Beijing,* 7.

[4] Aikman, *Jesus in Beijing,* 74–95.

grown. This growth in an officially atheist country with a stagnant population is something of a

mystery. Liao Yiwu calls it a "secret story."[5] For some, the secret was that nonbelievers were

drawn to faith because of a nun who rescued scores of abandoned infants, especially little girls.[6]

Others were drawn by an Episcopal priest's courage and his refusal to join the Three-Self Church

with its anti-Christian beliefs.[7] Others were drawn by the testimony of Christians who survived

decades of imprisonment with their faith intact.[8] Again and again, in countless cases, men and

women went from disillusionment to hope as they saw that Christianity fills the void that the

Communist Party promised and failed to fill.[9]

In the end, every aspect of this "secret story" comes together in a central fact: Christianity

in China has grown by conversion—by handing *on* the faith to those who have not known it

moreso than by handing it down from generation to generation.

> Unlike other Chinese religious adherents, Christians in China become Christians by
> change of faith and not by birth. In China, people who are born into Muslim families
> are considered Muslim if they simply don't eat pork or follow other 'Muslim'
> customs. People are considered Buddhist or Taoist if they simply pay homage at
> ancestral tombs and believe that their ancestors are with them spiritually. But
> becoming a Christian in a hostile society is a matter of faith and is voluntary.[10]

In the case of China, most converts to Christianity are not converting from another religion,

but from another worldview—the worldview of Chinese Communist authoritarianism. Beginning

with Mao and continuing after him, the CCP has claimed near-absolute authority and demanded

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[5] Liao Yiwu, *God Is Red: The Secret Story of How Christianity Survived and Flourished in Communist China* (New York: Harper One, 2011).

[6] Yiwu, *God Is Red*, 11–16.

[7] Yiwu, *God Is Red*, 48–53.

[8] Yiwu, *God Is Red*, 161–75.

[9] Yiwu, *God Is Red*, 181–82.

[10] Gavin [no surname], "Christianity in China," China Highlights (August 23, 2021), https://www.chinahighlights.com/travelguide/christianity.htm.

unquestioning obedience. Chinese Christians—whether from the CCC, CPA, or underground churches—emphasize that they are not political dissenters. The "Confession of Faith of House Churches in China" explicitly says: "We support the constitution of the people's Republic of China and the leaders and the government of the people that God established."[11] This loyalty extends to governmental policies. For example, all groups endorse the CCP's insistence that Taiwan must be considered a province of China and not an independent nation.[12]

On the matter of Christian acceptance of governing policies, a challenging question arose with regard to the one-child policy. Did Christians support the policy as part of their honor toward governing authorities? In many (or perhaps most) cases, the answer is Yes—even to the point of Christians who willingly aborted their children if they already had one child. In an interview with Morgan Lee, Raymond Yang, a Chinese house church pastor for almost three decades, shared his conversation with the wife of one of the largest house church ministries in China. This woman had three or four abortions and believed they were completely moral because the government (at that time) had a one-child policy. Yang recognizes that he and his wife, who are convinced that abortion is killing and contrary to God's will, are out of step not only with nonbelievers, but also with most Chinese Christians, including pastors. He and his wife have sought to convince others that abortion is sin, but admits the difficulty they face:

> My wife and I have had the chance to meet many pastors in the past decade and have been talking about abortion with many pastors. And I think we have brought some level of impact to different pastors, but in general, I still don't see a whole lot of changes. I haven't talked to many pastors who really care about this in China.[13]

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[11] Aikman, *Jesus in Beijing,* 321.

[12] Aikman, *Jesus in Beijing,* 3, 220.

[13] Morgan Lee, "Why Chinese Christians Don't Talk about Family Planning," *Christianity Today* podcast (June 4, 2021), https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/podcasts/quick-to-listen/china-three-children-one-child-family-abortion.html.

Nevertheless, the patriotism of Christians has not ended the CCP's suspicion of the church.

Despite the considerable control the CCP exercises over the CCC and CPA leadership, the CCP

knows it does not control the hearts of the many people who flock to services in the sanctioned

churches. Even less do they control the house churches which for all their humble acceptance of

CCP rule, will not accept the authority of communism in the realm of faith.[14] Chinese

Communism has understood that from the beginning. As a result, the history of Christianity in

China since 1950 is one of living through alternating periods of mild to extreme governmental

opposition.[15] The CCP understands that Christians cannot give the all-encompassing obedience

that the CCP demands. Tension, suspicion, and—all too often—persecution are inevitable.

Five years after *Jesus in Beijing*'s updated version and one year after the publication of

God Is Red, Xi Jinping became the General Secretary of the CCP, the highest office in China. In

the decade since his first election, he has solidified control politically, effectively ensuring that

he can be General Secretary for life. His dictatorial leadership approach is molded after Mao:

total authoritarianism. His attitude toward Christianity is also much more akin to Mao's than to

his predecessors, Jiang Zemin (General Secretary from 1989–2002) and Hu Jintao (General

Secretary from 2002–2012). Under Jiang and Hu Christianity was afforded an increasing level of

tolerance, many imprisoned church leaders were freed, and house churches came out of

underground seclusion to establish thriving congregations. Xi has exerted an ever-increasing

control over the CCP itself, over the press, education, the arts, and over Christian churches.

> China's Christians, at 100 million strong and constituting that country's largest
> religious minority, are facing a new government policy of severe religious repression
> and persecution. The modicum of toleration that, for two generations, allowed the

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[14] Aikman, *Jesus in Beijing*, 221–24.

[15] Aikman tells the story of Chinese Christianity from the time of Mao up to the early 2000s by means of vignettes centered on particular Christian individuals (Chapter 3: "Patriarchs," Chapter 4: "Uncles," Chapter 5: "Aunts, Nephews, and Nieces"). See *Jesus in Beijing,* 47–118.

development of a robust, evangelizing Chinese church no longer exists. In the past three years, the government has launched a systematic campaign to cut China's Christian demographic drastically and control whatever survives within a little "birdcage," as Hong Kong's Cardinal Joseph Zen describes the push by the Chinese Communist Party for ideological conformity.[16]

It is too soon to tell what the results of Xi Jinping's rule will be. While CCP pressure against Christians in China has increased greatly, the church is not in a state of paralysis. Brent Fulton has described some of the most hopeful aspects of Chinese Christianity and warns against an over-emphasis on the narrative that sees the church in China only through the lens of persecution. Instead, he urges "a new narrative" about China and the church: one that recognizes "how God meets us in suffering," how the church can grow apart from the mega-church model, how God indeed shows his power in weakness, and how in Christ the meeting of cultures can be one of complementary strengthening rather than a clash of civilizations.[17]

Yet, the oppression is real. And Chinese Christianity is not naïve about the reality of governmental opposition. Even as they have appealed for toleration from the CCP, the Chinese House Church Confession of Faith includes a section titled, "Our Attitude Toward Persecution." There they pledge themselves to "yield to the government" all-the-while praying for their country and loving those who lead it.[18] One might hope, however, that love for country would be an encouragement for Christians to advocate for China to develop a greater respect for human life. Christians could be a prophetic voice that discourages abortion and teaches that children are a gift, not a burden (Ps. 127).

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[16] Nina Shea, "Christians under Xi: Their Plight Has Lately Worsened," *National Review* 73, no. 14 (August 2, 2021): 43–44.

[17] Brent Fulton, "Chinese Christians Deserve a Better Label than 'Persecuted," *Christianity Today* (October 9, 2020), https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2020/october-web-only/chinese-christians-persecuted-narrative-church-xi-jinping.html.

[18] Aikman, *Jesus in Beijing,* 324.

DT and Religion in Latin America

The population of Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) stood at about 620 million

people at the end of 2021. Brazil and Mexico comprise over half of the total population of the

region.[19] Over the past century the LAC as a whole has witnessed a sustained increase in life

expectancy[20] and declining fertility.[21] As a result, its countries have all reached at least the fourth

stage of the DT and are now experiencing a growing population percentage of older adults.[22] At

the same time, however, LAC is still relatively youthful, especially in comparison to North

America.[23]

As is the case in other parts of the world, aging poses challenges for public policy. Two are

most significant: an older population demands greater resources for old-age pensions and social

services such as health care and long-term care. This is the problem that is looming for LAC

although at present the region still has a significant percentage of the population that is working

age. That fact is an opportunity to encourage greater savings rates and to promote economic

growth, thereby increasing the kind of taxes that can fund retirees into the future. As Ignacio

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[19] See "Latin America Population 2022," World Population Review, accessed March 20, 2022, https://worldpopulationreview.com/continents/latin-america-population. Data from United Nations population estimates. See also Countrymeters, "South America," accessed March 20, 2022, https://countrymeters.info/en/South_America#:~:text=Demographics%20of%20South%20America%202021,of%20433%2C487%2C823%20the%20year%20before.

[20] "Health at a Glance: Latin America and the Caribbean 2020, Life Expectancy at Birth," OECD iLibrary, accessed March 20, 2022, https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/1189c03d-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/1189c03d-en.

[21] Wanda Cabella and Mathia Nathan, "Challenges Posed by Low Fertility in Latin America and the Caribbean," (working paper published by United Nations Population Fund, 2018), https://lac.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Baja%20fecundidad%20en%20ALC%20%28jun%202018%29%20version%20web%20ingl%C3%A9s.pdf.

[22] Stats Visual Archives has created an animated age-sex structure visual that shows the changing age-sex pyramid of LAC. See Stats Visual Archives, "Latin America—Changing of Population Pyramid and Demographics," accessed March 21, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ja72rPX0B80.

[23] About 26% of the LAC population is 10–24 years of age. For North America, the figure is 20%. See Pan American Health Organization, "The Health of Adolescents and Youth in the Americas," Washington, DC, 2018. The full report is available for download at www.paho. org/adolescent-health-report-2018.

Apella says: "The challenge of Latin American and Caribbean countries could be summed up as follows: countries need to get rich before they get old."[24]

As the population of LAC ages, it is also changing in its religious sensibilities. Pew Research conducted an in-depth analysis of religion in Latin America published in 2014.[25] Their survey showed a massive loss of membership for the Roman Catholic Church—a loss that is all-the-more remarkable because the continent has been for centuries identified as almost entirely Roman Catholic. "For example, roughly one-in-four Nicaraguans, one-in-five Brazilians and one-in-seven Venezuelans are former Catholics." The departures have been of two kinds: "Just one-in-ten Latin Americans (9%) were raised in Protestant churches, but nearly one-in-five (19%) now describe themselves as Protestants. And while only 4% of Latin Americans were raised without a religious affiliation, twice as many (8%) are unaffiliated today." [26]

The switch to "Protestant churches" is almost entirely toward Evangelicalism, not toward historic Protestant denominations. And the reasoning for the switch reflects evangelical identity. Over 50% of all respondents who had switched cited this set of reasons: (1) a focus on a personal relationship with God, (2) an inviting style of worship, (3) a greater emphasis on personal morality, (4) a greater willingness of the church to help its members, and (5) the outreach efforts

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[24] Ignacio Apella, "When We're Sixty-Four Years Old in Latin America, Will It Be Too Late?" WorldBank Blogs, June 22, 2021. https://blogs.worldbank.org/latinamerica/when-we-are-64-years-old-latin-america-will-it-be-too-late#:~:text=The%20challenge%20of%20Latin%20American,is%20only%2015%25%20of%20GDP%20. See also Rafael Rofman and Ignacio Apella, *When We're Sixty-Four: Opportunities and Challenges for Public Policies in a Population-Aging Context in Latin America,* (Washington, DC: Worldbank Group, 2020). Available for pdf download at http://hdl.handle.net/10986/34562.

[25] Pew Research Center, "Religion in Latin America: Widespread Change in a Historically Catholic Region," (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, November 13, 2014), https://www.pewforum.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2014/11/Religion-in-Latin-America-11-12-PM-full-PDF.pdf. See also José Darío Rodríguez Cuadros, "The Religious Shift in Latin America," *Hérodote* 171, no. 4 (2018): 119–34, https://doi.org/10.3917/her.171.0119.

[26] Pew, "Religion in Latin America," 4.

of the new church.[27] Another significant mark of the converts to evangelical Protestantism was youth: "pluralities of Catholic-to-Protestant converts say they left Catholicism before the age of 25."[28] Every country in Latin America has seen a reduction in the percentage of the population that was raised Catholic but are no longer Catholic today, The net losses range from a loss of 25 percentage points in Nicaragua to a loss of only 4 percentage points in Panama.[29] On a percentage basis, the countries of Central America, and especially El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua, have had the most dramatic shift toward Evangelicalism with evangelicals making up from 30% (Nicaragua) to 44% (Honduras) of each country. Less than half the population of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras is Roman Catholic today.[30]

Not all who leave Rome are embracing Evangelicalism. A growing share of the population is leaving the Christian faith entirely. As noted, the percentage of unaffiliated for LAC has risen to 8%.[31] Of the most populace countries in LAC: Brazil has the largest percentage of Evangelicals (26%), but also 8% unaffiliated; Mexico has the largest Catholic population (81%), but Protestants (8%) and the unaffiliated (7%) are growing; Colombia has the lowest percent unaffiliated (6%) with 79% Catholic and 13% Evangelical.[32] But in Uruguay, the most secular country in the region, only 42% of the population identifies as Catholic while 37% of the people are unaffiliated and 15% are Protestant.[33] In some ways, Chile has experienced an even more dramatic shift toward secularism. Few of the Chileans who have left the Catholic church in the

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[27] Pew, "Religion in Latin America," 5.

[28] Pew, "Religion in Latin America," 6.

[29] Pew, "Religion in Latin America," 12.

[30] Rodríguez Cuadros, "Religious Shift," 122.

[31] Pew, "Religion in Latin America," 4.

[32] Pew, "Religion in Latin America," 14.

[33] Pew, "Religion in Latin America," 18.

past decades have embraced Evangelicalism, which has not increased its share of the population, while the unaffiliated share has grown rapidly and "makes Chile the second most secular country in Latin America after Uruguay."[34]

None of the religious shifting may seem at first to be connected to the demographic transition. Rodríguez Cuadros, however, suggests that the movement away from the Catholic church "reflects a broader shift in Latin American societies away from treating religion as the main pivot of society."[35] The demotion of religion as a central priority of life is an indirect or secondary effect of the DT. Belief in personal agency, not divine control (either directly or through a church), increases in societies that have passed through the 1DT.[36]

Another secondary or indirect effect of the DT is also significant in LAC. The second and third stages of the DT are marked by strong population growth. That growth is most evident among the poor and marginalized segments of a population whose understanding of and access to birth control is less than that of middle and upper classes. The poor will experience more natural growth during these stages of the DT. The growth of Evangelicalism, and Pentecostal Evangelicalism in particular, has been strongest among the poor of LAC. Note Samuel Escobar's comment on Pentecostalism and the poor:

> Sociological observation points out that the numerical growth of Pentecostals takes place especially among socially marginalized groups that suffer uprooting and anomie during periods of rapid urbanization. Also, some aspects of Pentecostal religious life and theological emphasis coincide with characteristics of the culture of poverty, such as an oral liturgy, narrative theology, uninhibited emotionalism, maximum participation in prayer and worship, dreams and visions, and an intense search for community and belonging.[37]

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[34] Rodríguez Cuadros, "Religious Shift," 120.

[35] Rodríguez Cuadros, "Religious Shift," 121.

[36] See the subsection, Secondary Effects, above pp. 32–40.

[37] Samuel Escobar, *The New Global Mission: The Gospel from Everywhere to Everyone* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 115.

Pentecostal Evangelicalism's efforts are marked by the development of independent

indigenous leadership throughout LAC, but especially in countries like Brazil. This means that

evangelical growth has benefited both from vigorous outreach leading to conversion and from

natural growth since its membership has been among the segments of the LAC population that

retained high birthrates longer.[38]

DT and Religion in Africa

Kaufmann is certainly correct to observe that greater religious devotion correlates with

higher birth rates. Religious people tend to encourage the formation of families with children.

> One reason for the secular-religious fertility gap is that religion's pronatalist message
> contrasts with the culture of low fertility now prevalent in the secular-individualistic
> West and secular-materialistic East Asia. Once material circumstances free people to
> choose their fertility levels, values come to matter more in determining individual
> fertility. "One of the most central injunctions of virtually all traditional religions,"
> remark Pippa Norris and Ron Inglehart, "is to strengthen the family, to encourage
> people to have children, to encourage women to stay home and raise children, and to
> forbid abortion, divorce, or anything that interferes with high rates of reproduction."[39]

Africa is in stage two of the 1DT, featuring a steady decline in early mortality and ongoing

population growth. This results in the youngest population of any continent. Only 5.6% of

Africa's population is over 60, compared to 12.8% of LAC, 13.3% of Asia, 17.7% of Oceania,

23.4% of North America, and 25.5% of Europe. Given its large population of child-bearing age,

Africa will continue to grow much more than any other region, even though its birthrate is

steadily declining.[40]

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[38] On Pentecostalism's focus on the poor, see Jeremy Bone, "Transitional Shifts in Latin American Christianity: Pentecostalism and Catholic Revitalization," Academia.edu, accessed March 23, 2022, https://www.academia.edu/14047527/Transitional_Shifts_in_Latin_American_Christianity_Pentecostalism_and_Catholic_Revitalization.

[39] Eric Kaufmann, *Shall the Religious Inherit the Earth? Demography and Politics in the Twenty-First Century* (London: Profile Books, 2010), 56, Kindle.

[40] See the US Census Bureau study of Africa's population, focused. ironically, not on Africa's birthrate, but

Africa is also the most religious of all the continents. The 2015 Pew Research report, "*The Future of World Religions,* divides Africa into two regions, placing North Africa (from the Sahara to the Mediterranean) with the Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa into a separate region.[41] North Africa, like the Middle East, is dominated by Islam. Pew summarizes the future of world religion: "The religious profile of the world is rapidly changing, *driven primarily by differences in fertility rates* and the size of youth populations among the world's major religions, as well as by people switching faiths."[42]

Projecting growth trajectories out to 2050, Pew predicts that Islam will nearly equal Christianity in adherents by that time, having increased both numerically and in percentage of world population.[43] Christians, Hindus, Jews, and "other religions" will retain their current shares of world population, which means they will all experience some numerical growth. Hindus, for example are expected to continue to make up about 15% of world population. Jews, will retain their 0.2% share of population. Christians are expected to grow numerically from 2.17 billion to 2.97 billion people, but that too indicates only the same 31% population share as at present. Buddhists, Folk Religion adherents, and all other religions are predicted to decline in their shares of the total population. For Buddhism, this is a result of the sub-replacement birthrates for all of east Asia. The religiously unaffiliated population is expected to grow in the short-term, but peak in about 2035 and then decline (from 16.4% to 13. 2% of world population.[44]

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the future challenge of older dependents. Wan He, "Increases in Africa's Older Population Will Outstrip Growth in Any Other World Region," USCB (April 13, 2022), https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2022/04/why-study-aging-in-africa-region-with-worlds-youngest-population.html.

[41] Pew, *Future of World Religions,* 154–57 and 163–65.

[42] Pew, *Future of World Religions,* 5, emphasis added.

[43] Pew, *Future of World Religions,* 5.

[44] Pew, *Future of World Religions,* 6.

Africa will account for most of the growth of both Islam and Christianity according to Pew's projections. "The projected growth of Muslims and Christians would be driven largely by the continued expansion of Africa's population."[45] Of the two African regions employed in Pew's study, "**sub-Saharan Africa** is projected to experience the fastest overall growth, rising from 12% of the world's population in 2010 to about 20% in 2050."[46] Because sub-Saharan Africa is largely Christian and vigorously evangelistic in addition to having a high birthrate, Pew expects that it will account for the lion's share of Christianity's growth in the coming decades, with its Christian population doubling to about 1.1 billion, which would represent nearly 40% of all Christians at that time.[47]

The publication of *The Next Christendom* by Philip Jenkins in 2002 was largely responsible for giving notice of the rising tide of Christian conviction in Africa as well as the entire southern hemisphere and Asia.[48] There he argued that the most significant religious matter of the century (and indeed the millennium) that had just passed was not the degree to which a few religious individuals had influenced the secular world. Rather, it was the fact that "one of the transforming moments in the history of religion worldwide" was occurring during the transition from the second to the third millennium.[49] By the time of the third edition of Jenkins' work, he saw no need to persuade readers about the influence of the Global South for Christianity. Instead, relying on more recent data, he argues that "the global population shift is actually proceeding a good

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[45] Pew, *Future of World Religions,* 14.

[46] Pew, *Future of World Religions,* 15. Emphasis in the original.

[47] Pew, *Future of World Religions,* 16.

[48] Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*, 1st ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). See also Alister E. McGrath, *The Future of Christianity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002).

[49] Jenkins, *Next Christendom,* 1.

deal more rapidly than I initially suggested."[50] He notes the trajectory of growth for Christianity

in Africa: "The number of African Christians is growing at around 2.5% annually, which would

lead us to project a doubling of the continent's Christian population in thirty years."[51]

The growth of Christianity in Africa should not be misunderstood. Despite the importance

of Western missionaries in the 19th century, African Christianity today (and the Christianity of

the rest of the southern hemisphere and Asia) is not so much a version of Western Christianity as

it is "a distinctive new tradition of Christianity comparable to Catholicism, Protestantism, and

Orthodoxy."[52] Although Jenkins warns against too monolithic an understanding of this new

tradition, he notes:

> Generally, we can say that many global South Christians are more conservative in
> terms of both beliefs and moral teaching than are the mainstream churches of the
> global North; this is especially true of African churches. The denominations that are
> triumphing all across the global South are stalwartly traditional or even reactionary
> by the standards of the economically advanced nations. The churches that have made
> most dramatic progress in the global South have either been Roman Catholic, of a
> traditionalist and fideistic kind, or radical Protestant sects, evangelical or
> Pentecostal.[53]

With regard to the pervasiveness of Pentecostal influences, Jenkins adds:

Making all allowances for generalization, then, global South Christians retain a
strong supernatural orientation and are by and large far more interested in personal
salvation than in radical politics. Often, Christianity grows and spreads in highly
charismatic and Pentecostal forms, ecstatic religious styles that are by no means
confined to classical Pentecostal denominations, but which span churches with very

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[50] Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity,* 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), Preface, Kindle.

[51] Jenkins, *Next Christendom,* 3rd ed., 2, Kindle. Jenkins recognizes that Christianity in Africa is growing both by conversion and by the high fertility rates of sub-Saharan Africa (6, Kindle).

[52] Jenkins, *Next Christendom,* 3rd ed., 5, Kindle. For this perspective Jenkins relies on such scholars as Edward Norman, Walbert Buhlmann, Kosuke Koyama, John S. Pobee, and, especially, Andrew Walls. See for example Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996).

[53] Jenkins, *Next Christendom,* 3rd ed., 8, Kindle.

different origins and traditions. Pentecostal expansion across the Southern continents has been so astonishing as to justify claims of a new Reformation.[54]

The underlying support and stimulus for Global Christianity's surge is the Bible translated into the vernacular. The Bible in whole or in part is available in over 1500 languages, including more than 650 African tongues.[55] With the Bible in their own tongue, Christians in Africa and throughout the globe "can claim not just the biblical story, but their own culture and lore in addition."[56] Jenkins emphasizes the rapt attention given to communal readings of Scripture as congregations gather. The Christian communities are bound by the words of Scripture, which is heard as nothing less than the voice of God speaking to them today.[57]

In large measure Mark Noll agrees with Jenkins' assessment regarding the distinctiveness of the burgeoning churches outside the West. Noll certainly acknowledges the role of the Western missionary movement—and especially the involvement of American evangelicalism. "In recent decades world Christian movements, especially Protestant and independent movements, have come increasingly to take on some of the characteristics of American Christianity."[58] Therefore, rather than direct American influence on non-Western Christianity, Noll prefers to speak of "parallel development" occurring between the two.[59]

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[54] Jenkins, *Next Christendom,* 3rd ed., 9, Kindle.

[55] Philip Jenkins, *The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 24. See also "Into How Many Languages Has the Bible Been Translated?" Christian Lingua Blog (September 11, 2018), https://www.christianlingua.com/into-how-many-languages-has-the-bible-been-translated/.

[56] Jenkins, *New Faces,* 25.

[57] Jenkins, *New Faces,* 25–28.

[58] Mark A. Noll, *the New Shape of World Christianity: How American Experience Reflects Global Faith"* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press), 109, Kindle. The critical trait of American Christianity was the turn away from the European assumption that the church had to be supported by the state "toward voluntary, self-directed organization as the dominant means for carrying on the work of the church" (Noll, *New Shape,* 111). That same move toward independence in leadership and direction is evident in the churches of the "third world."

[59] Noll, *New Shape,* 109.

As an example, he examines the West African Revival, where a superficial look might see a manipulation of African peoples by devotees of Charles Finney and his emphasis on revival techniques. Relying on recent African scholarship Noll suggests that the revival occurred because it provided a way to establish a spiritual family to replace the traditional African emphasis on family and blood ties that had been dramatically undercut by artificial colonial divisions cutting through tribes and the colonial imposition of centralized authority in place of familial bonds.[60] Additionally, Noll cites the cultural role that public confession played in pre-Christian religiosity and of the consequent significance of moral renewal as reasons that Africans so willingly embraced the sort of public confession that the East African Revival emphasized.[61] In sum, Noll argues that the East African Revival is an example of how "Christianity assumed an African shape, even as Africans followed their own initiatives in embracing salient aspects of Christian faith as practiced in the Western world."[62]

Lamin Sanneh asks *Whose Religion Is Christianity?* and draws a distinction between "World Christianity and Christendom."[63] He briefly traces the recent surprising expansion of Christianity, noting that during the first three-quarters of the twentieth century the prevailing assumption of Western observers was that Africa would soon be dominated by Islam. "By 1985 it had become clear that a major expansion of Christianity had been under way in Africa in spite of prevailing pessimism about the imminent collapse of postindependent states, and of waning confidence in the church in Europe."[64] While the West increasingly portrayed missionary

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[60] Noll, *New Shape,* 183–84.

[61] Noll, *New Shape*, 184–85.

[62] Noll, *New Shape,* 186.

[63] Lamin Sanneh, *Whose Religion Is Christianity? The Gospel beyond the West* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 13–93.

[64] Sanneh, *Whose Religion?* 15. He notes about Africa (p. 15): "By 1985 there were over 16,500 conversions

Christianity as bigoted and culturally insensitive, Africa's rapid church growth was among the poor and marginalized who increasingly shaped Christian practices to meet their needs.[65] Africa is thus a prime example of World Christianity: "the movement of Christianity as it takes form and shape in societies that previously were not Christian, societies that had no bureaucratic tradition with which to domesticate the gospel."[66] This is in contrast to "Christendom" which "refers to the medieval imperial phase of Christianity when the church became a domain of the state, and Christian profession a matter of political enforcement." But World Christianity also contrasts with "Global Christianity," by which Sanneh means replicating the "forms and patterns developed in Europe." Ultimately, the shift to World Christianity has been dependent on the ability to communicate the gospel in the mother tongue. [67]

The observations of Jenkins, Noll, and Sanneh about the Christian religion in Africa have less to do with the 1DT than with the changing demographic profile of African and World Christianity. All emphasize the vigor of African Christianity and the phenomenon of conversion there. Nevertheless, the birthrate transition figures prominently in the picture of African church growth. Africa is still in phase two of the 1DT, marked by a decreasing death rate and an increasing child population because of advances in medical care. The result is Africa's youthfulness. The African church's vigor is then tied directly to its youthfulness. Christianity's

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a day, yielding an annual rate of over 6 million. In the same period (i.e., between 1970 and 1985), some 4,300 people were leaving the church on a daily basis in Europe and North America."

[65] Sanneh, *Whose Religion?* 18, identifies three significant factors of the expansion: (1) it took place "*after* colonialism and during the period of national awakening"; (2) it was linked to vernacular Bible translation; and (3) it was led by Africans.

[66] Sanneh, *Whose Religion?* 22. He adds: "World Christianity is not one thing, but a variety of indigenous responses through more or less effective local idioms, but in any case without necessarily the European Enlightenment frame."

[67] Sanneh, *Whose Religion?* 22–26. On the matter of the significance of Christian translation into vernacular languages, see also Lamin Sanneh, *Encountering the West: Christianity and the Global Cultural Process* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1993), 139–51.

conversion growth goes hand in glove with dynamic population growth and a massive cadre of youthful, energetic Christians and evangelists.[68]

The growth of Christianity in China and other parts of Asia, the continuing transition from Roman Catholic to Evangelical Christianity in Latin America, and the explosion of church growth in Africa all attest to the truth of Philip Jenkins' claim: "The era of Western Christianity has passed within our lifetimes, and the day of the Southern churches is dawning. The fact of change itself is undeniable: it has happened, and will continue to happen."[69]

DT and Religion in Europe

In 2002, Jenkins first revealed the epochal shift from the West—North America and Europe—toward the southern hemisphere as he documented Christianity's explosive growth in the developing world in contrast with its decline in the West. His *Next Christendom* is now in its third edition as he works to keep up with the ongoing trend. "Until recently, the overwhelming majority of Christians have lived in white nations, allowing some to speak of 'European Christian' civilization." But that is no more the case. "Over the last century, however, the center of gravity in the Christian world has shifted inexorably away from Europe, southward, to Africa and Latin America, and eastward, toward Asia."[70]

What happened to this Euro-centric dominance of Christianity? To some degree, the

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[68] While Christian adherence is certainly increasing as a result of conversion, it is important to note that Christianity's fastest growth is in Africa, where the Christian population is most youthful. Overall religious adherence world-wide can be correlated closely with median ages. Thus, Pew indicates that the fastest growing religion is Islam, with a median age of 24; then Christians with a median age of 30; and, lastly, Buddhism, in decline, with a median age of 36. Hindus have a median age of 27, but they are not growing faster than Christianity and are expected to decline as a percentage of world population in the future. Pew Research Center, "5 facts about Buddhists around the world," Kelsen Jo Starr, Pew FactTank, Washington, DC, April 5, 2019, https://pewrsr.ch/2OQJDFc.

[69] Jenkins, *Next Christendom,* 3rd ed, 3.

[70] Jenkins, *Next Christendom,* 1.

answer is the DT. As noted, Europe's population—particularly its ethnically *European*

population—is in decline. Fewer Europeans means fewer potential European Christians. And, in

contrast, more people in the southern hemisphere means more potential Christians there. But that

only partially explains the phenomenon of the decline of the church in Europe. Even with respect

to declining European birthrates, such birthrate decline does not explain the shift in attitudes that

made people unwilling to have more children.[71] Religiosity, however, does offer a significant

explanation of fertility decisions:

> We found this to be the case, as far as the overall effect across countries is concerned.
> Regardless of gender, and for both short- and long-term fertility intentions, compared
> to the non-religious, people of medium religiosity are more likely to intend to have
> a(nother) child, and highly religious people are even more likely to have such
> intentions.[72]

Therefore, declining fertility correlates with the decline of European Christianity, but it is

less the cause than the effect of declining religiosity. Europe as a whole is simply less religious

in general than in the past and, specifically, it is far less Christian. The decline is severe. One of

the key findings of a 2018 report, "Europe's Young Adults and Religion," was that

> The proportion of young adults (16–29) with no religious affiliation ('nones') is as
> high as 91% in the Czech Republic, 80% in Estonia, and 75% in Sweden. These
> compare to only 1% in Israel, 17% in Poland, and 25% in Lithuania. In the UK and
> France, the proportions are 70% and 64% respectively.[73]

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[71] Research by Joshua Goldstein, Wolfgang Lutz, and Maria Rita Testa shows that younger cohorts throughout Europe have lower ideal family sizes, led by German-speaking countries with the lowest number of desired children. See "The Emergence of Sub-replacement Family Size Ideals in Europe," *Population Research and Policy Review* 22 (2003): 483–85. http://dx.doi.org/10.1023/B:POPU.0000020962.80895.4a.

[72] Christoph Bein, Anne H. Gauthier, and Monika Mynarska, "Religiosity and Fertility Intentions: Can the Gender Regime Explain Cross-Country Differences?" *European Journal of Population* 37 (2021): 459, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10680-020-09574-w.

[73] Stephen Bullivant, of St. Mary's University, "Europe's Young Adults and Religion: Findings from the European Social Survey (2014–16) to inform the 2018 Synod of Bishops," St. Mary's University Twickenham London (Benedict XVI Centre for Religion and Society, 2018), 3, https://www.stmarys.ac.uk/research/centres/benedict-xvi/docs/2018-mar-europe-young-people-report-eng.pdf. Israel was the only country included that was not within Europe geographically. The survey was conducted while the UK was still part of the EU.

Outside of Israel, Poland, and Lithuania, the non-religious young adults in the remaining

countries were reported as 37% or higher. The six countries with the most religious young adult

Christians (Poland, Lithuania, Austria, Slovenia, Portugal, and Ireland) are all historically

Roman Catholic, but the two largest historically Catholic countries, Spain and France, are both

marked by high percentages of non-affiliated young adults at 55% and 64% respectively (oddly

enough, Italy was not included in the report).[74]

In Germany, where individuals register either as church members—Protestant or

Catholic—or as unaffiliated, a stark change has taken place. "Fifteen years ago, 61% of Germans

belonged to either a Catholic or Protestant church. Today, about 26% of Germans are officially

registered as Catholics and 23.7% as Protestants."[75]

A 2018 Pew survey begins with a frank assessment: "Western Europe, where Protestant

Christianity originated and Catholicism has been based for most of its history, has become one of

the world's most secular regions."[76] Among their central findings, Pew notes that a majority of

adults continue to identify themselves as Christians, but they are unlikely to attend church

services. Non-practicing Christians outnumber those who worship with some regularity in every

EU country surveyed except Italy, where church-goers and non-attenders were tied. Among the

historically Lutheran Scandinavian countries, the Christians who attend "more than a few times a

year" (Pew's standard for being an active Christian) are less than 15% of the population. In

Germany, with a large ostensibly Lutheran population, the percentage of those who attend is

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[74] Bullivant, "Europe's Young Adults and Religion," 6.

[75] "Germany: Record Numbers Leaving Churches," Deutsche Welle, accessed June 29, 2022, https://www.dw.com/en/germany-record-numbers-leaving-churches/a-62286684.

[76] Pew Research Center, "Being Christian in Western Europe" (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, May 29, 2018), 6, https://www.pewforum.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2018/05/Being-Christian-in-Western-Europe-FOR-WEB1.pdf.

22%.[77] Out of the four categories used by Pew—Church-attending Christians, Non-practicing Christians, Religiously unaffiliated, and Other religion/don't know/ref.—the non-practicing are the largest category for Europe as a whole and typically outnumber any of the other categories.[78]

The actual beliefs of Europeans are in keeping with their practices. Churchgoers generally "believe in the biblical depiction of God," while "non-practicing Christians say they do not believe in God 'as described in the Bible.'" Rather, they "believe in some other higher power or spiritual force." As might be expected, "a clear majority of religiously unaffiliated adults do not believe in any type of higher power or spiritual force in the universe."[79] Also as one would expect, being an active Christian influences moral judgments. For example, "church-attending Christians are considerably more conservative than both non-practicing Christians and religiously unaffiliated adults on questions about abortion and same-sex marriage." But:

> Vast majorities of non-practicing Christians and religiously unaffiliated adults across Western Europe favor legal abortion and same-sex marriage. In some countries, there is not much difference on these questions between the attitudes of Christians who rarely attend church and adults who do not affiliate with any religion.[80]

Given such beliefs, one might wonder why non-practicing European Christians continue to identify as *Christians.* One hint might be that majorities of such people believe that "churches and other religious organizations play an important role in helping poor and needy."[81] And, sadly, both practicing and non-practicing Christians are more likely than the unaffiliated to view immigrants and ethnic minorities negatively.[82]

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[77] Pew, "Being Christian in Western Europe," 7.

[78] Pew, "Being Christian in Western Europe," 8.

[79] Pew, "Being Christian in Western Europe," 9.

[80] Pew, "Being Christian in Western Europe," 28.

[81] Pew, "Being Christian in Western Europe," 19.

[82] Pew, "Being Christian in Western Europe," 20, 22.

Overall, therefore, Pew paints a bleak picture for Christianity in Europe.

> Europe is the only region projected to see a decline in its total population between 2010 and 2050. Although Christians will continue to be the largest religious group in the region, Europe's Christian population is expected to drop by about 100 million people, falling from 553 million in 2010 to 454 million in 2050.[83]

Yet, there are hopeful signs. In Great Britain, for example, while there is a declining portion of the White population affiliated and active in Christianity, Black majority churches are growing. While the increasing diversity of England may be seen in the growth of Islam, it is also having a positive effect for Christian churches from various traditions.[84] Over 700 new Pentecostal congregations were formed in London over a seven-year period, but the Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Presbyterian denominations have also benefited significantly.[85]

In Germany a similarly hopeful phenomenon is occurring, with immigrant Christians providing growth in the church. Many new churches in Germany have been planted by immigrant church planters.[86] In other cases, immigrants are joining existing congregations. One example is the rapid growth of *Dreieinigkeits-Gemeinde*, a congregation in Berlin-Steglitz and a member congregation of the LCMS partner church, *Selbständige Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche* (SELK). The congregation has had over 1,200 baptisms of converts in recent years, most of whom are refugees from Iran and converts from Islam. It is one of some 20 similar congregations of former Muslims that are now part of SELK. These congregations account for

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[83] Pew Research Center, "The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010-2050" (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, April 2, 2015), https://www.pewforum.org/2015/04/02/europe/.

[84] Ruth Gledhill, "Future of Christianity in Britain Is Islam and Black Majority Churches," *Christian Today* (February 9, 2015), https://www.christiantoday.com/article/future.of.religion.in.britain.is.islam.and.black.majority.churches/47716.htm.

[85] Ruth Gledhill, "Church Attendance Has Been Propped Up by Immigrants, Says Study," *Guardian* (June 3, 2014), https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jun/03/church-attendance-propped-immigrants-study.

[86] Stephen D. Dye, *Mission in the Diaspora: Multicultural Churches in Urban Germany Initiated by Church Planters from the Global South*, PhD diss., Biola University, La Mirada, CA, 2017, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses, see especially 50–63.

most of the growth within SELK in recent years.[87]

In France the RCC continues to claim the most adherents—about 60% of the population identifies as Catholic. But when asked if they are "practicing Catholics," the number drops to 15%. And, narrowing things even more, less than 5% attend mass weekly.[88] Protestant Christians in France make up just about 3% of the population, with over half self-identified as Evangelicals. Among the Christian groups, only Evangelical adherents are growing numerically, having increased ten-fold since 1970.[89] Muslims make up about 8–9% of the French population while the remaining 28–30% of the population are religiously unaffiliated (most of whom are self-identified as atheist or agnostic). As a result, Pew Research Center ranks France as one of the most conflicted countries in terms of political, social, and religious tensions.[90] Much of the tension revolves around mistrust of Muslims by the secular majority of the population, made up of the unaffiliated and the non-practicing Catholics.[91]

It is of note that animosity toward Muslim immigrants is much less evident among practicing Catholics and Evangelicals.[92] This may be the result of French Catholic support for Pope Francis' appeal to all the European churches to welcome immigrants.[93] Another possible

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[87] "German Churches See Rise in Baptisms for Refugees," Deutsche Welle, accessed March 7, 2022, https://www.dw.com/en/german-churches-see-rise-in-baptisms-for-refugees/a-38771600. See also Roger Drinnon, "Synod Walks with German Partner in Ministry Amid Flood of Refugees," *Reporter* (November 20, 2015), https://reporter.lcms.org/2015/synod-walks-with-german-partner/.

[88] Carol Ferrara, "The Catholic-ness of Secular France," EuropeNow Daily (October 2, 2019), https://www.europenowjournal.org/2019/10/02/the-catholic-ness-of-secular-france/.

[89] "Evangelicals in France," ImpactFrance.org, accessed March 8, 2022, https://impactfrance.org/evangelical-france/.

[90] Pew Research Center, "Diversity and Division in Advanced Economies," Laura Silver, Janell Fetterolf, and Aidan Connaughton (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, October 13, 2021), https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2021/10/13/diversity-and-division-in-advanced-economies/,

[91] Ferrara, "The Catholic-ness of Secular France."

[92] Pew, "Diversity and Division."

[93] Gabriela Ceraso and Linda Bordoni, "European Churches Respond to Pope's Appeal for Migrants and

cause may be that significant numbers of Christians have also emigrated from their home countries to France, especially from Francophone Africa. Immigrants are among the most religious Catholics and Evangelicals in France. They account for something of a revival of French religiosity for Catholics and, even more, for Protestants.[94]

The cases of England and France are sufficient to establish a basic pattern for Europe regarding the 2DT and the churches. Among White Europeans, religiosity is weak across the board, but especially among younger cohorts. As Europe ages, the somewhat more religious older groups are gradually dying. Overall the churches of Europe are in the midst of a massive decline in adherence. And, while immigrants are viewed as a threat to European culture and civilization by growing numbers in Europe, it is immigrants who are the most religious and therefore the most significant bright spot for Christianity in Europe.

The fact that immigrants may eventually produce a more widespread revival of Christian faith in Europe is not a pleasant prospect for all. Eric Kaufmann, a committed secularist, takes no comfort in the fact that native-born populations are increasingly less religious because he is worried about the increasing "fundamentalist" religiosity of the rest of the world. His book, *Shall the Religious Inherit the Earth?*, is motivated by his concern that the religious tend to hold to traditional moral codes and support governments and policies that are consistent with their religious values and contrary to his own. "Fundamentalist religious movements uphold the primacy of mores based on holy texts. They argue that these should supersede profane motives

Refugees," *Vatican News* (December 22, 2021), https://www.vaticannews.va/en/church/news/2021-12/europe-church-pope-appeal-migrants-refugees-collaboration-politi.html.

[94] Hugues Lagrange and Toby Matthews, trans., "The Religious Revival among Immigrants and Their Descendants in France," *Revue française de sociologie* 55, no. 2 (2014): 201–44, DOI: 10.3917/rfs.552.0201.

such as custom, pragmatism and liberalism."[95] The immigration of such religious people to the

West is, for him, a threat. His fear multiplies because those who are most devout tend also to

have larger families while secularists have smalerl families or none at all—which prompts the

question in his title. Thus, the general decline of religious devotion in Europe is masking another

reality: the growth of fundamentalist religion, both Muslim and Christian.

> Today, evangelicals, Pentecostalists and charismatics make up more than 8 percent of the European population, twice as numerous as Muslims, and they are increasing at the same rate [as Muslims]. Though fundamentalist Christianity is enjoying a global resurgence, its expansion in Europe is more noticeable because of surrounding decline. In effect, Christianity seems to be retrenching; religious decline is taking place, but as the loosely attached fall away, they reveal a vital and growing core of fundamentalist energy.[96]

DT and Religion in the United States: Six Trends

As is the case throughout the developed world, the US has experienced the demographic

transition from a growing youthful population to a population marked increasingly by aging.[97]

The US, however, differs from the rest of the developed world by having experienced significant

immigration and, consequently, it has enough younger people for a sustainable birth rate.

Nonetheless, US demographic trends are challenging to the country and to American religion.

Between 2016 and 2019 Pew Research published brief yearly updates on "demographic

trends shaping the U.S. and the world."[98] Of the "6 Demographic Trends Shaping the US and the

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[95] Kaufmann, *Religious Inherit the Earth?* 2. Pew's later research reinforces Kaufmann's expectation, positing that "the religiously unaffiliated population is projected to shrink as a percentage of the global population, even though it will increase in absolute number." *Future of World Religions*, 8.

[96] Kaufmann, *Religious Inherit the Earth?* 159.

[97] See the subsection above, The North American Response to Demographic Transition, pp. 50–57.

[98] Pew Research Center, "10 Demographic Trends Shaping the US and the World in 2016," D'Vera Cohn and Andrea Caumont (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, March 31, 2016), http://pewrsr.ch/1VUU4py; Pew Research Center, "10 Demographic Trends Shaping the US and the World in 2017" Anthony Cilluffo and D'Vera Cohn (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, April 27, 2017), http://pewrsr.ch/2pqflhD; Pew Research Center, "7 Demographic Trends Shaping the US and the World in 2018," Anthony Cilluffo and D'Vera Cohn (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, April 25, 2018), https://pewrsr.ch/2qZtkKu; and Pew Research Center, "6 Demographic

World in 2019,"[99] several have proven to be continuing patterns. The first of the six 2019 trends asserted that Millennials were on the cusp of becoming the largest single adult grouping in the US. Population data from later in 2019 confirmed that fact: "Millennials, whom we define as ages 23 to 38 in 2019, numbered 72.1 million, and Boomers (ages 55 to 73) numbered 71.6 million."[100] The second trend from 2019 was: "Hispanics are projected to be the largest racial or ethnic minority group in the U.S. electorate when voters cast their ballots next year."[101] That, too, was confirmed as the 2020 census revealed that the Hispanic population had grown by 23% since the 2010 census and was 18.7% of the total population, surpassing the Black population.[102]

The third trend identified in 2019 was ongoing changes to the American family, including a growing share of unmarried parents (25%), increasing childbirths for women ages 40–44 (coupled with a subsequent increase in lifetime fertility compared to 2010), and a continuing move toward later marriage.[103] None of these trends has abated according to Daniel A. Fox who also notes that religion plays a much less prominent role in the American family today. [104]

Trends Shaping the US and the World in 2019," Anthony Cilluffo and D'Vera Cohn (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, April 11, 2019), https://pewrsr.ch/2Gaolyp. No similarly titled updates were provided for 2020 or 2021.

[99] Pew, "6 Demographic Trends—2019."

[100] Pew Research Center, "Millennials Overtake Baby Boomers as America's Largest Generation," Richard Fry (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, April 26, 2020), http://pewrsr.ch/2FgVPwv.

[101] Pew, "6 Demographic Trends—2019."

[102] US Census Bureau, "2020 Census Illuminates Racial and Ethnic Composition of the Country," Nicholas Jones, Rachel Marks, Roberto Ramirez, Merarys Ríos-Vargas, (August 12, 2021), https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2021/08/improved-race-ethnicity-measures-reveal-united-states-population-much-more-multiracial.html. Hispanics accounted for over half of all US growth in the decade. African Americans (Blacks alone and in combination) make up 14.2 % of the US.

[103] Pew, "6 Demographic Trends—2019."

[104] Daniel A. Cox, "Emerging Trends and Enduring Patterns in American Family Life," Survey Center on American Life (February 9, 2022), https://www.americansurveycenter.org/research/emerging-trends-and-enduring-patterns-in-american-family-life/. Cox also reports an increase in the number of blended families, a growing share of never-married people who express no interest in every marrying, and a sharp increase both in marriages with neither spouse having religious affiliation and marriage ceremonies that have no religious officiant or religious dimension.

The fourth trend emphasizes that the immigrant share of the US population is increasing while. perhaps surprisingly, the fifth trend is that the *unauthorized* immigrant share of the population has declined.[105] Although these two trends might appear mutually exclusive, both are the case. As already noted, the Hispanic population of the US expanded significantly between the 2010 and 2020 censuses. This is the case even though Asians, not Hispanics, are the fastest-growing immigrant group in the US.[106] Among Asian Americans, nearly 60% are foreign-born.[107]

As for a decline in the share of unauthorized immigrants, it should first be noted that all immigration to the US has slowed. Indeed, "net migration to the United States, the change in the number of foreign-born residents, has significantly declined over the last five years due to policies of the Trump administration, processing backlogs, the pandemic, and other factors."[108] The decline in overall immigration was mirrored by a decline in unauthorized immigration, according to research by Robert Warren of the Center for Migration Studies as reported in *Forbes* early in 2021.[109] However, "a massive surge of illegal immigrants" from the Spring of 2021 through the end of the year, together with a scaling back of deportations and expulsions has seemingly reversed the trend of decline in unauthorized immigration, at least momentarily.[110]

The sixth and final trend that Pew identified in 2019 was that "Incomes are rising in the

[105] Pew, "6 Demographic Trends—2019."

[106] Pew Research Center, "Asians Are the Fastest-Growing Racial or Ethnic Group in the US," Abby Budiman and Neil G. Ruiz (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, April 9, 2021), https://pewrsr.ch/3tbjILO.

[107] Pew Research Center, "Key Facts about Asian Americans, a Diverse and Growing Population," Abby Budiman and Neil G. Ruiz, (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, April 29, 2021), https://pewrsr.ch/315iK5e.

[108] Tara Watson, "The Decline in US Net Migration," *The Econofact Network* (March 7, 2022), https://econofact.org/the-decline-in-u-s-net-migration.

[109] Stuart Anderson, "Illegal Immigration in America Has Continued to Decline," *Forbes* (March 10, 2021), https://www.forbes.com/sites/stuartanderson/2021/03/10/illegal-immigration-in-america-has-continued-to-decline/?sh=22d107964e14.

[110] Steven A. Camarota and Karen Ziegler, "Immigrant Population Hits Record 46.2 Million in November 2021," Center for Immigration Studies (December 20, 2021), https://cis.org/Camarota/Immigrant-Population-Hits-Record-462-Million-November-2021.

US, but the increase is not being felt equally by all Americans."[111] In 2020 the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis published a blog post by Ana Hernández Kent and Lowell Ricketts that examined wealth inequality in the US. Several facts emphasized the significant gap between groups. The wealthiest 10% of the US (12.9 million families) owned 76% of the wealth and the next 40% (51.5 million families) owned 22% of the wealth. That left less than two percent of US wealth to share among the remaining 50% (64.3 million families) of the population. As grim as that is, the bottom 50% of the population had made significant gains in wealth since the Fed's previous wealth survey in 2016. The median gain in wealth for Black families was 32% during the period of 2016–2019 while White families gained only 4% in that same period. Nevertheless, the wealth gap between the median White family and the median Black family remains vast: $184,000 versus $23,000. The picture was not much different for Hispanic families. Their media gain in wealth was also substantial—a 38% increase. But the wealth of the median Hispanic family at $38,000 also lagged well below the median White family.[112]

These six trends challenge not only the country, but also the church. The following four subsections discuss the religious challenge the trends present. Trend 1 is considered in the first subsection (Millennial Challenge). Trends 2, 4, and 5 are all discussed in the second subsection (Multiethnic America). The third subsection (Family Decline) looks at Trend 3 and the church. And Trend 6 is the topic of the fourth subsection (Income Inequality).

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[111] Pew, "6 Demographic Trends—2019."

[112] Ana Hernández Kent and Lowell Ricketts, "Has Wealth Inequality in America Changed Over Time? Here Are Key Statistics," *Federal Bank of St. Louis*, Open Vault Blog (December 2, 2020), https://www.stlouisfed.org/open-vault/2020/december/has-wealth-inequality-changed-over-time-key-statistics. The data comes from the Fed's Survey of Consumer Finances, a triennial survey.

The Millennial Challenge

Pew's 2019 trend predictions did not mention the continuing decline of religious affiliation in the US. That decline in religiosity, however, is not unrelated to the demographic trends. All of the six trends, however, are connected to the ways that American religiosity is connected at least indirectly to the DT and, emphatically, to the changing demographic profile of America.

For example, as Millennials become the dominant generation in America, the church faces the reality that the Millennial generation is not only becoming the most influential generation in American society, but is also leading the shift away from organized religion and, more specifically, from Christianity. Pew's 2019 data indicates that 40% of all Millennials identify as unaffiliated (and 9% claim a faith other than Christianity). [113] And for the next generation, Generation Z, the percentage of unaffiliated is even higher than for the Millennials.[114]

While many of the unaffiliated have grown up without any church background, the unaffiliated cohort is also experiencing growth from those who were formerly part of the church. The Barna Group, under the leadership of David Kinnaman, has researched both the unaffiliated and younger Christians who are leaving the church to find the reasons for Christianity's decline among the young.[115] The unaffiliated strongly reflect alienation from Christianity based on negative views of the church and Christians.[116] But Kinnaman and Hawkins also indicate that

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[113] Pew Research Center, "In US, Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace: An Update on America's Changing Religious Landscape," Gregory Smith, (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, October 17, 2019), 7, https://www.pewforum.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2019/10/Trends-in-Religious-Identity-and-Attendance-FOR-WEB-1.pdf. "Decline of Christianity" hereafter with page references from pdf.

[114] Daniel A. Cox, "Generation Z and the Future of Faith in America," Survey Center on American Life (March 24, 2022), https://www.americansurveycenter.org/research/generation-z-future-of-faith/.

[115] On unaffiliated younger groups see David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *Unchristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity and Why It Matters* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012). On why youth are leaving the church see David Kinnaman and Aly Hawkins, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church and Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), Kindle.

[116] The church is viewed as coercively evangelistic, antihomosexual, too judgmental, hypocritical, too

nearly three-fifths of all Christian teens will leave the church after age 15. The teen cohort shares

many of the same attitudes about Christianity with the unaffiliated.[117]

Kinnaman's Barna research is mirrored in many ways by that of Christian Smith in *Soul*

Searching and *Souls in Transition*.[118] In *Soul Searching,* Smith studied the religious and spiritual

attitudes of American teens (high school youth),[119] coining the term "Moralistic Therapeutic

Deism" (MTD) to describe the predominant religious attitude of teens. In brief, MTD holds the

following:

1. A God exists who created and orders the world and watches over human life on earth.

2. God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions.

3. The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself.

4. God does not need to be particularly involved in one's life except when he is needed to resolve a problem.

5. Good people go to heaven when they die. [120]

Souls in Transition is a follow-up to *Soul Searching* that tracks teens as they become

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political, intellectually naïve (out of touch, old-fashioned, and boring), and coercively evangelistic (not accepting other religions). See Kinnaman and Lyons, *Unchristian,* 26.

[117] Kinnaman and Hawkins discovered "a wide range of perspectives, frustrations, and disillusionments" prompting young people to leave Christianity. The church is too protective, intellectually shallow and anti-science, sexually repressive, and unaccepting of other religions. See Kinnaman and Hawkins, *You Lost Me,* Kindle Part 2: Disconnections, quote from "Disconnections Explained."

[118] For Smith see the following: Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005) and Christian Smith and Patricia Snell, *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). Also by Smith: "On 'Moralistic Therapeutic Deism' as U.S. Teenagers' Actual, Tacit, De Facto Religious Faith," The 2005 Princeton Lectures on Youth, Culture, and the Church (Princeton: Princeton Theological Seminary, 2005), 46–58; online at The Princeton Lectures on Youth, Church, and Culture (ptsem.edu). Christian Smith, Kyle Longest, Jonathan Hill, and Kari Christoffersen, *Young Catholic America: Emerging Adults In, Out of, and Gone from the Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

[119] Given the date of the research (2004), it is worth noting that Smith's subjects are part of the Millennial generation. The later study, *Souls in Transition,* tracks the teen generation of 2004 as it moves into adulthood.

[120] Smith, "On 'Moralistic Therapeutic Deism,'" 46–47.

adults. The marks of MTD remain in the survey population moving forward, a tendency Smith

sees as a movement away from certainty regarding truth and direction for life.[121]

Research by Barna and Pew indicates that for both the unaffiliated and the young

Christians who are leaving the church, the most commonly held negative perception about

Christianity is that it is sexually repressive (particularly with respect to homosexuality).[122] This,

together with the general charge that Christianity is too judgmental and too exclusive (seeking to

evangelize all non-Christians), indicates that the underlying dilemma facing Christianity is

secularization. Three other researchers support this fact. David T. Olson's *The American Church

in Crisis,*[123] and Mark Chaves's *American Religion*[124] give heavy attention to the correlation

between increasingly secular trends and declining religiosity in the US. Samuel Escobar, in *The

New Global Mission,*[125] takes a more international focus with particular attention to international

Evangelicalism. Olson and Chaves acknowledge the significance of demographic change, both in

terms of different behaviors among age cohorts, but also in terms of the relative demographic

strength of the cohorts.[126]

Olson states: "The ongoing downturn in church attendance this millennium is partially

related to external cultural changes."[127] Two of the aspects of cultural change are the moves (1)

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[121] Smith, *Souls in Transition,* 292–94.

[122] See footnotes 117 and 118 above and Jeff Diamant, "Half of US Christians Say Casual Sex Between Consenting Adults Is Sometimes or Always Acceptable," Pew Research Center (August 31, 2020), https://pewrsr.ch/3lJyBBE.

[123] David T. Olson, *The American Church in Crisis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008).

[124] Mark Chaves, *American Religion: Contemporary Trends* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

[125] Escobar, *New Global Mission.*

[126] Olson discusses "the overall trajectory of the American church in light of national population growth" in chapter 2, 33–46. Chaves, *American Religion*, 17–20, 40, notes that both the trend toward being unaffiliated and those who count themselves "spiritual but not religious" are strongest among younger people.

[127] Olson, *American Church in Crisis,* 161.

from a Christian world to a post-Christian world, and (2) from a modern world to a postmodern world. In a post-Christian world outreach (the missionary task) is a greater need than pastoral care of an existing congregation—a circumstance that parallels the early church. In a postmodern world full of uncertainty, ministry must reckon with a culture that is no longer habitually religious, but one that is "secular yet spiritually curious."[128]

Chaves notes that America remains a very religious country compared to the rest of the developed world, yet, the most significant religious trend is toward no religion. And as America becomes more religiously diverse (both in terms of increasing disaffiliation and in the growth of non-Christian religions), the result is a move toward a widespread tolerance that affirms that all religions are equal pathways to God or salvation.[129] This represents a softening of beliefs. While a majority of Americans continue to believe in God, belief in the inerrancy of Scripture has declined sharply. Chaves sees this as "declining confidence in the special status of one's own religion" and a move away "from seeing Christianity as uniquely true."[130] An additional emphasis in Chaves' overview of religion in the US is his take on religious polarization as a growing trend (a trend that has only accelerated since the publication of his book in 2011). As the unaffiliated grow, they are no longer silent. They too have a message to preach.[131]

The most recent research indicates that the American religious picture may be shifting.

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[128] Olson, *American Church in Crisis,* 163–69. Olson argues that the church has passed through four historical phases on its way to the postmodern world: first, "*Christendom in a religious culture*" (165, the West to the 19th century); second, the religious culture "*was becoming increasingly secular*" (166, early 20th century); third, the church faced "*a secular culture that had some religious memory*" (167, mid-20th century to 2000); and fourth, "*mission churches engaging a secular yet spiritually curious culture*" (167, this millennium); italics in the original.

[129] Chaves, *American Religion,* 10–11, 27, says that about 75% of all Americans share this understanding.

[130] Chaves, *American Religion,* 37.

[131] Chaves sees the increase among the unaffiliated as an element of this polarization, arguing that it is a backlash against the religious right's perceived power (20–21). Christel Manning speaks of how the unaffiliated tend to feel like outsiders in American culture and, as a result make it a priority to provide their children with "ammunition" against conservative Christians. See *Losing Our Religion: How Unaffiliated Parents Are Raising Their Children* (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 81–85.

"The 2020 Census of American Religion" suggests two noteworthy movements. First, PRRI says, "The proportion of white Christians hit a low point in 2018, at 42%, and rebounded slightly in 2019 and 2020, to 44%." Second, PRRI reports a *decline* in the percentage of unaffiliated in the same two-year period, from 25.5 to 23.3%. If this marks a stabilization in what had been an ongoing downward trend for Christianity, that would be highly significant. Plus, these changes are not occurring because of shifts in religiosity for older cohorts. Rather, PRRI's Figure 3 (fig. 13 herein) indicates that while the long-term trend for the unaffiliated is powerful, there is some evidence for a rise in affiliation for youth. The 18–29 cohort was reduced from 38 to 36% between 2016 and 2020, and the 30–49 declined from 26 to 25% in that period.[132]

FIGURE 3. More Young Adults are Unaffiliated Today Than in the Past
Religiously unaffiliated, by age cohort, 1986-2020
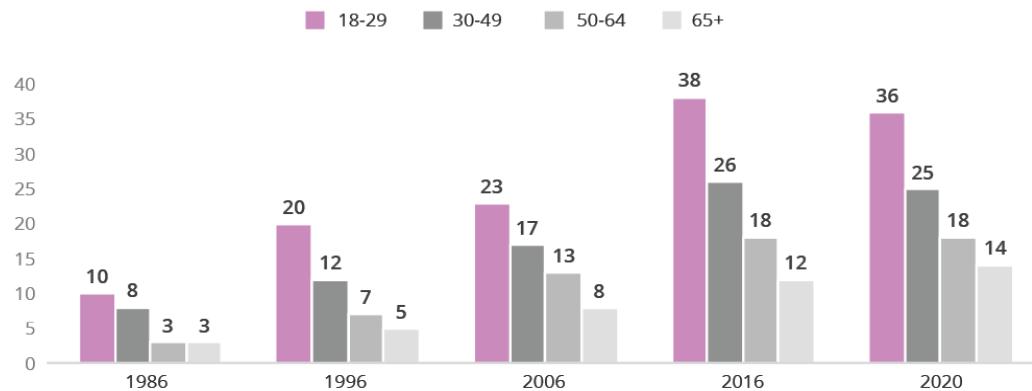
Sources: General Social Survey, 1986, 1996, 2006; PRRI American Values Atlas, 2016, 2020.

Figure 13. Religiously unaffiliated adults by age cohort.[133]

The Challenge of Multiethnic America

The second, fourth, and fifth trends that Pew predicted in 2019 were all addressing various

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[132] PRRI Staff, "The 2020 Census of American Religion," PRRI (July 8, 2021), https://www.prri.org/research/2020-census-of-american-religion/.

[133] Figure 13 is a copy of PRRI's Figure 3 in "The 2020 Census of American Religion."

aspects of multiethnicity in America. As noted above in the second predicted trend, Hispanics are now the largest single ethnic minority in the US and the minority share of the US population continues to grow, even while the unauthorized immigrant population declined (at least during the period of 2016–2020). Moreover, as predicted in the fourth trend, the immigrant population of the US is growing as a share of the population. This is the case even though the rate of immigration declined during the Trump presidency and the COVID-19 crisis (the fifth trend).

All of this presents a significant challenge for Christianity, but also an opportunity. It is difficult, if not impossible, to know the rate of immigration to the US in the future, but even if immigration were to cease entirely, the diversity of the US population will continue. As noted in the subsection of chapter one, "New America: Greater Diversity," America is becoming inexorably more multiracial—the "White only" population's decline in the 2020 census is indicative of that fact. For that reason American diversity will challenge denominations or religious groups that are mostly White far more than other groups.

In 2015 Pew Research analyzed its data from the 2014 Religious Landscape study with regard to racial and ethnic diversity in denominations. They published the results in a brief article by Michael Lipka, "The Most and Least Racially Diverse US Religious Groups."[134] As noted earlier, in chapter two, it is generally true that the denominations or Christian groups that are the least racially and ethnically diverse are in decline, while those with greater diversity are demographically healthy and experiencing greater growth. None of this is surprising. It is the case for several reasons. First, the DT results in an aging population. That is the case for denominational populations. With an aging population there will be less internal growth—fewer

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[134] Pew Research Center, "The Most and Least Racially Diverse US Religious Groups," Michael Lipka (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, July 27, 2015), http://pewrsr.ch/1KtFGxx. See Appendix One.

young people mean fewer babies and that effect multiplies over time. Second, greater diversity in America means a larger number of immigrants within a population, and immigrants to the US include a greater percentage of young people than the general US population. More youth means more people of child-bearing age. A third factor will be explored more fully in chapter four and five: greater diversity in a church body is intentional—it happens when a church body prioritizes mission and outreach rather than prioritizing the care of its own current members.

The Challenge of Family Decline

The Pew organization's third anticipated trend was ongoing changes in the American family. The subsection from chapter one, Effects of the DT: Secondary Effects (pp. 32–40 above), explored at some length major changes in the lives of women and families in the US. Briefly, those changes include both direct and indirect effects. There is, first, the direct effect of smaller families (due to declining birthrates). But that results in such secondary effects as a growing sense of personal efficacy, a dramatic change in the course of the lives of most women, a decline of marriage, and numerous changes to the family.

As confidence in human agency and personal efficacy rises, life's priorities change dramatically. Pew Research Center reports that family, career, and financial well-being now top the list of priorities for 17 advanced economies—all of which are post-DT.[135] Eventually getting married and having a family become priorities for many or most people, but marriage and family have to fight for a place alongside getting a good education and a lucrative job and often settle for third place, at least temporally speaking. And, as already noted, when pregnancy is easily

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[135] Pew Research Center, "What Makes Life Meaningful? Views From 17 Advanced Economies," by Laura Silver, Patrick Van Kessel, Christine Huang, Laura Clancy and Sneha Gubbala (November 18, 2021), https://www.pewresearch.org/global/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2021/11/PG_11.18.21_meaning-in-life_fullreport.pdf, 6.

avoided, casual intimacy seems more and more appropriate. As women and men run an increasingly parallel life course, a sense of competition, even with one's spouse, is likely.

A second direct effect on the family is increasing societal longevity, which is accompanied by the secondary effect of a more this-worldly focus for life, more confidence in human agency, and less of a sense that life is dependent on God. Longevity also certainly affects family life. Post-transition we are less likely than our forebears were to have to bury a child or to have a parent die young from an infection. We are more likely to see our grandchildren and even great-grandchildren. We are also more likely than earlier generations to spend a quarter, a third, or more of our lives in retirement.[136] And a spiritual life with an eternal focus pales as a priority when the apparent alternative is a better or more pleasant or, at least, a much longer here and now. Oh, and not everything is rosy about a long life. That long retirement may mean we outlive our money. Or income inequity may mean that our children move in or need us to provide childcare. Or that long life with one spouse may just be too much to take and one or the other opts for a "gray divorce."[137]

All of the changes to life in families are directly or indirectly linked to the DT are significant challenges for the church. Family remains a high priority, and so does good health, but Pew reports that "spirituality, faith and religion" are the second *lowest* of all priorities for people in the 17 countries they surveyed (only pets came in lower, surprisingly).[138] Hence, as much as people want to prioritize families, they do so with less and less of a belief that family

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[136] An older friend of the author recently died at 96. He retired at 60. He was employed for 38 years and retired for 36 years.

[137] Carol R. Hughes, "Why the Divorce Rate for Older Couples Is Soaring," *Psychology Today* (August 16, 2021), https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/home-will-never-be-the-same-again/202108/why-the-divorce-rate-older-couples-is-soaring

[138] Pew, "What Makes Life Meaningful," 7.

life needs moral and spiritual guidance to prosper. Given such priorities, there is little mystery in

the decline of religiosity in the Millennial and Generation Z cohorts. Some are indeed leaving the

church, but millions never experienced the church in any meaningful way. They were *not raised

in the church.* Their parents are at least partly responsible for a widening generational gap in

religious identity and beliefs; they were more likely than previous generations to raise their

children without any connection to organized religion.[139]

> Millennials may be the symbols of a broader societal shift away from religion, but
> they didn't start it on their own. Their parents are at least partly responsible for a
> widening generational gap in religious identity and beliefs; they were more likely
> than previous generations to raise their children without any connection to organized
> religion. [140]

Moreover, while MTD may well describe the Millennials and Generation Z, it is hardly

their invention. As Penny Edgell notes, while some denominations have been doctrinally

rigorous, "the overall tenor of U.S. religiosity has been a kind of pragmatic moralism" and

starting with the Baby Boomers, increasingly therapeutic.[141]

The Challenge of Income Inequity

"You always have the poor with you, and whenever you want you can do good for them"

(Mark 14:7). Even in a world of plenty, inequity remains. The discussion of this sixth prediction

from Pew noted both the rise of income and its extreme unevenness. The poor are with us, as are

the unemployed and underemployed, the working poor, the paycheck-to-paycheck citizens,

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[139] Daniel Cox and Amelia Thompson-DeVeaux, "Millennials Are Leaving Religion and Not Coming Back," FiveThirtyEight (December 12, 2019), https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/millennials-are-leaving-religion-and-not-coming-back/. Note also: while MTD describes the younger cohorts, they come by it honestly. As Penny Edgell notes, while some denominations have been doctrinally rigorous, "the overall tenor of U.S. religiosity has been a kind of pragmatic moralism" and starting with the Baby Boomers, increasingly therapeutic.

[140] Cox and Thompson-DeVeaux, "Millennials Are Leaving Religion."

[141] Penny Edgell, Review of *Souls in Transition*, by Christian Smith and Patricia Snell. *Sociological Forum* 25, no. 3 (2010): 632. http://www.jstor.org/stable/40783522.

struggling young parents, singles who "fail to launch" from home because their job will not fund an independent lifestyle, immigrants crowded together pooling minimum wage jobs to live the American dream. We have them all. Maybe we are some of them, too. And in America today, the slide toward poverty or financial distress is strongly correlated with the previous section's discussion about changes in the family. When marriage falters, economic distress is an all-too-common companion because marital success and economic success are compatible.[142]

How do churches address these challenges? Emma Green asks, "Can Religious Charities Take the Place of the Welfare State?" Her answer, based on interviews with a number of political scientists, is, "No." "I spoke with roughly a half dozen scholars from a variety of ideological backgrounds who study religious giving, and they were all skeptical that churches, synagogues, mosques, and other faith-based organizations could serve as an adequate substitute for the government in providing for the needy and vulnerable." It is not as if religious entities are doing nothing. Green mentions a study from 2001 that found that already at that time religious organizations provided a quarter of a billion dollars in social services in Philadelphia alone.[143]

Green cites Mark Chaves from a 2016 study that found that most congregations budget some funds for care of the poor. Food pantries are the most common type of aid that is given, but the median amount of outlay for social services was $1500 for the most involved

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[142] See Wilcox, *National Marriage Project 2010*, 34. He writes: "The third cultural development that has played a role in eroding the standing of marriage is that moderately educated Americans are markedly less likely than are highly educated Americans to embrace the bourgeois values and virtues—for instance, delayed gratification, a focus on education, and temperance—that are the *sine qua nons* of personal and marital success in the contemporary United States. By contrast, highly educated Americans (and their children) adhere devoutly to a "success sequence" norm that puts education, work, marriage, and childbearing in sequence, one after another, in ways that maximize their odds of making good on the American Dream and obtaining a successful family life."

[143] Emma Green, "Can Religious Charities Take the Place of the Welfare State?" *The Atlantic* (March 26, 2017), https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/03/budget-religion/520605/.

congregations.[144] An estimated $3.3 billion from congregations was used in all programs that benefited nonmembers in 2013.[145] This is considerable, but it hardly compares to, say the $30 billion spent that year on Section 8 housing alone. Yet, instead of scoffing at what churches contribute to the poor, Chaves and Eagle make a vital point: "the typical and probably most important way in which congregations pursue social service activity is not with direct financial contributions." No, they say, it is the many ways that individuals and churches help in times of need: working at a soup kitchen, building a Habitat house, cleaning up after a disaster, and so forth. "Congregations are very good—perhaps uniquely good in American society—at mobilizing volunteers for this kind of work, work that usually is done, not incidentally, in collaboration with other congregations or service organizations rather than alone."[146]

Another "social service" the church can provide harks back to the connection between marital and economic success mentioned above. Some churches have taught the "success sequence" of education, work, marriage, and childbearing in that order simply by teaching obedience to the commandments.

Conclusion: DT and Religion in America

Christian churches have two general responses to demographic shifts and changes: the first is to focus on retaining and gaining the largest possible share of a homogeneous population. This shows itself in denominational efforts to retain existing members, for example, through the transfer of members who are leaving one congregation to another denominational congregation in a new location. Another example is church planting in the suburbs of the fastest growing

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[144] Mark Chaves and Alison J. Eagle, "Congregations and Social Services: An Update from the Third Wave of the National Congregations Study," *Religions* 7 (5), no. 55 (2016): 9, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel7050055, 5.

[145] Chaves and Eagle, "Congregations and Social Services," 7.

[146] Chaves and Eagle, "Congregations and Social Services," 7–8.

regions of America where the residents tend to be similar (socio-economically) to the church body's current members. Such plants have potential to become a larger congregation. This is the American megachurch approach. With regard to this, Scott Thuma writes:

> The national distribution of megachurches reveals a clear pattern. Over 75 percent of these congregations are located in the Sunbelt states, with nearly half of them in the southeast region. According to 1992 data, California had the highest concentration of megachurches, followed by Texas, Florida, and Georgia (Thumma 1993a,b). Vaughan found that megachurches clustered around those metropolitan areas which were among the fastest growing in the country (1993:77–80). Sprawl cities, such as Houston, Orlando, Dallas/Ft. Worth, Los Angeles, Atlanta, Phoenix, and Oklahoma City, contained the highest number of megachurches.

> In addition, megachurches are a suburban reality. Nearly all megachurches are to be found in the suburbs of large cities. These churches are primarily located in prominent places on highly visible tracts of land. They are generally near the expanding edges of the city, within easy access from major highways, and quite often in the immediate proximity of other megachurches. The only exception to this suburban pattern are those older inner city established "First churches" of all ethnic varieties.[147]

The second type of response contrasts with the homogeneous response. It attempts to broaden appeal beyond the homogeneous group. An example of this is a commitment to revitalize congregations in changing neighborhoods. Another is seeking to identify and train ministers who are the race and ethnicity of the communities that increasingly make up the American demographic. On a denominational level, some of the best examples of this approach are Pentecostals and Seventh-Day Adventists, but Roman Catholics and PCA also illustrate this.

Underlying these two approaches, however, may be two different theological emphases. One assumes that converts will need to adhere to the missionary church's theology and practice. The other assumes that the missionary church must adapt its practice and—to some degree—its theology to the needs of the peoples it seeks to convert.

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[147] Scott Thuma, "Exploring the Megachurch Phenomena: Their Characteristics and Cultural Context," Hartford Institute for Religion Research, accessed March 31, 2022, http://hirr.hartsem.edu/bookshelf/thumma_article2.html.

Demographic Transition and Decline in American Christianity

The demographic changes identified in the first chapter affect the whole of American life—and that means they deeply affect the church. As Taylor predicted, the changing age profile of America is evident in terms of "longer lives, fewer babies, and more immigrants."[148] When it comes to "longer lives," American Christians largely reflect the rest of America. Indeed, American Christians are the poster children for the graying of America. Christians in the US are also, like the rest of the population, having "fewer babies"—a phenomenon that to some extent is simply a direct result of their graying. Old people have grandchildren, not babies. However, we will note that Christians who are of child-bearing ages are having more babies, on average, than their non-Christian peers. That would bode well for the future were it not also the case that the number of Christians in the child-bearing age groups are part of a rapidly shrinking minority.

On the matter of Christianity and the significant changes resulting from immigration, it is also true that, overall, American Christianity is increasingly diverse racially and ethnically. However, the perspectives of many American Christians on "race and religion," may not reflect the changing America. Too many Christian churches appear to have little ability (and perhaps willingness) to mirror the growing racial and ethnic diversity of the country as a whole.

The result of all this is sobering. At present the percentage of professing Christians in the United States is declining—especially among those who are under 40 years of age.[149] Pew

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[148] Taylor, *Next America*, 6.

[149] A very helpful resource on the declining Christian segment of the US population is Pew Research Center, and their religious landscape survey in particular. The report is referenced herein in its pdf version. See Pew Research Center, "America's Changing Religious Landscape," Gregory Smith, primary researcher (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, May 12, 2015), https://www.pewforum.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2015/05/RLS-08-26-full-report.pdf. Pew's most recent supplement to its Landscape survey is also utilized: Pew, "Decline of Christianity," pdf. I should note, however, Rodney Stark's contention that Pew's assumption of rising secularism is wrong. His view is based on a broader definition of religiosity than Pew uses. See Rodney Stark, *The Triumph of Faith: Why the World is More Religious Than Ever* (Wilmington, DE: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2015), Kindle.

Research indicates that the decline is not short-term. The pace of decline itself is increasing.

> The religious landscape of the United States continues to change at a rapid clip. In Pew Research Center telephone surveys conducted in 2018 and 2019, 65% of American adults describe themselves as Christians when asked about their religion, down 12 percentage points over the past decade.[150]

George Hawley, in observing survey data from the General Social Survey (GSS),[151] notes:

> What is immediately apparent is that Christians, particularly those who attend worship with some regularity, tend to be older than the overall population and *much* older than those who do not belong to any religion. Almost 23 percent of Christians who regularly attend worship are over the age of 65. It is more startling that fewer than 13 percent of adult regular worship attendees are under the age of 30.[152]

In contrast with that, religiously unaffiliated American adults are now 26% of the overall population. This decline in religiosity is primarily at the expense of Christianity, not non-Christian religious traditions whose adherents have actually increased, from 5% to 7% of the US population over the decade from 2009 to 2019.[153] The phenomenon of growing irreligiosity has been described as the rise of the "nones"—that is, the increase in those who respond with "none" to survey questions about their religious affiliation. America's mainline churches and nearly all denominations have experienced marked numerical declines in recent decades.

Rise of the Religiously Unaffiliated and the DT

Pew Research published a landmark study in 2012 titled "'Nones' on the Rise: One-in-Five

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[150] Pew, "Decline of Christianity," 3.

[151] The General Social Survey (GSS) is a project of the independent research organization NORC at the University of Chicago, with principal funding from the National Science Foundation. See the General Social Survey website at http://gss.norc.org.

[152] George Hawley, *Demography, Culture, and the Decline of America's Christian Denominations* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2017), 15.

[153] Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, and Hindus were named as non-Christian religious groups in the Pew study, while additional non-Christian religious adherents were simply identified as "Other (non-Christian)." See Pew Research Center, "Decline of Christianity," pdf, 11.

Adults Have No Religious Affiliation."[154] In its title, Pew employed the term "nones" for those with no religious affiliation, but also indicated some discomfort with the term. It implies individuals who are not religious, but Pew's research shows that the people in question are often not without "religious beliefs or religious practices." Rather, the "nones" are those who do not belong to any particular church, synagogue, mosque, temple, or other religious *institution*.[155]

The 2012 study showed a remarkable decline in religious affiliation over a five-year period beginning in 2007. The data at that time was already sobering:

> In the last five years alone, the unaffiliated have increased from just over 15% to just under 20% of all U.S. adults. Their ranks now include more than 13 million self-described atheists and agnostics (nearly 6% of the U.S. public), as well as nearly 33 million people who say they have no particular religious affiliation.[156]

While the number of atheists and agnostics has certainly increased, Pew emphasized "that many of the country's 46 million unaffiliated adults are religious or spiritual in some way. Two-thirds of them say they believe in God (68%)." And at least a small segment of them (10%) are interested in a religious institution.[157] But the most striking result of the 2012 survey was its implication that this movement away from religious affiliation would increase, not decrease, because it was a phenomenon "largely driven by generational replacement, the gradual

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[154] Pew Research Center, "'Nones' on the Rise: One-in-Five Adults Have No Religious Affiliation." The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, October 9, 2012), https://www.pewforum.org/2012/10/09/nones-on-the-rise/, pdf download. Abbreviated hereafter as "Nones" with all page references from the pdf.

[155] The Preface states that "the Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life has used—and will continue to use—'religiously unaffiliated' as our preferred term for Americans who tell us in surveys that they are atheists, agnostics or have no particular religion. 'Nones,' however, has become a popular label for the same population, used not only in social scientific journals but also by the media, including on the cover of Time magazine and Page One of USA Today. As a result, in this report we use both terms interchangeably, but we put 'nones' in quotation marks to indicate that it is a colloquialism. More importantly, we emphasize that the absence of a religious affiliation does not necessarily indicate an absence of religious beliefs or practices." Pew, "Nones," 7.

[156] Pew, "Nones", 9.

[157] Pew, "Nones," 10.

supplanting of older generations by newer ones."[158] They illustrated it with the following graph (fig. 14).

Religious Affiliation by Age

■Unaffiliated ■Affiliated ■Don't know/Refused

Age	Unaffiliated	Affiliated
18-29	32	67
30-49	21	77
50-64	15	84
65+	9	90

Source: Aggregated data from surveys conducted by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, January-July 2012.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER
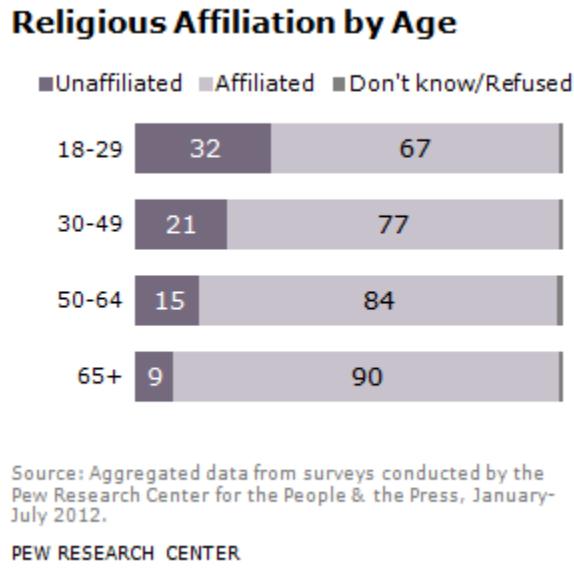
Figure 14. Religious affiliation by age. [159]

Pew shows that those 18–29 were unaffiliated at three times the rate of those over 65 and more than 50% more likely to be unaffiliated than the cohort closest to them in age, those 30–49. Such disaffiliation continues. Figure 15 illustrates Pew's aggregated data between 2009–2019. Note that although the decline in Christian affiliation includes all ages, one sees in figure 15 the dramatic difference in the level of decline between age cohorts. Sixteen percent of Millennials no longer identified as Christian between 2009 and 2018 while the next closest cohort, Generation X, left the church at half that rate (8%), Boomers at 6%, and Silents at only 2%.

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[158] Pew, "Nones," 10.

[159] Figure is from Pew, "Nones," 10.

Broad-based declines in share of Americans who say they are Christian

Percentage-point change between 2009 and 2018/2019 in the share who identify as ...

	... Christian	... Unaffiliated
Men	−12	+10
Women	−11	+10
Silent Gen. (born 1928-45)	−2	+1
Baby Boomers (1946-64)	−6	+4
Generation X (1965-80)	−8	+6
Millennials (1981-96)	−16	+13
White, non-Hispanic	−12	+10
Black, non-Hispanic	−11	+7
Hispanic	−10	+8
Less than a college education	−11	+8
College graduate	−13	+12
Northeast	−15	+12
Midwest	−10	+7
South	−12	+10
West	−9	+11
Republican/lean Rep.	−7	+6
Democrat/lean Dem.	−17	+14
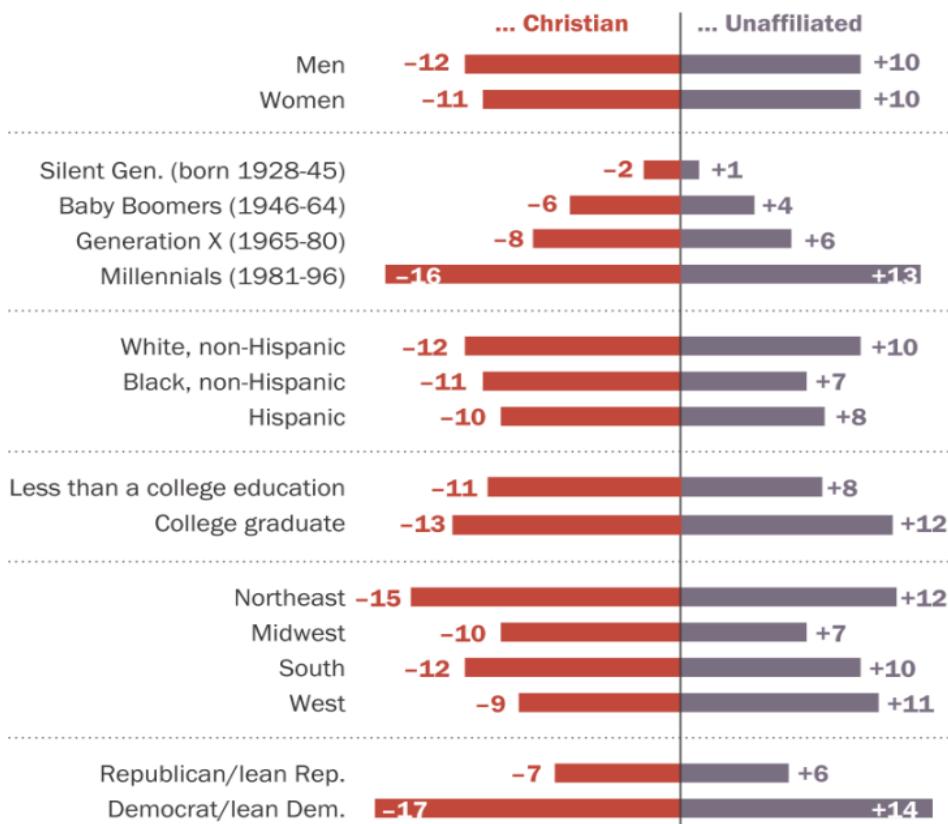
Source: Aggregated Pew Research Center political surveys conducted 2009 and January 2018-July 2019 on the telephone.
"In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Figure 15. Declining affiliation in the United States by various factors.[160]

Two additional factors from figure 15 are also noteworthy. First, while all races/ethnicities experienced growing departures from the church, the rate was highest for non-Hispanic Whites. Second, the geographic region with the greatest level of decline was in the Northeast.

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[160] Figure is from Pew, "Decline of Christianity," 7.

Surprisingly, the South had the second highest level of decline, followed by the Midwest. The West had the lowest level of decline in Christian affiliation by percentage (all the while increasing by 11 points in the number who were unaffiliated!).[161]

Pew's data (above) is based on a single metric, claimed affiliation by individual respondents. The Barna organization's study, "State of the Church 2020," confirms the significance of the overall decline of Christianity while looking at two other criteria. Its three criteria were: Christian identity (claimed affiliation), faith as a high priority, and worship attendance. The decline among practicing Christians has been radical: "In 2000, 45% of all those sampled qualified as practicing Christians. That share has consistently declined over the last 19 years. Now, just one in four Americans (25%) is a practicing Christian."[162]

There are other aspects of the overall trend toward declining religious affiliation. 60% of non-churchgoers nevertheless claimed church membership in 2007. By 2012 only 50% of the non-attenders claimed denominational affiliation. The decline in both church affiliation and attendance has come primarily at the expense of White mainline and Evangelical churches. White evangelicals declined as a percentage of the total US population between 2007 and 2012 from 21% to 19%. White mainline membership dropped from 18% to 15%. It is noteworthy, however, that such a decline did not occur among Black Protestants or other minority Protestants.[163] This is not only a recent trend. Note the following Pew graph from 1972 to 2010 in figure 16. It is evident that, despite some variation, the trend in the US from the early 1970s to

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[161] Pew, "Decline of Christianity," 18.

[162] Barna distinguishes between "Practicing Christians," "Non-practicing Christians," and "Non-Christians." "Practicing Christians identify as Christian, agree strongly that faith is very important in their lives and have attended church within the past month." Barna Research, "State of the Church 2020: Signs of Decline & Hope among Key Metrics of Faith," (2020), https://www.barna.com/research/changing-state-of-the-church/.

[163] Pew, "Nones," 13.

2010—that is, nearly a four decade period—has involved a long-term decline in the percentage

of the population that is Protestant (mainline or Evangelical) from 62% to 51%, a slower decline

in the RCC population, and a long-term increase in the unaffiliated population, from 7% to 18%!

Long-Term Trends in Religious Affiliation

Source: General Social Surveys, 1972-2010. Other religious affiliations and those who did not give an answer are not shown.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER
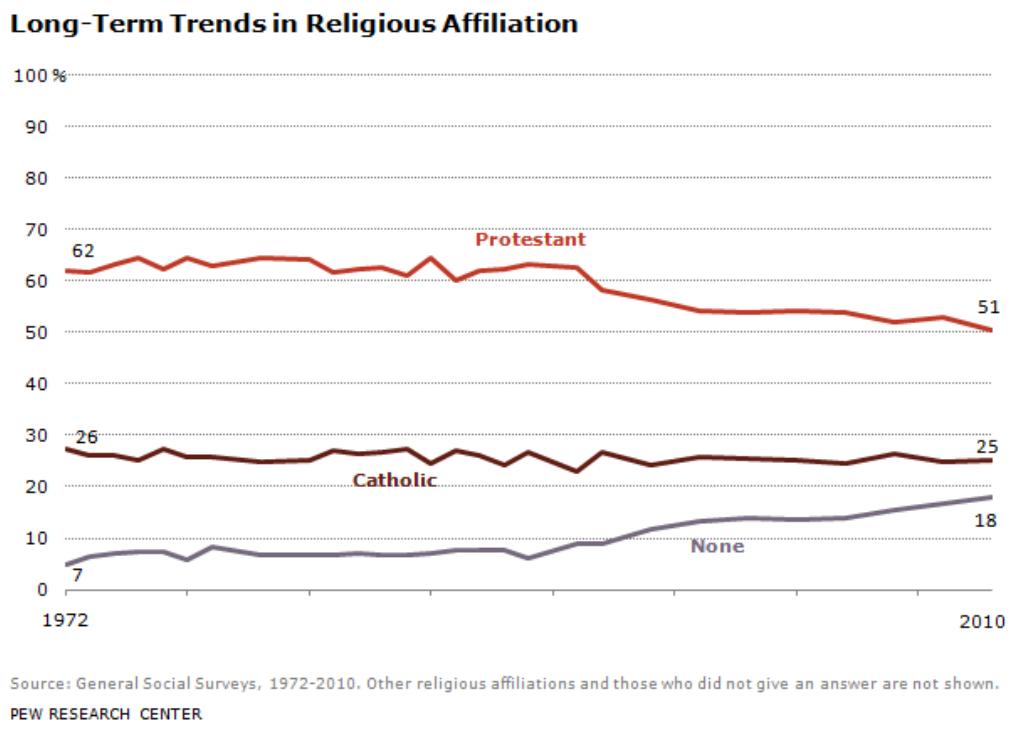
Figure 16. Religious affiliation trends, 1972–2010.[164]

That trend has only increased over time. By 2012, Pew indicated that for the first time in

the organization's research history Protestants comprised less than half of the US population

(48%). By 2019 the percentage was 43% (fig. 17).[165]

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[164] Figure is from Pew, "Nones," 14.

[165] See Pew, "Nones," 13 and Pew, "Decline of Christianity," 4.

Protestants and Catholics shrinking as share of U.S. population; all subsets of 'nones' are growing

% of U.S. adults who identify as ...
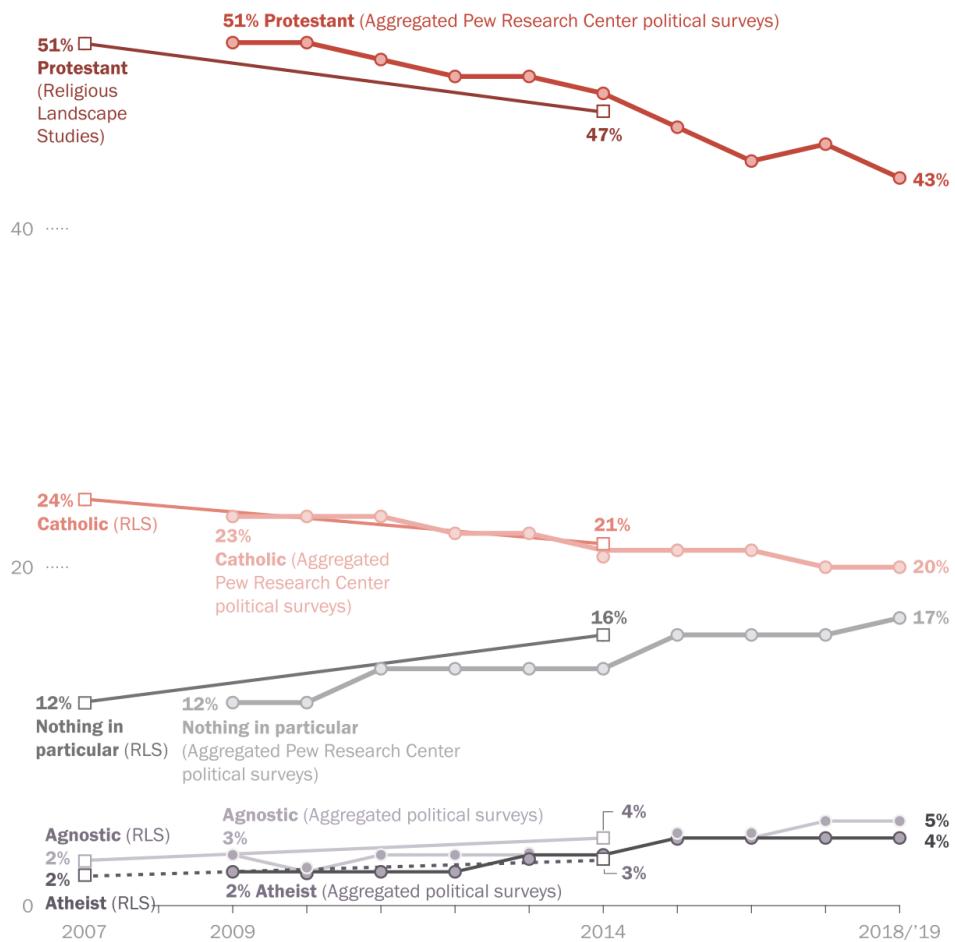
Figure 17. The continuing decline of Christian adherence.[166]

Pew's data is corroborated by Gallup's reporting. Reporting on a 2016 Gallup survey,

Frank Newport explains that "the percentage of Americans who identify with a specific

Protestant denomination has dropped from 50% in 2000 to 30% in 2016, while Christians who

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[166] Figure from Pew, "Decline of Christianity,' 4.

don't identify with a specific denomination have doubled, from 9% to 17%."[167] The decline is acute among Protestants. Catholic affiliation had been fairly steady up to 2010 at about 25% of the US population. But by 2021 Americans claiming to be Roman Catholic declined to 21%.[168] The flip side of this is the rising number of the unaffiliated, who have increased from 16% of the population in 2007 to 29% in 2021.[169] Moreover, among those who did identify as Christians (of any denominational backgrounds), attendance at worship had plummeted from 54% of Christians in 2007 who attended once or more monthly to 45% in 2019.[170]

Before exploring Protestant decline further, some attention must be given to the Roman Catholic Church in the United States. As noted above, the RCC has experienced a slower rate of decline than Protestant denominations have. Catholics held fairly steady at about 25% of the population from 2000 to 2010, but in the past decade their decline has been more substantial dropping to about 21% of the US population, where it has remained since 2017. Pew notes the persistence of the RCC's 21% share of the US population.[171]

Thus, the decline in Christian affiliation is across the board in American denominations, Catholic or Protestant, but it is most evident in the mainline Protestant churches.[172] According to data compiled by Ryan Burge, Membership decline in mainline churches between 2018 and 2020

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[167] Frank Newport, "More US Protestants Have No Specific Denominational Identity," Gallup News, Religion (July 18, 2017), https://news.gallup.com/poll/214208/protestants-no-specific-denominational-identity.aspx.

[168] Pew Research Center, "About Three-in-Ten U.S. Adults Are Now Religiously Unaffiliated," Gregory A. Smith (December 14, 2021), 5, https://www.pewforum.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2021/12/PF_12.14.21_update_on_religion_trends_report.pdf.

[169] Pew, "Three-in-Ten Unaffiliated," 4.

[170] Pew, "Decline of Christianity," 6.

[171] Pew, "Three-in-Ten Unaffiliated," 5. But note PRRI's estimate of 22% RCC affiliation, p. 124 below.

[172] For general purposes, seven denominations may be included as belonging to the mainline tradition (listed in order of size): United Methodists (UMC), the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), The Episcopal Church (TEC), Presbyterian Church in the USA (PCUSA), American Baptist Church in the USA (ABC), United Church of Christ (UCC), and Disciples of Christ (DoC).

was as high as 40%.[173] A graph from Gallup illustrates the sharp decline of the mainline

churches, together with the slower decline of the RCC, and the rise of both the unaffiliated

("nones") and the non-denominational (see fig. 18).[174]
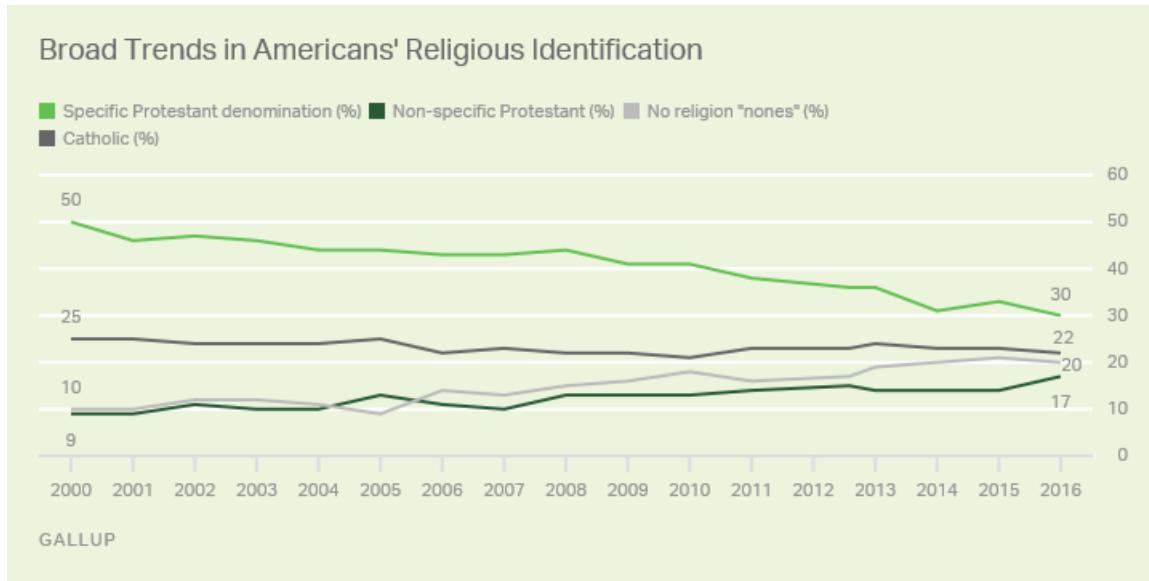
Figure 18. Changing trends in American religion.[175]

Because mainline churches have experienced the greatest level of decline and there has

been some Evangelical growth, it was often suggested that mainline liberalism was the cause of

their decline. But ongoing decline among countless conservative churches makes that theory

increasingly untenable. Hawley not only disputes the theory, but argues that, to the contrary, the

Religious Right's conservative politics have led to overall decline in Christianity. Commenting

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[173] Ryan P. Burge, "Why It's Unlikely U.S. Mainline Protestants Outnumber Evangelicals," Religion Unplugged (July 12, 2021), https://religionunplugged.com/news/2021/7/12/why-its-unlikely-us-mainline-protestants-outnumber-evangelicals. Burge's data says that the ABC had the lowest level of decline, at only 4%. Membership decline in the other six church bodies ranged from 40% to 15%.

[174] Newport, "No Specific Denominational Identity." While broadly illustrative, Figure 18 may be somewhat misleading. It combines membership in specific Protestant churches in a single category, which would intermix both liberal denominations (e.g., Episcopalians) and conservative evangelical denominations (Southern Baptists).

[175] Figure from Newport, "No Specific Denominational Identity."

on the theory that liberalism is the primary source of decline in Christian affiliation he writes:

> The more traditionalist evangelical denominations have now begun a nosedive of their own. And to make matters worse for those denominations that once formed the backbone of the Religious Right, the growth we do see among evangelicals comes largely from Pentecostal denominations, which, on average are not especially (politically) conservative.
>
> The decline of many evangelical denominations, including the Southern Baptist Convention, seems to give new credibility to the argument that the Religious Right was, overall, a detriment to Christianity in the United States.[176]

The Healthiest Churches

The decline of Protestantism as a whole—which includes both "mainline Protestantism" and Evangelicalism—is a dramatic reality, but one that currently strikes hardest at mainline Protestantism. The statement in Pew's 2015 Landscape study is generally true also today:

> Recent years have brought a dramatic decline in the share of Americans who identify with mainline Protestant denominations. Today, just 15% of all U.S. adults identify with mainline Protestant churches, down from 18% in 2007. By comparison, evangelical Protestantism and the historically black Protestant tradition have been more stable. Today, 25% of U.S. adults identify with evangelical denominations, down less than one percentage point since 2007. And roughly 7% of American adults identify with the historically black Protestant tradition, little changed since 2007.[177]

Evangelical strength has come largely at the expense of the mainline. Significant numbers of people who left mainline churches joined evangelical churches in recent decades. The decline in mainline membership, therefore, bodes poorly not only for mainline Protestantism itself, but also for Evangelicalism in that Evangelicalism has a smaller pool of potential new members from the mainline. A 2017 Gallup poll emphasized evangelical gains from the mainline churches. It showed that between 2000 and 2016 the percentage of Protestants identifying with mainline

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[176] George Hawley, "Is the Religious Right to Blame for Christianity's Decline?" *The American Conservative* (June 5, 2017), https://www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/is-the-religious-right-to-blame-for-christianitys-decline/.

[177] Pew Research Center, "Shifting Composition of American Protestantism," in "U.S Religious Landscape Survey" (2007), https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/immigrant-status/immigrants/.

denominations (Baptist, Methodist, Lutheran, Presbyterian, and so forth) declined from 50% to

30%. Clearly, one of the most dramatic changes in Protestantism is the increase in *non-*

denominational Evangelicalism.[178]

We have seen that the mainline churches are in steep decline while non-denominational

Evangelicalism is growing slightly. But will that growth last, and what is the future of

Evangelicalism? Burge is skeptical about the well-being of Evangelicalism:

> It's fair to say that both the mainline and evangelical traditions in the United States
> are losing members. But that seems to be happening a bit asymmetrically.
> Evangelicalism is undoubtedly down from its peak in the early 1990s. But it's
> reached a bit of a stasis in recent years, being buoyed by some inflows from the
> mainline tradition and enough younger families to offset some of the losses through
> death.[179]

Burge is not alone in his concern. Already in 2013 John Dickerson suggested that estimates

of Evangelical well-being were overblown, to put it mildly: "inflated," "hated," "dividing,"

"bankrupt," "bleeding," and "sputtering" are the adjectives he used to describe Evangelicalism.[180]

Briefly, he noted that evangelical churches were not successfully evangelizing new believers,

were declining as a share of the US population, and were losing their youngest members.

Evangelicals were declining not only in the less religious regions of the US (e.g., the Northeast,

Pacific Coast) but also in the historic "Bible Belt" and in places with the largest and most

successful megachurches.[181]

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[178] Newport, "No Specific Denominational Identity," https://news.gallup.com/poll/214208/protestants-no-specific-denominational-identity.aspx. See also the comments by Kate Shellnutt, "The Rise of the Nons: Protestants Keep Ditching Denominations," Christianity Today online (July 20, 2017), https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2017/july/rise-of-nons-protestants-denominations-nondenominational.html.

[179] Ryan P. Burge, "Mainline Protestants Are Still Declining, But That's Not Good News for Evangelicals," *Christianity Today* (July 13, 2021), https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2021/july/mainline-protestant-evangelical-decline-survey-us-nones.html.

[180] John Dickerson, *The Great Evangelical Recession: 6 Factors that Will Crash the American Church . . . and How to Prepare* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), Kindle. The adjectives are his chapter headings in Part One.

[181] Dickerson, *Evangelical Recession,* 116–22, Kindle.

However, as Pew noted in 2015, another trend in Evangelicalism is more promising. The non-White Christians in the United States are not experiencing the kind of decline that we have described. Although there is a growing percentage of religiously unaffiliated African Americans, Black Protestantism is still largely stable in retaining its numbers.[182] Moreover, although there is generational decline in affiliation and attendance among Blacks also, Black Millennials are nevertheless much more religiously involved, certain of their beliefs, and pray more regularly than non-Hispanic Whites.[183]

Non-White Evangelicalism as a whole is growing. As Pew puts it: Between 2007 and 2014 the share of Evangelicals who were Hispanic more than doubled from 7% to 16%.[184] Immigration continues to offer evangelism opportunities for churches, but most of those opportunities are with people of color. The African immigrant population also continues its significant upward climb, as does the Asian population.[185] In light of America's growing diversity, this trend toward greater diversity in Evangelicalism suggests the potential for further growth.

Unlike Evangelicalism as a whole, the US Assemblies of God (AG) are an exceptional denomination in terms of growth, showing increasing levels of membership in all but three years of the past 40. Moreover, this growth flies in the face of the recent declines that are so common in the rest of American Christianity. Since 2005 AG membership has increased overall in every

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[182] Pew Research Center, "Black Americans Are More Likely than Overall Public to Be Christian, Protestant," David Masci, Besheer Mohamed, Gregory A. Smith (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, April 23, 2018), https://pewrsr.ch/2K6a2vI.

[183] Pew Research Center, "Black Millennials Are More Religious than Other Millennials," Jeff Diamant and Besheer Mohamed (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, July 20, 2018), https://pewrsr.ch/2uzj3rd. See also Pew Research Center, "10 New Findings about Faith Among Black Americans," Besheer Mohamed (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, February 16, 2021), https://pewrsr.ch/2Zn0Dcg.

[184] Pew, "Changing Religious Landscape," (2015), 52.

[185] See Pew Research Center, "African Immigrant Population in US Steadily Climbs," Monica Anderson, FactTank (February 14, 2017), http://pewrsr.ch/2l55fhT and Pew Research Center, "Facts About Asian Americans."

year but one, growing from 2.8M to 3.3M in that period. Moreover, AG members are far more active than other Evangelicals in terms of regularity of church attendance and participation in church programs. The growth is certainly connected to church planting, with 25% of AG current congregations less than 10 years old.[186] But another factor may be more important: the church body manages to be both conservative and diverse. As Ryan Burge describes this intriguing phenomenon: "Research shows that membership of the Assemblies of God has become more politically conservative and more religiously active today than just a decade ago, but its own numbers indicate that it has achieved incredible racial diversity—44% of members in the United States are ethnic minorities."[187]

Another denomination that has grown steadily is the Seventh-day Adventist Church (7DA). A significant factor in its growth over the past decade or more is its shift to urban America after previously being a largely rural denomination. By 2010 nearly three-fourths of all 7DA congregations were in metropolitan areas.[188] Adventist growth slowed in the decade from 2010 to 2020, but it was still stronger than US population growth as a whole. The US grew by 7.4% in the decade while the 7DA church grew by 12.1%.[189] A final striking aspect of the 7DA denomination is its diversity. Indeed, Pew noted that the Adventist Church in the US is the single

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[186] Ryan P. Burge, "Assemblies of God Growing with Pentecostal Perseverance," *Christianity Today* online (August 11, 2021), https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2021/august/assemblies-of-god-grow-us-council-denomination-decline-poli.html.

[187] Burge, "Assemblies of God Growing." See also John W. Kennedy, "Ethnic Minorities Continue to Strengthen," Assemblies of God, News (August 2, 2021), https://news.ag.org/en/news/ethnic-minorities-continue-to-strengthen?D=2E2B8F9F882A474AACE6260145ECF58B.

[188] "Census of Religion Shows Growing Nondenominational, Non-Christian Segments in the US," (AdventistToday.org, 2010), accessed January 27, 2022. https://atoday.org/census-of-religion-shows-growing-nondenominational-non-christian-segments-in-the-u-s/. For complete statistics of yearly growth since 1863 see ASTR Staff, "Church Membership Statistics," accessed January 27, 2022, https://www.adventistarchives.org/church-membership.

[189] "Despite Slowing Growth Rates, the Adventist Denomination in the U.S. Continues to Grow Faster than the Population" (April 30, 2021), https://atoday.org/despite-slowing-growth-rates-the-adventist-denomination-in-the-u-s-continues-to-grow-faster-than-the-population/.

most ethnically and racially diverse of all American churches. Michael Lipka gives details:

> Seventh-day Adventists are among the most racially and ethnically diverse American religious groups: 37% are white, while 32% are black, 15% are Hispanic, 8% are Asian and another 8% are another race or mixed race.[190]

One more denomination is worthy of attention in a consideration of the healthiest American denominations, the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA). Because of its significant similarity to the LCMS, more detailed attention will be given to the PCA below. At present, it is sufficient simply to note that the PCA has experienced numerical growth nearly every year since its formation in 1973 and that it, like the healthier churches just mentioned, is becoming more diverse and has vigorously pursued mission in cities.

Thus, membership decline is widespread, but it is *not* true of all Christian churches. While subsets of Evangelicalism have fared better in terms of membership trends than Evangelicalism as a whole or Christianity in general, even there demographic effects are evident. Most notably, one finds that the churches that are the healthiest from a demographic standpoint are those marked by either one or both of two particular traits: a high rate of fertility on the part of female membership or a high percentage of members who are from non-White or immigrant populations. "With the influx of immigrants since the passage of the 1965 Immigration Act, not only has the ethnic and racial composition of the United States changed dramatically, but also the religious landscape has been significantly altered."[191] As Soong-Chan Rah has said, another American church has emerged:

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[190] Pew Research Center, "A Closer Look at Seventh-day Adventists in America," Michael Lipka (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, November 3, 2015), http://pewrsr.ch/1k7PJQX.

[191] Russell Jeung and Jonathan Calvillo, "Race, Immigration, Ethnicity, and Religion in America," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion* (February 27, 2017), pdf, 2, https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.013.487.

Contrary to popular opinion, the church is not dying in America; it is alive and well, but it is alive and well among the immigrant and ethnic minority communities and not among the majority white churches in the United States.[192]

Simple math is foundational for Rah's claim. It is true that recent immigrants have brought greater religious diversity to the US, since many are adherents of Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam (to mention only the major world religions). However, although people entering the US by immigration are diverse, the majority of immigrants identify as *Christian*. Pew's data indicates that 68% of new Americans identify as Christian and 40% worship weekly.[193] In addition, immigrant populations have a higher average fertility rate than American-born women and immigrant populations are generally more youthful than the native-born population. Even though later generations of immigrant populations quickly move toward the average TFR of the US, the factors of an initial higher fertility rate and youth are significant.[194] Hence, as immigration continues into the US, this increases the number of Christians.

Trump administration policies slowed immigration into the US during the period of 2016–2020, but immigration is increasing again under the Biden administration. Any increase will have a positive result for Christianity. The churches and church bodies which are most welcoming to immigrant populations will experience greater numeric growth as a result.

The New America in the Roman Catholic Church

The Roman Catholic Church is the largest Christian denomination in the world and in the

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[192] Soong-Chan Rah, *The Next Evangelicalism: Freeing the Church from Western Cultural Captivity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 15.

[193] Pew Research Center, "Immigrants," in "U.S Religious Landscape Survey: Christians Decline Sharply as Share of Population; Unaffiliated and Other Faiths Continue to Grow," (2015), https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/immigrant-status/immigrants/.

[194] Pew Research Center, "Hispanic Women No Longer Account for the Majority of Immigrant Births in the US," Gretchen Livingston, (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, August 8, 2019), https://pewrsr.ch/2YzvLa8.

United States. According to 2020 data (reported in 2022), the Vatican reported that the worldwide Catholic population exceeded 1.36 billion or 17.7% of the world's total population.[195] This indicates that the RCC is continuing a pattern of worldwide growth at a rate that slightly exceeded the growth of the world population.[196] The most recent Vatican statistics show that Roman Catholic growth was strongest in Africa (2.1%) and Asia (1.8%).

According to PRRI's report, "The 2020 Census of American Religion," Catholics make up about 22% of the total US population (a little over 73 million). Their data indicates that the 22% includes 12% of the US that are White Catholics, 8% Hispanic Catholics, and 2% Black, Asian, and other ethnicities. All Protestants combined exceed the number of Catholics,[197] but no single Protestant denomination numbers even one-fifth the membership of the RCC in the US.[198]

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[195] Catholic News Agency, "Vatican: Number of Catholics Worldwide Rose by 16 Million in 2020," *Catholic Sentinel* (February 23, 2022), https://catholicsentinel.org/Content/News/Vatican/Article/Vatican-Number-of-Catholics-worldwide-rose-by-16-million-in-2020-/2/61/45107.

[196] Carol Glatz, "Vatican Statistics Show Continued Growth in Number of Catholics Worldwide," *National Catholic Reporter* (Catholic News Service, March 26, 2021), https://www.ncronline.org/news/vatican/vatican-statistics-show-continued-growth-number-catholics-worldwide.

[197] PRRI Staff, "The 2020 Census of American Religion." Protestants make up about 45% of the US population according to PRRI, which divides Protestants into five categories (White Mainline, Evangelical, Black, Hispanic, and Other Protestants of Color). It should be noted that PRRI measures according to denominational affiliation data rather than on the basis of surveys of individuals. Pew Research works with individual responses, but reports a similar percentage of US Catholics, although slightly lower at 21%. Pew also shows more variation in its measurements of Evangelical versus Mainline Protestants and indicates that Evangelicals still outnumber Mainline Protestants, while PRRI reports more Mainline than Evangelical Protestants. Pew Research Center, "About Three-in-Ten U.S. Adults Are Now Religiously Unaffiliated," Gregory A. Smith (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, December 14, 2021), https://www.pewforum.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2021/12/PF_12.14.21_update_on_religion_trends_report.pdf. See comments by Mark Pattison, "Updated: Pew Survey Shows Catholic Numbers Hold Steady, 'Nones' Rise, Protestants Decrease," Catholic Standard (December 17, 2021), https://cathstan.org/news/us-world/updated-pew-survey-shows-catholic-numbers-hold-steady-nones-rise-protestants-decrease.

[198] The Southern Baptist Convention is the largest Protestant denomination at 14 million members. See "Annual Church Profile Statistical Summary: 2020 Southern Baptist Convention Statistical Summary," Lifeway Research (April 23, 2021), http://blog.lifeway.com/newsroom/files/2021/05/ACP_Summary_2020.pdf. See also Mark Wingfield, "SBC Loses Another 435,000 Members in 2020," *Baptist News Global* (May 24, 2021), https://baptistnews.com/article/sbc-loses-another-435000-members-in-2020/#.YltnSujMKUk.

A Church in Crisis: Flight from the Roman Church

While the American Catholic church remains the largest US denomination, not all is well

with it. David Olson identified a number of problems that persist: a steep decline in mass

attendance; a crisis of reputation and finance due to the abuse scandal; declining urban

membership and decaying urban facilities (especially in the northeast); and a severe shortage of

priests and religious.[199] Of all these trends, the abuse scandal certainly gets the most attention for

obvious reasons. The fact of so many reported cases of abuse by priests (compounded by the all-

too-frequent unwillingness of bishops to invoke meaningful discipline that provides just

retribution and prevents future abuse), has no doubt led to a weakened commitment on the part

of the laity and prompted many to leave the RCC. A 2019 Gallup report corroborates this:

> Between 2004 and 2014, a majority of Catholics rated the clergy's ethics highly, but opinions fell sharply between 2014 and 2015. That 13-point drop from 57% to 44% followed the release of a study by the Catholic Church that found more than 4,000 priests had faced sexual abuse accusations in the prior 50 years.[200]

As troubling as the abuse scandal has been, perhaps a more significant long-term trend

should be of greater concern for the RCC in the United States, namely, the decline in attendance

at services. Gallup reports that weekly attendance for Catholics is less than 40%.[201] Its

longitudinal data indicates that this is a dramatic change from historical trends (see fig. 19).

Whereas past attendance patterns showed a far higher percentage of attendance at public worship

for Catholics in comparison to Protestants, that is no longer the reality as self-identified

Catholics are now less likely to attend services than Protestants.

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[199] Olson, *American Church in Crisis,* 50–54. The "religious" refers to both unordained monks and nuns.

[200] Megan Brenan, "US Catholics' Faith in Clergy is Shaken," *Gallup News* (January 11, 2019), https://news.gallup.com/poll/245858/catholics-faith-clergy-shaken.aspx.

[201] Lydia Saad, "Catholics' Church Attendance Resumes Downward Slide," Gallup (April 9, 2018), https://news.gallup.com/poll/232226/church-attendance-among-catholics-resumes-downward-slide.aspx.
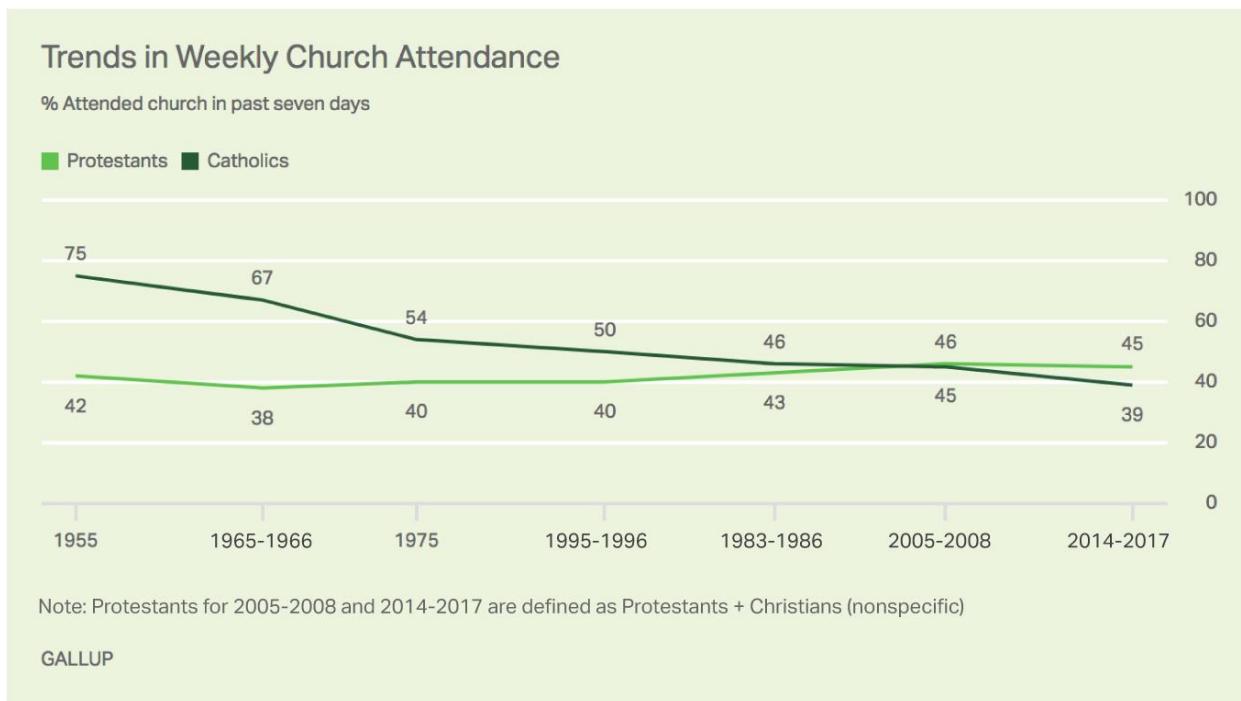
Figure 19. Comparison of Catholic and Protestant church attendance.[202]

Catholics are not just attending services less frequently. Pew reports that over half of all Americans who were raised Catholic leave the church at some point in their life, and, while about a fifth of those later return to the church, nearly three-fifths (or 28%) of all who were raised Catholic leave for good and the other fifth retains only a semblance of "Catholic culture" absent any convictions or commitment.[203] Where are these people going? Some join Protestant denominations. More leave the faith, either to become Nones or to identify as atheist or agnostic. But a significant movement over the past decade among those who leave the RCC seems to be toward nondenominational churches.[204]

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[202] Figure from Lydia Saad, "Catholics' Church Attendance Resumes Downward Slide," Gallup (April 9, 2018), https://news.gallup.com/poll/232226/church-attendance-among-catholics-resumes-downward-slide.aspx.

[203] Pew Research Center, "Half of U.S. Adults Raised Catholic Have Left the Church at Some Point," Caryle Murphy (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, September 15, 2015), http://pewrsr.ch/1iLISf1.

[204] Ryan P. Burge, "Nondenominational Churches Are Adding Millions of Members. Where Are They

Given that nearly 40% of Catholics are leaving—most for good and another large number becoming mere "cultural Catholics"—one wonders how the RCC in the US has survived. As severe as the decline in Protestantism has been in recent decades, the total number of those who have left the Catholic Church makes any Protestant church's losses seem insignificant by comparison. Pew Research explains:

> Catholicism has experienced a greater net loss due to religious switching than has any other religious tradition in the U.S. Overall, 13% of all U.S. adults are former Catholics — people who say they were raised in the faith, but now identify as religious "nones," as Protestants, or with another religion.[205]

As a point of comparison, the total number of *former* Catholics in the US (more than 40 million strong) exceeds the total number of members in the four largest Protestant church bodies! In addition, Protestantism as a whole benefits greatly from those former Catholics, since many current Protestants were raised Roman Catholic.[206]

A Church's Hidden Strength: The Diversity of American Roman Catholics

Given the grim realities just described, the survival of the RCC would seem in peril. But current data tells another story. The Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) reports ongoing declines in membership, but they are modest.[207] The Vatican's annual census, however, reports slight growth in the number of Catholics in North America.[208] Between the two,

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Coming From?" *Christianity Today* (August 5, 2022), https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2022/august/nondenominational-growth-mainline-protestant-decline-survey.html.

[205] Pew Research Center, "7 Facts About American Catholics," David Masci and Gregory A. Smith (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, October 10, 2018), https://pewrsr.ch/2Nucqgp.

[206] Pew, "7 Facts About American Catholics."

[207] CARA, "Frequently Requested Church Statistics," accessed April 17, 2022, https://cara.georgetown.edu/frequently-requested-church-statistics/.

[208] Catholic News Agency reported that the Catholic Church had grown numerically on every continent in 2020, albeit with its most modest growth in Europe. The report was based on data from the Vatican's 2022 Pontifical Yearbook. See Claire Giangravé, "Vatican Census: The Catholic Church Is Growing Everywhere but

Pew's recent look at overall religiosity in the US emphasizes the continuing decline of

Protestantism, but adds:

> By comparison, the Catholic share of the population, which had ticked downward between 2007 and 2014, has held relatively steady in recent years. As of 2021, 21% of U.S. adults describe themselves as Catholic, identical to the Catholic share of the population in 2014.[209]

To be sure, the 21% figure is a decline from previous periods, as Pew indicated. Between

2007 and 2014, the RCC's share of the US population decreased from 24 to 21%.[210] Yet, while

that decline of affiliation for the US RCC is certainly significant, it is less than the overall

decline of self-identified Christians in that period, which plummeted from 78% of the population

in 2007 to 71% in 2014.[211] And that Rome has seemingly held steady at 21% of the American

population since 2014, indicates that something significantly positive is at work. The RCC's

hidden strength is no mystery.

> **Catholics in the U.S. are racially and ethnically diverse**. Roughly six-in-ten Catholic adults are white, one-third are Latino, and smaller shares identify as black, Asian American, or with other racial and ethnic groups. The data also show that the share of U.S. Catholics who are Latino has been growing, and suggest that this share is likely to continue to grow. Indeed, among Catholic Millennials, there are about as many Hispanics as whites.[212]

The 2019 Gallup study noted above shows that the US RCC has not experienced the

precipitous decline in membership that has faced Protestantism in America. It also notes what

must be a primary driver for the relative stability of RCC affiliation:

> One key factor behind the stability in Catholic identification has been an increase in the number of Hispanics in the U.S. In 2018, Gallup data showed that Hispanics

Europe," *America: The Jesuit Review* (October 21, 2021), https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2021/10/21/vatican-census-catholic-church-growing-241696. Also, Catholic News Agency, "Number of Catholics Worldwide Rose."

[209] Pew, "Three-in-Ten Adults Unaffiliated."

[210] Pew, "7 Facts About American Catholics."

[211] Pew, "Decline of Christianity Continues," 3.

[212] Pew, "7 Facts About American Catholics," emphasis in the original.

made up 15% of the U.S. population and 30% of all U.S. Catholics. More than four in 10 Hispanics are Catholic.[213]

This racial-ethnic breakdown is similar to the US population according to the 2020 Census, at least in terms of Whites compared to all minority populations. The roughly 60% share of the US RCC that is White compares favorably with the Census report that 61.6% of the US identified themselves as White alone.[214] Pew's and Gallup's reporting is also confirmed by survey data from CARA utilizing parish reports already in 2010. CARA indicates that 58% of the US RCC was non-Hispanic White already then.[215] It is no surprise that the next largest share of the Catholic population is Hispanic.

The *Wall Street Journal*'s Brian McGill provided a graphic look at "Catholicism in the US" in 2015, noting both the growing numbers of American Catholics who were leaving the church, a decline in priests, and the growing number of parishes without a priest to serve them. The article, however, also corroborated the fact of the RCC's hidden strength. Hispanic membership is the predominant source of hope for the US Catholic Church. This is not simply because of the sheer number of Hispanic Catholics, but because younger Catholics are primarily Hispanic. Youthful membership is, of course, the key for natural or endogamous growth in any denomination. Note figure 20 from the article (below) and the marked difference between the age cohorts in the RCC. It is also important to note that not only is the number of young Hispanics significant, but the youth cohort also has higher portions of Black and other/mixed individuals. The graph indicates that among 18 to 29 year old Catholics in 2015, well over 50% were either Hispanic,

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[213] Brenan, "US Catholics' Faith."

[214] USCB, "2020 Census Illuminates."

[215] CARA heavily utilizes internal data from the USCCB together with its own polls and compares them to national surveys. Mark Gray, Mary Gautier, and Thomas Gaunt, "Cultural Diversity in the Roman Catholic Church," CARA (Washington, DC: Georgetown University, June 2014), 4, http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/cultural-diversity/upload/cultural-diversity-cara-report-phase-1.pdf.

Black, or Other/Mixed races.[216]

Younger Catholics Are Primarily Hispanic

According to the Public Religion Research Institute, the ratio of white Catholics to Hispanic Catholics is now less than two to one. That is down from 10 to one in the early 1990s. At 49%, Hispanics are a majority of all young American Catholics (ages 18–29), more than triple the percentage of Catholic seniors.
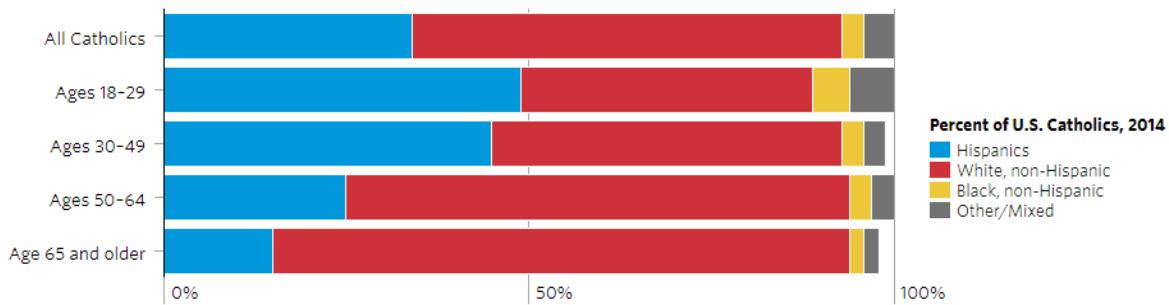
Note: Figures may not total 100% due to rounding

Figure 20. Catholics by age cohort (2015).[217]

The Gallup and Pew data and McGill's conclusions are reinforced by the decennial US

Religion Census, published by the Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies. As

Yonat Shimron reports:

> The study finds that the Catholic Church in the U.S. is the largest religious body, with 61 million adherents in more than 19,000 churches, comprising close to 19% of the U.S. population. That's a modest growth of 2 million adherents from 2010, when the church had nearly 59 million adherents.[218]

The US Religion Census indicates that the RCC percentage of the American population may

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[216] Brian McGill, "Catholicism in the US," *Wall Street Journal* (September 18, 2015), http://graphics.wsj.com/catholics-us/.

[217] Figure from McGill, "Catholicism in the US."

[218] Yonat Shimron, "Religious Groups with Immigrant Members Grew Fastest over Past Decade," *Religious News Service* (November 11, 2022), https://religionnews.com/2022/11/11/religious-groups-with-immigrant-members-grew-fastest-over-past-decade/. The US Religion Census is not a poll, but is the data gathered by denominations and other religious bodies. It is, therefore, "on the ground" data rather than an extrapolation based on a random sample. The website of the US Religion Census is https://www.usreligioncensus.org/index.php.

have declined over the decade, but that is balanced by an actual growth in adherents. Once again, immigrant additions are credited with RCC stability and its modest growth.

The strongly multi-cultural nature of the RCC is evident in parish life across the country. Nearly 40% of Catholic churches are either predominantly or very much non-White. In a 2014 CARA study of RCC parishes, 323 out of 846 responding parishes could be identified as multi-cultural parishes. To meet that definition the parishes had to meet one of three criteria: regular masses in a language other than English (not including Latin masses); a non-Hispanic White membership of 40% or less; and/or a score of 33% or higher on a diversity index.[219] CARA estimates that "more than 5,000 parishes" have masses in a language other than English.[220] All this indicates the significant measure of racial and ethnic diversity in Catholic parishes. But Catholic diversity is not just a result of its minority parishes. Mark Chaves points out that, "Catholic churches are much more likely than Protestant churches to have some minority presence even when they are predominantly white."[221] That is a further source of strength in itself, since it indicates to visitors from the community that regardless of their race or ethnicity, they will not be excluded from participation in the parish.

CARA indicates that Catholic diversity is due more to immigration than evangelization. A non-English mass indicates that a parish ministers to first and second-generation immigrants. Parishes in the South and West are much more likely to be multi-cultural as a result of heavy Hispanic immigration.[222] Immigration's benefit is clear. CARA estimates that "40 percent of all growth in parishioners in U.S. parishes from 2005 to 2010 was among Hispanics and Latinos"

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[219] Gray, et al., *Cultural Diversity in the Catholic Church*, 5. "The diversity index measures the probability that two randomly selected parishioners would self-identify as a different race or ethnicity," 5.

[220] Gray, et al., *Cultural Diversity in the Catholic Church,* 6.

[221] Chaves, *American Religion,* 29.

[222] Gray, et al., *Cultural Diversity in the Catholic Church,* 5.

thanks to heavy immigration in that period.[223] But Hispanics are not the only immigrant group that has led to RCC growth. Catholics comprise about a quarter of all African immigrants, about the same fraction of Vietnamese immigrants, nearly two-thirds of all Filipino immigrants, and a quarter of the immigrants from the Pacific islands.[224] Over the past decade the US population would have declined, but for immigration.[225] The immigrant harvest for the American Catholic Church has been substantial.

Foreign-born Catholics Keep Membership Steady

Catholics coming from other parts of the world have kept the church on stable footing. In 1975, the first year the data were recorded, foreign-born members, predominantly from Mexico and other Latin American countries, made up about 8% of the church. Today that number is almost 28%.

Percentage of U.S. population
(Select series to hide)
— Catholics, self-reported
— Catholics, official
— Catholics, foreign-born
— Catholics, native-born
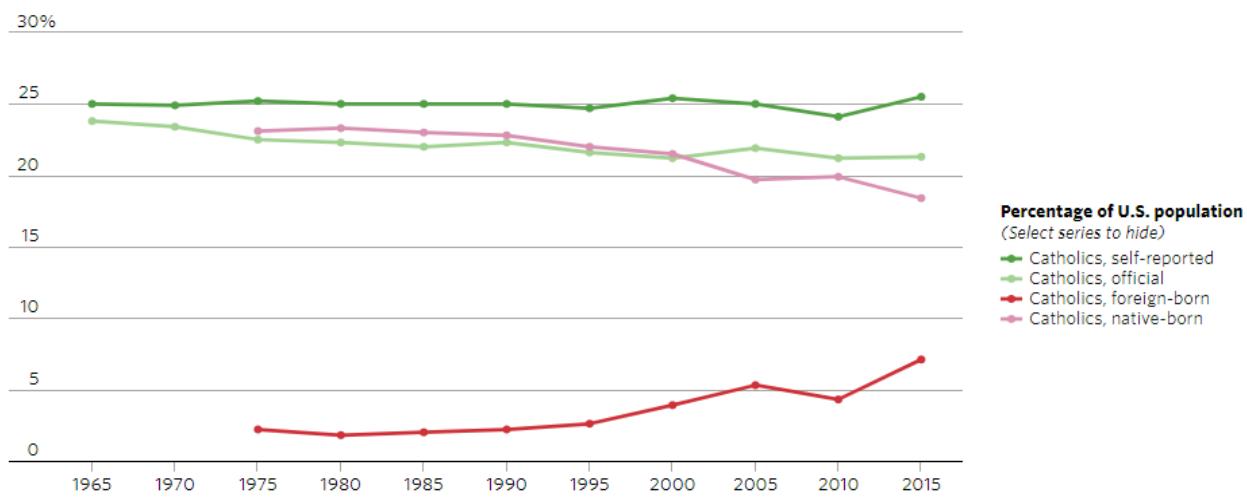
Note: Foreign-born and native-born numbers self-reported. Official numbers come from *The Official Catholic Directoy* via CARA.

Figure 21. The immigration offset.[226]

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[223] Gray, et al., *Cultural Diversity in the Catholic Church,* 6.

[224] Gray, et al., *Cultural Diversity in the Catholic Church,* 7.

[225] William H. Frey, "What the 2020 Census Will Reveal About America: Stagnating Growth, an Aging Population, and Youthful Diversity," *Brookings* (January 11, 2021), https://www.brookings.edu/research/what-the-2020-census-will-reveal-about-america-stagnating-growth-an-aging-population-and-youthful-diversity/.

[226] Figure from McGill, "Catholicism in the US."

Clearly, the strength of the Roman church is not really hidden. It is the cultural diversity

that is evident in the faces of the immigrant populations that increasingly fill its parishes. "What

explains the resilience of the Catholic Church in the face of declining membership over a

lifetime? New immigrants arriving in the United States—many Catholics from Latin America—

have helped offset the decline in religious affiliation among the U.S.-born population."[227]

The New America in the Presbyterian Church in America

A History of Struggle

In 2015, Sean Michael Lucas wrote of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA):

In just over forty years, the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) has grown to be
the largest conservative Presbyterian denomination in the English-speaking world.
From a small evangelical splinter group that left the declining Presbyterian Church in
the United States, the PCA has survived and continued and expanded and matured
despite the early predictions of both enemies and friends. And while it is still
relatively small in comparison to a body such as the Southern Baptist Convention, the
PCA exercises a theological influence in the evangelical world, and a cultural
influence in the United States, disproportionate to its size. [228]

Such a claim deserves exploration, even if that exploration must be limited. To delve

deeply into the historical roots of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) is too great a task

for this dissertation. Only a brief sketch is possible.[229] However, two factors demand recognition.

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[227] PRB, "Immigration Gives Catholicism a Boost in the United States," Population Reference Bureau (April 15, 2008), https://www.prb.org/resources/immigration-gives-catholicism-a-boost-in-the-united-states/.

[228] Sean Michael Lucas, *For a Continuing Church: The Roots of the Presbyterian Church in America* (Philipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2015), Kindle, Foreword.

[229] Major sources for PCA history and membership are Robert C. Cannada and W. Jack Williamson, *The Historic Polity of the PCA* (Jackson, MS: First Presbyterian Church, 1997); Don K. Clements, *Historical Roots of the Presbyterian Church in America* (Narrows, VA: Metokos, 2006); Jerry Kornegay, ed., *Living History of the Presbyterian Church in America* (St. Louis: PCA Historical Center, 1994); Sean Michael Lucas, *For a Continuing Church: The Roots of the Presbyterian Church in America* (Philipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2015); John Edward Richards, *The Historical Birth of the Presbyterian Church in America* (Liberty Hill, SC: Liberty, 1987); Paul G. Settle, *To God All Praise and Glory: 1973 to 1998—The First 25 Years* (Atlanta: PCA Administrative Committee, 1998); Frank Joseph Smith, *The History of the Presbyterian Church in America: Silver Anniversary Edition* (Lawrenceville, GA: Presbyterian Scholars Press, 1999); and *The Yearbook of the Presbyterian Church in America* (Lawrenceville, GA: Office of the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America) for the years 1974–2018.

There would be no PCA were it not for (1) the "battle for the Bible" of the second half of the 20th century; and (2) for the north-south division of the United States—a division that became acute after all the northern states abolished slavery. The shadow of the Civil War was a factor in the formation of the PCA. A heavily anecdotal history of the PCA by Don K. Clements illustrates this with two of its chapters, "The Battle for the Bible—Christianity and Liberalism" and "The Southern Presbyterian Roots of the PCA."[230]

The history of Presbyterianism in the US is a convoluted one marked by both regional and theological divisions. The New School and Old School division of the early 19th century led a preponderance of southern presbyteries into the Old School, while the New School was stronger in the North. Although both theological positions had adherents in both sections of the US, Civil War hostilities divided southern Old School followers from their northern theological partners and led to the formation of the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America in 1861 (renamed the Presbyterian Church in the United States [PCUS] in 1865).

The century after 1865 included numerous mergers and realignments and controversies among all Presbyterian groups over Darwinian evolution, the ordination of women, the civil rights movement, and biblical authority. Another point of increasing discussion and disagreement was a movement toward organic union between the PCUS and the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America.

The PCUS "resided in the southern states that comprised the former Confederate State of America, plus the border states of Maryland, Kentucky and Missouri."[231] Given the spread of

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[230] Don K. Clements, *Historical Roots of the Presbyterian Church in America* (Narrows, VA: Metokos, 2003, 2006). The 2006 edition is available only in Kindle format. While not identified as a second edition, it does include two additional chapters.

[231] Clements, *Historical Roots,* 189, Kindle.

Baptist theology throughout the South, the southern Presbyterians retained their identity only because of an "independency of spirit" and a "firmer theological identity.[232] "Southern Presbyterianism, as it was first established, was warmly evangelical on the one hand and thoroughly orthodox in doctrine on the other. In general this marked the Southern Church until its decline into Liberalism in the 1950s and 1960s."[233] It was also distinctively an Old School Presbyterian Church, opposed to revivals and devoted to the Westminster Confession's theology.

The controversy over slavery led to an additional division beyond the Old School, New School split. Prior to the Civil War, the two groups became four with each group dividing over slavery. Then the four became two again as the question of slavery so came to dominate church life that New and Old aligned against slavery in the North, while New and Old were generally supportive or at least opposed to the church weighing in on the matter in the South. Only after the Civil War did southern Presbyterians come to see itself as the true continuance of Old School Presbyterianism.[234]

Four key distinctives were emphasized in Old School Presbyterianism. (1) Verbal plenary inspiration of Scripture, (2) loyalty to the Westminster confessional standards, (3) the "spirituality of the church" (that is, the church is to proclaim the Gospel and stay out of civil affairs), and (4) a belief that Presbyterian polity is prescribed by God (*de jure divino*) and is not one option among other biblically acceptable forms of church governance (*de jure humano*).[235] This stance held through the 1930s in the PCUS, but thereafter the church moved away from

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[232] Clements, *Historical Roots,* 190, Kindle,

[233] Clements, *Historical Roots,* 193, Kindle

[234] Clements, *Historical Roots,* 195–96, Kindle

[235] Clements, *Historical Roots,* 196–97, Kindle

adherence to these standards.[236]

Nevertheless, in general, the more theologically and socially conservative and least ecumenically-minded presbyteries were in the southern US throughout the first half of the twentieth century. In this same period there emerged a different response to social and theological issues from local churches than from national hierarchies. "These polar responses, one emanating from the local churches, cautious and concerned over the increasing liberalism in the church, the other descending from the church hierarchy, progressive and committed to new ways of construing the Presbyterian witness in the world, were replicated in a series of crises that occurred in the sixties and seventies."[237] By the 1960s, however, it was clear that conservative voices were in the minority of the PCUS and by 1983, the PCUS merged with the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A (UPCUSA) to form the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

An important step toward the PCA was taken as far back as 1942 with the publication of *The Southern Presbyterian Journal* as a warning call about the growing acceptance of evolution and historical-critical views of Scripture, as well as an advocate for conservative theology in general and Old School Presbyterian theology in particular.[238] The journal provided information about rising theological and social progressivism within the PCUS and UPCUSA. It also provided inspiration to work for the cause of traditional theology and practice.

Three other organizations were also significant in the eventual decision to form a new denomination. The Presbyterian Evangelistic Fellowship was opposed to the method of social activism and committed to evangelism as the only authentic way to bring about meaningful

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[236] Clements, *Historical Roots,* 199–203, Kindle.

[237] Randall Balmer and John R. Fitzmier, *The Presbyterians* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1993), 107.

[238] The *Southern Presbyterian Journal* was established because of prior concerns about the theological direction of PCUS. See Lucas, *Continuing Church,* 66–99.

societal change. Concerned Presbyterians sought to convince conservatives "to organize ruling elders as a mass movement to save the church" against liberal theology. And Presbyterian Churchmen United was such an organized group of elders.[239]

It was in this context that the "National Presbyterian Church"—almost immediately renamed as the Presbyterian Church in America—was established at a formational General Assembly on December 4–7, 1973. From its very inception the PCA made clear that it stood firmly in the Old School tradition. The four emphases noted above—inerrancy of Scripture, the Westminster Standards, church "spirituality," and Presbyterian polity—were decisive in 1973. In some ways, however, the third element was the most challenging of the four to interpret. In 1861 the southern Old South Presbyteries ended fellowship with northerners, but not with an explicit expression of support for slavery. Rather, they withdrew over the matter of the spirituality of the church; explicitly because of a resolution of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America that made "allegiance to the federal government in Washington be a term of communion."[240] So also, in the case of the formation of the PCA, the civil rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s was a prominent point of debate, but it too was not explicitly cited as a reason for the formation of the PCA. As Frank Joseph Smith puts it, both the Presbyterian Church of the Confederate States of America (formed in 1861) and the PCA (formed in 1973) were established because of "illegal actions and breaches of faith by those in control" and because of a refusal to allow the socio-political trends of the day to determine the Church's policy. In the 1860s the particular issue was slavery. In the 1960s and 1970s the issues included women's ordination, abortion, promiscuity, divorce, and even the gospel itself. This is not the place, of course, to

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[239] Lucas, *For a Continuing Church,* 7–9.

[240] Frank Joseph Smith, *The History of the Presbyterian Church in America: Silver Anniversary Edition* (Lawrenceville, GA: Presbyterian Scholars Press, 1999), 4.

advocate the ultimate justice of either the liberal or conservative positions nor to determine the

sociological question of whether it was the Church or society which first influenced the other to

take a stand not based firmly on Scripture. It is appropriate, however, to note that the parting of

the ways came because one group wanted to abide strictly by God's Word, while the dominant

group wished to be much looser in its views and practice.[241] Thus the question of the "spirituality

of the Church," or whether "church structure could speak authoritatively on matters not

discussed directly in Scripture," was the stated concern.[242]

One of the topics "not discussed directly in Scripture" was "racial matters." An editorial in

the *Southern Presbyterian Journal* complained: "The Federal Council has caused confusion and

resentment by constant meddling, in the name of the Church, in economic, social and racial

matters, and in the affairs of State."[243] Another author in that same publication was more explicit.

Among the priorities of conservative Presbyterians should be preservation of "the purity and

integrity of the White man of North America upon whose shoulders are laid the burdens of the

world."[244]

"Concerned Presbyterians," a conservative group, published a pamphlet *Are You a

Concerned Presbyterian?* The pamphlet emphasized their worries especially about the "social

Gospel"[245] "Presbyterian Churchmen United" and others were distressed by the same "social

Gospel," as evident at a 1969 denominational conference that, among other things, gave some

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[241] Smith, *History of the PCA,* 5–6.

[242] Smith, *History of the PCA,* 6.

[243] William Childs Robinson, "Our Southern Presbyterian Banners," *Presbyterian Journal* (May 1942): 5. Quoted in Smith, *History of the PCA,* 16.

[244] J. E. Flow, "Positive or Negative," *Southern Presbyterian Journal* (September 29, 1954): 8–9. Quoted in Lucas, *Continuing Church,* 101–2.

[245] Smith, *History of the PCA,* 60.

support for James Forman's "Black Manifesto."[246] Emerging from the National Black Economic

Development Conference in 1969, the "Black Manifesto" was a demand for $500,000,000 in

reparations from America's "racist churches and synagogues." [247] While the UPCUSA 1969

Assembly rejected the manifesto it voiced approval to many of the demands raised by the Black

clergy caucus that had commended it. In response, a number of southern presbyteries vigorously

objected.[248] Another issue arose shortly after when the UPCUSA's Council on Church and Race

gave a grant of $10,000 to the Angela Davis legal defense fund in 1971. Davis had been charged

with murder and kidnapping in California. Her identity as a Black activist and a self-proclaimed

Marxist resulted in a severe backlash throughout the denomination, but especially from southern

members of the church body.[249] These events certainly motivated the *Presbyterian Journal,*

Presbyterian Churchmen United, and many others to oppose the overall socio-political direction

of the PCUS and the UPCUSA. As Lucas explains, many southern Presbyterians saw a dual

threat to Christian civilization from Communists and those who were promoting racial

integration.[250]

Thus, at the time of formation, the PCA consisted entirely of congregations and members

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[246] Smith, *History of the PCA,* 73. On the "Black Manifesto" see Keith Dye, "The Black Manifesto for Reparations in Detroit: Challenge and Response, 1969," *Michigan Historical Review* 35, no. 2 (Fall 2008): 53–83, http://www.jstor.org/stable/25652179. See also Robert S. Lecky and H. Elliott Wright, eds., *Black Manifesto: Religion, Racism, and Reparations* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1969).

[247] Smith, *History of the PCA,* 73. See also Gayraud S. Wilmore, "Identity and Integration: Black Presbyterians and Their Allies in the Twentieth Century," (109–33), in *the Presbyterian Predicament: Six Perspectives* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1990), 126–27.

[248] Smith, *History of the PCA*, 100.

[249] Wilmore, "Identity and Integration," 109–33. See also Paul Tangeman, "PHS LIVE: The Angela Davis Legal Defense Fund 50 Years Later," PCUSA.org (September 21, 2021), https://www.pcusa.org/news/2021/9/21/phs-live-angela-davis-legal-defense-fund-50-years/.

[250] Lucas, *Continuing Church,* 103. On southern Presbyterian support for segregation, see pages 112–24.

of the PCUS, with none of its members or congregations coming from the UPCUSA.[251]

Nevertheless, it seems evident that whatever role controversy over race had in 20th century Presbyterian divisions, it was never the only issue. In "A Statement," a 1953 position paper created by conservatives opposing the proposed merger of the southern and northern branches of Presbyterianism (PCUS and UPCUSA), "race relations played absolutely no part," or, at the very least, it was not mentioned.[252] Ultimately, Smith therefore offers a balanced perspective on what led southern Presbyterians to divide from their colleagues in the North in 1973. "It might be tempting to posit that the loss of cultural and ideological isolation post-World War II, with the resulting threat to Southern heritage, created the tensions within Southern Presbyterianism which led to the division in 1973. While those facts are significant, they do not tell the whole story."[253]

This perspective is certainly not accepted by everyone. Tobin Grant is blunt in his disagreement as is evident in the title of his essay: "What Catalyst Started the Presbyterian Church in America? Racism." Grant argues that the spiritual understanding of the church, the demand for biblical literalism, and opposition to theological liberalism were all mere foils in support of the real concern—opposition to the civil rights movement. Why else would the church be entirely southern at its inception? He cites the policies of several founding congregations that publicly refused to allow Blacks to worship in their facilities, arguing that Blacks and Whites could be spiritually equal without being equal members of individual churches.

> The narrative most commonly heard in PCA churches is that it formed to protect and keep the faith and avoid the slide into liberalism. But this is akin to the belief that the

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[251] Clements, *Historical Roots,* 205–14, Kindle. At its formation the PCA had 249 congregations with about 40,000 members. Chapter 16 of Clements' book, on the formation of the PCA, is a first-person account written by Charles Dunahoo.

[252] Smith, *History of the PCA,* 23. He adds that while race relations were mentioned with some frequency in the *Presbyterian Journal,* as a point of division, the same journal at time expressed opposition to "racial exploitation" (in the form of discrimination).

[253] Smith, *History of the PCA,* 45.

south seceded because of states rights: the southern states claimed they had a right to make their own laws, but they made this claim only because they were on the verge of losing slavery. Likewise, the PCA formed to avoid liberalism, but this liberalism was defined as support for integration and racial equality.[254]

Lucas is not nearly as harsh as Grant in his assessment of the place of race in the PCA's formation. Moreover, he notes that the PCA at its inception "explicitly and officially stated" a desire to become a church body for all races, despite the fact that it was overwhelmingly southern and White.[255] Nevertheless, he does not shrink from a frank recognition that race was certainly a significant factor in the process that led to the PCA. The southern worldview that dominated the founders of the PCA cannot be described honestly without acknowledging its racial perspective.

> This merger of doctrinal, political, racial, and economic conservatism represented the worldview of southern Presbyterian conservatives. In their minds, it was not possible to separate the strands; the same Bible that taught of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection was the same Bible that legitimated segregation, championed individualism, and castigated Communism.[256]

The essence of the rejoinder to these views from both Smith and Clements is that if being a segregated church was an essential goal of the PCA at its formation, it would not have emphasized from its beginning the importance of the missionary mandate. Already at that time the PCA initiated outreach to go beyond "Dixie" with a message that would be firmly biblical and consistent with the Westminster Confession.[257]

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[254] Tobin Grant, "What Catalyst Started the Presbyterian Church in America? Racism," *Religion News Service* (June 20, 2016), https://religionnews.com/2016/06/30/what-catalyst-started-the-presbyterian-church-in-america-racism/.

[255] Lucas, *Continuing Church,* Foreword, Kindle loc. 132.

[256] Lucas, *Continuing Church,* 133. See also his comments on race, 190–200.

[257] Smith, *History of the PCA,* 45–46.

Growth in the PCA through Doctrinal Fidelity and Outreach

The church that was formed in 1973 was certainly southern and "Old School." But it was more than that. Lucas, who unstintingly shows the extent to which the roots of the PCA included significant concerns about retaining "racial integrity" (that is, segregation of the races), never doubts the central priorities of those who founded the PCA:

> [C]onservative leaders never lost sight of what they meant to do. They sought to forge a Presbyterian church that would be a continuation of what they saw to be the best parts of the PCUS story: a conservative, evangelical, mainline Presbyterian body that would be true to the Bible and the Reformed faith and obedient to the Great Commission.[258]

The PCA was committed to not repeat the theological drift of the predecessor denominations that would soon form the PC(USA). And it was deeply committed to the Great Commission. These two commitments have enabled the PCA's steady growth since its formation.

Like many break-away denominations, the initial growth of the PCA was from churches that were dissatisfied with their mother churches, in this case the PCUS and the UPCUSA. The PCA's founders wanted a more conservative brand of Presbyterianism. And, as noted, nearly all the initial membership was from south of the Mason-Dixon line. But that was to change quickly. Dunahoo asserts: "Though we started with churches mainly in the Southeast our intent and design was to be a national church reflected in our first choice of names, The National Presbyterian Church."[259] That happened quickly. In the initial years a number of presbyteries from other parts of the country joined the PCA because of their own dissatisfaction with the theology and practice of the "liberal" Presbyterians. A signal event occurred the same year the

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[258] Lucas, *Continuing Church,* 282–83.

[259] Clements, *Historical Roots,* 205; Kindle, "The Founding of the PCA," loc. 3065.

PCA was established. The UPCUSA refused to authorize the ordination and ministry of Wynn

Kenyon, a ministry candidate who opposed the ordination of women. But only a few years later

it ordained Mansfield Kaseman—who denied the divinity of Christ and his resurrection from the

dead.[260] Such notable events hastened the move of many individuals, congregations, and

presbyteries into the PCA. As a result, during the first decade of its existence the majority of the

church's growth came by means of congregations leaving the PCUS and UPCUSA.

The PCA's steady growth, however, was by no means simply the result of switching on the

part of those dissatisfied with the PC(USA) and its predecessor bodies. Rather, the new church

took to heart its initial commitment to reach beyond the south in preaching the gospel and

planting congregations. By the year 2000, the PCA had congregations in all fifty states as well as

in Canada, Puerto Rico, and Bolivia. As a result, the PCA has demonstrated a steady pattern of

growth, increasing in membership nearly every year throughout its now nearly fifty-year history.

Between 1973 and 1980, the PCA more than doubled in membership, from 41,232 to 90,999. A

decade later, the church had doubled again to 222,275 in 1990. By 2000 membership stood at

306,156. In 2010 membership was at 346,814 and by 2020, the last year for which data is

available, membership was 383,338.[261] The church body that began in the South had

demonstrated a zeal for church planting and evangelistic outreach throughout the North. That

zeal has resulted in a conversion rate that is about double that of the LCMS.[262] Yet, there

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[260] John H. Adams, "Two Cases Established Precedents for Today's Battles in the PCUSA," *The Layman* 37, no. 1 (February 24, 2004), https://layman.org/news7a4f/.

[261] This data is published in the PCA's yearbook, which provides comprehensive statistical information annually about the church body. See Presbyterian Church in America, *The Yearbook of the Presbyterian Church in America* (Lawrenceville, GA: Office of the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America, 1974–2020). Lucas notes that PCA membership statistics are "undoubtedly low because only half the churches report their statistics annually"; *Continuing Church,* 316.

[262] See Lyman Stone, "What Is Our Life Together? Report on the Results of the Lutheran Religious Life Survey" (2019), 58, https://www.lutheranlifesurvey.church/.

remained questions about its identity.

Reflection and Redirection

At the time of its formation the PCA faced an important but unexpressed question. How was this church to address a lineage that was traced from the slave-holding South prior to the Civil War, that furthermore held firmly to segregation as an aspect of Presbyterian identity from the 1860s through the 1950s, and that included as founding leaders many who had been stalwart defenders of separation between the races as necessary for "racial integrity"?

In brief, the answer is that this lineage would be acknowledged as sinful and ultimately repudiated. Arguably, the most notable change over time on social and political issues for these conservative Presbyterians has been on the issue of race. The PCA did not rest comfortably with the heritage of opposition to the civil rights movement, to integration, and to the increasing racial and ethnic diversity of the US population. The call for racial integrity simply disappeared, at least from public discourse, in the PCA.

Perhaps this was associated in part with the fact that the initial departure from the PCUS was more of a sobering than a celebratory experience. Lucas documents a "great fear" that division from the PCUS would lead to further divisions: that "the resultant church would divide into smaller and smaller parts and the dream of a continuing Presbyterian church faithful to Scripture and the Reformed faith and obedient to the Great Commission would die."[263] That worry, among other challenges, led the PCA to be a humble and not a triumphal church body in its initial and ongoing development.

As the PCA developed, it needed to understand what sort of church it would be. For some,

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[263] Lucas, *Continuing Church,* 316.

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the central concern was to remain strongly doctrinal, in fidelity to the Westminster Standards. For others, the priority was to be strongly evangelical, in fidelity to the Great Commission. Neither priority was viewed as contradictory to the other. A commitment to Westminster and to the Great Commission were both firmly defined as essentials for the PCA, but where would its priority lie? "The problem of identity was not simply an issue of what the new church would believe, but how it would carry out those beliefs."[264] The founding generation prevented this question from dividing the new church, but did so in a way that "kept the denomination focused on being true to Scripture and the Reformed faith broadly construed, but especially on the evangelistic mandate in domestic and international missions."[265]

Lucas speaks of this "centrist instinct" as the key to the PCA's ongoing growth. "Whenever difficult doctrinal matters came up to the General Assembly—whether theonomy, creation days, or confessional subscription—the PCA has tended toward solutions that move toward the center and keep as many people within the church as possible."[266] One important result was that the PCA, from the start, has resisted the fundamentalist label, speaking instead of itself as an evangelical church and distancing itself from figures like Carl McIntire.[267]

The PCA's brand of evangelical identity included a desire to revive the Christian identity of the US. In that sense, there was something of a departure from the "spiritual church" emphasis in earlier conservative Presbyterianism with its insistence that the church should stay out of matters of society and government. Yet the PCA, with the rest of American Evangelicalism, willingly identified itself with conservative political priorities. But there was an exception. While

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[264] Lucas, *Continuing Church,* 317.

[265] Lucas, *Continuing Church,* 319.

[266] Lucas, *Continuing Church,* 320–21.

[267] Lucas, *Continuing Church,* 321.

most conservative Presbyterians had supported segregation and opposed civil rights up to and through the 1960s, the PCA took a different turn: "the same evangelistic dynamic that drove them toward theological moderation also served to challenge their views on racial segregation."[268] An evangelistic church that planned to send missionaries throughout the world could not support separation between Christians of different races here at home.

Actions began to follow. Only a few years after it was established, the PCA participated in a 1977 North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC) conference on race relations. The conference issued this statement:

> We are convinced that we, as Reformed Christians, have failed to speak and act boldly in the area of race relations. Our denominational profiles reveal patterns of ethnic and racial homogeneity. We believe that this situation fails to give adequate expression to the saving purposes of our sovereign God, whose covenant extends to all peoples and races. We are convinced that our record in this crucial area is one of racial brokenness and disobedience. In such a situation the credibility of our Reformed witness, piety and doctrinal confession is at stake. We have not lived out the implications of that biblical and confessional heritage which we hold in common with each other, with its emphasis on the sovereignty and freedom of grace, on the absence of human merit in gaining salvation, and on the responsibility to subject all of life to the Lordship of Christ.

The NAPARC statement continued:

> The description of God's people in 1 Peter 2:9, 10, as a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, reveals the church's visible oneness as the community of those separated into the Lord. It is a oneness on the order of the racial, cultic, and national unity of Israel (Exodus 19:6), and it has as its purpose the declaration of the wonderful works of God. Therefore, the church's identity transcends and makes of secondary importance the racial, national and cultic identities of the world.

Lastly, note the repentant confession included in the NAPARC statement:

> In repentance we acknowledge and confess that we have failed effectively to recognize the full humanity of other races and the similarity of their needs, desires, and hopes to ours; and thus we have failed to love our neighbor as ourselves.... Within the church, our members have exhibited such attitudes and actions as discourage membership or participation by minority groups.... Our churches have not

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[268] Lucas, *Continuing Church,* 323.

been free from such formal actions as discourage membership or participation by minority groups. They have been guilty of a lack of positive action concerning mission to ethnic groups in their own neighborhoods and to ethnic groups at large. They have practiced a kind of cultural exclusivism, thinking of the church as "our church" rather than Christ's. This involves the sins of pride and idolatry.[269]

Such a challenge from NAPARC to the PCA's southern mindset did not show itself immediately in the PCA's own formal statements or policies. But the PCA's evangelical focus did become evident early on as it began to plant churches around the country. Not only did it *not* stick to its southern homeland, it did not focus its efforts on small cities, suburbs, and small towns similar to the settings of its first congregations. Rather, it accepted the necessity of urban missions. One of its most well-known church plants occurred in 1987 when Tim Keller, a homiletics professor from Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia, was sent to New York City. There, in what most would consider an environment that is hardly conducive, if not downright hostile to Christianity, Redeemer Presbyterian Church began its ministry.[270]

This sort of redirected missional activity did not occur without theological reflection. In 1998 Keller was one of twenty-seven PCA leaders who articulated various aspects of their theological vision for the PCA, including a vision for mission in *A Statement of Identity for the Presbyterian Church in America*.[271] Their proposal would not minimize the fallen world's need for evangelism or that the gospel is a confrontation with sinful humanity: "We affirm that the church's task of evangelism is to confront the lost with the gospel and further to build the church

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[269] Quoted in PCA Historical Center, "Studies & Actions of the General Assembly of The Presbyterian Church in America," accessed May 6, 2022, https://pcahistory.org/pca/studies/race.html.

[270] Today over 1,500 people—mostly young—worship at Redeemer or one of its NYC satellites. Redeemer's Manhattan locations are Downtown, East Side, West Side, East Harlem. For a brief history of Redeemer see "Redeemer History," Redeemer Churches & Ministries, accessed July 22, 2022, https://www.redeemer.com/learn/about_us/redeemer_history.

[271] Dominic A. Aquila, et al., *A Statement of Identity for the Presbyterian Church in America* (no city: no publisher given, 1998), available in J. Oliver Buswell, Jr. Library at Covenant Theological Seminary Library.

through the conversion of unbelievers and their families."[272] The *Statement* was therefore firm in its theological foundation, but it was also cognizant of the need to be realistic about the mission field the PCA was facing. They would proclaim the same gospel faithful Christians had always confessed, yet it would have to "be communicated in the language and culture of the hearer, using a multiplicity of methods" open to ongoing reform. The writers did not relax the need for confessional theology, but "the Reformed faith should be made intelligible and applicable to all cultures and socioeconomic classes, which entails cultural and linguistic sensitivities and adaptations." And again: "We affirm… that the church in its mission must address both material and spiritual issues (Acts 6:1–7)." Yet, social problems cannot "be resolved without the preaching of the gospel and the turning of souls to God (Eph. 2:12–18)."[273]

Two additional affirmations showed where this group of leaders was urging the PCA to turn its focus. They affirmed "that biblical mission is usually most effective when done indigenously, and we further affirm that the training and empowering of indigenous leadership must be a central part of our mission strategy."[274] This affirmation of "indigenous leadership" indicates the recognition that the PCA should not only no longer be a southern church, but that it also should not remain comfortable as a White church—not in an America that was multi-racial and multi-ethnic.

A second significant affirmation is consistent with the first: "We affirm that biblical stewardship, wise planning, and potential impact strongly suggest *that we focus most of our missional energies on the great urban population centers of the world*."[275] The PCA at the time

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[272] Aquila, et al., *Identity for the PCA,* 40.

[273] Aquila, et al., *Identity for the PCA,* 41, emphasis added.

[274] Aquila, et al., *Identity for the PCA,* 41.

[275] Aquila, et al., *Identity for the PCA,* 43.

was still heavily southern, with most of it churches in smaller cities, suburbs, and rural locations. That is, it was much like the rest of mainline Christianity, like the most well-known parts of Evangelicalism, or, for that matter, like the LCMS. To urge the expenditure of "most of our missional energies on the great urban population centers of the world" was to say that mission in and to the cities should be the *highest missionary priority* for the PCA. Such a proposal was beyond bold.

The unofficial status of *Identity for the PCA* meant that it might have had no impact. The status of its authors, however—including noteworthy men like Frank M. Barker, James Montgomery Boice, William Edgar, Tim Keller, Tremper Longman, Donald J. MacNair, Vern Poythress, and R. C. Sproul—meant otherwise. Its priorities would loom large in future PCA work, resulting in the church body working toward greater racial and ethnic inclusivity and investing heavily in church planting in major cities throughout the US and beyond.[276]

Regarding the affirmation about "indigenous"—that is, multi-racial—work, Lucas notes that, "At a denominational level, the PCA took two significant actions that addressed the issues of race."[277] The first was an overture that was adopted at its 2002 Assembly as a step toward racial reconciliation. Acknowledging that "the heinous sins" "of servitude—including oppression, racism, exploitation, manstealing, and chattel slavery—stand in opposition to the Gospel," Overture 20 included this apology:

> **We therefore** confess our involvement in these sins. As a people, both we and our fathers, have failed to keep the commandments, the statutes, and the laws God has commanded. We therefore publicly repent of our pride, our complacency, and our complicity. Furthermore, we seek the forgiveness of our brothers and sisters for the reticence of our hearts that have constrained us from acting swiftly in this matter.

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[276] "PCA Churches," PCAAC.org, accessed August 2, 2022, https://www.pcaac.org/church-directory/.

[277] Lucas, *Continuing Church,* 324.

We will strive, in a manner consistent with the Gospel imperatives, for the encouragement of racial reconciliation, the establishment of urban and minority congregations, and the enhancement of existing ministries of mercy in our cities, among the poor, and across all social, racial, and economic boundaries, to the glory of God. Amen.[278]

Two personal resolutions at the same assembly were also approved. The first, Personal Resolution 6, provided the rationale for confessing past sins of former generations (corporate sins), warned about the gravity of sins of omission, and emphasized the priority of evangelistic outreach "wherever the descendants of Adam are to be found." This resolution was affirmed as having been answered by the Assembly action approving Overture 20. The second personal resolution, Personal Resolution 2, was also answered affirmatively. On the basis of Acts 10:34 it called on the entire church to "renounce any racism and/or class consciousness." It also called for every church to welcome "all persons without regard to race, class or national origin" as an aspect of the PCA's *Book of Church Order.*[279] Note that the citation of the *Book of Church Order* implied the possibility of discipline against any congregation that would practice discrimination.

The second "significant action" Lucas mentions was a pastoral letter.

In 2004, the denomination approved a pastoral letter on racism that declared racism to be sinful, a denial of the gospel, and the breaking of several of the commandments. It, too, declared that "it is crucial that we repent of those teachings and actions in our history that are sinful, make a clear break from them and establish a new beginning in obedience by God's grace." While the denomination and its local churches have a long way to go in undoing the difficulties created by their past stand for racial segregation, these represented beginning steps along the way.[280]

Such statements reveal a church body determined to better reflect the diversity of the US.

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[278] Emphasis in the original. Overture 20 was submitted to the Assembly by the Nashville Presbytery. 30th General Assembly (2002), 30–53, III, Items 14–16, p. 262–70. Available from the PCA Historical Center, "Studies & Actions of the General Assembly of The Presbyterian Church in America."

[279] See PCA Historical Center, "Studies & Actions of the General Assembly of The Presbyterian Church in America." The names of the individuals submitting the resolutions are not given.

[280] Lucas, *Continuing Church,* 324.

They were an admission that as much as the PCA valued its theological heritage that heritage

was not problem-free. The honest confession has borne good fruit.

> The children and grandchildren of the PCA founders, however, are part of a
> denomination that has witnessed and participated in a Reformed awakening in the
> African-American community, and that is planting multiethnic congregations,
> establishing campus ministries at historically black colleges and universities (which
> have a very substantial Asian membership), is deliberately reaching out into the
> Hispanic communities, and is intentionally and happily committed to a PCA that is
> increasingly multiethnic.[281]

None of this should suggest that the PCA is a perfect church body in terms of its approach

to racial and ethnic diversity. It has been most successful in its efforts in Korean ministry, but

seemingly less successful in terms of Hispanic and Black ministry.[282] However, it is true that the

PCA has been more effective in its efforts toward diversity than the LCMS.

The preceding pages show the strong similarity of the PCA to the LCMS, especially with

regard to several factors. Both churches experienced theological crises in the 1970s that shaped

their identities. The PCA was formed due to the theological crisis in Presbyterianism as its

founders sought to retain conservative theological stances on many issues. The LCMS

experienced a church division with a significant percentage of churches and ministers leaving

because the majority of the Synod did not waver in its commitment to biblical inerrancy and

biblical teachings on social issues such as abortion. Both denominations remain very

"conservative" in terms of key theological teachings and practices (inerrancy of Scripture,

ordination of men only to the preaching ministry, opposition to abortion, defense of traditional

man-woman marriage, belief that same-sex behavior is sinful, refusal to ordain practicing

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[281] Lucas, *Continuing Church,* Foreword, Kindle.

[282] See Mission to North America, "MNA Hispanic Ministries," accessed November 30, 2022,
https//pcamna.org. African American Ministries, "A Community Devoted to the Flourishing of African Americans
in the PCA," accessed November 30, 2022, https://aampca.org.

homosexuals or to acknowledge or to consecrate same-sex marriage).

In addition, both church bodies were highly homogeneous, non-Hispanic White churches in

the 1970s. But at that point dissimilarity must be noted. Since the 1970s the PCA has grown

numerically nearly every year while the LCMS has experienced unrelenting membership

decline.[283] In addition, the PCA has gone from being an all-White denomination at its inception

in 1973 to a denomination that is now about 20% non-White. As seen above this is all the more

striking because the heritage that led to the PCA was not supportive of the civil rights movement.

A final difference is also important: the PCA has focused much of its attention to church planting

in the very cities that the LCMS has fled, especially in the Northeast US.[284]

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[283] See Chapter Three. LCMS decline mirrors that of liberal Protestants, such as the PC(USA). See Jerry Van Marter, "PC(USA) Membership Decline Slows, but Does Not Stop," Office of the General Assembly Communications (Louisville: Presbyterian Church (USA), June 4, 2018), https://www.pcusa.org/news/2018/6/4/pcusa-membership-decline-slows-does-not-stop/.

[284] Pew Research Center's Landscape Survey results for the PCA are instructive and perhaps a bit embarrassing for the LCMS to consider. The PCA is about 20% non-White. That includes 6% African American membership (to the LCMS' 2%), 3% Asian compared to the LCMS with less than 1% Asian, and 6% Latino to the LCMS' 1%. The PCA is 5% other/mixed race while the LCMS is 2%. See Pew Research Center, "Presbyterian Church in America," Religious Landscape Study, accessed February 10, 2020, https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/religious-denomination/presbyterian-church-in-america/

CHAPTER THREE

A CLOSER LOOK AT THE LCMS DEMOGRAPHIC DILEMMA

Demographic Transition and the LCMS

In 1968, not everyone shared Paul Ehrlich's *Population Bomb* panic. The baby boom was

in full swing and that was good news for many. Churches were rejoicing in membership growth

as children were born in record numbers, swelling membership rolls. During that period the

LCMS included in its *Statistical Yearbook* a chart titled, "Two Decades of Missouri Synod

Growth." Virtually every other American denomination could have done the same. We have

seen, however, that such euphoria over church membership in America did not last.

While there are some exceptions to the pattern of church membership decline in the US,

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod is not one of them.[1] The LCMS has suffered significant

membership decline in light of the demographic changes discussed in chapters one and two. It

illustrates the DT, having experienced a low birth rate similar to the rest of the US population.

Additionally, like many denominations, we have experienced the results of America's increasing

secularization, especially in terms of the loss of membership among the youngest population

cohorts. Lastly, the LCMS has failed to adjust to the changing demographic profile of America,

remaining a largely homogeneous non-Hispanic White church body.

From Growth to Decline

The Synod's statistical reports have documented prolonged membership decline both

among baptized and communicant members, as have outside surveys conducted by organizations

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[1] Within this dissertation The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod will be referred to in several additional ways: the LCMS, the Missouri Synod, and the Synod. In addition, I will employ the plural pronoun, we, to refer to the LCMS since I belong to this church body.

such as Pew Research.[2] Statistics from the LCMS *Statistical Yearbook* and/or *Lutheran Annual* give an ominous portrait of the Synod. Total membership (includes all the baptized of any age) for 1960 was 2,391,195. Membership totals increased until 1972, when the LCMS overall membership peaked at 2,878,406, a 20% increase in 12 years.[3] These boom years, however, were brought to a close, first, by the LCMS schism of the mid-1970s and then by a persistent drop in membership due to the end of the Baby Boom amid other demographic factors. In 2000, LCMS total membership was 2,553,971, down 11.7% from the LCMS peak in 1972. For 2020 membership was 1,807,408, down 37.2% from the 1972 peak and down 24.4% from its 1960 total. Congregationally speaking, this trend has resulted in the fact that of the nearly 6000 LCMS congregations, nearly 20% have fewer than 25 people attending weekly and 75% have fewer than 100 attending weekly.[4]

Adult or confirmed membership reveals a similar trend to overall membership. Again, there is first a marked increase in confirmed membership as baby boomers were confirmed, followed by decreases beginning in the early 1990s and consistent thereafter. In 1960 adult membership was 1,524,152; by 1980 it rose to 2,042,644, up 34%; by 2000 it had declined to 1,934,116, down 5% from 1980); and in in 2020 it was 1,503,351, down 29.8% over 40 years. Figure 22 charts the decline from 1962 through 2020 based on LCMS statistics.

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[2] See Pew Research Center, "Members of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod," Religious Landscape Survey (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2014), accessed February 10, 2020, http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/religious-denomination/lutheran-church-missouri-synod/. Pew provides helpful information on LCMS membership demographics, individual beliefs, and political views.

[3] Data from ARDA (Association of Religious Data Archives) is fairly consistent with the statistics from the LCMS itself. ARDA gathers data from other sources, however, and the comparison between their numbers and the in-house numbers of the LCMS is therefore inexact. See ARDA, "Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS)," accessed August 5, 2022, https://www.thearda.com/denoms/D_887.asp. Using ARDA data, the Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies (ASARB) compiles data for denominations by metro region, county, and state. See "US Religion Census 1952–2020" accessed February 10, 2020, http://www.usreligioncensus.org.

[4] As reported to the author on August 5, 2022 from LCMS Rosters and Statistics. Specifically, the LCMS has 5893 congregations with 19% having less than 25 in worship and another 56 % that have between 26 and 99 attending weekly. See Appendix 3 for more complete data.

Year	Baptized Members	Confirmed Members ("Adults")	Child Baptisms	Youth Confirmed	Adults Conf. or Bap.	Total Members Gained
1962	2,611,695	1,677,943	83,604	51,536	31,480	61,391
1967	2,847,425	1,901,339	70,592	58,490	26,074	62,435
1972	2,878,406	2,028,728	62,066	56,878	27,758	54,873
1977	2,766,958	2,052,180	55,948	40,926	30,306	55,562
1982	2,725,623	2,051,168	60,682	38,296	29,048	59,605
1987	2,707,134	2,041,567	55,768	30,699	26,684	55,268
1992	2,617,272	1,958,747	50,241	26,299	21,226	53,364
1997	2,603,036	1,951,391	46,984	32,481	29,549	55,504
2002	2,512,714	1,907,923	35,606	25,542	19,197	44,031
2007	2,383,084	1,835,064	27,913	21,079	14,112	29,383
2012	2,196,787	1,707,509	24,917	18,470	14,735	29,522
2013	2,163,698	1,685,597	21,318	15,877	10,789	23,189
2014	2,097,258	1,641,679	25,551	18,585	14,856	29,986
2015	2,060,514	1,609,100	23,500	16,830	14,147	27,621
2016	2,017,834	1,584,251	28,507	21,493	16,092	32,287
2017	1,968,641	1,545,124	21,087	15,512	14,105	26,236
2018	1,913,015	1,504,610	19,605	14,974	11,091	19,401
2019	1,864,800	1,470,208	16,871	13,282	10,991	18,866
2020	1,807,408	1,433,378	12,649	12,010	7,483	11,072
% of decline over 60 years	30.80%	14.58%	84.87%	76.70%	76.23%	81.96%

Figure 22. LCMS statistical data from 1962–2020 (selected years).[5]

George Hawley, who has conducted in-depth research on the decline of America's

denominations in general and on the LCMS in particular,[6] says of the LCMS,

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[5] Data from The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, Department of Human Resources, *Statistical Yearbook* (St. Louis: Concordia, published yearly until 1981) and The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, *The Lutheran Annual* (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, published yearly with statistical data included after 1982). See Appendix Three for further LCMS data according to district.

[6] The work of George Hawley (Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of Alabama) is particularly significant for this dissertation. Both Hawley and a Wisconsin Synod historian, Ryan C. MacPherson (Professor of American History at Bethany Lutheran College), were separately contracted by the LCMS to provide analyses of Synod's membership trends. Their work is published in a special demographics issue of the *Journal of Lutheran Mission* Special Issue, 3 no. 3 (December 2016) archived online at

Since 1971, the first year for which we have data, we have witnessed a significant decline in the number of LCMS adherents in the United States. We further see that **the rate of decline increased in 2000**. In 1971, the ARDA data indicate that the number of LCMS adherents stood at 2,772,648. By 2010, the total number was only an estimated 2,270,921 adherents—a drop of about 500,000 people. While there was a decline in every decade since 1971, about half of that decline occurred between 2000 and 2010—the number of LCMS adherents dropped by 250,000 people over that ten-year period.[7]

LCMS membership decline has caused much distress and provoked many to ask, "What has caused this decline?" LCMS President Matthew C. Harrison's answer is summarized in six bullet points.[8]

- "This demographic decline is not only an LCMS problem."

- "The retention of baptized and confirmed youth is a key area on which to focus."

- "The [Synod's] persistent, long-term decline manifests itself both in a massive decrease in child baptisms … and a smaller but still significant decrease in adult converts."

- "The number of child baptisms and adult converts have decreased together in a remarkably similar pattern."

- "Thus, there is no wedge that can be driven between openness to life (family size) and sharing life (evangelism).

- "These reports don't only share difficult data; they also point out what the Synod does well and what strengths we can build on. … The key here is to build a strong Lutheran self-identity among the membership."

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www.lcms.org/journaloflutheranmission. In that issue see George Hawley, "A District-Level Examination of Demographic Trends and Membership Trends within LCMS Districts" ["District-Level Trends" herein], Special Issue: 2–6 and "The LCMS in the Face of Demographic and Social Change: A Social Science Perspective" ["LCMS—Demographic and Social Change" herein], Special Issue 7–84. In the same issue see also Ryan C. MacPherson, "Generational Generosity: Handing Down Our Faith to Our Children and Our Children's Children" ["Generational Generosity" herein], Special Issue, 85–121. Both authors provide not only important data, but also make specific practical suggestions with regard to the implications of their data. Also significant is George Hawley *Demography, Culture, and the Decline of America's Christian Denominations* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2017).

[7] Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change," 38; emphasis in the original. Hawley is referring to ARDA data in this quote.

[8] Joe Isenhower Jr., "Reversing the LCMS Membership Decline: Not Just by Having More Babies," *Reporter* online edition (February 28, 2017), https://reporter.lcms.org/2017/reversing-lcms-membership-decline/.

This dissertation will respond in some depth to that question about the cause of the decline. Harrison's points are accurate as far as they go. It is vital to note, as he does, that the decline represents two simple facts: the LCMS is growing neither from within nor from without.

Rather than growing from within, the LCMS is experiencing fewer infant baptisms, largely because it has declining numbers of young people of child-bearing age. Available data indicates that LCMS birthrates have declined to a point where births, infant baptisms, and youth confirmations are not replacing member deaths. In addition, LCMS data indicates that many children who are baptized never become communing members—they are never confirmed. Similarly, of those who are confirmed in their early teen years, many stop attending LCMS churches regularly and never become active adult members. LCMS growth from 1950 through the 1970s correlated significantly with the American demographic phenomenon of a sharp rise in birthrates after World War II that is commonly referred to as the "Baby Boom."[9] A larger proportion of LCMS growth during that period was due to the baptism of infants and the confirmation of adolescents than to the conversion of adults.[10] The same pattern was repeated in virtually every other major American denomination. The subsequent decline in birthrate that followed afterward in the US was mirrored by a similar decline both in LCMS birthrates and

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[9] The "Baby Boom Generation" is the widely accepted term used to describe the period between 1946 and 1964. See Cheryl Russell, *The Baby Boom: Americans Born 1946–1964,* 8th ed. (Amityville, NY: New Strategist). This is one of six generational categories commonly used for somewhat distinctive age cohorts since early in the 20th century. The generations may be identified as (1) the Greatest Generation (1900–1924); (2) the Silent Generation (1925–1945); (3) the Baby Boom Generation (1946–1964); Generation X (1965–1980); Millennials (1981–1997); and Generation Z (or Gen Z or post-millennials (1998–present). (CNN used the preceding names and dates, see "American Generation Fast Facts, *CNN*, August 17, 2019, https://www.cnn.com/2013/11/06/us/baby-boomer-generation-fast-facts/index.html. More detailed is: "What are the Origins of Generation Names?" *OED Blog,* June 19, 2015, https://blog.oxforddictionaries.com/2015/06/19/generation-name-origins. It should be obvious that neither the cohort names nor the proposed dates are precise. For the purposes herein, it is helpful simply to note that the US birthrate did increase dramatically after World War II up to the mid-1960s.

[10] The difference between confirmed and baptized membership has declined significantly over time, which indicates that earlier growth was due in large measure to childbirth. See the statistics provided by The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, *Statistical Yearbook,* for the years 1950 through 1994. Thereafter membership and other statistics for the LCMS are included in *The Lutheran Annual*.

total membership.[11] Together with most of American Christianity, the LCMS has also

experienced a declining retention rate for young people, a trend that began with the Baby Boom

generation and has continued since then.[12]

The foregoing data is strongly suggestive and persuasive, but it does not provide concrete

information about the birth rates of LCMS lay members overall. However, specific information

on family size is available for ordained and commissioned church workers and others who work

in LCMS congregations and schools and are covered by Concordia Worker Benefit Plans. The

following data (see fig. 23) indicates that *for **married workers** with dependent children* the

average number of children per worker is 2.17 (25,307 divided by 11,682). In addition, *for **all***

***workers** with dependent children* the average number of children per worker is 2.12 (27,339

divided by 12,881). If the family size for church workers is very close to national averages, and

only slightly above replacement rate, this further suggests the reliability of similar family size

estimates for all LCMS laity.

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[11] It is not true that the Synod's growth throughout its earlier history, prior to the 1960s, was primarily internal growth from childbirth. Rather, after its formation in 1846 the Missouri Synod vigorously reached out to burgeoning numbers of immigrants from Germany into the U.S. Much of LCMS growth during its first seventy-five years, especially, was exogenous in nature. One helpful source on German immigration to the United States is Michael Barone, *Shaping Our Nation: How Surges of Migration Transformed America and Its Politics* (New York: Crown, 2013). See also John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1955, 1989). Mark A. Noll notes that, "Almost all American churches in the nineteenth century grew at a much faster rate than the American population as a whole." Noll, *New Shape*, 112–13, Kindle. For Lutheran outreach in this earlier period, see E. Clifford Nelson, ed., *The Lutherans in North America* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), 255–67, who notes the challenges facing immigrant Lutheran churches such as the Missouri Synod. See also Mark Granquist, *Lutherans in America: A New History* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015), 171–227. Steve O. Scheiderer also provides data on the mission efforts of the Missouri Synod from its inception through the middle of the 20th century showing persuasively that while the Synod certainly grew most dramatically in conjunction with German immigration, its mission to immigrants was not simply a matter of German immigrants rushing into Missouri Synod congregations, but an effort that presented many challenges and required great sacrifice. See Scheiderer, "The Church Growth Movement: A Lutheran Analysis," (STM thesis, Concordia Theological Seminary, 1985).

[12] See Mark Kiessling and Juliana Shults, "The Search for Young People: 2017 Research of Millennials and the LCMS," *Concordia Journal* 44, no. 4 (2018): 19–32. Pew Research Center data indicates that only 10% of LCMS adults are in the 18–29 age cohort. See "Members of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod," https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/religious-denomination/lutheran-church-missouri-synod/.

Concordia Retirement Plan (CRP) - Actively Enrolled Workers - May 2022

	# of Workers				# of Dependent Children	Average # of Dependent Children
	No Dependent Children	With Dependent Children	Total			
Married	9,113	11,682	20,795		25,307	1.22
Not Married	6,991	1,199	8,190		2,032	0.25
Total	16,104	12,881	28,985		27,339	0.94

Concordia Health Plan (CHP) - Actively Enrolled Workers - May 2022

	# of Workers				# of Dependent Children	Average # of Dependent Children
	No Dependent Children	With Dependent Children	Total			
Married	3,674	7,054	10,728		16,297	1.52
Not Married	3,269	789	4,058		1,387	0.34
Total	6,943	7,843	14,786		17,684	1.20

Note: CHP spouse and dependent children information is based on recorded dependent information for CHP covered active workers. The spouse and dependent children information does not reflect dependent enrollment in the health plan.

Figure 23. Family size for actively enrolled LCMS workers.[13]

Therefore, it seems evident that the Missouri Synod's membership trend is largely representative of a demographic transition that has occurred in the population of the United States as a whole. This factor deserves an in-depth examination.

The Graying of the LCMS

As noted earlier, the US population is aging because of the DT. Recall again the age-sex distribution graphs in figures 4, 5, and 6 above. They illustrate the dramatic reshaping of America's population over the past six decades and enable us to visualize the growing

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[13] Data from emails to the author from Louis Johnson (Director: Ministry Engagement) dated June 17 and July 27, 2022. Chart created by Mr. Johnson.

percentage of Americans in older population cohorts today compared to 60 years ago. The total

percentage of individuals under the age of 25 has shrunk from over 44% to under 32%. In

addition, individuals 85 and older have grown from 0.5% to 2% of the population, a four-fold

increase. The percentage of the population over 90 is eight time greater than in 1960. Finally,

note the imbalance of the sexes after age 55.[14]

The graying of the LCMS is consistent with the aging of the entire American population.

Data on the age profile of the LCMS from Pew Research's 2015 Religious Landscape Survey

portrays this reality.[15]

Age distribution among members of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod
% of members of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod who are ages…

PEW RESEARCH CENTER
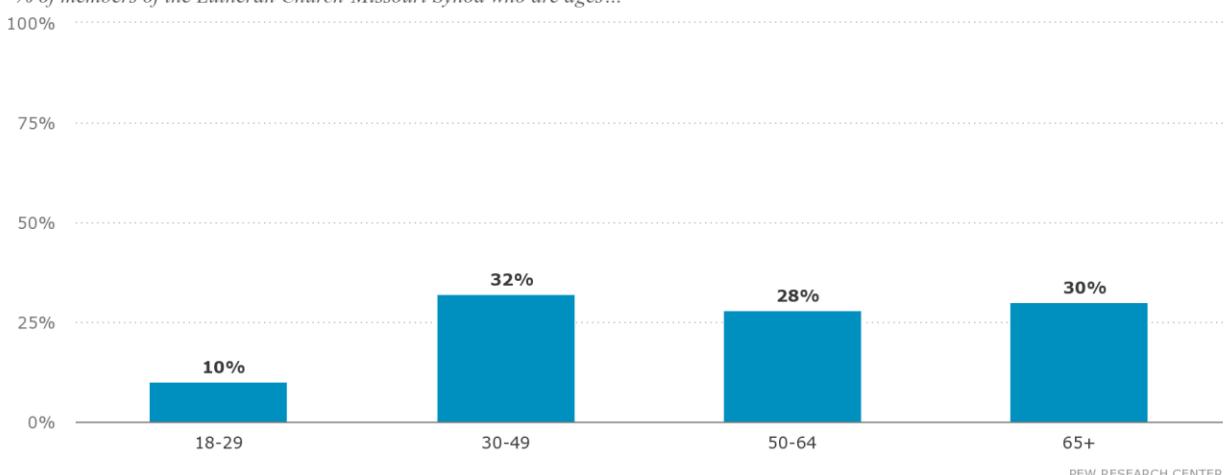
Figure 24. LCMS age cohorts.[16]

Pew's data mirrors the observations of a visitor to a cross-section of LCMS churches: the

LCMS is graying. Pew's cohort data shows 10% of the LCMS as age 8–29 (compared to 22% for

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[14] See Figures 4, 5, and 6 and the accompanying discussion on pages 29–31 above.

[15] Pew Research Center, "Members of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod." Religious Landscape Study (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, May 12, 2015), http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/religious-denomination/lutheran-church-missouri-synod.

[16] Figure from Pew, "Members of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod."

all US adults), 32% as 30–49 (compared to 34% for all US adults), 28% as 50–64 (compared to 26% for all US adults), and 30% as 65 and older (compared to 26% for all US adults).[17] While LCMS members in 2014 were fairly close to the national averages in the middle cohorts (30–49 and 50–64), the LCMS profile is significantly older than that of the US in general in the 65+ cohort and has less than half the national average of youth 18–29.

Addressing LCMS Demographic Decline: Ryan MacPherson and George Hawley

Synod leaders have wrestled with the fact of overall membership decline within the LCMS in recent decades. They have wondered about the causes of these transformations and the appropriate response. President Gerald Kieschnick (2001–2010) addressed LCMS decline in a 2009 book, *Waking the Sleeping Giant.* He saw the decline as a failure of witness and tried to address it by means of a personal outreach program titled "Ablaze."[18]

Two scholars noted earlier, Ryan C. MacPherson and George Hawley, require additional attention. Each has addressed the direct effects of the DT on the LCMS. MacPherson, a scholar from the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, was commissioned by the LCMS Office of National Mission, in light of the demographic decline of the Synod, to "[p]rovide analysis and advice consistent with" LCMS doctrine and practice; to "[i]dentify the pertinent demographic factors" leading to that decline; to show how "trends in family dynamics" "have shaped the synod's current trajectory"; and to "[s]uggest possible courses of action for prudently addressing

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[17] Pew Research Center, "Which US Religious Groups Are Oldest and Youngest?" Michael Lipka (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, July 11, 2016), https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/07/11/which-u-s-religious-groups-are-oldest-and-youngest/. See also Pew Research Center, "Members of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod," Religious Landscape Study, Washington, DC, accessed January 28, 2022. http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/religious-denomination/lutheran-church-missouri-synod. Pew's sample size was small, 417 individuals, so its reliability or margin of error is considered to be +/- 6 percent. Moreover, Pew only surveys adults 18 and older.

[18] Gerald B. Kieschnick, *Waking the Sleeping Giant: The Birth, Growth, Decline, and Rebirth of an American Church* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2009). See especially 35–88.

the synod's numerical decline and financial struggles in a manner that integrates stewardship and evangelism with biblical teachings concerning the family."[19]

George Hawley teaches political science at the University of Alabama, with particular research interests that "include religion, electoral behavior, political parties, the radical right, and the conservative movement in America."[20] Hawley was also commissioned by the LCMS Office of National Mission to research LCMS demographic statistics. He authored two reports, one which was based on ARDA data, [21] and a companion report based on data gathered by the LCMS Office of Rosters and Statistics.[22] In addition, Hawley included a section on the LCMS in his book, *Demography, Culture, and the Decline of America's Christian Denominations* (*Demography, Culture, Decline* herein).[23]

Ryan MacPherson

The American family is an area of significant interest for Ryan MacPherson. In an earlier historical study, he offered a brief but intriguing sketch of the change in the general pattern of the American middle-class family over time. The shift from an agrarian economy to an industrial one—one of the elements of the 1DT—resulted in a significant change in male and female roles: "Men shifted from working with their families to working for their families. Women's work

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[19] MacPherson, "Generational Generosity," 87–88. MacPherson originally presented his research at a conference ("summit") sponsored by the LCMS Office of National Mission on February 3, 2015. See Roger Drinnon, "Synod Leaders Assess Church Decline, Future at Summit," *Reporter* (blog), March 3, 2015 (updated July 20, 2018), https://blogs.lcms.org/2015/synod-leaders-assess.

[20] George Hawley, https://www.georgehawley.com, accessed May 12, 2022.

[21] George Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change" *Journal of Lutheran Mission* 3, no. 3 Special Issue (December 2016): 7–84, https://lcms.app.box.com/v/journal-lutheran-mission.

[22] George Hawley, "A District-Level Examination of Demographic Trends and Membership Trends within LCMS Districts," *Journal of Lutheran Mission* 3, no. 3 Special Issue (December 2016): 2–6, https://lcms.app.box.com/v/journal-lutheran-mission.

[23] See "Trends within One Denomination: The LCMS" in chapter 6 of Hawley, *Demography, Culture, and Decline* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2017), 96–101.

became less productive (generating surplus crops or crafts) and more consumptive (keeping the home)."[24]

His research also showed that the high birth rates of the baby boom years of the mid-20th century do not fit with the stereotype of large families being an economic burden on families. He also shows that the Baby Boom era had significant societal benefits. The general inequality between the rich and the poor narrowed, as did the particular inequalities between Whites and Blacks and between the middle aged versus the young and old. He shows that nderneath these well-known facts lay a hidden foundation, often overlooked by economic analysts: those who prospered most during the postwar decades were married and raising children.[25]

Elsewhere MacPherson develops "The Natural Law of the Family." He argues "that nowhere but the natural family can the radical inequalities inherent in human nature be channeled more efficiently toward liberty, justice, and prosperity."[26] There is no surprise then that these perspectives (on the danger of cultural trends that discourage marriage, fidelity in marriage, child-bearing, and multi-generational connections) show up in his report submitted to the LCMS.

MacPherson's LCMS study, "Generational Generosity," is wide-ranging. His approach is both demographic and "spiritual" (theological). Central to his demographic analysis is the contention that LCMS decline is due primarily to a decline in birthrate.

> One factor has overpowered all other factors in the synod's numerical decline: a plummeting birth rate during the 1960s, which never rebounded but instead fell further during the 1990s.

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[24] Ryan C. MacPherson, "Marital Parenthood and American Prosperity: As Goes the Middle-Class Family, So Goes the Nation," *The Family in America* 26, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 2.

[25] MacPherson, "Marital Parenthood and American Prosperity," 6–7.

[26] Ryan C. MacPherson, "The Natural Law of the Family," in *Natural Law: A Lutheran Reappraisal*, ed. Robert C. Baker (St. Louis: Concordia, 2011), 201.

• The birth rate peaked in 1956 at 4% (four births per 100 baptized members).

• In the 1970s and the 1980s, the birth rate averaged about 2%.

• Today, the birth rate is scarcely higher than 1%.[27]

This focus on birthrate is the controlling factor for all of MacPherson's work. Consequently, he offers recommendations that are largely pro-natalist and pro-family.[28] In focusing so much on internal growth (handing down the faith), he gives scant attention to outreach (handing on the faith).

In making his case, MacPherson first denies a number of "standard stories" or explanations of Synod's decline. LCMS decline is not, he says, because of (1) a failure to evangelize as effectively as Baptists; or because of (2) American migration from rural to urban centers; or because of (3) LCMS theological conservatism; or because of (4) inadequate youth ministry causing post-confirmation losses; or because of (5) inadequate numbers of early childhood centers; or because of (6) an inadequate focus on Hispanic outreach; or, lastly, because of (7) a failure to utilize more bi-vocational ministries.[29]

Regarding the causes that fail to explain LCMS decline, he first suggests that rather than being out-evangelized by the Southern Baptists (SBC), Lutherans and Baptists "have followed quite similar trajectories in church growth as well as in church decline." He supports his claim on the basis of 2008 data by first synthesizing LCMS baptism and confirmation statistics and then comparing them to SBC baptism statistics. The result is his supposition that it takes about 42 LCMS members to add one confirmed member while it takes about 47 Baptists to add one

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[27] MacPherson, "Generational Generosity," 87. Note, his analysis is based on total individuals, male and female, and therefore his percentages are, at best, about one-half of what the TFR would be per female member.

[28] MacPherson, "Generational Generosity," 96–97.

[29] MacPherson, "Generational Generosity," 89–96.

baptized member.[30]

His contention that the LCMS "evangelizes" better than the SBC by citing the ratio of current members needed to add one new member seems questionable. The data he assembles for both churches has little probative value because he does not look at gains from the outside. He is looking only at new baptized members in the SBC and new confirmed members in the LCMS, but both of those statistics would include gains from within current families—children raised Baptist who then get baptized as teens or baptized Lutheran kids who get confirmed.[31] He argues that since Baptists tend to baptize young people at roughly the age of Lutheran confirmation the two balance each other. He is unable, however, to measure gains from the outside (non-family gains) since Lutherans categorize adult member acquisition not only by confirmation, but also by adult baptism and affirmation of faith. Is there similar variety within the SBC? Even if he were measuring actual gains from outside, his approach would do little more than indicate that both denominations are lagging. This fails to address actual evangelism.

MacPherson also dismisses the significance of the reality of urbanization—that over 80% of the US population lives in urban or metropolitan centers.[32] He rejects as false the claim about LCMS decline characterized as: "It's because we were always a rural synod, but now the nation is urban." Instead, he says, "rural, urban, and suburban congregations all have experienced numerical declines."[33] His further reason for dismissing the importance of urbanization is to note

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[30] MacPherson, "Generational Generosity," 89. MacPherson argues that since Baptists tend to baptize their young people at roughly the age that Lutherans confirm theirs, the comparison is appropriate.

[31] MacPherson, "Generational Generosity," 89.

[32] "US Cities Factsheet," Center for Sustainable Systems (University of Michigan), https://css.umich.edu/factsheets/us-cities-factsheet#:~:text=Urban%20Land%20Use%20Patterns,to%20live%20in%20urban%20areas, accessed May 13, 2022.

[33] MacPherson, "Generational Generosity," 90.

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the level of suburban American disinterest in Christianity. Nothing at all is offered on the fact that the LCMS has experienced a precipitous decline in urban churches and in urban church membership all the while cities teem with people.

The third, fourth, and fifth "standard stories" about why the LCMS is in decline are more convincing. He disputes the claim that the LCMS is "too conservative," that better youth programs are needed, and that more early childhood centers should be established.[34] This dissertation will not dispute these claims, although each claim might benefit from further thoughtful discussion.[35]

MacPherson's claims regarding the sixth story, however, are more problematic. He minimizes the importance of Hispanic outreach and ignores outreach to other ethnicities. Specifically, he rejects this explanation: "We need to focus on Hispanic outreach, to keep pace with the changing face of America." Certainly, MacPherson is generally supportive of Hispanic outreach and he cites some success. Yet, his judgment overall is that such efforts are beneficial only "for some neighborhoods," but the Synod should not expect much growth from them.[36] He says this without any evidence of thorough-going research. He focuses on a single district, Northern Illinois, but admits that the Synod's statistical office said that "a reliable comparison of 'Hispanic Outreach' versus 'No Hispanic Outreach' cannot be made."[37] Moreover, this "standard story" addresses only Hispanics and ignores all other ethnicities. It also ignores the striking fact

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[34] MacPherson, "Generational Generosity," 91–94.

[35] MacPherson engages only with James Burkee's thesis on LCMS decline—that the Otten segment of the LCMS pulled the Synod too far right ("Generational Generosity," 91). But research by both Barna and by Christian Smith, for instance, strongly suggests that conservative moral positions *are* one reason for Gen-X and Millennial disenchantment with Christianity (see above 109–17). Kiessling and Shults have shown the depths of the LCMS problem retaining youth (see "The Search for Young People"). MacPherson himself acknowledges that the value of early childhood centers is a topic ripe for healthy debate (MacPherson, "Generational Generosity," 93–94).

[36] MacPherson, "Generational Generosity," 94–95.

[37] MacPherson, "Generational Generosity," 94.

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that "the changing face of America" is more and more a face of color, not the nearly all-White

face of American Lutheranism.[38]

Wrapping up his look at faulty "standard stories," MacPherson quickly dismisses bi-

vocational ministry models (the seventh standard story) arguing against it anecdotally. He says it

is detrimental to marriage, parenting, and procreation. A bold claim, but unsubstantiated. He

argues, instead, that the LCMS needs to improve its financial stewardship in order to support

pastors adequately and diminish any need for outside employment.[39] There is value in his

suggestions—of course our financial stewardship could improve—but this section ignores too

much. What of the significance of bi-vocational ministries in urban America? Or in Pentecostal

growth especially? Or even in the LCMS where pastors serve two (or more) congregations?

After dispatching the seven "standard stories" that he denies as causative for LCMS

decline, MacPherson turns to his central contention: "One factor has overpowered all other

factors in the Synod's numerical decline: a plummeting birth rate during the 1960s, which never

rebounded but instead fell further during the 1990s."[40] Although he cannot be certain about the

birthrate decline in percentage terms, MacPherson rightly points out the striking difference

between the "83,000 child baptisms in 1959 compared to 23,000 in 2010."[41] As figure 22 on page

62–63 above shows, infant baptisms in the LCMS have continued their troubling slide. Although

from 2012 to 2016 the numbers fluctuated between a high of 28,507 (in 2016) to a low of 21,087

(in 2017), the numbers in the subsequent three years declined each year, from19,605 in 2018, to

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[38] MacPherson seemingly confined his research on Hispanic ministry in the LCMS by searching for Hispanic services on the LCMS website's church locator (see "Generational Generosity," 94n33). He evidently did not contact the Center for Hispanic Studies at Concordia Seminary, which would have been an informative resource.

[39] MacPherson, "Generational Generosity," 95–96.

[40] MacPherson, "Generational Generosity," 96.

[41] MacPherson, "Generational Generosity," 96.

16,871 in 2019, and then to 12,649 in 2020. It seems certain that the numbers for 2020 were heavily influence by the COVID19 pandemic, but even with that in mind, the trend is discouraging. The decline in baptisms also would strongly imply an overall decline in birthrate. It seems very likely that LCMS couples of child-bearing age, like most non-Hispanic Whites in America, have experienced a declining TFR over the past six decades. But another factor that could result in declining child baptisms should be noted. The loss of about 500,000 members during the Seminex controversy[42] may have included a greater percentage of young adults still in their child-bearing years compared to older adults. Nevertheless, there is no doubt about the significance of the decline in child baptisms and it seems impossible for that to occur without declining births.

In the fourth section of his study, MacPherson explores seven reasons for declining LCMS births. The first two, delayed marriage and birth control, are central to the DTM and directly causative of birthrate decline.[43] Along with his comments on delayed marriage, MacPherson also mentions the rise in "mixed marriages," by which he means marriage to a non-LCMS person.[44] With regard to birth control, MacPherson offers a history of how confessional Lutherans went from viewing birth control as sin to accepting it as an *adiaphoron*.[45] While it seems fairly obvious that he views this as mistaken (he implies that it means the LCMS does not value children), he confines his specific judgment to this: "Suffice it to say, even if some forms of contraception may morally be used within marriage to limit family size or space children under certain circumstances, such decisions—while seemingly individual and private—have deprived

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[42] MacPherson quotes James Burkee on this fact, "Generational Generosity," 91.

[43] See pp. 13–24 above.

[44] MacPherson, "Generational Generosity," 97.

[45] MacPherson, "Generational Generosity," 97–99.

the synod—collectively and publicly—of the only stable source it has ever known for numerical growth."[46] To say childbirth is the only source of "numerical growth" the LCMS has ever known is to sweep away the mission and church planting of almost the entire first century of the Synod!

The third causative factor in the list is infertility. The inclusion of this factor is curious since he has no data to substantiate that infertility is a major reason for declining LCMS births. The one reason he does cite for including infertility is that it is an involuntary reason for childlessness, and he wants to be sensitive to those who suffer from it.[47]

One might wish that he had been equally sensitive to the feelings of those who experience divorce—MacPherson's fourth causative factor in birthrate decline. He offers a number of conjectures about divorces in the LCMS (e.g., he estimates that 25% of LCMS adults have experienced divorce or are currently divorced), but he says nothing about the heartbreak divorce involves for so many godly men and women who suffer an unwanted divorce. His conclusion that divorce caused membership decline is grounded in extrapolation and inductive reasoning, not data. And, oddly, there is no mention of birthrate in this section. The closest he comes to a correlation with birthrate and divorce is to link divorce to the absence of fathers in the pews.[48]

MacPherson cites student debt as the fifth cause for declining Synodical births. Following Allen Carlson, MacPherson argues that the Federal Student Loan program encourages borrowing to fund higher education, higher education delays marriage, and delayed marriage reduces a woman's child-bearing years.[49] While there may be some validity in this progression, this cause

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[46] MacPherson, "Generational Generosity," 98.

[47] MacPherson, "Generational Generosity," 99.

[48] MacPherson, "Generational Generosity," 99–100; see also his comments on p. 101, where he links divorce and doctrinal change.

[49] MacPherson, "Generational Generosity," 100, cites Allan C. Carlson, "'Anti-Dowry'? The Effects of Student Loan Debt on Marriage and Childbearing," *The Family in America* 19, no. 12 (2005), http://ticas.org/sites/default/files/pub_files/carlson_student_loans_final.pdf.

of synodical demographic decline is redundant with the first reason he cited: delayed marriage.

Doctrinal change is MacPherson's sixth cause for declining births. [50] Under this heading he includes only the topics of birth control and divorce. Thus, there is a measure of redundancy here also. In his discussion of birth control as the second causative factor, he already detailed the change in doctrine regarding birth control as a cause of declining births. He does dig more deeply here, acknowledging the 1981 CTCR report that cautions against intentional childlessness as well as similar cautions from the LCMS Sanctity of Human Life Committee as well as the work of Gene Edward Vieth, and the blog "Lutherans and Procreation."[51]

He then charges the Synod with also changing its consensus opinion on divorce, broadening the grounds by which divorce could be viewed as acceptable. But he concludes with restraint: "While it is beyond the scope of this report to determine whether the earlier consensus or the recent consensus has stronger biblical support (or whether some third position should be articulated), the practical ramifications remain clear: divorce occurs more frequently than it once did, and with a lower sense of disapproval than it once had."[52] Whether or not one considers a change in "consensus" regarding pastoral practice in the case of divorce to equal a change in doctrine concerning divorce, MacPherson's conclusion seems to have validity. The LCMS has changed the way it handles both birth control and divorce. It also seems certain that the widespread acceptance of birth control among Missouri Synod women has decreased the birth

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[50] Kieschnick, *Waking the Sleeping Giant*, 37–39, includes "doctrinal difficulties" as the major cause of LCMS "sleepyheadedness" in recent decades. The doctrinal difficulties Kieschnick has in mind are differences over the administration of the Sacrament, the service of women, and worship practices. He prefers to speak of LCMS decline in terms of non-productiveness and so he does not address changing LCMS demographics.

[51] MacPherson, "Generational Generosity," 100–101. See CTCR, *Human Sexuality: A Theological Perspective* (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1981); LCMS Sanctity of Human Life Committee, "Resolution 6-10: Guidance on Contraceptive Methods," n.d. http://www.lcms.org/pageaspx?pid=864; Gene Edward Veith, Jr. and Mary Moerbe, *Family Vocation: God's Calling in Marriage, Parenting, and Childhood* (Wheaton, IL: Crossways, 2012), 109–12.

[52] MacPherson, "Generational Generosity," 101.

rate for the Synod.

"Vocational confusion" is a seventh factor that MacPherson claims has caused declining birthrates in the LCMS. He quotes the Augustana and the Large Catechism regarding the great importance attached to the vocations of marriage and parenthood. Then he argues that, based on the six other causes he has already identified, the LCMS has done "less and less" to counter the societal trends that have led to "the deterioration of the American family in recent decades." His prescription is to emphasize the biblical teaching about the vocations of husbands and wives and fathers and mothers. "The Christian family, therefore, grows the church in two ways: natural increase and evangelistic outreach."[53]

MacPherson's arguments for causation of LCMS birthrates are not equally persuasive, but he nevertheless recognizes that the DT's downward pressure on childbirth will not be resolved by government or technology. While, as we will see, Hawley eschews theological argumentation, MacPherson gladly invokes theology to support his view. He suggests that, at root, both the problem of membership decline and the solution to it must be understood in spiritual terms. That is, "spiritual problems also manifest themselves in material ways."[54] Spiritual intervention—the Word of God—is required. So, as he offers suggestions toward demographic "rebuilding" in the LCMS the steps are doctrinal in nature. This is most apparent in the "three actions" that he recommends "for rebuilding the baptized and confirmed membership of the LCMS."[55]

The first action step is a revival of Lutheran teaching on the vocations of marriage and parenthood. He briefly mentions Deut. 6, Eph. 5 and 6, Col. 3, Titus 3, and 1 Peter 3, but goes into some detail describing a "Titus 2 model" of ministry which emphasizes mentoring—

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[53] MacPherson, "Generational Generosity," 102.

[54] MacPherson, "Generational Generosity," 87.

[55] MacPherson, "Generational Generosity," 102.

intergeneration mentoring in particular. He envisions a multi-generational process involving

grandparent, parents, and children. Along the way he urges congregations with early childhood

centers to understand that they are sending a mixed message to parents: "the church values

children, yes, but the church also empowers parents to forgo having more children." So the only

way to be biblically faithful in that case is to emphasize ministry to the parents, instructing them

that Scripture encourages them always to be open to having more children.[56] He recognizes that

this will be a challenging process because Christians are pulled in different directions: "How to

prioritize family life amid the demands of a career? How to identify one's talents and share them

in one's congregation?"[57]

These are commendable suggestions. Solid "mentoring" is really just an aspect of handing

down the faith, whether from parents to children, or other relationships. This is evidently not just

an academic exercise for MacPherson. He manages a website that encourages stronger family

vocations for Christian men and women (www.hausvater.org). As for handing *on* the faith to

others, MacPherson does mention the benefit of mentoring in one example of Hispanic

outreach.[58] The priority, however, clearly is placed on handing down the faith through Christian

families.

The second action step is complementary to the first. MacPherson advocates the restoration

of "intergenerational models of ministry." He sees some strengths in such things as youth groups

and children's Sunday school, but he finds it to be problematic overall that so many

congregational activities are segregated by age groups. He cites these disadvantages: (1)

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[56] MacPherson, "Generational Generosity," 103. MacPherson provides more detail on the Titus 2 Model together with a diagram and web address for www.hausvater.org in Appendix C, 109–10.

[57] MacPherson, "Generational Generosity," 104.

[58] MacPherson, "Generational Generosity," 103, see also 94.

"children learn from the words and deeds of peers, rather than from parents," (2) children acquire "the view that Christianity is childish," (3) and the Body of Christ is fractured into age segments. Instead,

> congregations must seek ways to integrate the generations and restore the Fourth Commandment vocations through which God has promised to deliver His blessings to young and old alike. Roller skating may be a fine youth activity on occasion, but other youth group events should be intergenerational, such as working alongside parents and grandparents to repaint the sanctuary.[59]

Once again, these ideas are not to be scorned. There is every reason for congregations "to consider how the life of the congregation and the life of the family can mutually support one another." But it is doubtful that churches with many "age-segregated" activities would disagree with that goal. Rather, their rationale for such activities would be a similar desire for church and family to be mutually supportive. MacPherson's ideas deserve respectful attention. Perhaps a bit more respect would be in order on his part for congregations that pursue a somewhat different direction in their approaches to ministry, rather than implying that they have somehow undermined "Fourth Commandment vocations."[60]

The third action step is economic, encouraging a mindset and actions that provide "support for young and growing families." His underlying concern here goes toward governmental and business policy decisions. He longs to see a family wage approach to compensation be re-established in the US. He bemoans the "legislation, court rulings, and cultural transformations occasioned by the feminist movement [that] called for an individualist, rather than familial, economic model." He then turns to church-specific actions. (1) He urges stewardship education for laity that involves tithing, optimizing income (e.g., to consider feasibility of only one parent

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[59] MacPherson, "Generational Generosity," 104.

[60] MacPherson, "Generational Generosity," 104.

working), expense prioritization, debt minimization, shared living (extended family households), all while trusting that God will provide. (2) LCEF and the Synod's colleges and universities should provide great financial aid to assist young people and avoid crushing school debts. (3) Congregations should help repay church worker student loans, emphasize workers over facilities, and enact a family wage approach to compensation.[61]

Debates over the validity of a family wage versus individual wages are theoretically intriguing, but the third action step seems to be only minimally practical. Stewardship education that challenges priorities is one thing but being overly prescriptive muddies the line between biblical mandates and matters of conscientious freedom. Synod's schools are non-profits and in many cases are struggling to survive. LCEF's focus is on congregation and church worker loans and savings accounts, so its ability to address the problem of student borrowing has limits also.

Given his focus, some questions are in order. Is it likely that congregations would close early childhood centers or preschools to encourage women not to work and enable the LCMS to increase the birthrates of its female members? Will denominational actions lead to fewer working women and more emphasis on frugality in the homes of member families? And what kind of an effect will one denomination have on encouraging a national policy of paying a living wage or providing other economic support for young families?

In summary then, the MacPherson materials are a mixed bag. He addresses a real problem—the numerical decline of the LCMS over five decades or more. His accompanying concerns are multi-faceted and sometimes more aptly targeted to the problem of decline than at other times. His solutions have some merit but seem frequently unrealistic and sometimes

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[61] MacPherson, "Generational Generosity," 104–5.

questionable. He provides a number of supportive resources including data tables and graphs.[62] The Synod can be grateful for his contribution.

The most obvious weakness in MacPherson's analysis of LCMS decline, however, is that he ignores the fact of continued population growth in the US. This is the case despite all the discouraging trends regarding the children and family patterns that MacPherson outlines. What makes the Synod's population dramatically unlike that of the country as a whole, however, is that we are no more diverse than we were in 1970. Moreover, this is not merely a demographic problem, it is also a theological or spiritual problem. Some of MacPherson's suggestions would likely benefit the membership picture of the LCMS if they were followed, but their entire benefit would be in terms of strengthening families to hand *down* the Gospel generationally. That should be a central priority for all Christians. Almost entirely absent, however, is any attention to handing *on* the Gospel outside of and beyond the Synod. That is a spiritual problem bar none.

The NT certainly gives some attention to "generational generosity"—handing down the saving Gospel and nurturing one's family in faith. In addition to some of the passages MacPherson cites, the baptism of entire households is a paramount example of handing down the faith in a family (Acts 16:15, 33; 1 Cor. 1:16; see also Acts 2:38). But, as important as it is for us to embrace generational generosity, far more of the New Testament emphasizes a generous Gospel outreach beyond family ties. Our Lord commands the Church to make disciples of the nations beyond us, not just our own children. Most of the book of Acts illustrates the Holy Spirit's pushing the Church away from home and family to the world beyond Jerusalem, to Judea, Samaria, and the end of the earth. Paul's epistles are not written to relatives, but to Gentile converts. It is discouraging, therefore, that a study of LCMS decline neglects this or, at best,

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[62] MacPherson, "Generational Generosity," 108–21.

gives only minimal attention to it. Even when mission beyond familial bonds is mentioned by

MacPherson—as is the case when he talks about Lutherans being better than Baptists at

evangelism, or when he mentions some growing Hispanic ministries[63]—he does so only to

suggest that these aren't the places where the LCMS should focus its energy. With regard to the

"changing face of America," there is nothing more than a half-hearted nod toward Hispanic

outreach in "some neighborhoods."[64]

And along the way, another demographic factor is also ignored. Today the unmarried

population of the United States is approaching 50% of all adults.[65] MacPherson's unswerving

focus on married couples and families fails to acknowledge the ministry needs of the unmarried.

Do single Christians have a vocation? Should Christian outreach ignore the unmarried, the

divorced, single young people both straight and gay who are surrounded by a world that

unceasingly tells them to act out sexually against the Spirit's direction? Are those who dwell

alone to be less of a priority for ministry since they will not—in many cases—offer a

demographic dividend? How does a congregation attempt to minister to the unmarried in an

appropriate way? MacPherson offers no encouragement to the LCMS to address such matters.

And it would be hard for an unmarried believer to find any counsel or encouragement in

MacPherson's study other than that they should get married and have kids.

George Hawley

Like MacPherson, George Hawley encourages actions to curb and reverse membership

decline—from encouraging early marriage and increased fertility to the recognition that religious

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[63] MacPherson, "Generational Generosity, 89–90 and 94–95."

[64] MacPherson, "Generational Generosity," 94.

[65] See above, 24.

affiliation is itself one of the strongest encouragements for fertility. Hawley's approach, however, is strictly sociological and not theological—or at least not intentionally theological. His research into LCMS demographics was published online in two articles in a December 2016 special issue of *Journal of Lutheran Mission*: "A District-Level Examination of Demographic Trends and Membership Trends within LCMS Districts" ("District-Level Trends" herein) and "The LCMS in the Face of Demographic and Social Change: A Social Science Perspective" ("LCMS—Demographic and Social Change" herein).[66] In addition, Hawley's 2017 book, *Demography, Culture, and the Decline of America's Christian Denominations* (*Demography, Culture, Decline* herein), is a far more expansive look at the relationship between the demographic transition and religious affiliation in the US. It devotes a subsection of chapter six to LCMS membership trends.[67]

LCMS—Demographic and Social Change

The *Journal of Lutheran Mission* editors placed "District-Level Trends" before "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change" in the special edition of 2016. I am reversing the order here for three reasons. First, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change," is much longer and more extensive. Second, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change" covers a wider period, reporting on membership between the years 1970 to 2010, while "District-Level Trends" deals only with 2000 and 2013. Third, In "District-Level Trends," Hawley refers the reader to "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change" as a "much longer report" and as a "predecessor" to "District-Level Trends."

Both pieces are in response to membership decline in the Synod. In both Hawley focuses

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[66] See 155–56, n6 above.

[67] Hawley, *Demography, Culture, Decline,* 96–101.

on low fertility as the central cause for LCMS decline. He also emphasizes the significance of the widespread demographic decline of the non-Hispanic *White* population in the US.

"LCMS—Demographic and Social Change" has four major sections: (1) Migration, Marriage and Birthrates (pages 8–28); (2) Religious Change in the US (pages 28–37); (3) A Statistical Portrait of the LCMS (pages 37–73); and (4) Natalist Policies (pages 74–84).

In the Abstract Hawley describes the scope of the report, beginning with comments on declining fertility and its impact on the "natural growth" of the church by childbirth. He notes that the decline of the LCMS reflects the declining non-Hispanic White population of the US and, for that matter, birthrate decline throughout the world. "Below-replacement-rate fertility is a major demographic trend throughout much of the world. It is therefore not surprising that the LCMS similarly suffers from relatively low birthrates and as a result faces a shrinking population." He adds that governments that have tried to increase fertility have had minimal success and so warns that, "we must acknowledge that a religious denomination's ability to boost the fertility of its members is limited." Yet, "marginal improvements" are possible where "earlier marriages and larger families" are encouraged.[68]

Next, Hawley adds an important paragraph pointing to the importance of outreach growth.

While natural growth through large families is a critical source of long-term church stability, outreach to non-church members is also important. This study therefore also examines the relevant research on church marketing techniques in order to provide guidance for attracting new members. This study is not pushing the LCMS to embrace a market based model of growth and evangelism. But it does provide an overview of what the research tells us about effective church growth.[69]

Third, Hawley promises a discussion of the reasons for declining religious affiliation and observance in the US. He notes that the problem is universal and not just a dilemma for the

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[68] Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change," 7.

[69] Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change," 7.

LCMS. Fourth, he promises some recommendations "regarding policies the LCMS leadership should consider as they plan for the future.[70]

In "Section 1: Migration, Marriage, and Birthrates," he introduces the 2DT (his acronym is SDT), explaining its result in lower TFRs throughout the developed world and in much of the rest of the world. He adds the important caveat that TFRs are somewhat inexact because many women may postpone births until their later child-bearing years. However,

> Deciding to defer giving birth to her first child until a later age typically indicates that a woman will have fewer children than a woman who has her first child at an earlier age. Nonetheless, while the median age at childbirth is rising, there is a serious downward distortion on measured fertility rates.[71]

The United States, he notes, is somewhere in the middle group of countries when it comes to fertility, with a TFR close to replacement level, but this is attributable to immigration. "Among non-Hispanic Whites in the United States—the racial/ethnic category that makes up 95% of the LCMS's membership—the total fertility rate was 1.8 as of 2010, which is below the replacement rate."[72]

He then discusses a complementary trend: later marriage and postponed child-bearing, noting that the good news in those realities is decreasing births to teens. Although postponing child-bearing does not mean women want to avoid motherhood, it does increase the likelihood of infertility and thus tends to diminish the number of children a woman will have.

> Marrying early and having a large family are important paths for a religious denomination to ensure a stable population, but early family formation has additional benefits, as well. The connection between marriage, parenthood, and religiosity is

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[70] Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change," 7–8.

[71] Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change," 9.

[72] Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change," 9.

well established. This effect is particularly pronounced for men, who are more likely to return to religion upon getting married or becoming a father.[73]

He also notes that, compared to unmarried young adults, couples that marry earlier in life are much more likely to stay involved in church life.[74]

Continuing his report to Synod, Hawley provides a subsection that lays out the consequences of low fertility to society and then explains the DTM. In his discussion of the demographic transition, he distinguishes the first and second DTs.[75] This section does not require extensive review because it is focused on matters that have been discussed earlier in Chapter One of this dissertation.[76] However, Hawley does offer several noteworthy emphases.

He believes that the decline in marriage, especially among lower economic groups in the US, is the result of taking marriage "too seriously": "In many cases, their expectations regarding the prerequisites of marriage are unrealistic and will never be met."[77] Failing to find the perfect spouse or being unable to afford the dream wedding, many women instead settle for child-bearing outside that impossibly idealized marriage.[78]

He mentions the work of Kevin McQuillian on how a religion might lead to higher fertility among its adherents. McQuillian posits three elements that are required for that effect. One, the religion must have a firm position that rejects behavior such as contraception or abortion that inhibits fertility. Two, the religion must communicate those teachings in an authoritative way

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[73] Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change," 10. He cites Arland Thornton, William G. Axinn, and Daniel H. Hill, "Reciprocal Effects of Religiosity, Cohabitation, and Marriage," *American Journal of Sociology* 98 (1992): 628–51, and John Wilson and Darren E. Sherkat, "Returning to the Fold," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 33, no. 2 (1994): 148–61.

[74] Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change," 10.

[75] Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change," 11–21.

[76] See pp. 12–40 above.

[77] Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change," 19.

[78] Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change," 20.

that encourages compliance. Three, the adherents of the religion must have sufficient loyalty to it so that they willingly comply with its dictates.[79] Left unstated are the obvious questions about whether the LCMS meets those requirements.

In the following subsection he connects the three facts of "Home Affordability, Marriage, and Fertility." He argues that when homes are more affordable, both marriage and fertility increase.[80] Then he turns to "Rural Population Loss and Its Implications for the LCMS." He notes that "LCMS adherents are much more likely to live in rural areas than are other Americans." And, since rural America is declining and Americans continue the process of urbanization, that decline affects the LCMS more than other populations. "LCMS adherents are disproportionately found in counties experiencing population loss." He notes, almost in passing, that as LCMS young people leave rural communities they often move to urban areas where there no "strong LCMS presence."[81] Why the LCMS has minimal presence in urban centers is unexplored.

Hawley then quickly mentions "Other Economic Issues" that affect marriage and fertility, beyond home affordability and urbanization.[82] Economic uncertainty is first cited. Ample data shows that birthrates decline during periods of unemployment. In turn, he adds the cost of divorce. More expensive divorce means fewer divorces. Tax structures may either encourage or discourage marriage. Declining union membership strongly correlates with a decline in marriage for the working classes. General economic inequality does the same. On the other end of the spectrum the educated middle and upper classes are likely to have fewer children because

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[79] Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change," 21. See Kevin McQuillian, "When Does Religion Influence Fertility?" *Population and Development Review* 30, no. 1 (2004): 25–56.

[80] Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change," 21–23.

[81] Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change," 24.

[82] Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change," 24–27.

marriage and childbirth are postponed for the sake of education and then, oftentimes, during the period of early employment when school loans are being repaid.[83]

As he draws the section to a close, he notes that the assumption that most women want fewer children today is questionable. Rather, "people today would like to have more children than is presently the case, and would have them if certain barriers were removed." As a result, desired fertility remains higher than achieved fertility. Then he concludes:

> Considering the issue of fertility rates and population decline in a national and even a global context should simultaneously hearten and distress the LCMS. On the one hand, this is not a problem unique to the LCMS. The LCMS in particular has not done anything "wrong" to cause its members to have below replacement rate fertility. This is a worldwide trend. That said, the fact that these trends are particularly pronounced for communities where the LCMS has had traditional strength is certainly discouraging. The fact that national governments, with all of their immense resources, have not been able to definitively resolve these concerns is also concerning. Despite the clear challenges, it is in the interest of the LCMS—and other denominations facing similar concerns—to make strides to increase membership through natural growth, even if it can only lead to marginal improvement.[84]

Hawley's second major section is "Religious Change in the United States." Here his purpose is to explore ways "to bring in new members."[85] However, he first looks at declining religiosity in the US. He observes that levels of church affiliation have waxed and waned in American history before beginning the current slide toward disaffiliation that began in the 1990s. He shares the projection that the decline of mainline Protestantism will continue, evangelicalism will retain it raw numbers but decline as a percentage, and Hispanic Catholics and unchurched secularists will grow as percentages of the population.[86] But predicting future religious affiliation

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[83] Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change," 24–27.

[84] Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change," 27.

[85] Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change," 28.

[86] Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change," 29; citing Vegard Skirbekk, Eric Kaufman, and Anne Goujon, "Secularism, Fundamentalism, or Catholicism? The Religious Composition of the United States to 2043," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 49, no. 2 (2010): 293–310.

is a challenging proposition because people who remain religious often switch denominations and others who are raised religious forsake not only their own denomination but also any religious affiliation. Of those who leave the church they were raised in, about 40% do so not because they want to leave that church body, but because they have moved to a place where their childhood denomination is not present. That leads to his first suggestion for increasing membership: "Keeping such people in the fold will therefore require establishing convenient churches in their new communities, or dissuading them from moving in the first place."[87] But, as he earlier noted, population movement is a particular problem for the LCMS since the movement of young LCMS members is frequently from rural or smaller communities to major metropolitan areas, where there are often few LCMS churches.[88]

Hawley then discusses studies that provide theories for the growth and decline of churches. He mentions the frequent assumption, based on mainline decline, that churches decline because of liberal theology. He questions the validity of that assumption, but says that without question churches that have changed their teaching to fit contemporary culture's views are *not* gaining members as a result. In keeping with his thesis overall, he endorses the view of scholars whose research indicates that the relative health of conservative evangelicalism compared to liberal Protestantism is due more to a higher birthrate than to people leaving their church homes for another church. He also notes the suggestion that churches that demand more of their members have outpaced churches with minimal expectations.[89]

It is one thing to leave a church for another church, but a greater concern is those who

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[87] Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change," 30.

[88] Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change," 30.

[89] Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change," 31; Hawley is citing Michael Hout, Andrew Greeley, and Melissa Wilde, "The Demographic Imperative in Religious Change in the United States," *The American Journal of Sociology* 67, no. 2 (2001): 468–500.

leave the Christian church entirely. Hawley's view of this phenomenon identifies a number of

potential causes. One suggestion is that Americans who were turned off by such groups as the

Moral Majority left Christianity entirely. Another similar view is that as Christian churches

became the most vocal opponents of same sex marriage and other sexual causes, proponents of

these causes rejected Christianity and not just particular churches. Next up he mentions Putnam's

research that Americans in general are increasingly disaffiliating from all group activities. He

then mentions that greater internet usage correlates with decreasing church attendance. Studies

by Christian entities, such as the Barna Group and Focus on the Family, suggest that declining

church involvement (drops in attendance at worship, Bible study, voluntary activities) tracks

with declines in affiliation, especially when parents involve their kids less often. Lastly he

mentions Kinnaman's argument that youth departures fall into three general categories (Nomads,

Exiles, and Prodigals) with Nomads more likely to return some day.[90]

Returning to the intersection of marriage and fertility with religion that he had touched on

earlier, Hawley observes that the unmarried are far less likely to be religiously affiliated or

religiously active than are those who are married. Moreover, while unmarried childbearing has

increased among older women, fertility still tends to be coupled with marriage and married

couples with children are more likely to be religious than are the childless.[91]

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[90] Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change," 31–33. In this subsection Hawley cites Michael Hout and Claude S. Fischer, "Why More Americans Have No Religious Preference: Politics and Generations," *American Sociological Review* 67, no. 2 (2002): 165–90; Nicholas Vargas, "Retrospective Accounts of Religious Disaffiliation in the United States: Stressors, Skepticism, and Political Factors," *Sociology of Religion* 73, no. 2 (2012): 200–223; Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000); Christian Smith, *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Young Adults* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Allen B. Downey, "Religious Affiliation, Education and Internet Use, *arXiv:1403.5534* (March 2014); "Barna Study of Religious Change Since 1991 Shows Significant Changes by Faith Group," *Barna Group*, August 4, 2011, https://www.barna.org; "Millennial Faith Participation and Retention," *Focus on the Family*, August 2013, http://www.focusonthefamily.com; and David Kinnaman and Aly Hawkins, Y*ou Lost Me: Why Young Christians are Leaving Church . . . and Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011).

[91] Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change," 33.

In his subsection, "Congregations and Young Adults," Hawley summarizes Robert Wuthnow's study of congregations with youthful membership. Wuthnow's research garnered both expected and unexpected results. More recently established congregations and mega churches tend to be more youthful. But smaller congregations were often more successful at developing firm attachments with youth. Also, small groups were equally effective regardless of congregational size. More surprisingly, contemporary worship music and styles are less of an appeal to young adults than to middle-aged adults. Just as noteworthy is the fact that parents are more influential than peers in continued religious involvement among young adults.[92]

The final topic Hawley touches on in section 2 is marketing. His approach is oddly diffident, as if he worries that such a topic will be off limits.

> Churches may bristle at marketing and other such "worldly" pursuits, and this chapter is not arguing that churches should fundamentally change their teachings and liturgy simply to put bodies into pews, nor is it urging the LCMS to adopt the stance of market-oriented "mega churches"—though it is not arguing against such a strategy, either. Regardless of one's position on church marketing, being good stewards of church resources surely entails knowing which outreach methods are typically useful for growing a church, and which generally pay few dividends.[93]

He then says that "existing research" finds that "phone calls to visitors and home visits" are effective but that adopting a vigorous marketing focus (treating people like customers) was far more effective at bringing in visitors than it was at leading people to become members. But he cites another study that showed that a positive "brand" (a church having a strong reputation in a community) is effective.[94]

In summary, Hawley reminds us that the downward trend in Christian affiliation in the US is reality, even though disaffiliation does not equal denial of faith in God. He dismisses as

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[92] Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change," 33–35.

[93] Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change," 35.

[94] Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change," 35–36

"especially weak" the view that churches should adopt the increasingly secular trends of Western society to grow, but he also notes that the LCMS shows that traditional teaching does not guarantee growth. "The strongest explanation for church growth and decline remains demographic. Churches with high birth rates tend to grow, or at least remain stable. Churches characterized by members with small families do not." Marriage and parenthood are "critical for the survival of a church," but only when children remain in the church as they become adults. In short, "there is not one thing that a congregation can pursue that is a universal remedy."[95]

Section 3 of Hawley's "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change" is "A Statistical Portrait of the LCMS." Based on data from ARDA between 1971 and 2010, the central statistic is a drop of about half a million LCMS adherents—from about 2.8 million in 1971 to less than 2.3 million in 2010.[96] Looking first at the size of the LCMS in each individual state, ARDA indicates that the LCMS exceeds 2% of the population in only nine states with the strongest LCMS populations in the Midwest. The data presented goes beyond the state to the county level, however, which indicates that there are "a fairly large number of LCMS adherents" in varied counties throughout various regions (and not only in the Midwest).[97]

The LCMS statistical portrait follows the Census Bureau's nine regions: (1) New England (Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut), (2) Mid-Atlantic (New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania), (3) East North Central (Michigan, Wisconsin, Ohio,

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[95] Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change," 37.

[96] Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change," 38.

[97] Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change," 39. The data Hawley assembles is mirrored by a statistical report based on *Lutheran Annual* data covering the years 1970–2011: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, Rosters and Statistics, *Forty Years of Statistics: Based on Lutheran Annual data for years 1970-2011* (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, [March 25] 2013).

Indiana, Illinois), (4) West North Central (Minnesota,[98] North Dakota, South Dakota, Iowa, Missouri, Nebraska, Kansas), (5) Atlantic South (Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, West Virginia, North Caroline, South Carolina, Florida, Georgia), (6) East South Central (Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi), (7) West South Central (Arkansas, Oklahoma, Louisiana, Texas), (8) Mountain (Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, Nevada, New Mexico, Arizona), and (9) Pacific (Washington, Oregon, California, Alaska, Hawaii).[99]

The LCMS has congregations in about 42% of the counties of the six New England (NEng) states. There are less than 1000 adherents in Maine and Vermont combined, and about 1000 in Rhode Island. All the New England states except Vermont experienced heavy membership losses during the decade from 1970 to 1980 because of the Synod controversy. The two states that have the largest number of adherents, Massachusetts and Connecticut, continued to decline since that time. The LCMS has fewer than 18,000 adherents in the region, a decline of more than half. [100]

The picture is no better for the Mid-Atlantic (MAtl) region, despite LCMS congregations in about two-thirds of all the region's counties. New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania all experienced steady decline in LCMS adherents from 1970 to 2010. Total LCMS membership was a little over 100,000 in the region in 2010, about half of its membership in 1970.[101]

The East North Central (ENC) region's five states all border the Great Lakes. This has

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[98] Minnesota is included in the Census Bureau's West North Central region. Hawley appears to have inadvertently omitted Minnesota from his initial analysis, however, since he does not report on that state. See below, page 97 for data on Minnesota from *Forty Years of Statistics*.

[99] Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change," 39–44.

[100] Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change," 40. The New England region LCMS congregations are all in the New England District of the LCMS. All percentages and membership figures are round numbers.

[101] The District make-up of the Mid-Atlantic region is not straightforward. The greater metropolitan area of New York is in the Atlantic District with the exception of a few English District congregations. (English and the SELC are non-geographical in make-up). The rest of the LCMS New York and Pennsylvania congregations comprise the Eastern District LCMS, although again there are English and also SELC congregations scattered throughout. New Jersey congregations are in the New Jersey District, except for a few English and SELC congregations.

included what were, in the past, the two largest concentrations of LCMS members: the metropolitan areas of Chicago and Detroit.[102] While the two North Central regions, East North Central and West North Central, are the traditional heartland of the LCMS, "even in this [the East North Central] region, we see that the LCMS is experiencing major decline." Indeed, in four of the five states the LCMS lost members decade by decade from 1970 to 2010.[103] Only Indiana experienced a slight rise during one of the decades (from 1990 to 2000). Illinois experienced the steepest losses, shrinking by more than 100,000 members in the four decades. Michigan lost over 60,000 members (over 20%), Wisconsin lost about 40,000 (over 15%, with most losses in the South Wisconsin district), Ohio about 30,000 (30%), and Indiana about 10,000 (about 8%) in the four decades for a total regional loss of almost a quarter of a million members.[104]

The story of decline continues into the West North Central (WNC) region, but not on the same level as in the East North Central. Each of the six Great Plains states experienced at least one decade of growth since 1970, except for South Dakota, which declined throughout the period. Only Nebraska showed a net gain over the 40 years, but with a dramatic rise between 1990 and 2000 followed by a steep fall from 2000 to 2010.[105] In this instance, however, Hawley's portrayal of ARDA data seems to exaggerate changes and not reflect the Synod's own data from *Forty Years of Statistics,* which indicates only a modest rise from 1990 to 2000 and a modest fall

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[102] See below "Population Migration and the LCMS—Flight from Urban America," 238–43.

[103] The Ohio District includes some congregations from outside the state in West Virginia and Kentucky. English and SELC congregations are also present in all five of the East North Central states. Membership figures are round numbers.

[104] Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change," 41. The five states of this region include eight LCMS districts: Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, North Wisconsin and South Wisconsin, Northern, Central, and South Illinois. All percentages and membership figures are round numbers.

[105] Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change," 41–42. The LCMS has seven districts in the six states Hawley considers.

from 2000 to 2010.[106] It should also be noted that Hawley provides data for only six of the seven

states in the West North Central census region. Data for Minnesota is missing, no doubt

inadvertently. The LCMS has two districts in the state. According to LCMS data, the Minnesota

South District experienced a minor decline over the 41 years from 1970 to 2011 while the

Minnesota North District experienced a steady and more significant decline.[107] Thus, for the

entire region the losses were substantial: while Nebraska gained 2000 members (+ 2%), Kansas

lost 2000 (-3%), South Dakota lost 4000 (-11%), North Dakota lost 5000 (-18%), Missouri lost

11,000 (-7%), Iowa lost 22,000 (-17%), and Minnesota lost 40,000 (-18%).[108]

LCMS statistics for the South Atlantic (SAtl) region are more positive. Hawley describes

the region as "impressively resilient." Between 1970 and 2010, six of its eight states grew in

LCMS membership.[109] Only Maryland and West Virginia declined (Maryland lost about 10,000

of the 30,000 members, the largest loss in the region). West Virginia, with fewer LCMS

members than any other state, declined from about 500 to a little over 100. Delaware also has

minimal LCMS presence, but several hundred members were added in that overall period. South

Carolina membership grew by about 1000 (nearly 50%). Virginia added over 5000 (also about

50%). Florida added about 50%, or 20,000 members. Georgia added about 30%, around 2500

members. And North Carolina added about 50% or 7000 souls. However, only Georgia and

North Carolina added members during the final decade of the period, from 2000 to 2010. Hawley

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[106] LCMS, *Forty Years of Statistics,* B-6. The apparent difference is possibly because Hawley looks only at ten year intervals, while *Forty Years of Statistics* uses two year intervals.

[107] LCMS, *Forty Years of Statistics,* B-6, B-10. Minnesota, Missouri, and Nebraska all have some non-geographic district congregations.

[108] Estimates based on Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change," 41, except for Minnesota, based on *Forty Years of Statistics,* B-6 and B-10. All percentages and membership figures are round numbers.

[109] Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change," 42. The District of Columbia is included in the South Atlantic division by the USCB. Since the LCMS has no congregations in DC, Hawley ignores it.

attributes the region's growth to migration from other states.[110]

The East South Central (ESC) region has four states and minimal LCMS presence. Tennessee and Kentucky had numeric gains over the 40-year period, while Alabama and Mississippi declined in membership from 1970–2010. Alabama's loss was the largest by percentage, over 20% (around 3,000 members) while Mississippi lost fewer than 10% (around 300). Both Tennessee and Kentucky gained significantly from 1970 through 2000, but then experienced steep declines in the final decade. Overall, Tennessee grew by about 40% (4000 members) and Kentucky by 20% (1000 members).[111]

The West South Central (WSC) census region includes Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, and Texas. The LCMS in Oklahoma declined slightly over the four decades by about 5% or 1000 members.[112] Louisiana experienced ongoing decline throughout the four decades of over 10,000 baptized members (40%). Arkansas and Texas both saw growth in the four decades: in Arkansas about 2000 members (20%) and in Texas over 20,000 members (over 20%) were added.[113]

The Mountain West (MtW) region is comprised by eight states that essentially follow the Rockies from Canada to Mexico.[114] Hawley points out that while the LCMS percentage of the

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[110] Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change," 42. Florida, Georgia, and Virginia have some non-geographic district congregations. All percentages and membership figures are round numbers.

[111] Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change," 42–43. LCMS churches in Tennessee and Kentucky are for the most part in the LCMS Mid-South District while those in Alabama and Mississippi are in the Southern District. All percentages and membership figures are round numbers.

[112] This is another example of decadal reporting (with changing increments of membership) inviting misunderstandings. Hawley's graph on p. 43 shows a steep drop from 1970 to 1980, an enormous rise from 1980 to 1990, a slight drop for 1990 to 2000, and then a huge drop from 2000 to 2010. The graph in *Forty Years of Statistics*, page is a much better portrayal showing modest movement in baptized members through the period.

[113] Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change," 43. Oklahoma and Texas are both LCMS Districts. Arkansas is in the Mid-South District. Louisiana is in the Southern District. All percentages and membership figures are round numbers.

[114] The LCMS has six geographic districts in the five states of the Pacific census region: the Montana District, the Northwest District (which includes LCMS congregations in Idaho), the Wyoming District, the California-Nevada-Hawaii District (CNH, which includes many Nevada congregations), the Rocky Mountain District (which

overall population is highest in northern states (Montana and Wyoming), the LCMS is larger

numerically in the states of Colorado and Arizona. The LCMS declined in membership in four of

the eight states, but its growth in the other four, and especially in Arizona, led to a net increase of

about 7000 members regionally (about 6%). Arizona doubled from about 13,000 to 26,000

members. Colorado declined by over 12% (6000). The other declining states were Idaho (minus

2000 members or 16%), New Mexico (down 1000, 16%), and Montana (down 1000, 7%). This

was offset by growth in Wyoming (from just under 9000 members to just over it), Utah (just

under 4000 to just over it), and Nevada (from about 4400 to about 7800 or 77%!).[115] As

impressive as the growth percentages for Arizona and Nevada, LCMS growth did not equal the

percentage of overall population growth. Arizona's state population nearly quadrupled in the

four decades from 1970 to 2010 and Nevada's state population increased *fivefold*.[116]

> The final region surveyed is the Pacific where the picture for the LCMS is very grim.[117]

> When we look at the trend over the last four decades, we see that throughout this region, the LCMS population is on the decline. In both Washington and Oregon, the number of LCMS adherents dropped by more than 12,000 people over this period. In California, that number was nearly 67,000 people.[118]

Hawley attributes the decline mostly to out-migration and suggests it helps explain the LCMS

growth in Arizona—a likely suggestion. That the three states increased in population during the

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includes Colorado, New Mexico, some Utah congregations, and some northern Arizona congregations), and the Pacific Southwest District (which includes some congregations in Utah, and many Arizona congregations). There are also English District congregations in Arizona, and Utah.

[115] Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change," 44.

[116] USCB, "Historical Population Change Data," (April 26, 2021), https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/dec/popchange-data-text.html.

[117] The LCMS has three geographic districts in the five states of the Pacific census region: the Northwest District (covering Washington, Oregon, and Alaska, as well as Idaho, which is in the Rocky Mountain census region), the California-Nevada-Hawaii District (CNH, covering northern California and Nevada, with Hawaii), and the Pacific Southwest District (southern California and Nevada). California has some English District churches.

[118] Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change," 44–45.

period he attributes mostly to foreign immigration, which is also likely, adding that few of the

immigrants would be Lutherans. While that may well be the case, there is no reference to the fact

that immigrants are often fertile soil for evangelization. He briefly comments on Alaska, where

the LCMS did grow in members (from about 2,000 to over 3,500) but omits any mention of

Hawaii, where the LCMS declined from about 2,300 members to 1,500 by 2010.[119]

As the third section continues, Hawley notes that the percentage of the LCMS living in

rural areas is double that of the US population as a whole. As of 2010 the LCMS was about 14%

rural, about 14% micropolitan (communities between 10,000 and 50,000) and the remainder

metropolitan. If one includes LCMS micropolitan percentages from that period with rural, LCMS

members are twice as likely to live in small cities than the rest of America.[120]

Moving on Hawley looks at "Correlates of a Large LCMS Population" in US counties. One

of the correlates pertains to US state geography. He identifies thirteen states as LCMS "core

states" because LCMS adherents in those states exceed one percent of the population.[121] He also

offers a correlation table based on those core states (fig. 25) that considers a number of variables.

One variable, however, stands out. The correlation of the percentage of people from a German

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[119] Pew Research Center, "The Religious Affiliation of US Immigrants: Majority Christian, Rising Share of Other Faiths," (May 17, 2013), https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2013/05/17/the-religious-affiliation-of-us-immigrants/. Wesley Grandberg-Michaelson, "What if US Christianity Needs More Immigrants?" *Sojourners* (October 9, 2013), https://sojo.net/articles/what-if-us-christianity-needs-more-immigrants. Soong-Chan Rah, *The Next Evangelicalism: Freeing the Church from Western Cultural Captivity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009). This is not to say that the evangelization of immigrants is an easy matter since the US is a vibrant religious marketplace where immigrants can most often find representatives of the religions from their homelands. See, e.g., Russell Jeung and Jonathan Calvillo, "Race, Immigration, Ethnicity, and Religion in America," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia* (Online), February 27, 2017, https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.013.487.

[120] Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change, 45; see USCB, "Micropolitan America," (July 2019), https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/visualizations/2019/demo/micropolitan-america.pdf. (It is also noteworthy that the USCB defines metropolitan to include all "counties with strong commuting ties" to an urban center.) Hawley notes that while the LCMS has a presence in metropolitan areas of over 50,000 residents, "LCMS adherents are more than twice as likely to live in rural areas compared to the rest of the US population" (p. 45).

[121] Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change," 46. The "core states" of the LCMS are thirteen states where LCMS adherents exceed one percent of the population; "All counties" includes the entire nation.

background in a county with LCMS adherents far exceeds any other factor that Hawley employs. "This demonstrates the remarkable degree to which the LCMS remains the church of a particular ethnic group," he says, and then concludes that "the LCMS has not just had trouble attracting non-White adherents, it has trouble attracting adherents from other White ethnic groups."[122]

Variables Correlated with LCMS Adherents, County Level, in States with Substantial LCMS Presence and Nationwide		
	Counties in LCMS Core States	All Counties
	Correlation Coeffieent	Correlation Coefficient
% German	0.51	0.57
% Employed in Agriculture	0.28	0.19
Median Age	0.27	0.21
Lost Population, 2000-2009	0.25	0.21
% Rural	0.21	0.08
% Voted McCain 2008	0.20	0.03
% Iriish American	-0.25	-0.15
% Southern European	-0.27	-0.13
% Unemployed 2009	-0.27	-0.24
% English American	-0.29	-0.24

Figure 25. Table of LCMS adherent correlation with variables (George Hawley).[123]

Next Hawley shows that the LCMS increased its percentage of the population in 28% (516) of all counties and decreased its population share in the other 72% (1337). The county-level picture for total numerical increase is more encouraging. The LCMS increased its total membership in about 43% (798) of all counties. Unfortunately, in the other 57% of counties

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[122] Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change," 46.

[123] Figure from Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change," 46. The "core states" of the LCMS are thirteen states where LCMS adherents exceed one percent of the population; "All counties" includes the entire nation.

(1053), where the LCMS declined in adherents, the average loss per county was more than twice

as high as the average gain per county where the LCMS increased numerically.[124]

With regard to his comparison of counties with LCMS gains or losses, Hawley notes only

one characteristic: "We see that counties where the LCMS is on the decline are slightly more

Hispanic, but otherwise, most of these other variables would be in the margin of error."[125]

Commenting further on the matter of Hispanics and the LCMS, he adds this:

> Looking at the coefficients for the largest racial and ethnic minority groups in
> America, we do not see many statistically significant or substantively important
> effects. It is interesting to note, however, that while it was not a substantively
> important variable, the coefficient for the percent Hispanic at the county level was
> statistically significant and *positive*. As Hispanics are such a small percentage of the
> LCMS population, we should probably not infer that Hispanics themselves are
> necessarily members of LCMS congregations. It does indicate, however, that larger
> LCMS populations tend to be found in counties that also have a Hispanic presence.
> We see no relationship between the LCMS population and the size of the black or
> Asian population.[126]

Thus, Hawley acknowledges that LCMS growth tends to be in counties with more Hispanics, yet

he immediately *assumes* that Hispanics are not part of that growth.

Of far greater interest to him is the high correlation of LCMS membership and counties

with people having German roots. This, he says, probably means that the LCMS is not racially

discriminating against Blacks and Hispanics and Asians, since LCMS folks are also not likely to

be from an Italian, Irish, or English heritage. Rather, the LCMS is just a church that makes

disciples by making babies, which "underscores both the need for the LCMS to improve its

outreach to other communities, and the importance of increasing the birthrates of its current

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[124] Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change," 46–47.

[125] Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change," 46.

[126] Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change," 48.

membership."[127] But the emphasis on birthrates is a problem since the LCMS population is an older one: "On average and controlling for all other variables, the older the population, the greater the percentage of the population that identifies with the LCMS."[128]

Hawley concludes this section of his article with an in-depth look at the counties where the LCMS has grown.[129] In an initial set of tables he shows data for the counties where the LCMS grew both numerically and as a percentage of the county population. A total of 450 counties in the US fit both criteria. It is striking that 223 of those counties had no LCMS adherents in 1970.[130] Figure 26 provides a table that summarizes Hawley's regional charts, indicating the LCMS "success stories" across the US. Each region has at least some such successes.

Region	Counties w Growth	Counties w/o LCMS Members in 1970	Mean LCMS Presence/County
New England (NEng)	7	4	173
Mid-Atlantic (MAtl)	16	7	402
East North Central (ENC)	79	21	1438
West North Central (WNC)	114	30	866
South Atlantic (SAtl)	75	57	395
East South Central (ESC)	48	30	251
West South Central (WSC)	68	36	249
Mountain West (MtW)	37	35	207
Pacific (Pac)	6	3	214

Figure 26. Counties with LCMS growth, numerically and as a percentage.[131]

The second column in figure 26 shows the number of counties in the respective region

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[127] Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change," 48. Another possible assumption from this is that the LCMS emphasizes its historical ethnicity to the detriment of missions.

[128] Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change," 49. He further confirms the accuracy of the relationships between aging and Germanic populations with the LCMS by looking at GSS data. See pages 49–50.

[129] Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change," 50–73. He again relies on data from ARDA.

[130] Hawley's tables for counties where the LCMS grew numerically and as a percentage of the population are on pp. 50–61 in "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change."

[131] Author's table based on data from Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change," 50–61.

where LCMS presence increased. The third column indicates how many of those counties had zero LCMS presence in 1970. The final column shows the average number of LCMS individuals in each respective county. The figure reveals, first, that the obvious LCMS stronghold is in the ENC region, with the WNC not far behind, given the large numbers of LCMS adherents in these counties and the number of counties in each region where the LCMS has grown. It is likely that the growing counties include locations where the LCMS has planted churches to follow population movements, since over one-quarter of the counties in each region had *no* LCMS members in 1970. Yet, as much as we should give thanks for such growth in these two regions, it is important to recall that, overall, the LCMS experienced a sharp, 250,000 member decline in the ENC region and a substantial loss also in the WNC of 82,000 souls.[132]

The three regions where the LCMS has experienced the highest overall loss by percentage are NEng, MAtl, and Pac (losing about half the LCMS membership in each or 216,000 souls combined).[133] Hawley earlier commented on the secularism of NEng and the steep decline early in the forty years for the MAtl, but seems unaware that these regions lost many congregations and members to the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Church (which merged with the ELCA) during the 1970s theological controversy. That would also be a factor in Pac's losses. One may also wonder, given the low number of counties with zero LCMS adherents, whether few churches have been planted in these three regions.[134]

The four regions—the SAtl, ESC, WSC, and MtW—where the LCMS has grown overall are all marked by one obvious county-level trait. An extremely high percentage of their growth counties were counties without any LCMS adherents in 1970. The four regions together had a

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[132] See pp. 96–97 above.

[133] See pp. 95–96 and 100 above.

[134] Unfortunately, there is no data in Hawley regarding the number of counties with zero adherents in 1970.

total of 228 growth counties. Of those counties, 158 or almost 70% had no LCMS adherents in 1970. This corroborates the assumption that LCMS growth in those counties involves strategic church planting combined with a likely degree of in-migration.

In a second set of tables Hawley shows the 345 counties where the LCMS grew numerically, but did *not* grow as a percentage of the county population. (Unfortunately, the headings for these tables are all mislabeled as counties where the LCMS grew numerically *and* as a proportion of the population.) [135] Across the country the Synod grew numerically in 345 counties even as it shrank as a proportion of the total population. About 40% of these counties are in the ENC and WNC regions, the Synod's heartland. More noteworthy is the fact that 45% of the growth counties were in three other regions: the MtW, the WSC, and the SAtl. This again shows the extent to which LCMS strength is increasingly moving South.[136]

Hawley concludes his statistical portrait with a sobering assessment:

Since the 1970s, the LCMS has actually seen an increase in the absolute number of adherents in hundreds of counties. However, in these counties the overall population growth rate has significantly outpaced the growth rate for the LCMS, meaning that LCMS adherents are nonetheless shrinking as a percentage of their total population. We see slightly fewer counties where the LCMS is experiencing major decline. However, in places where the LCMS has been shrinking, the decline has been, on average, precipitous.[137]

Hawley provides two appendices at the conclusion of the statistical portrait section. The first explains the spatial regression model that he uses to sift through the many variables he included in his study and to look for the most determinative variable(s). As noted in the main text of his work, he isolates German ethnicity as the key variable determining LCMS strength. He

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[135] Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change," 60–69. The heading for each of these tables reads: "Counties where LCMS has grown in absolute numbers and as a proportion of the population."

[136] Although the MtW region includes the northern states of Montana, Idaho, and Wyoming, the majority of the growing counties are in the states from Colorado south.

[137] Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change," 70.

tests that by creating spatial regression analyses also for the ELCA, Presbyterian Church (USA), and the SBC, concluding:

> The main thing to take away from this aspect of the analysis is that the LCMS is not unique in that its size at the county level is at least partially determined by the ethnic makeup of the county. This indicates that, as is the case for the LCMS, membership in other Protestant denominations is usually inherited.[138]

The second appendix, in which he looks at "what aggregate and individual data tell us about German Americans today," flows from the first.[139] He finds that counties with a strong German American presence have a lower than average population, but a "much higher LCMS population." They are more rural and older in median age, have low unemployment and very low poverty rates, and are more likely to be married and much more likely to vote Republican. But, as strong as these counties are on economic and social metrics, and as staunchly Republican as they are, they are only average when it comes to "religious commitment."[140]

In "Section 4: Natalist Policies" Hawley provides recommendations to the LCMS. Here he returns to his initial focus: the danger of low birth rates for society as a whole and for the LCMS in particular. He therefore suggests policies that encourage fertility after a quick sketch of what some countries are doing to encourage higher birthrates.[141] He begins:

> While the LCMS is not in the same position as a national government, the knowledge of which policies can effectively encourage family formation is nonetheless useful. Many of these efforts can possibly be replicated on a smaller scale. The LCMS may also choose to lobby governments to support effective pronatalist policies that will help both LCMS adherents and other elements of society create large, strong families.[142]

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[138] Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change," 71.

[139] Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change," 72.

[140] Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change," 72–73.

[141] See Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change," 74–79, where he looks at Australia, France, Sweden, and the United States.

[142] Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change," 74. See also the more thorough-going examination

Regarding US policies, Hawley spends much of his time noting that more concern has been

given to preventing births among poorer, unmarried women than on encouraging fertility. He

adds: "For the LCMS, the goal is not just more births, but more births in the context of Christian

marriage." And, for that reason, "we should not incentivize irresponsible behavior."[143]

In his "Conclusions and Recommendation," Hawley looks at a number of policy

recommendations. First, however, he notes this:

> In reading this report, the reader may have noticed an omission that deserves an
> explanation. As others have noted, one possible way for the LCMS and other
> Protestant denominations to thrive in the twenty-first century is to gain new adherents
> from new immigrant communities, particularly Hispanics. In fact, this is often treated
> as a panacea for a Christian denomination's problems. While the author of this study
> encourages outreach and evangelism among all communities, there are reasons to be
> skeptical that this approach will save the LCMS or any other Protestant
> denomination.[144]

He seems resigned to LCMS failure in Hispanic outreach instead:

> While the demographics of the United States have changed markedly since the
> immigration reforms of the United States in the 1960s, the demographic profile of the
> LCMS has changed little in the last hundred years. The LCMS remains 95 percent
> non-Hispanic white and disproportionately strong in communities originally settled
> by Germans. Outreach to immigrant communities in the United States should
> certainly be encouraged. But given the impressive resources expended on this project
> up to this point, and the relatively paltry return on investment, it is not clear how to
> make such efforts successful.[145]

As reasons for skepticism, he cites decreasing birthrates among Hispanic immigrants, LCMS

"inability to attract" Hispanics despite "impressive resources expended" on that effort, and the

similarity of LCMS and Catholic worship on that effort (suggesting that Latinos who switch

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of what countries are doing around the world to increase birthrates below in the subsection "Structural Responses to
the Demographic Transition and Declining Births" in Chapter Four.

[143] Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change," 79. If the antecedent for "we" is the LCMS, then he
would have the LCMS continue to encourage welfare policies that do not provide additional funds for a woman who
has additional children.

[144] Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change," 79.

[145] Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change," 80.

move to churches with other worship styles since LCMS worship is similar to the RCC).[146]

Given his sociological and demographic research, Hawley's first prescription for the LCMS is to pursue pro-natalist policies. His recommendations include (1) encouraging home affordability, (2) providing affordable daycare, (3) encouraging "responsible higher education," (4) educating about fertility, (5) encouraging parents to be involved in church with their kids, and (6) encouraging inexpensive weddings.[147] On home affordability (1) he suggests offering low-interest home loans to active member families. On daycare (2) he is ambivalent since he prefers a full-time parent in the home, but does allow that "providing quality daycare probably does more good than harm from a fertility perspective."[148] As for higher education (3), "While the LCMS obviously cannot tell its adherents what to study or where to go to college, it can provide education to graduating high school seniors about the likelihood that a particular college major will be a sound financial investment." Plus, the LCMS should consider reorganizing its university system to provide shorter, more cost-effective programs of study and provide married student housing. The Synod can also provide facts about fertility (4) (e.g., the strong correlation between postponing children and infertility) and parental church involvement (5) (that kids are more likely to continue in church life if their parents are faithful, active church members). Lastly, churches should help reduce the costs of getting married (6) by means of low or no-cost charges for the wedding and use of facilities.[149]

Hawley then returns to his examination of US counties, this time looking for counties in

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[146] Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change," 80. Anecdotally, at least, the third suggestion seems contrafactual to the experience of many LCMS pastors who have found that similarities in the liturgy enables many Catholic-to-Lutheran converts to feel more comfortable in Lutheran services. Plus, Hispanic ministries employ a variety of "styles" of worship.

[147] Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change," 80–81.

[148] Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change," 80.

[149] Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change," 81.

each USCB region with larger percentages of women who are married and mothers. The purpose is to suggest locations for church-planting. "Planting new LCMS congregations in counties that already have high rates of childbearing within the context of marriage may increase the odds that these congregations will attract a large number of families with young children." More specifically, Hawley is looking only for counties where married women are, on average, one standard deviation above the mean for the country.[150] In a series of charts he then identifies a total of 369 counties in the US overall. Regionally, he identifies a whopping 133 West North Central counties, with Kansas and Nebraska leading (31 each), followed by South Dakota (24), Iowa (14), North Dakota (13), Missouri (11), and Minnesota (9). In the Mountain West 67 counties are listed. The state totals in order are: Idaho (18), Utah (17), Colorado (10), Montana (9), Nevada and Wyoming (5 each), New Mexico (2), and Arizona (1). The next preferred region would be the West South Central with 59 counties throughout. State by state the greatest number of high fertility counties in the WSC is in Texas (41), with Arkansas (9), Louisiana (6), and Oklahoma (3) lagging far behind. The East South Central follows with 47 counties: Mississippi has the most counties here (17), followed by Kentucky (13), Tennessee (11), and Alabama (6). Next comes the South Atlantic with 39 counties overall and 21 of them in Georgia, while the remainder are in North Carolina (7), Virginia (6), South Carolina and Florida (2 apiece), and West Virginia (1). There are only 17 counties in the East North Central, where the LCMS has its densest current population: Ohio (5), Indiana and Wisconsin (4 each), Illinois (3), and Michigan (1). The Pacific region has only five, with two in California, two in Washington, and one in Oregon. The Mid-Atlantic has two New York counties and the Northeast has none.[151]

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[150] Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change," 82.

[151] The regional high-fertility county data appears in a set of tables. See Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change," 82–84.

It bears repeating that Hawley offers only one criterion for the counties he recommends to the Synod for church-plants. He requires a high percentage of married women who had children in the previous year—specifically, at a rate that was one standard deviation above the national average. This essentially means the women in the county were 50% more likely to have given birth than other American women. He adds that he did *not* look at "age, race, or any other demographic attribute." Evidently, his research also did not consider the population of the counties in question. Indeed, of the counties identified, many are in largely rural states with relatively low populations overall. Since a county could make the high-fertility list even though it has a very small population shows the importance of further criteria. To be sure, Hawley recognizes that his data "is only a starting point" and that more work would be needed before planting a church in a particular county.[152] An examination of population would be near the top of that work list.

District-Level Trends

Hawley's "District-Level Trends" also indicates the trajectory of decline throughout the Synod, showing how LCMS decline reflects birthrate decline regionally in the US. "District-Level Trends" is focused on a shorter period from 2000 to 2013. Moreover, he used different data for this follow-up study: "This study primarily differs from its predecessor in that it uses membership data provided by the LCMS. In my previous study, I relied primarily on data provided by the Association of Religious Data Archives (ARDA)."[153]

Hawley warns about areas of inconsistency between ARDA and LCMS statistics, but then explains how he corrected for these inconsistencies as much as possible. As part of this process

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[152] Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change," 80.

[153] Hawley, "District-Level Trends," 2.

"it was first necessary to generate a new file in which every US county was categorized

according to its LCMS district." Thus, Hawley's in-depth research examines the demographics

of individual LCMS districts based on county-by-county research. He warns that this necessitates

the use of "aggregate numbers to reach conclusions about a smaller subset of the population or of

individuals."[154] That is, he could examine the population trend of a county ("aggregate numbers")

but had to extrapolate that the county's LCMS subset was reflective of the county as a whole. He

found that ARDA data from "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change" was highly congruent

and correlated very closely with the LCMS statistics used in "District-Level Trends.

> The lesson from this is that, although the numbers from ARDA and the LCMS
> internal numbers are not identical (again this is to be expected, as the two sources of
> data measure different things), there is no evidence of any systematic differences. If
> the ARDA data indicate a major change in LCMS membership, we can expect that
> the internal LCMS numbers will show the same thing.

> These results additionally demonstrate that my own new county file for the LCMS
> districts is accurate, as this is the file I used to make estimates using the ARDA
> county files.[155]

He then looks at "Correlates of LCMS Percentage Change." His working hypothesis is "the

premise that trends in the family will be related to membership trends within the LCMS." This

required him to explore "different ways to measure family formation," such variables as

birthrates, marriage rates, age, and race.[156] He tested correlation coefficients for a number of such

variables in order to determine which had the highest correlation. Figure 27 gives his results.

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[154] Hawley, "District-Level Trends," 2.

[155] Hawley, "District-Level Trends," 4.

[156] Hawley, "District-Level Trends," 4.

PEARSON'S R COEFFICIENTS FOR LCMS PCT CHANGE, 2000-2013*	
White Birthrate	0.50
White Marriage Rate	0.42
Total Birthrate	0.45
Total Marriage Rate	0.36
% White	0.35
White Married Birthrate	0.32
Total Population % Change, 2000-2013	0.14
Median Age	-0.14

*All Census data from 2014 estimates

Figure 27. Pearson's R coefficient chart.[157]

Notice that the chart displays the level of correlation between eight variables, only one of which would be considered statistically significant. LCMS membership decline across the districts in the fourteen-year period from 2000–2013 correlates strongest with the decline of the White birthrate at a Pearson's R coefficient rate of 0.50.[158] Pearson's R coefficient is a statistical measure of correlation between two variables. A perfect positive correlation is 1.0 (for example, sleeve size increases in perfect proportion to arm length). If the Pearson's R rate is 0.50 or higher (or -0.50 or lower), it is considered statistically significant.[159] That said, a coefficient of 0.50 is considered to be only a moderate level of correlation. Therefore, of the variables used, the White

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[157] Figure from Hawley, "District-Level Trends," 4.

[158] The variables he includes are all drawn from American Community Survey research: White birthrate, White marriage rate, total birthrate, total marriage rate, percentage white, White married birthrate, total population percentage change, and median age. Hawley, "District-Level Trends," 4.

[159] Note: Pearson's R coefficient is also statistically significant when it is negative. For example, time spent working has a strong negative correlation with time available for leisure.

birthrate has a statistically significant connection with LCMS membership trends. That the

correlation is only moderate, however, coupled with even lower levels of correlation in some

other periods where Hawley was only able to look at data from states rather than counties, results

in a hesitation to draw strong conclusions. Rather, Hawley only states this: "It is nonetheless

interesting to note that the relationship between birthrates and LCMS change seems to be

stronger during periods of membership decline."[160]

Demography, Culture, and the Decline of America's Christian Denominations

Hawley's 2017 book, *Demography, Culture, and the Decline of America's Christian*

Denominations, offers a perspective that is similar to "LCMS—Demographic and Social

Change" and "District-Wide Trends," but with a focus on the decline of American Christianity as

a whole. Moreover, while the state of the family still holds his primary attention among many

variables examined as potential causes of decline, this study also gives a significantly greater

emphasis on two other variables: denominational diversity and the level of devotion (importance

of religious faith in the lives of adherents).

His thesis on the relationship between the decline of religiosity and the decline of marriage

and fertility is consistent with the two reports he prepared for the LCMS, but more sophisticated.

> I argue that the decline of marriage and fertility and the decline of religious
> observance are related. It would be too simplistic to say that one is the direct result of
> the other. The relationship is bi-directional. As the nation becomes less religious, it
> becomes less family oriented; however, a nation that is not family oriented also tends
> to become less religious.[161]

He concludes that, despite other causes for growing secularization, "few variables have the

explanatory power of trends in the American family. The decline of large, stable American

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[160] Hawley, "District-Level Trends," 6.

[161] Hawley, *Demography, Culture, Decline*, 21.

families and the decline of demographically healthy Christian congregations are not unrelated."[162]

As Hawley looks at the big picture of US Christianity several points are important. He notes that most of the unaffiliated are not firmly anti-Christian, but simply institutionally uninvolved.[163] Moreover, while the ranks of the unaffiliated (the "Nones") have grown, the increase is due more to marginal members sliding out the back door than to the loss of actively involved Christians.[164] In addition, the growth of the Nones is not due to Blacks or Hispanics, whose level of religious affiliation is higher than the rate for non-Hispanic Whites.[165] Education complicates the affiliation picture since those without a bachelor degree are more likely to identify as Christians, but those Christians with a college degree are more active in church.[166] And, while the decline in affiliation affects nearly all denominations, there are exceptions.[167]

Hawley provides an overview of the DT[168] and then explores its causes. In chapter 3 he delves into economic changes that are associated with the DT and in chapter 4 he looks at cultural causes.[169] His big-picture look at economics and technology includes quick summaries of the demographic effects of declining agrarianism, rising industrialization, expanded education (especially for women), government policies (welfare policies, affordable daycare), and declining union membership.[170] On cultural causes he looks at everything from radical

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[162] From his Conclusion, Hawley, *Demography, Culture, Decline*, 199. See also p. 21.

[163] Hawley, *Demography, Culture, Decline*, 8.

[164] Hawley, *Demography, Culture, Decline*, 11.

[165] Hawley, *Demography, Culture, Decline*, 17.

[166] Hawley, *Demography, Culture, Decline*, 18.

[167] Hawley, *Demography, Culture, Decline*, 21.

[168] Hawley, *Demography, Culture, Decline*, see chapter 2, 25–36.

[169] Hawley, *Demography, Culture, Decline*, see chapters 3 and 4, 37–74.

[170] Hawley, *Demography, Culture, Decline*, chapter 3, 25–36.

individualism to the paradox of voluntary and involuntary childlessness, the tendency of greater

fertility among the religious (but with many exceptions).[171]

In Chapter 5: "Why People Abandon Christianity," Hawley debunks the theory that the

decline of Christianity is due to people leaving theologically and socially liberal churches. While

that happens to some extent, it does not explain the similar rates of decline for the ELCA and

LCMS.[172] Moreover, people leave both conservative and liberal churches over social issues like

same-sex marriage. The central problem is not liberal vs. conservative, it is family size: "we see

that trends in marriage are harming Christian congregations in two ways—fewer people are

getting married, and thus are less likely to raise children in the context of Christian marriage, and

those who are not married are increasingly unlikely to attend worship services."[173]

The following chapters, Chapter 6 and Chapter 7, are the most relevant for this dissertation.

The nexus of family and decline is the focus of Chapter 6.

> Existing literature indicates that the best predictor of a denomination's growth or
> decline is not its particular stance on a theological or political issue. Nor does it have
> anything to do with its liturgy or the average size of its churches. The best predictor
> of a church's future growth is the current average fertility of its contemporary
> members. There is one clear, key reason why the evangelical Protestant
> denominations have a healthier demographic profile than their mainline Protestant
> counterparts: adherents to an evangelical Christian tradition have, on average, more
> children—though there is considerable variation between different denominations
> classified evangelical.[174]

Fervency of faith—religious zeal—is an apparent factor in connection with child birth rates.

Where rates of participation in church are higher, fertility also tends to be higher.[175]

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[171] Hawley, *Demography, Culture, Decline*, chapter 4, 63–74.

[172] Hawley, *Demography, Culture, Decline,* Chapter 5, 75–88.

[173] Hawley, *Demography, Culture, Decline,* 85.

[174] Hawley, *Demography, Culture, Decline*, 89.

[175] Hawley, *Demography, Culture, Decline*, 90–92.

Hawley's research for Chapter 6 relies on the Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES) for the 2014 elections. He sought to isolate the percentage of 30 to 49 year-old women in each denomination with three or more children. The CCES included a large overall population, but he warns that the number of individuals from particular denominations was sometimes quite small, resulting in a "fairly large" margin of error in such cases. His conclusions therefore are cautious: "The most fecund denominations were growing, or at least not declining further."[176] While the denominations with lower numbers of children tended to be mainline and in decline, there are exceptions. The American Baptist Churches USA is the most liberal Baptist denomination, but it is growing and its women have a fairly high number of children. Overall, the mainline denominations had the lowest birthrates—about the same as unaffiliated "seculars," except for the Episcopalians who "were actually *less* likely to have large families than secular respondents."[177] Meanwhile, more theologically conservative denominations tended to have more large families and many "have been growing in numbers or holding steady," but again there were exceptions. For example, the LCMS has a higher percentage of large families than Catholics, non-denominational evangelicals, and independent Baptists, but is in decline.[178]

In Chapter 6 he includes a section devoted to the LCMS as an example of how "current average fertility" affects denominational membership.[179] This is based almost entirely on the report considered above: "District-Level Trends." His data, as noted above, is largely from the LCMS, but includes birthrates from the ACS. Although all LCMS districts showed losses between 2000 and 2013, he emphasizes the linear relationship between higher birthrates and

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[176] Hawley, *Demography, Culture, Decline*, 93.

[177] Hawley, *Demography, Culture, Decline*, 95.

[178] LCMS women "were 2.8 times as likely" to have large families compared to secular respondents; Hawley, *Demography, Culture, Decline*, 95.

[179] Hawley, *Demography, Culture, Decline*, 96–101.

lower rates of membership decline. LCMS districts located in regions, states, and counties with higher birthrates experienced fewer membership losses.[180] He also shows that "gains and losses among adults are poor predictors of the denomination's health." Instead, natural growth (births) as measured by infant baptisms, is predictive. And, as a result, the future he paints is bleak because of the upcoming deaths of adults whose births led to a growing church in the 1950s through the early 1970s.[181] As his grim scenario nears its close he does slip in a caveat: "I am not arguing that birthrates explain everything, only that they are one of the best predictors of a denomination's overall health."[182] He also mentions that the LCMS suffered a significant loss of congregations in the 1970s, that Lutherans have "unique characteristics" (highly ethnic, "famously taciturn," and more dependent on natural growth since they do not benefit from immigration). Nevertheless, he closes with "Lutherans are not the worst performers when it comes to losing adult members."[183] Concluding the chapter, Hawley notes the "unmistakable" "relationship between family and religious decline." Church bodies with the lowest birthrates are in the sharpest decline.[184]

In turning to "Diversity, Devotion, and Politics: Other Explanations for Denominational Decline" (Chapter 7), Hawley begins with an important admission: "Although my interest in family formation and denomination decline was the primary catalyst for this project, I never expected to find that these were the sole determinants of religious change in the United States. Indeed, that is not what I found."[185]

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[180] Hawley, *Demography, Culture, Decline*, 96–97.

[181] Hawley, *Demography, Culture, Decline*, 98–99.

[182] Hawley, *Demography, Culture, Decline*, 100.

[183] Hawley, *Demography, Culture, Decline*, 101.

[184] Hawley, *Demography, Culture, Decline*, 103.

[185] Hawley, *Demography, Culture, Decline*, 105.

With respect to diversity, Hawley first suggests that a lack of diversity does not mean denominational ill-will toward those of a different race or ethnicity and that "hand-wringing" about a "lack of diversity may be unwarranted." But he adds that a denomination that serves a shrinking sub-population should "expect to shrink as both a percentage of the [overall] population and in absolute numbers." As a corollary to that, "we see compelling evidence that those denominations that are less white tend to shrink at a slower rate, or even grow." [186] The evidence is "compelling" indeed:

> The correlation coefficient for percent non-white and denominational growth **was an impressive 0.7.** And the figure additionally shows an obvious, linear relationship between the two variables. **Thus, more diverse churches are, on average, performing better than less diverse churches. And therefore it is probably true that diversity initiatives have some promise to turn around declining denominations, though this is easier said than done, as I will discuss shortly.[187]**

He goes on to point out that achieving a greater level of diversity is not a simple matter. Roman Catholics have done it, he says, because of Hispanic immigration, but few other denominations will have that kind of opportunity. Adventists are highly diverse, but he sees no clear model for how that was achieved. In addition, the goal of increased diversity is a complicated one. For congregations to have more Black members, he says, Blacks would have to leave Black denominations. And Hispanics who become evangelical have largely been drawn from Catholic churches. So he asserts that "one can reasonably challenge the argument that non-diverse churches *per se* are a problem, as well as the argument that greater diversity can solve all the problems faced by declining denominations. Nevertheless, some denominations are more successful than others at attracting a wider and more diverse membership. And, in addition, there

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[186] Hawley, *Demography, Culture, Decline*, 106.

[187] Hawley, *Demography, Culture, Decline,* 107, emphasis added. A Pearson's R correlation coefficient of 0.7 is a very high positive correlation. See pp. 204–05 above.

is evidence that churches may either consciously or unconsciously "exhibit discriminatory behavior." (He cites a 2015 study on how churches welcome newcomers.[188]) Then he concludes that the evidence on the matter of diversity suggests that "many Christian Churches" could be more welcoming and thus "increase their diversity (and perhaps their total membership numbers).[189]

On the matter of devotion—that is, the importance of religion—Hawley reports that members of some denomination claim a greater measure of devotion than do members of other denominations. Less than half the members of the UCC, the Orthodox, Episcopalians, Catholics, the PCUSA, the UMC, and the ELCA claim high importance for religion. The LCMS and the American Baptists are both near 60% in the percentage of members who say religion is "very important," but Mormons, Independent and Southern Baptists, and 7DA members are all at about 70 to 75% in that claim and members of the Assembly of God are over 80%. "Most denominations that include a large majority declaring that religion is very important in their lives are growing, or at least declining very slowly." The SBC is an outlier, since members claim high devotion but the denomination is in decline. He might also have included the LCMS in that.[190]

In this section Hawley erroneously claims that "the relationship between growth and this variable [devotion] is stronger than it is for either fertility or for diversity. The correlation coefficient between the two was a moderate 0.53."[191] It is true that devotion is stronger than the correlation coefficient for fertility, but it is well below the coefficient for diversity. The previous

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[188] The source is Bradley R.E. Wright, et al., "Religion, Race, and Discrimination: A Field Experiment of How American Churches Welcome Newcomers," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 54, no. 2 (2015): 185–204.

[189] Hawley, *Demography, Culture, Decline*, 110.

[190] Hawley, *Demography, Culture, Decline*, 110–11.

[191] Hawley, *Demography, Culture, Decline*, 110.

section of the chapter showed that the correlation coefficient between diversity and growth was a much higher 0.7. Dr. Hawley later acknowledged the error.[192]

The final section of Chapter 7 addresses "Partisan Politics and Denominational Growth." Here his results may be surprising, especially for those who wish to identify conservative and liberal politics with conservative and liberal theology. With such an assumption, one would assume that churches full of conservative Republicans (evangelical churches) would have to be doing better than churches full of Democrats (the mainline churches), since mainline churches are in such steep decline and Evangelicalism—if one includes the non-denominational evangelicals and Pentecostals—is in less of a decline. Hawley finds that, to the contrary, "the denominations that had a greater number of Republicans were actually declining at a faster rate than denominations with fewer Republicans."[193] Why? First, because diverse churches are doing so much better than all White churches and minorities tend to vote Democrat, not Republican. Second, it is a false assumption that theologically liberal denominations are full of politically liberal Democrats. In fact, Republicans outnumber Democrats in the ELCA, Episcopal Church, PCUSA, and the UMC.[194]

In his conclusion to Chapter 7, Hawley cites both the results of Chapter 6 and Chapter 7 to say, "that there are three variables that are correlated with strong denominations." The variables are large families, diversity, and a high level of devotion. Membership in a particular political

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[192] In an email to me, Dr. Hawley said: "I must have made a mistake there. If I recall correctly (it's been a few years), my initial analysis of church diversity used a slightly different measure, giving weaker results. I'd have to go back and find earlier drafts to remember what the difference was. The problem was that when I updated the diversity section with better data, I must have failed to change the section on devotion. Sorry for the confusion." Email from George Hawley, November 11, 2018.

[193] Hawley, *Demography, Culture, Decline*, 112.

[194] Hawley, *Demography, Culture, Decline*, 112.

party is *not* associated with denominational strength.[195]

In the remaining chapters of *Demography, Culture, Decline* Hawley addresses additional topics. In the history of denominational divides in the United States (Chapter 8), he suggests that the recent major division of Christianity between Roman Catholic, mainline, and evangelical churches is perhaps running its course. An Evangelicalism that includes everything from American Baptists to Pentecostals and Adventists has little to hold it together.[196]

Chapter 9 looks at Roman Catholicism in the United States. On the one hand, there is a certain stability since the percentage of Americans who identify as Catholic has changed very little from the 1970s to 2014 (from about 26 to 25% of the population according to some surveys he cites). But, on the other hand, the makeup of the RCC in America has changed markedly since the percentage of White Americans has declined by about a third in that period. Immigration is the reason that Catholicism has retained a strong and fairly consistent presence. But Hawley is skeptical that immigration will be able to continue to fill RCC pews because of declining numbers of Hispanic immigrants in recent year.[197] Moreover, the Catholic Church has a poor retention rate (only about 68%) and, unlike the other church bodies, the RCC continues to suffer decline because of the abuse scandal and its blow to Roman Catholic moral authority.[198] Lastly, the Catholic family is no longer the large brood made famous by the Kennedy clan. Today it is only slightly larger than the US average, so large families also will not be filling the pews in the future. And as for the pews, the average Catholic is now less likely than most Protestants to

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[195] Hawley, *Demography, Culture, Decline*, 112–14.

[196] Hawley, *Demography, Culture, Decline*, 115–29.

[197] Hawley, *Demography, Culture, Decline*, 132–34.

[198] Hawley, *Demography, Culture, Decline*, 134–36.

attend church regularly.[199] In short, "While in no immediate danger of collapse, the Catholic Church in the United States faces many severe challenges."[200]

Baptists (Chapter 10) are also suffering, but he also notes bright spots. The SBC disavowed its pro-slavery origins and today over 1,000 SBC churches are majority Black. That reality is only multiplied in other Baptist denominations where Pew found that over one-quarter were predominantly African American.[201] Baptists are in decline as a percentage of the United States (from about 20% of the United States in 1973 to around 14% in 2014).[202] But the retention rate for Baptists is quite strong at about 78% and the total number of Baptists (unlike the percentage) has remained about the same. Baptist family size is greater than average and Baptist devotion (attendance patterns) is also above average.[203]

Chapter 11 looks at Methodists. Here the picture is uniformly bleak. From its 19th century peak, when over a third of the country claimed to be Methodists, the UMC now claims less than 4% of the population and far smaller numbers are active members. Only the African Methodist Episcopal branches of Methodism are growing. The UMC is 94% non-Hispanic White, has smaller than average families, with low retention rates (only about 40% of those raised Methodist remain in the church), and minimal devotion.[204]

Hawley, like most social scientists, considers the Latter-Day Saints (LDS) as a Christian denomination. He is aware, of course, that Christian churches view them quite differently. They

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[199] Hawley, *Demography, Culture, Decline*, 136–38.

[200] Hawley, *Demography, Culture, Decline*, 139.

[201] Hawley, *Demography, Culture, Decline*, 143.

[202] Hawley, *Demography, Culture, Decline*, 144.

[203] Hawley, *Demography, Culture, Decline*, 145–48. One can only wonder what effect the recent abuse scandal in the SBC will have on Baptist membership.

[204] Hawley, *Demography, Culture, Decline*, 151–58.

are, however, the prime example of a religious group that supports his central thesis about the importance of internal or natural growth and Chapter 12 makes that case. The LDS, he says, demands grudging respect from churches because it fosters such a powerful family and community atmosphere. Although the number of LDS members in the US is in dispute (is it 1.6% or 2% of the US population?) and even though many Mormons leave the LDS, Mormon families enable the LDS to remain strong. Mormon women "have an average of 3.4 children" compared to the national average of 2.1. They are also more likely to be married than the US as a whole or than any other denomination. And while their level of racial and ethnic diversity is on the low side (they are well over 80% non-Hispanic White), their diversity is increasing. Thus: "The LDS Church has the healthiest demographic profile of any religious group examined in this volume, and this is largely due to the comparative health of Mormon families."[205]

What a contrast between Mormons and Lutherans, the topic of Chapter 13.[206] By Hawley's criteria, there is almost nothing healthy about Lutherans. No Lutheran group is thriving, but ELCA losses are "catastrophic" having experienced "more than a 25 percent contraction between 2007 and 2014." The LCMS, in turn, lost 11% in that same period.[207] Only "About 54 percent of people who identified as Lutherans at age 16 still identified as such when they were asked their current religious status in the GSS."[208] Hawley wonders how significant political and social liberalism is in ELCA losses, but argues that the ELCA is not as liberal as many other mainline denominations. Even more to the point, the LCMS is deeply conservative on matters of sexuality

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[205] Hawley, *Demography, Culture, Decline*, 159–66; quote from 165.

[206] Hawley, *Demography, Culture, Decline*, 167–75.

[207] Hawley, *Demography, Culture, Decline*, 170.

[208] Hawley, *Demography, Culture, Decline*, 171.

and abortion, but its losses, while less than those of the ELCA, are also dramatic.[209] Once again,

Hawley sees the central problem as an unhealthy family profile with very low fertility:

"According to the GSS, among all female Lutheran respondents over the age of 45 queried in

2010 or later, almost 35 percent had zero or one child—which is ten percentage points higher

than it was the [sic] for all non-Lutheran Christians, and almost five percentage points higher

than the rate among Methodists."[210] Regarding devotion, despite some disparities in surveys, the

news is just as grim: "we can be confident that Lutherans attend worship, on average, less than

other Protestants."[211]"In other words, not only are Lutherans not doing a good job replacing

themselves, Lutherans are not, on average, particularly committed to their faith."[212] Other

demographic facts are noted: Lutherans are less diverse than any other group and they are much

older than the overall population—with the LCMS even older than the ELCA; but Lutherans do

have a high rate of marriage (and he neglected to mention here that young LCMS women have a

much higher number of children than the US average).[213] "American Lutheranism is in

trouble."[214]

Presbyterians (Chapter 14) and Episcopalians (Chapter 15) are in equally perilous

straights.[215] Presbyterians are in "particular trouble" and Episcopalians in "serious trouble."[216]

Hawley is aware that the PCA and other evangelical Presbyterians are doing much better than the

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[209] Hawley, *Demography, Culture, Decline*, 172.

[210] Hawley, *Demography, Culture, Decline*, 172. On these measures he adds a caution about sample size.

[211] Hawley, *Demography, Culture, Decline*, 173.

[212] Hawley, *Demography, Culture, Decline*, 174.

[213] Hawley, *Demography, Culture, Decline*, 174; on LCMS childbirth numbers, see Hawley, 95, and n213 above on p. 114.

[214] Hawley, *Demography, Culture, Decline*, 174.

[215] Hawley, *Demography, Culture, Decline*, on Presbyterians, 177–84, and on Episcopalians, 185–91.

[216] Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change," 183 and 190.

PC(USA), but his data sources do not allow him to separate the two.[217] He can show that the decline in Presbyterianism as a whole (from about 5% of the US to about 2%) is worse for non-Hispanic White Presbyterians.[218] The same is true for Episcopalians.[219] Family life will not help since "Presbyterians have unusually small families,"[220] and it is even worse for the Episcopal church whose average family size is not only lower than any other group, but also lower than the Nones.[221] Both groups are also marked by a lower level of devotion than average for Christians.[222]

Pentecostals (Chapter 16) present a radically different picture than the one drawn up to this point in Hawley's book. The mainline churches all have evangelical offshoots. No so for Pentecostals, all of whom are somewhere in the greater evangelical wing. The early racial division among Pentecostal churches has declined especially since the formerly White Assemblies of God (AoG) "endeavored to become more racially inclusive" beginning around 1960. Today the AoG is 43% non-White.[223] Moreover, contrary to the pattern of growth most significant for Hawley's thesis, Pentecostals are not growing from within, but from without, and that growth offsets the fact of a relatively poor retention rate. Even more, Pentecostals have lower than average rates of marriage and children. But they do have more children than average.[224] They are deeply devoted, as seen in worship attendance. The picture is "bright."[225]

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[217] Hawley (*Demography, Culture, Decline,* 178–79) is skeptical whether evangelical Presbyterians will be able to remain stable in membership.

[218] Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change," 181.

[219] Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change," 187–88.

[220] Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change," 182.

[221] Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change," 188–89.

[222] Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change," 182–83 and 190.

[223] Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change," 194.

[224] Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change," 195.

[225] Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change," 196.

Hawley concludes his book with a reminder of his argument that "few variables have the explanatory power of trends in the American family." The decline in the family is "not just the result of a decadent culture"—economic factors are pushing people to delay or forgo marriage and family. But whatever the causes, decline in Christianity is the result because "the reality is that most denominations have grown or declined naturally—via reproduction or lack thereof." He acknowledges his lack of attention given to non-denominational growth, and in light of that growth wonders whether the day of denominationalism is past. Certainly, the growth of non-denominational churches enables the hopeful note on which he ends: "Because of the growth of non-denominational churches, we can be confident that Christianity is not going to vanish from the United States, in spite of rising secularization." Moreover, he is not hoping for the end of denominations because they have the ability to "keep a church on a biblically sound and socially beneficial trajectory."[226]

MacPherson and Hawley: Affirmation and Critique

As we have seen, Ryan P. MacPherson and George Hawley offer separate but largely consistent explanations for LCMS decline. In both cases they see the primary cause of LCMS decline to be the lack of internal growth—bearing and raising children in the faith. MacPherson: "One factor has overpowered all other factors in the synod's numerical decline: a plummeting birth rate during the 1960s, which never rebounded but instead fell further during the 1990s."[227] Hawley: "Below-replacement-rate fertility is a major demographic trend throughout much of the world. It is therefore not surprising that the LCMS similarly suffers from relatively low birthrates

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[226] Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change," 199–201.

[227] MacPherson, "Generational Generosity," 87.

and as a result faces a shrinking population."[228]

Affirmation

Ryan MacPherson's report to the LCMS corroborates a basic assumption of this dissertation: LCMS membership decline is directly related to the DT of this country in which overall birthrates have been in sharp decline since the 1970s. But there is more to MacPherson's work than numeric losses. Although MacPherson emphasizes declining births, the heart of his concern is for the families of the LCMS. One can only affirm that concern. He sees social and economic benefits in large, solid families, but his emphasize on "doctrinal change" in LCMS teaching on birth control suggests that his perspective is more theological and spiritual rather than simply pragmatic. It seems evident that he believes the change in LCMS teaching that allowed and perhaps encouraged the use of birth control was a negative turn. It undermined the vocations of marriage and parenthood. In his view this is a grave mistake since "God intends for the family to incarnate His love to the world."[229]

It is easy to suggest that MacPherson's veiled condemnation is too severe a judgment on the generation of LCMS theologians and pastors who opened the door to the use of contraception. Certainly, a more charitable view of what occurred is that the Synod determined that it could not hold to a blanket condemnation of all techniques to limit births—a perspective that has continued in the LCMS. That said, it is hard to dispute MacPherson's contention that the practice of contraception became the rule more than the exception among members of the LCMS. And, in so doing, internal growth was stymied for the Synod. More importantly, the

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[228] Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change," 7; see also "District-Wide Trends," 2: "This paper was created with the expectation that family formation patterns within these various districts are predictors of the denomination's health—that is, in places with high rates of marriage and childbirth, the LCMS is suffering a less severe decline."

[229] MacPherson, "Generational Generosity," 102.

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LCMS was somewhat complicit in fostering less appreciation for children as a gift of God.[230]

On a more practical level, MacPherson's conclusion that declining birthrates is central to LCMS decline is hard to dispute. His comparison of infant baptism totals over the years is somewhat lacking in precision since, strictly speaking, it is not a measure of births. Nevertheless, it is impossible to see anything less than a high association between declining infant baptisms and declining births.

I will argue below, however, that MacPherson's view claims too much—that as serious as a plummeting birthrate is, that has *not* overpowered all other factors in the synod's numerical decline."[231] His approach is overly simplistic in several ways and, as a result, undermines his claim that "Other factors… appear to have shaped the synod demographics much less than the steep and persistent decline in the birthrate."[232] However, the relevance of birthrate decline must still be granted and MacPherson is right to urge the Synod to address it.

Therefore the three positive steps MacPherson recommends to the LCMS deserve serious consideration.[233] While one might quibble about whether Titus 2 really is a "model," the idea of pastors encouraging each generation to play a role in handing down biblical teachings and conduct is obviously sound and worthy of affirmation. Also worthy of some affirmation is the corollary idea of "intergenerational models of ministry," although here one should be cautious about the implication that activities that focus on a specific age group are somehow undermining the family. The third recommendation, to "Provide economic support for young and growing

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[230] On this, see Gilbert Meilaender, "The Child as a Gift of God," (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 2016 Resolution 3-04A Task Force on Life, 2019), https://files.lcms.org/wl/?id=iO3gudfjWDHjMWeSm8BKXhgLM6DIP2wU

[231] MacPherson, "Generational Generosity," 82.

[232] MacPherson, "Generational Generosity," 107.

[233] MacPherson, "Generational Generosity," 102–6.

families" would perhaps be the most challenging because it involves, well, money. It would be refreshing, however, to have a serious debate over something like having church worker wage scales factor in family size as they did in the past.

Much of Hawley's work is also worthy of affirmation. In his two studies prepared for the LCMS he too corroborates one assumption of this dissertation, that LCMS membership decline is an illustration of the DT in our own population. He, like MacPherson, therefore helps to demystify the decline of LCMS church membership. Christian adherence in the US and the Synod is in decline in large measure because demographic transition first slowed the growth of and is now reducing the Caucasian population that previously bolstered membership.

He documents the power of the DT on the Synod's population, illustrating that below-replacement fertility is a major cause of LCMS decline. Like the rest of the Western world, the sinking LCMS population is directly linked to declining "natural growth" from childbirths. He also turns his attention to an analysis of the causes of low birthrates, giving significant time to discussions of potential causes such as economic growth, the influence of television, religiosity, and home affordability. His study offers a valuable exploration of the significance of the rural character of much of the LCMS on its membership. He offers approaches to membership retention and church marketing, providing some helpful perspective there as well. Along the way he, like MacPherson, encourages actions to curb and reverse membership decline—from encouraging early marriage and increased fertility to the recognition that religious affiliation is itself one of the strongest encouragements for fertility.

Hawley's approach is objective in tone and more balanced than that of MacPherson. As much as he emphasizes internal decline, he recognizes that outreach is also lacking. "If you were not born and baptized into an LCMS family, it is unlikely that you belong to the LCMS today.

This underscores both the need for the LCMS to improve its outreach to other communities, and the importance of increasing the birthrates of its current membership."[234]

In keeping with his more thorough approach, Hawley is also careful in his conclusions. He shows that the correlation of LCMS decline with the decline of the non-Hispanic White population is beyond dispute. LCMS aging correlates with overall aging among non-Hispanic Whites: "In fact, the greying that is occurring within LCMS pews in many ways reflects the greying of American society."[235]

Based on his sociological and demographic research and his prioritization of the family-fertility factor in decline, Hawley encourages a key mission strategy of emphasizing church-planting in counties with high percentages of young married households with children.[236] His recommendation to the LCMS is based on demographic potential, noting that "those counties that continue to have a healthy demographic profile—measured by the percentage of the female population that is both married and having children— as such counties may be useful places to consider planting new churches."[237] This suggestion has common-sense validity. His county-wide data is certainly a factor worthy of consideration as the LCMS plans future church-planting. The Synod would be wise to attempt its implementation.

While pessimistic about outreach to Hispanics and other minority racial and ethnic groups, Hawley grants much more significance to the importance of diversity than MacPherson does, especially in the book *Demography, Culture, Decline.* As a result, even though this dissertation

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[234] Hawley, "Demographic and Social Change," 48.

[235] Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change," 8.

[236] Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change," 82.

[237] Hawley states that "the LCMS should pursue policies that facilitate earlier marriages and larger families. Failing to halt or even reverse this trend would be disastrous for the LCMS; the current trajectory will result in a major contraction for the denomination." See Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change," 8.

critiques aspects of Hawley's work, it acknowledges the validity of much of what he offers and, indeed, it relies heavily on his research.

Critique

There is no need at this point to rehearse the many questions and critical comments raised already in this chapter's review of Ryan MacPherson's "Generational Generosity."[238] A summary is adequate. His rejection of "standard stories" is far too superficial and prone to straw man arguments. Why compare the LCMS to Baptists instead of to churches that are growing strongly from outreach such as Pentecostals or 7DA churches? His quick dismissal of the significance of population migration in the US fails completely to investigate the various aspects of that phenomenon or its significance for the LCMS. His defense of theological conservatism is welcome as far as it goes, as is his questioning of whether better youth programs or more daycare centers would turn around LCMS decline. But if such glib "standard stories" are inadequate, so is their glib dismissal. Far more seriously, his claims about LCMS Hispanic outreach are built on an interview with one District President and a look at churches in two districts that list Spanish services. His contention that Hispanic outreach will not bear much fruit is simply an assumption based on very limited history. Meanwhile, he ignores an obvious source of information—the Center for Hispanic Studies at Concordia Seminary—and fails even to mention, much less consider outreach to other ethnic groups and racial minorities.

When MacPherson turns to his own story for why the Synod is declining in membership, he exhibits a myopic inability to see anything but declining births. Everything flows out of the singular fact of declining births. He urges "prayerful discussion and prudent action" in light of

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[238] See above, pp. 162–76.

it.[239] Then he lays out seven subsidiary factors "that have contributed to the decline." Delayed marriage is certainly a reality in the US as a secondary effect of the demographic transition, but MacPherson mentions it almost in passing and then shifts to a discussion of "mixed marriages" (marrying outside of the Synod) without offering a reason for connecting the two.

Birth control is MacPherson's central focus. He seems to want to make this the most significant contributing cause of LCMS decline since it has "deprived the synod—collectively and publicly—of the only stable source it has ever known for reliable growth." He continues: "The exhortations from LCMS leaders in favor of procreation accomplished more for the growth of the synod during the early 1900s than any 'evangelism program,' 'contemporary worship service,' or 'youth ministry' has accomplished in the last fifty years."[240] Such a claim is hyperbole at best and falsehood at worst.[241] LCMS growth for most of the first century of its existence was largely *external* growth—i.e., evangelism!—as it planted churches all over the US and gathered immigrant Germans into its fold.[242] Moreover, he fails to acknowledge the well-known "youth ministry" called Walther League and all that it accomplished during its storied history.[243] This failure to acknowledge the Synod's history of outreach and external growth is a glaring error that blinds him to the need for it in the present.

Of the next three causes of declining births—infertility, divorce, and student debt--

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[239] MacPherson, "Generational Generosity," 96.

[240] MacPherson, "Generational Generosity," 98.

[241] Stone indicates that even doubling the LCMS fertility rate would result only in a modest slowing of LCMS membership decline. See Stone, "What Is Our Life Together?" 54–56.

[242] See e.g., August R. Suelflow and E. Clifford Nelson, "Following the Frontier 1840–1875," (157–58) and Eugene L. Fevold, "Coming of Age 1875–1900," (255–78) in E. Clifford Nelson, ed., *The Lutherans in North America* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975); also Carl S. Meyer, "Early Growth of the Missouri Synod," (194–246) and Thomas Coates and Erwin L. Lueker, "Four Decades of Expansion, 1920–1960," (386–435), in Carl S. Meyer, ed., *Moving Frontiers: Readings in the History of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1964).

[243] See William F. Weiherman, *Fifty Years of Christian Service to Lutheran Youth: A Survey of the History of the International Walther League* (Chicago: Walther League, 1943).

MacPherson relies more on assumptions than data. How much of a cause for declining births is infertility? It certainly has some connection with postponing childbirth, but his single paragraph on the topic is really a warning against being judgmental toward infertile couples. And while one cannot fault his assumption that more divorce occurs in the LCMS today than it did generations ago and that divorce also carries much less of a stigma in the LCMS today, he can only assume that it is causative of population decline. And Student debt?—surely it connects to delayed marriage, but he addressed that earlier. His comments reflect a bias again Federal Student Loans, but almost nothing pertinent to declining births. And when he comments on doctrinal change, he only addresses two topics that he has already mentioned: birth control and divorce.

The seventh causative item is a focus on vocation. Here he is on much more solid ground and is somewhat less tendentious in his claims. Yet, his view of vocation is narrow, and is addressed only to the realm of those who live in families.

As a whole then, MacPherson gives helpful attention to declining birthrates as a factor in Synod's declining membership. Unfortunately, he is not focused or convincing in his arguments for causation. He seems to want to grind countless axes in his report. With his single-minded focus on birthrate, he blinds himself to any recognition that lack of internal growth is not the only problem facing the Synod. Nor does it overpower all other factors. His positive suggestions are worthy of "prayerful discussion and prudent action,"[244] but they will by no means solve the Synod's membership crisis.

George Hawley's work is far more careful and potentially beneficial than MacPherson's. But he, too, minimizes the importance of outreach--external, missional growth. Part of that is skeptical view of ethnic outreach as a viable recommendation for addressing LCMS decline. On

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[244] MacPherson, "Generational Generosity," 96.

the matter of ethnicity Hawley indicates that counties with strong Germanic heritage are the locales where the LCMS has the strongest presence currently. This invites the idea that these counties are also locations where the Synod should continue to focus its church-planting efforts.[245] Hawley never says as much, but it is hard to resist this implication when he states:

> In other words, we can say that a large German population appears, at present, to be a necessary, but not sufficient, condition of a large LCMS presence. This point is driven home in the following scatter plot, which shows both the percent German and the percent LCMS at the county level. We see that there are no counties with a very large LCMS presence that do not also have a sizable German-American presence, but there are many counties with a large German-American population but few or no LCMS adherents.[246]

Like MacPherson, some of Hawley's suggestions for improving the LCMS membership picture seem unrealistic. For example, how will we to persuade young adults to stop moving out of existing communities or move to communities where the LCMS has a strong presence? This suggestion follows shortly after a passing mention that many LCMS young people are moving to cities which "by and large, do not have a strong LCMS presence."[247] The seemingly obvious and realistic need—that the LCMS should be planting more city churches—is never emphasized.[248]

Hawley acknowledges that the matter of race and ethnicity needs to be addressed both in further research and in actual evangelistic outreach.[249] Yet, his consistent focus is on addressing "the birthrates of non-Hispanic whites"[250] while he expresses a significant level of skepticism about outreach to Hispanics. Other immigrants and African Americans are barely mentioned.

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[245] Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change," 47–50.

[246] Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change," 49.

[247] See Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change," 24.

[248] Hawley does say, in passing, on p. 49 of "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change": "To keep young people in the LCMS, it is important for the LCMS to actually have a presence in the communities where young people actually live." He never, however, connects this with his observation that the LCMS is weak in cities.

[249] Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change," 46, 48–49.

[250] Hawley, "A District-Level Examination," 4.

Thereby he downplays the acknowledged need for the LCMS to address race and ethnicity.[251]

Along the way, he suggests that LCMS homogeneity as a non-Hispanic White denomination has nothing to do with "any racial discrimination *per se*."[252] At the very least, such an assertion requires far more support than the fact that the LCMS population is largely from a German background and fails to include Poles, Italians, and people of other European countries.

Hawley offers an important limitation. His work is sociological, not theological:

> But my report does not dictate LCMS policy, and I assume that any policies the LCMS implements in the future will be created with crucial input from religious scholars and leaders who will ensure that the Gospel remains the denomination's primary guide and inspiration.[253]

As a result, Hawley's reports are exclusively centered on an institutional view of the church. He gives no attention to the church as the people of God, the body of Christ.[254] He should not be faulted for this self-limitation, but neither can one ignore that it diminishes the value of his work. This study will emphasize that the sociological emphasis on the church, while of value, tends to fail to address the creedal traits of the church's unity, holiness, apostolicity, and—of particular interest—its catholicity. However, from a theological viewpoint, the sociological data indicates not only that the LCMS may have a birthrate problem, but also a catholicity problem. The data from the social sciences shows that the decline in American Christianity, though widespread, is not uniform. Churches that have focused their efforts on evangelizing and incorporating minority and immigrant populations are not declining but growing.[255]

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[251] See Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change," 80.

[252] Hawley, "LCMS—Demographic and Social Change," 48.

[253] George Hawley, "Responses" [to Rebeka Cook], *Journal of Lutheran Mission* 4, no. 1 (March 2017): viii–x.

[254] Cook notes this in "Limits of Interpretation," vii.

[255] Note that even though the articles by Hawley and MacPherson did not emphasize the importance of diversity within the Synod, LCMS President Harrison included "Intentional outreach to immigrant populations" as

Despite accepting much of the validity in the research and the proposals offered by Hawley, this dissertation disagrees most strongly with the prioritization given to internal growth over external growth. It also questions the strategy of doubling down on church-planting in the Midwest and smaller or rural communities as Synod's highest outreach priority. While family revitalization is indeed important and homogeneous outreach is not to be ignored, Hawley's suggestion that the *single most important cause* for LCMS decline is the DT fails to account for the more important fact of the Synod's lack of racial and ethnic diversity. Again, this dissertation does not disagree with attention and energy given to family-focused solutions to LCMS decline—pro-natalist ideas, if you will. Neither does it oppose church planting by LCMS districts located in the Midwest. Rather, the argument here is that although the DT is certainly a significant reason for LCMS membership decline, it is *not* the single most important cause for our decline and ought not be the sole or even chief focus of the LCMS moving forward. Hawley's research itself contradicts that assumption.

While Hawley's research for the LCMS is focused almost entirely on the factor of birthrate and family formation, his later book is far more balanced in its view of what is causing decline in most denominations. He shows that there is a stronger correlation between membership growth and denominational diversity than there is between family and birthrate factors (and also a slightly stronger correlation for the level of member devotion than for birthrate!). Chapter 7 of *Demography, Culture, Decline* is devoted to "Diversity, Devotion, and Politics." It shows that the correlation between denominational diversity and growth far exceeds the correlation between growth and birthrates. "The correlation coefficient for percent non-White and denominational

one of six priorities for his administration. He did so in the issue of *Journal of Lutheran Mission* that followed immediately after the issue featuring MacPherson and Hawley. Matthew C. Harrison, "From the President," *Journal of Lutheran Mission* 4, no. 1 (March 2017): iii.

growth was an impressive 0.7."[256] Earlier, in the sixth chapter of that book, he had noted

correlations between early marriage and higher birthrates for membership success at about 0.5,

not nearly as high as the 0.7 correlation for non-White membership and denominational growth.

His book therefore identifies *three* decisive factors that correlate with membership growth in

denominations. "Over these last two chapters, we saw that there are three variables that are

correlated with strong denominations: the propensity to marry young and have large families,

racial and ethnic diversity, and the percentage who claim that religion is very important to

them."[257]

This balance is exactly right and is endorsed by this dissertation. It is true that the DT *is* of

great importance in the decline of religious participation in the US and in the LCMS as a case in

point. It clearly is of great significance to LCMS membership decline when considered

sociologically. Moreover, Hawley's emphasis on the DT is rightly connected with the

importance of family formation to the demographic health of religious groups in the US in

general and in the LCMS in particular. Hawley notes that, overall, "Lutherans are shrinking both

as a percentage of all Americans, and as a percentage of White Americans."[258] This, too, must be

affirmed. Consequently, this dissertation is favorable to suggestions from MacPherson and

Hawley that to some extent the Synod should adopt "pro-natalist" and "pro-family" responses to

address its membership decline. But it is unfortunate that the two LCMS scholars failed to give

diversity its due in their reports. LCMS homogeneity is the greatest obstacle to LCMS growth.

Therefore, both Hawley and MacPherson share the same weakness—too little attention to

the failure of LCMS external growth. Rebeka Cook, a statistical analyst, raised another potential

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[256] Hawley, *Demography, Culture, Decline,* 107.

[257] Hawley, *Demography, Culture, Decline*, 113.

[258] Hawley, *Demography, Culture, Decline,* 169.

problem with both MacPherson and Hawley when she questioned their work. She wrote a

lengthy rejoinder in a letter to the editor, published in the *Journal of Lutheran Mission.* She notes

several fallacies at work:

1. The inability of the study design(s) to infer causal relationship, but assumption of causality evident throughout the articles in the journal;

2. An enhanced meaning of the results given to the outcomes of the analysis methods chosen;

3. An inadequate set of variables included in the analysis; and

4. A causal pathway model that is in error.

Cook concludes:

In short, the research evidence presented in the 2016 Special Edition of the *Journal of Lutheran Mission* does not support the conclusions with the degree of certainty that the authors and the editors have inferred. The research does present some interesting correlations, includes some large data sets, includes a limited literature review, and can be a starting place for more rigorous study if this topic continues to be an area of interest.[259]

Dr. Cook's contention is not that there is no evidence of correlation between birthrates and

LCMS decline, but that the correlation results in an overly confident assumption of causality.

She wants "to emphasize the limitation of this study design and to advocate for greater caution in

crediting the 'cause of decline' in the LCMS as being birthrate based on the body of evidence in

this journal." She questions the overly strong assumptions of causation in the articles and

suggests that the approach to interpreting the data implies that the authors are in effect saying:

"The LCMS needs to increase the white, non-Hispanic birthrate." Therefore, she adds: "I

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[259] The four "significant fallacies" are quoted in full from Cook's letter to the editor which precedes her four-page critique (p. iv). See Rebeka Cook, letter to the editor and "Limits of Interpretation in the *Journal of Lutheran Mission* December 2016 Edition," *Journal of Lutheran Mission* 4, no. 1 (March 2017): iv–vii. http://lcms.org/journaloflutheranmission. Cook gives particular attention to Hawley's two articles and much less to MacPherson. Consequently, only Hawley replied to her critique. See George Hawley, letter to the editor, *Journal of Lutheran Mission* 4, no. 1 (March 2017): viii–x, http://lcms.org/journaloflutheranmission.

recommend extreme caution, prudence, and care in promoting the 'birthrate.'"[260]

Another weakness Cook sees is the limited number of variables considered in the research and the failure to control for confounding variables. For example, birthrate may be directly affected by marriage rate and by increased female education.

> The variables used in the journal are all a starting place to explore decline and provide thought-provoking correlations, but the list is incomplete, and the causation and strength of any one factor cannot be determined by the methods used. In summary, the scientific process to narrow significant variables for inclusion seems to have been omitted.[261]

Cook wants theology to norm social science as she completes her review by addressing the "causal pathway" at work in the three articles in question. By a causal pathway she means "the process by which an outcome is brought into being." Theology is concerned with faith and the "causal pathway" for faith is the Holy Spirit working in Word and Sacrament to bring faith into being. In both Hawley's and MacPherson's work, however, she sees a different causal pathway with a different outcome: "family faith" leads to an "LCMS adherent." That is the essence of the natural growth that concerns both Hawley and MacPherson. Cook argues that while a faithful family may be involved in the outcome of faith, it must not be assumed to be the cause. Rather, a family may be the setting in which a person is more regularly exposed to the "message of Jesus"—but it is the Word, not the family, that is causative. Thus, she worries that the special issue articles were devoted wholly to institutional survival—having "LCMS adherents"—and not to "faith formation, followers of Jesus, the body of Christ, restoration of a broken world, grace, forgiveness, or the family of God."[262]

Cook gives particular attention to Hawley's two articles. Hawley replied first to her

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[260] Cook, "Limits of Interpretation," v.

[261] Cook, "Limits of Interpretation," vi.

[262] Cook, "Limits of Interpretation," vi–vii.

critique. He thanked her for many "important points" and he agrees that his correlations are only

a starting point. However, he defends the conclusion that "family formation and higher fertility

rates" are foundational for stronger church bodies.[263] He also defended his sociological rather

than theological approach in his work:

> When working on my report, I treated the LCMS as I would treat any other social organization (a political party, for example). I thus focused my attention on measurable variables like LCMS adherents. Questions of discipleship and the Holy Spirit were not part of my analysis because I know of no way to measure these things.[264]

Ryan MacPherson also responded to Cook in an open letter to her published in the

"Responses" section of the *Journal of Lutheran Mission*. He, too, thanks her for her critique.

Specifically, he expressed gratitude for her interest in LCMS membership trends and for her

theological focus on the means of grace. He explains that while neither he nor Hawley say much

about Jesus, that is because of the question they were addressing: "What are the factors, humanly

speaking, that help to describe and perhaps explain the trajectory of LCMS membership?"[265] He

then defends himself with a common-sense ("simple demographic arithmetic") argument against

the charge that it is unwarranted to assume that birthrate decline is causal for declining LCMS

membership by noting that he did also consider additional factors. He also argues that while

epidemiology can demand stricter approaches to causation, historians tend to focus on

"preponderance of evidence" and so "we have good reasons to attribute the overall numerical

decline of the LCMS to a declining birthrate." He thus stands by his conclusion that

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[263] See George Hawley, "Responses" (letter to the editors), *Journal of Lutheran Mission* 4, no. 1 (March 2017): viii–x, http://lcms.org/journaloflutheranmission. Hawley supports his emphasis on the causative power of fertility primarily with an article by Michael Hout, Andrew Greeley, and Melissa J. Wilde, "The Demographic Imperative in Religious Change in the United States," *The American Journal of Sociology* 107 (2001): 497–530.

[264] Hawley, "Responses," ix.

[265] Ryan MacPherson, "Responses" (open letter to Rebekah Cook), *Journal of Lutheran Mission* 4, no. 1 (March 2017): x–xiii, http://lcms.org/journaloflutheranmission.

declining birthrate is the primary cause of LCMS decline. MacPherson goes on to question whether Cook holds to infant baptismal regeneration, distinguishes the visible and invisible churches, and emphasizes that his recommendation of intergenerational ministry is based "on doctrine, not data."[266]

The Depth of the Demographic Dilemma

Even from a purely sociological perspective, the DT and its declining birth rates is only a partial explanation for membership decline in many Christian churches. Three other demographic factors should also be considered: first, the relative strength of Christianity in certain minority populations (e.g., among African-Americans, Hispanics, and some other immigrant populations)]; second, the growth of specific Christian movements (e.g., Pentecostalism); and, third, the growth (or at least relative numerical health) displayed by church bodies with greater diversity such as the Presbyterian Church in America and the US Roman Catholic Church (but also the American Baptist Churches USA).

The comparison and contrast of the PCA with the LCMS is most telling in this regard, due especially to the similarity between the two church bodies in the 1970s when both were highly homogeneous, non-Hispanic White churches. Both denominations were and are very conservative in terms of key theological teachings and practices (inerrancy of Scripture, confessionally traditional, ordination of men only to the ministry, defense of traditional man-woman marriage, belief that same-sex behavior is sinful, refusal to ordain practicing homosexuals or to acknowledge or to consecrate same-sex marriage). Yet, since the 1970s the PCA has grown numerically nearly every year while the LCMS has experienced decline. In

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[266] MacPherson, "Responses," xi–xii.

addition, the PCA has gone from being a southern, largely small-town, all-White denomination

at its inception in 1973 to a denomination that is now about 20% non-White and well-represented

in America's cities.[267] These changes in the PCA are far more reflective of America's changing

demographics while the LCMS has largely remained Midwestern, non-urban, and monocultural.

As the title of this dissertation "Beyond the Numbers" indicates, the ultimate goal of the

research is to provide a constructive reaction and response to the effects of the first and second

demographic transitions and to the changing demographic profile of the United States. The

response is particular to the context of the LCMS and will focus on the need for the LCMS to

address its homogeneity as both a demographic or sociological problem and, more importantly,

as a *theological* problem. Hawley does not address the Synod's decline as a theological problem

at all. MacPherson does so, but with a narrow lens devoted to the failure of handing down the

faith generationally and teachings about divorce and birth control. In addition, the task before

both scholars was somewhat narrow because of its internal focus—to consider reasons for

Synod's decline and suggest ideas for numerical growth. A broader and more robust theological

critique is necessary.

LCMS youth ministries under Mark Kiessling has helpfully researched and addressed the

matter of retention.[268] Scholars such as Joel P. Okamoto have argued for engagement with the

shifting intellectual framework of the West.[269] Such reactions to the decline of the LCMS focused

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[267] Pew Research Center's Landscape Survey results for the PCA are instructive and perhaps a bit embarrassing for the LCMS to consider. The PCA is about 20% non-white. That includes 6% African American membership (to the LCMS' 2%), 3% Asian compared to the LCMS with less than 1% Asian, and 6% Latino to the LCMS' 1%. The PCA is 5% other/mixed race while the LCMS is 2%. See Pew Research Center, "Presbyterian Church in America," Religious Landscape Study, accessed February 10, 2020, https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/religious-denomination/presbyterian-church-in-america/

[268] See Kiessling and Shults, "Search for Young People," 19–32.

[269] See Joel P. Okamoto, "When Salt Loses Its Saltiness: Nihilism and the Contemporary Church," *Concordia Journal* 44, no. 4 (2018): 33–49.

on retention of youth, secularization, and a failure to engage our culture intellectually are all commendable, but they too are internally focused. This dissertation seeks to offer an external focus, arguing that the problem the LCMS faces is a failure of mission and, ultimately, a failure to appreciate and to teach the catholicity of the Church. For that reason, then, the final task of the dissertation will be to make suggestions for LCMS catechesis that emphasize catholicity and thus are also able, potentially, to address denominational membership decline.

The Constancy of the LCMS Demographic Profile

The lack of internal growth is coupled with the fact that the LCMS is not growing significantly from without. LCMS efforts in church-planting and evangelism are not leading to new member gains that increase the total number of LCMS adherents overall. Indeed, the results of the Synod's outreach efforts do not even equal those who are leaving it for other church bodies or for no affiliation in any church. In other words, LCMS membership decline goes well beyond losses that would be based on declining birth rates alone. Simply put: the number of individuals who leave LCMS congregations exceeds the number who join.[270] This is evident especially in terms of the relationship of communicant membership losses to communicant membership gains.

A Homogeneous Synod and Growing American Diversity

Consideration of the lack of external growth—growth from mission and outreach—reveals a fact that is of particular importance to this dissertation. The most glaring failure of external growth lies in the fact that while American society has grown increasingly diverse in terms of ethnicity and race over past decades, the LCMS has remained largely homogeneous. And, as a

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[270] This fact is corroborated by Hawley's research in *Demography, Culture, Decline*, 110–11.

result, while denominations that are more diverse racially and ethnically are growing as they tap

into growing segments of the US population, the opposite is true of the Synod due to its

monoculturalism and its lack of racial and ethnic diversity.

The United States has had significant immigration from Central and South America,

Africa, and Asia, which has decreased the percentage of non-Hispanic Whites as a percentage of

the population. Moreover, the fertility rate of these new Americans is higher than the fertility rate

of non-Hispanic White women. As a result, the US population, which is already one of the most

ethnically and racially diverse populations in the world, has become even more diverse.

Moreover, immigrants are a fertile mission field. Racial and ethnic minorities have, overall, a

higher level of religious adherence in general and Christian adherence in particular.[271]

The Census Bureau predicts that the trend toward racial-ethnic diversity will continue:

> The non-Hispanic White population is projected to shrink over coming decades, from 199 million in 2020 to 179 million people in 2060—even as the U.S. population continues to grow. Their decline is driven by falling birth rates and a rising number of deaths over time as the non-Hispanic White population ages. In comparison, the White population, regardless of Hispanic origin, is projected to grow from 253 million to 275 million over the same period.[272]

We note that the data on birth rates provides, at least implicitly, one other reason for LCMS

decline. Because the LCMS remains a strongly homogeneous church body in terms of

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[271] Hawley's research indicates a correlation of 0.5 for White birthrate with the change of membership in the LCMS. Hawley, "District-Level Trends," 4. In other words, decreasing birthrates correlate modestly with membership decline. In *Demography, Culture, Decline,* he shows the more significant correlation of denominational diversity and denominational growth: "The correlation coefficient for percent non-White and denominational growth was an impressive 0.7." In other words, having more non-White members correlates much more strongly with denominational growth. Hawley, *Demography, Culture, Decline,* 106–7. On the importance of religion by race and ethnicity, see Pew Research Center, "Racial and Ethnic Composition," (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, May 12, 2015), https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/racial-and-ethnic-composition/. Note especially two charts: "Importance of religion in one's life by race/ethnicity" and "Attendance at religious services by race/ethnicity."

[272] USCB, *Demographic Turning Points for the United States: Population Projections for 2020 to 2060,* Current Population Reports, Jonathan Vespa, David M. Armstrong, and Lauren Medina, P25-1144 (March 2018), https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2018/demo/P25_1144.pdf.

race/ethnicity at 95% non-Hispanic White, it has proven that LCMS outreach efforts are ineffective in reaching immigrants, the segment of the U.S. population that is most youthful and diverse. Immigrants would not only increase LCMS heterogeneity, but also increase its birthrate.

There is no disputing the LCMS birth dearth *or its correlation with the homogeneity of the Synod*. Hawley notes: "Among non-Hispanic whites in the United States—the racial/ethnic category that makes up 95 percent of the LCMS's membership—the total fertility rate was 1.8 as of 2010, which is below the replacement rate."[273] This low TFR is the first cause of LCMS population decline that may be cited. But it is also necessary to see that the low TFR is predictable demographically for a non-Hispanic White population. That decline is corroborated by the decline in infant baptisms in the LCMS.[274] Decline is to be expected if the LCMS is largely cut-off from the segment of America that is growing: the "minority" populations (fig. 28).[275]

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[273] Hawley, "LCMS–Demographic and Social Change," 9–10. He cites Mark Mather. Mather, "Fact Sheet: The Decline of U.S. Fertility," *Population Reference Bureau,* July 2012, http://www.prb.org/Publications/Datasheets/2012/world-population-data-sheet/fact-sheet-us-population.aspx.

[274] Actual birth rate data for the LCMS is not available. One can extrapolate from baptismal statistics since most LCMS baptisms are of infants, but that figure is also not strongly reliable.

[275] Pew Research Center, "U.S. Hispanic Population Growth Has Leveled Off," Jens Manuel Krogstad (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, August 3, 2017), http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/08/03/u-s-hispanic-population-growth-has-leveled-off/. See also the CDC's National Center for Health Statistics. "Births in the United States, 2017," Joyce A. Martin, Brady E. Hamilton, and Michelle J. K. Osterman, NCHS Data Brief no. 318, Washington, DC, August 2018, https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db318.pdf.

Hispanics accounted for more than half of total U.S. population growth last year

U.S. population increase, 2016 to 2017

	2017 population	Change, 2016-17	Share of total increase
Hispanic	58,603,060	1,132,773	51%
Asian	18,262,549	521,092	24%
Black	40,573,936	344,700	16%
White	197,959,872	-9,736	0%
Total	325,344,115	2,216,602	

Note: Estimates for 2017 are preliminary. White, black and Asian are single race, not Hispanic. Hispanics are of any race. American Indians/Alaska Natives, Native Hawaiians/Other Pacific islanders and multi-race Americans not shown.
Source: Pew Research Center analysis of U.S. Census Bureau population estimates.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Figure 28. Hispanics as driver for US population growth.[276]

Population Migration and the LCMS—Flight from Urban America

Another factor contributing to LCMS membership decline is that the LCMS has largely

abandoned America's cities over the past five decades. LCMS presence in five cities illustrates

this. New York City (NYC), Los Angeles (LA), Chicago, and Houston are the largest US cities

at present. NYC, LA, and Chicago, have been the three largest US cities throughout the past five

decades.[277] Detroit was the fifth largest city in the 1970 census and it had the second largest

number of LCMS members of all US cities. Houston is the fastest growing major city in the US.

The following table charts LCMS decline in the four largest American cities and in Detroit,

which had once been among America's leading population centers. It shows the difference in

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[276] Figure from Pew Research Center, "Hispanics Have Accounted for More Than Half of Total US Population Growth since 2010," Jens Manuel Krogstad (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, July 10, 2020), https://pewrsr.ch/324NHu4.

[277] The three were the largest three cities since 1960. The 1960 census rank by population was NYC, Chicago, LA. In 1950, Philadelphia was the third largest US city. A helpful chart of the top 10 largest US cities by decade since the first US census in 1790 may be found at Wikipedia, "List of Most Populous Cities in the United States by Decade," last edited on 26 October 2022, at 20:58 (UTC), https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_most_populous_cities_in_the_United_States_by_decade#1980.

overall membership and adult membership during the fifty-year period from 1968 to 2018.

LCMS Decline in Five Cities (1968–2018)						
City	Members in 1968	Members in 2018	Amount of Decline	Adult Members 1968	Adult Members 2018	Amount of Decline
NYC	30,490	4,475	0.85	18,809	3,463	0.82
Chicago	55,028	5,630	0.90	38,850	4,494	0.88
LA	3,400	774	0.77	2,206	679	0.69
Houston	24,570	12,083	0.51	15,045	8,729	0.42
Detroit	48,949	4,229	0.91	32,801	3,133	0.90
TOTALS	162,437	27,191	0.83	107,711	20,498	0.81

Figure 29: LCMS decline in five select cities.[278]

To summarize the fifty-year data presented in Figure 29, LCMS baptized membership in the five cities in question declined, overall, from 162,437 souls to 27,191. The Synod has only slightly more than 15% as many members today as we had five decades ago in those cities. That is a decline of 83%.

What happened? Two of those cities, Chicago and Detroit, lost population, but not nearly on the level that the LCMS declined. Detroit's population loss was the most dramatic. Its 1970 census population was 1,511,482. By the 2020 Census, Detroit's population was only 639,111, a loss of 58% of its population. As drastic as that is, however, it is less than the LCMS

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[278] Data is from the *1969 Statistical Yearbook* (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1969), and from *The Lutheran Annual 2020* (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 2019).

membership decline of 91%. In other words, the rate of LCMS membership decline was 36 percentage points greater than Detroit's population decline. In that period, 32 of the 48 LCMS congregations that existed in 1968 were closed while 2 new churches were planted.

Chicago's population also declined. In 1970, Chicago was the second largest US city, boasting a population of 3,366,957. According to the 2020 census, 2,746,388 people were living in Chicago, a population decline of 18%. LCMS membership decline far exceeds that at 90%. In the case of Chicago, the rate of LCMS membership decline was more than 400% greater than Chicago's population decline. In the five decades, the LCMS closed 40 of the 77 congregations that it had in 1968. Four new congregations were planted.

The populations of NYC, LA, and Houston have all grown in the past five decades based on the censuses of 1970 and 2020. LCMS membership, however, declined. NYC grew by 11.5% from 7,894,862 in 1970 to 8,804,190 in 2020. LCMS membership *declined* by 85%. Out of 53 1968 congregations, 18 were closed by 2018. Eight new churches were planted in NYC.

LA experienced much greater growth, from 2,816,061 in 1970 to 3,898,747 in 2020, adding more than 38% to its 1970 population while LCMS membership *declined* by 77%. Out of 11 1968 congregations, only one was closed while five churches were planted.

Houston's population surged 87% from 1,232,802 in 1970 to 2,304,580 in 2020, but again the LCMS declined, this time by 53%. Of 32 LCMS congregations in 1968, 13 were closed. However, there were more than 45 new starts in the five decades.

Clearly, the cause of LCMS decline in these urban centers *is not due to change in a city's total population.* Where a city's population declined, LCMS membership declined *far more*. Where there was population increase, the LCMS still declined dramatically.

That does not mean, however, that LCMS urban decline had nothing to do with changes in

the populations of these cities. The reality is that LCMS membership decline in urban America is part of a widespread migration in US cities. The door to this migration was opened by landmark Supreme Court rulings such as *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), that ruled racial discrimination in education unconstitutional, and *Shelley v. Kramer* (1948), that banned the restrictive covenants that had prevented Blacks (and other non-Whites) from buying houses in White neighborhoods throughout America. These rulings, together with the civil rights reforms that began in the 1960s, enabled an increasing number of African Americans to move from highly restricted urban neighborhoods—ghettos, in many cases—to neighborhoods that had earlier been "whites-only." But, as Blacks moved in, Whites moved out. That story was repeated throughout urban America—most prominently in northern cities like NYC, Chicago, and Detroit.[279] That basic pattern would repeat in cities like LA and Houston, but this time a majority of the new residents were Hispanic.[280] Mark T. Mulder points out how those moves affected a particular church body in Chicago, the Christian Reformed Church. The departure of White homeowners was soon followed by closing city congregations or moving them to the suburbs.[281] A similar pattern took place in the LCMS with its members who were nearly all White, part of the millions who left. Some of our congregations moved. Many others were closed. And new

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[279] This dissertation cannot retrace the history of the "Great Migration" of Blacks from the South to northern cities in the first half of the 20th century, or the history of White flight from America's cities in the decades of the 1960s and 70s. For a representative look, see the example of Detroit as described by Thomas Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996); or, for NYC, see Harold X. Connolly, *A Ghetto Grows in Brooklyn* (New York: New York University Press, 1977); or, for Chicago, Louis Rosen, *The South Side: The Racial Transformation of an American Neighborhood* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1998).

[280] See Guadalupe San Miguel Jr., *Brown, Not White: School Integration and the Chicano Movement in Houston* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2001) and on LA, see especially Part 2 in Josh Kun and Laura Pulido, eds, *Black and Brown in Los Angeles: Beyond Conflict and Coalition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014).

[281] Mark T. Mulder, *Shades of White Flight: Evangelical Congregations and Urban Departure* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2015).

churches were planted in suburbia. The result is the reality we face today of a minimal LCMS presence in cities.

Out of our five representative cities, only Houston provides a glimmer of hope, since LCMS losses there were the least devastating out of the five. Even that glimmer must be seen in light of the fact that Houston's growth was the greatest of the five cities, since it has nearly doubled in size over the past five decades. Nevertheless, LCMS decline in Houston is less extreme, enough so that it is an outlier for the Synod and merits further comment and study. Thanks to correspondence with Dr. Jon Braunersreuther, a mission executive with the Texas District, some comments and tentative conclusions are offered.[282] Two distinctive factors in the story of the LCMS in Houston are noteworthy. First, the LCMS in Houston has clearly been engaged in church planting in the city, with *more than 45 new mission starts* over the past 50 years.[283] In the five decades, the LCMS closed many of its Houston congregations, but it experienced an overall net gain of 53% in number of congregations because of the addition of the churches that were planted. The second noteworthy factor is that, of the new starts, about half are a "cross cultural" congregation—a racially or ethnically minority group. Clearly, the emphasis given to reaching the new populations of Houston is an important factor in reducing the level of overall LCMS membership decline.[284]

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[282] After beginning with data from the *Statistical Yearbook* and the *Lutheran Annual,* I engaged in email correspondence with Dr. Jon Braunersreuther, Director of Mission Strategy of the LCMS Texas District. Braunersreuther provided further detail on the District's work in Houston. About half the new starts are Hispanic, but there are also various Asian and African Immigrant congregations that have been planted.

[283] *The Lutheran Annual 2022* shows that out of a total of 87 LCMS church starts in the previous year, the Texas District was responsible for 44 of them—just over 50% of the total. Florida-Georgia District started 13 missions. 16 districts had zero starts and another 13 districts started only 1 congregation. LCMS, *The Lutheran Annual 2022* (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 2021), 790.

[284] https://www.latimes.com/nation/la-na-houston-diversity-2017-htmlstory.html "In 1970, Whites comprised 61.2 percent of the population, Blacks 25.7 percent, Hispanics 12.1 percent, and Asians one percent." See https://cis.org/Report/Shaping-Texas-Effects-Immigration-19702020#:~:text=In%201970%2C%20Whites%20comprised%2061.2,but%20barely%20so%20%E2%80%94%20

The reality is that, overall, LCMS church-planting and outreach efforts have been inadequate for the task of addressing the population changes that have taken place. We have done far better, of course, in suburbia and in small towns, but in general our church body's demographic profile fits the America of the past better than the America of the present.

Breaking Down the LCMS Dilemma

We return to Richard R. Osmer's questions for the task of practical theology.[285]

What's Going On? Failure to Connect with America's Changing Demographic Profile

George Hawley, Ryan MacPherson, and others have shown that in the midst of the changes in America's demography the LCMS has fared poorly.[286] The LCMS has failed to retain its own youth. None of its districts is growing. It is graying rapidly. These are direct effects of the DT.

The significance of the DT goes beyond birthrates. Indirect effects are also a significant aspect of the difficulty that the LCMS has in connecting with the new America. The move from rural to urban settings directly fed into the 1DT, and not only because it resulted in declining infant mortality. Tim Dyson shows how this produced indirect effects. Declining mortality with consequent longevity leads people to focus more expectations and attention on life here and now and less on an afterlife. Urbanization breaks up the extended family, former social and religious ties, and undermines cultural traditions (such as religious patterns). The life cycle of women changes dramatically. In such ways, the DT leads indirectly to a more secularized—here-and-

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52.3%20percent.

[285] Osmer, *Practical Theology,* Kindle Introduction.

[286] George Hawley, "The LCMS in the Face of Demographic and Social Change: A Social Science Perspective," Special issue, *Journal of Lutheran Mission* 3, no.3 (December 2016): 7–84. http://lcms.org/journaloflutheranmission. "Generational Generosity: Handing Down Our Faith to Our Children and Our Children's Children," Special issue, *Journal of Lutheran Mission* 3, no.3 (December 2016): 85–121. http://lcms.org/journaloflutheranmission. See also Kiessling and Shults, "Search for Young People," 19–32.

now—worldview.[287] All churches face this challenge, but church bodies that are more biblically and culturally traditional have a particularly difficult task in the face of such secularization.

As significant as declining birthrates are, the demographic factor that, arguably, deserves the most attention is that the LCMS looks less and less like America as a whole. The Synod has not reached out to the new America. This is true geographically, racially, and ethnically. LCMS presence on the coasts is in sharp decline while the coastal US remains densely populated with 40% of the US population living in counties adjacent to either the Pacific or Atlantic coasts. Even more significantly, as the US moves toward a majority minority population, the LCMS remains largely White.

"Why Is It Going On?" Families, Homogeneity and Racialization

The DT's effect on the LCMS cannot be ignored. There is no debate over the fact that family size has declined in the LCMS, as is true in almost every other population group in the US and, for that matter, throughout the world. Declining birthrates affect not only the present day, but the next generation as well. The fewer the births in one generation, the fewer the number of potential parents when those infants become adults.

As important as families are to the state of the LCMS, homogeneity[288] is just as or more important. Homogeneity on some level is required for unity in any group. The Missouri Synod is a church body with a heritage that prioritizes doctrinal homogeneity: unity in pure doctrine and right practice. Despite a significant debate about biblical hermeneutics in the 1960s and 1970s,

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[287] Tim Dyson, *Population and Development: The Demographic Transition* (London: Zed Books, 2010). One may also consult the work of Lesthaeghe, for example: Ron Lesthaeghe and Lisa Neidert, "The 'Second Demographic Transition' in the US: Exception or Textbook Example?" The Pennsylvania State University CiteSeerX Archives, 2015, http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.565.3808&rep=rep1&type=pdf.

[288] OED, s.v. homogeneity, def. 1: "Identity of kind with something else."

the LCMS never changed its public affirmation of the plenary inspiration and authority of the

Holy Scriptures as the Word of God.[289] Just as consistently, the Synod has held to an unwavering

commitment to the Lutheran Confessions "as a true and unadulterated statement and exposition

of the Word of God."[290]

Without minimizing points of discussion and debate in the matter of church practices,[291] the

LCMS displays significant theological unity overall, particularly regarding its clergy and its

official, stated doctrinal positions. Theologically speaking, the LCMS is one of the most

homogeneous church bodies in North America, if not the world.

Turning from theology to sociology, homogeneity reigns there as well. As part of its

Religious Landscape Survey, Pew Research Center data indicates that, as of 2014, the LCMS

remains about 95% non-Hispanic White. As such, it is third among the five *least* racially diverse

denominations in the United States.[292] In addition, the LCMS, due to its geographic traits, shares

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[289] The Synod's position had been clearly articulated in the *Brief Statement of the Doctrinal Position of the Missouri Synod,* adopted unanimously in 1932. See *Brief Statement of the Doctrinal Position of the Missouri Synod* (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1932), par. 1–3. In response to the debates of the 1960s and 70s, the result was a firm reaffirmation of inspiration and inerrancy by the LCMS in its 1973 convention (Res. 3–01). See The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, *Proceedings of the Fiftieth Regular Convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod* (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, July 6-13, 1973), 127–28.

[290] See The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, *Handbook: Constitution, Bylaws, Articles of Incorporation 2019* (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 2019), Article II. This article remains unchanged from the original constitution of the Missouri Synod.

[291] One may note differences of opinion about admission to Communion, about the role of the laity when clergy are not available, about the significance of such concepts as order of creation, the relationship of the doctrine of creation to aspects of evolutionary science, and questions about exactly what church leadership roles women may rightly hold. Despite these debates, few cases of theological dissent have been expressed in recent years and none has represented anything more than the viewpoint of a small minority of LCMS clergy or congregations.

[292] The five denominations are, the United Methodist Church (94% non-Hispanic white), the African Methodist Episcopal Church (94% Black), the LCMS (95% non-Hispanic White), the ELCA (96% non-Hispanic White), and the National Baptist Convention (99% Black). See Pew Research Center, "The Most and Least Racially Diverse US Religious Groups," Michael Lipka, FactTank, July 27, 2015, https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/07/27/the-most-and-least-racially-diverse-u-s-religious-groups/. In addition, see Pew Research Center, "Racial and ethnic composition among members of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod," Religious Landscape Study, accessed February 10, 2020, https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/religious-denomination/lutheran-church-missouri-synod/racial-and-ethnic-composition/.

the sociology of suburban, small town, and rural middle America. *Forty Years of Statistics,* compiled by LCMS Research Services, details the reality of an LCMS that, while present across the country, has an increasingly thin presence in the Northeast and on the entire West Coast. In addition, it becomes apparent that the LCMS has suffered extensive losses in northern urban centers such as Chicago and Detroit.[293] The Atlantic, New Jersey, and New England districts are all among the smaller of LCMS Districts and together they have declined in their membership at twice as great a rate as the LCMS overall. The California/Nevada/Hawaii (CNH), Northwest, and Pacific Southwest (PSW) districts continue to be among the larger districts, yet the first two have declined by 20% and the third, despite significant growth of retirees into its Arizona region, has also declined more than the Synod overall. (It is to be noted, in addition, that some districts, such as Florida-Georgia and Texas, have benefited from LCMS church members who move south for retirement.)[294] Geographically, the LCMS is significantly under-represented in urban and coastal America—even though the coasts and cities continue to be the population centers of the US.

Another social trait of the LCMS follows from the preceding. Overall, the LCMS, as a largely White, non-urban church body, displays the traits that sociologists Michael Emerson and

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[293] The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod Rosters and Statistics, *Forty Years of Statistics: Based on Lutheran Annual Data for Years 1970–2011* (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, [March 25] 2013). The study groups LCMS Districts into three categories by size. The five "largest" Districts include the Northwest and Pacific Southwest, but these two Districts show the most significant rates of decline in that group, which also includes Texas, Michigan, and Missouri. The five "Large" districts (Indian, Minnesota, Nebraska, N. Wisconsin, and N. Illinois are all in the Midwest (N. Illinois shows a very high rate of decline due to the significance of membership losses in Chicago). The next group of five districts, "Large-Mid-Sized" districts includes California/Nevada/Hawaii (CNH), Florida-George (Fl-Ga), Minnesota N. (MNN), S. Wisconsin (SWis), and the Southeastern District (SE). CNH has suffered the most significant decline in that group. Of the five "Mid-Sized" districts, Iowa W., Kansas, Ohio, Rocky Mountain, and Southern, the most significant decline is in the Southern District. For the five "Small-Mid-Sized" districts, Central Illinois, Eastern, English, Iowa East and Mid-South, the greatest recent decline is in the Eastern and Mid-South (although the Mid-South's decline is a recent phenomenon). The five "Smaller" districts include Atlantic, N. Dakota, Oklahoma, S. Dakota, and S. Illinois. The Atlantic, by far, experienced the greatest losses. Of the "Very Small" districts—Montana, New England, New Jersey, SELC, and Wyoming—the greatest losses by percentage were in New England and New Jersey.

[294] This is not to discount the important missiological efforts of each of these districts. The Texas District, in particular, has a vigorous focus on reaching the diverse population of that state.

Christian Smith refer to as "racialization."[295] It must immediately be admitted that the verb, to

racialize, is not precisely defined. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines it in three ways as, "To

impose a racial interpretation on; to cause to become racist in attitude, behaviour, or structure; to

categorize or divide according to race."[296] The first definition seems to imply and the second

definition clearly indicates a malevolent element in one who racializes. The third definition,

however, is more innocuous. Racialization in the sense that Emerson and Smith use it is akin to

the third definition from Oxford since it is distinguishable from "racism." Indeed, rather than

assuming malevolent racism as the basis of racialization, they argue that it exists despite the

good intentions of many.

> This book is a story of how well-intentioned people, their values, and their
> institutions actually recreate racial divisions and inequalities they ostensibly oppose.
> It is a narrative of how some of America's core values and assumptions and its
> reliance on market principles contradict and work against other esteemed values. To
> tell this tale of paradox, we explore the connection between two of the most dynamic,
> controversial, longstanding, and unique aspects of American life—evangelical
> religion and black-white race relations.[297]

Therefore, racialization does not necessarily imply a belief in the inherent inferiority of one

race compared to another, nor is it necessarily a matter of bigotry or animosity toward

individuals of another race. Rather, racialization addresses the structures of a society and the

thought modes that people develop toward those who are perceived to be from another race.

Smith and Emerson explain:

> In short, and this is its unchanging essence, a racialized society is a society wherein
> race matters profoundly for differences in life experiences, life opportunities, and
> social relationships. A racialized society can also be said to be "a society that

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[295] See Christian Smith and Michael O. Emerson, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000). Kindle Edition.

[296] OED, s.v. racialize, *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, accessed December 01, 2021, https://www-oed-com.csl.idm.oclc.org/view/Entry/238619.

[297] Smith and Emerson, *Divided by Faith*, Introduction, Kindle.

allocates differential economic, political, social, and even psychological rewards to groups along racial lines; lines that are socially constructed."[298]

One example of such racialization is that Black children are far more likely than White children to live in poor communities with high crime and attend sub-standard schools.[299]

The LCMS has a long history in Black ministry and has regularly condemned racism. The Synod's involvement in outreach to African Americans began as a participant in the Synodical Conference's mission endeavors. The Synodical Conference resolved in its 1877 convention to begin such work among the "Freedmen" of the South.[300] Such joint work continued until the end of the Synodical Conference in 1967. During that period many elementary schools were started throughout the South, congregations were planted, and institutions for the training of Black church workers were established. After the end of the Synodical Conference, the LCMS continued to give support and encouragement to Black ministry.

The LCMS began to condemn racism in its convention resolutions beginning in 1971. Resolutions against racism were passed at conventions in 1971, 1973, 1977, 1979, 1981, 1983, 1992, 1995, 2016, and 2019.[301] In addition, in a widely circulated report, the Commission on Theology and Church Relations published a robust theological argument against racism in

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[298] Emerson and Smith, *Divided by Faith,* chap. 1, Kindle.

[299] See Janie Boschma and Ronald Brownstein, "The Concentration of Poverty in American Schools," *The Atlantic* (February 29, 2016), https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2016/02/concentration-poverty-american-schools/471414/.

[300] On the Synodical Conference outreach, see Rosa Young, *Light in the Dark Belt: The Story of Rosa Young* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1950); Richard C. Dickenson, *Roses and Thorns: The Centennial Edition of Black Lutheran Mission and Ministry in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1977); and George J. Gude, "The Home Mission Work of the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference: A Description and Evaluation." ThD diss., Concordia Seminary, 1991. On the Synod's pronouncements against racism, the 2019 Res. 11-04A To Affirm the Common Humanity of All People and Ethnicities, in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, *Convention Proceedings 2019* (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, July 20–25, 2019), 216–17.

[301] See the LCMS *Convention Proceedings* for all these years, available online at https://files.lcms.org/folder/4D677E99-DA94-4508-A9E6-53508C030612.

1994.[302]

This history of outreach and regular condemnations of racism, however, does not mean that the Missouri Synod can wash its hands of either racism or racialization. George Gude's dissertation on the work of the Synodical Conference in Black ministry is a sobering story of paternalism and disrespect toward Black pastors and church workers, motivated by overt racist views.[303] More recently, Matthew E. Borrasso has addressed the closing of the last LCMS institution devoted entirely to Black ministry. He argues that the voices of Blacks were not given "equal weight" with others in discussions about the closing of Concordia Selma, and that this was consistent with a longstanding synodical tendency to treat Black ministry as "expendable."[304]

The notion of racialization and its connection to the LCMS must be explored more thoroughly. At this point we note only that the LCMS as a denomination is divided by race, with its congregations in large measure to be found in White neighborhoods and communities. This is even more the case with its schools, from elementary through graduate levels. Urban rather than suburban congregations are the ones most likely to be in poorer and more diverse neighborhoods and the ones most likely to close. New starts are planted with greater frequency in White, middle America rather than in urban or poor or heavily minority neighborhoods.

Economics plays a significant role in racialization. For example, as a congregational church body, the Missouri Synod operates today with a *de facto* understanding that every congregation is on its own financially. It is, in most cases, solely responsible for the costs of a minister. As a

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[302] The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod CTCR, *Racism and the Church* (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1994), https://files.lcms.org/wl/?id=2ZSjBpgjY39Eo1lH1vqCgI79YUGmfrve.

[303] Note especially the section of chapter two titled "The Impact of Racism in the Spread of Black Missions" in "Mission Work of the Synodical Conference," 87–90.

[304] Matthew E. Borrasso, "Concordia Selma Closes: Putting the Demise of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod's Educational Institutions for Black Ministry in Historical Perspective," *Journal of the Lutheran Historical Conference* (2019): 214–30. The referenced terms are used in his concluding paragraph on p. 226.

result, as a congregation experiences decline, it is soon priced out of the "ministry market" and soon struggles to survive with part-time ministry services at best. This often leads only to further decline and the congregation eventually closes. While this is true around the Synod as a whole, which has many small congregations that can no longer support a pastor, the pattern has been particularly devastating to urban ministries.[305]

One result of such racialization is that the Synod has a small and apparently shrinking number of Black pastors and churches. How can it be otherwise when so many Black congregations in urban American as well as in the South have closed? In conversations and email correspondence with Dr. Roosevelt Gray, Director of Black Ministry in the LCMS, the following facts emerged. Synod has about 150 African American and Immigrant Black pastors in about 170 congregations with predominantly Black membership. Few American Black men are in our seminaries—indeed, as is the case for Whites, Black seminary graduates are not numerous enough to replace Black pastors who are retiring. The only significant growth in Black pastors over the past decade has been American and immigrant Black men who are completing Ethnic Immigrant Institute of Theology (EIIT) and Specific Ministry Pastor (SMP) training and/or colloquy. [306]

It is not the argument of this dissertation that these practices and patterns are the result of *racism per se*. Presumably, few LCMS members bear overt antagonism against Blacks or other minorities. We can at least hope that no one from among us would defend something like White nationalism, approve of intentional segregation, or believe in the superiority of Whites compared

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[305] Admittedly, this is an over-simplification, but nevertheless captures the scenario that the author has witnessed on numerous occasions in New York, the Philadelphia region, and St. Louis.

[306] I am grateful for the work of Dr. Gray and for ready assistance to me in this dissertation. He regularly tracks LCMS congregations that are largely African American or African Immigrant, as well as the roster of African American and African Immigrant pastors.

to Blacks or other racial groups. But that does not mean that racialization is not a problem. Racialized patterns have resulted in a church body that simply does what seems most natural and easy: plant and nurture the church in places where we are most comfortable and with the kind of people that we identify with most easily. In that sense the LCMS is quite clearly a part of racialized America. It is also true that the average individual member of the LCMS has a radically different set of "life experiences, life opportunities, and social relationships" than the typical African American or a person of another ethnicity residing in urban America. This inevitably narrows the understanding of the LCMS for such "other people."

In 2020, after the police shootings of a number of African-American individuals and the consequent heightened attention to questions about racism and the racial divide in America, the Barna Group surveyed attitudes among Christians regarding race. The results are sobering. A declining percentage of White Christians believe the US has a race problem. Only 33% believe that the US has a race problem (fig. 30). This was after prolonged and widespread demonstrations due to the George Floyd killing.[307] In the same survey 81% of Black Christian adults perceived a definite race problem. This also indicates that African American *Christians* are more convinced than the overall Black population that the US has a race problem.

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[307] Barna Group, "White Christians Have Become Even Less Motivated to Address Racial Injustice," Barna Research: Faith and Christianity (September 15, 2020), https://www.barna.com/research/american-christians-race-problem/.

CURRENT PERCEPTIONS OF RACE RELATIONS IN AMERICA, BY ETHNICITY — Barna

DO YOU THINK OUR COUNTRY HAS A RACE PROBLEM?
% WHO SAY "DEFINITELY"

● All U.S. adults ● Self-identified Christians

All ethnicities
- 2019: 49% / 47%
- 2020: 46% / 43%

White adults
- 2019: 46% / 40%
- 2020: 37% / 33%

Black adults
- 2019: 72% / 75%
- 2020: 76% / 81%

Hispanic adults
- 2019: 52% / 54%
- 2020: 58% / 55%
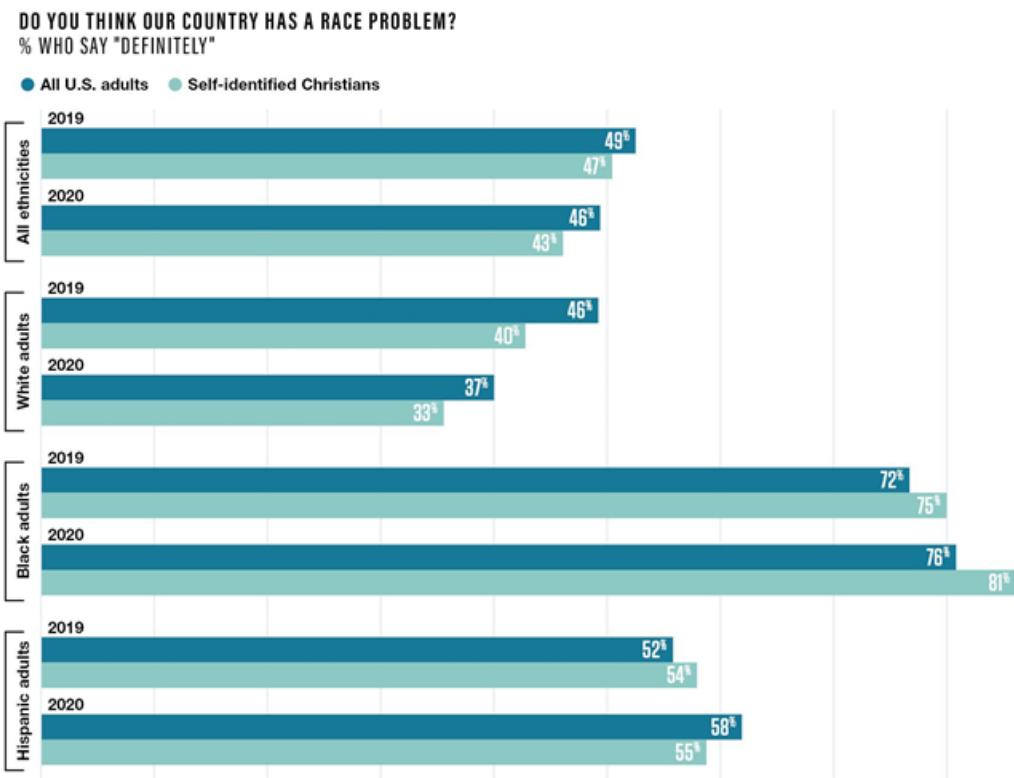
n=1,065 U.S. self-identified Christian adults; June 18 to July 17, 2020.   © 2020 | barna.com

Figure 30. Barna on perceptions of race relations.[308]

Even more striking was the response to another statement in the survey: "Historically, the United States has been oppressive to minorities." Considering the fact of slavery alone, one wonders how anyone could disagree.[309] But less than half of White Christians agreed with the statement (fig. 31).

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[308] Figure from Barna Group, "White Christians."

[309] To say nothing of decades of Jim Crow laws, the treatment of Chinese during the age of railroad construction, or the mass incarceration of Japanese citizens in World War II. The only glimmer of hope is that the number of Whites who acknowledge historical oppression of minorities did increase between 2019 and 2020.
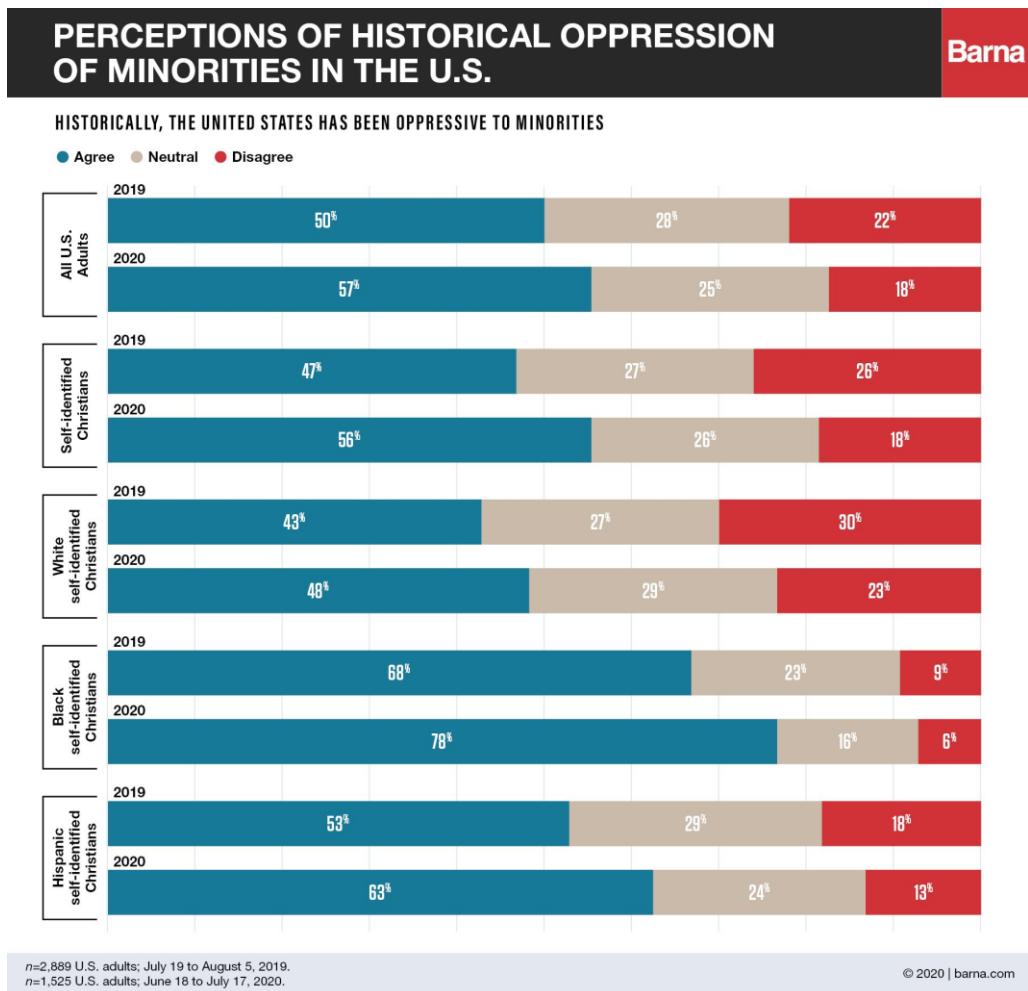
Figure 31. Barna on perceptions of historical oppression.[310]

The results of the Barna survey cannot simply be understood as representative of LCMS opinions. They are instructive, however, because they indicate how differently people see current and past circumstances, depending on their racial and ethnic background. As such, they may be instructive in recognizing how intractable a problem it is when a church body is racially and ethnically homogeneous.

The data from the preceding section is ultimately only information about who the LCMS is

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[310] Barna Group, "White Christians."

and where it is as a denomination. It is not, in itself, able to provide any inherent theological

meaning. As Osmer notes:

> The use of theories from other fields like anthropology and psychology is an
> important part of practical theological interpretation. Such theories, however, can
> take congregational [or denominational!] leaders only so far. As members of the
> Christian community, they face further questions: What ought to be going on? What
> are we to do and be as members of the Christian community in response to the events
> of our shared life and world? These questions lie at the heart of the normative task of
> practical theological interpretation.[311]

"What Ought to Be Going On?" Plotting a Future for the LCMS

Osmer's third question, "What ought to be going on?" begs clarification with regard to the

auxiliary verb "ought." One could take it from a theological standpoint that would imply

assumed obligations for God along the lines of—What ought God to be doing? Of course, that is

not the sense here. Rather, the concern is with "What should be happening in the LCMS?"

The answer then is relatively simple, at least on the surface. The LCMS ought to be

fostering both internal growth (natural or endogenous growth) and external growth (outreach or

exogenous growth). That is, internally speaking, it *ought* to engage in solid teaching about the

gifts of marriage and children, so that the Synod would grow as individual members marry,

faithfully live according to the Word of God together, bear children, and bring them up as

baptized disciples who learn to keep all that Christ has given to his church. In addition, the

Synod and its congregations *ought* to be vigorously engaged in evangelizing those who do not

know Christ, from all nations. All of this is obvious.

On the level of internal growth, another changing factor in American life requires attention.

As Kiessling and Shults have shown, the LCMS has a long-standing problem of retention of

young adults, beginning with the Baby Boomers. They describe something like a snowball

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[311] Osmer, *Practical Theology,* Introduction, Kindle.

effect—only half of those baptized are confirmed, of those who are confirmed, many do not remain in the church, thus there are fewer young adult members. That means fewer young members who might marry, bear children, and have them baptized.[312] The authors then provide helpful suggestions toward what the LCMS *ought* to do. Among their suggestions they emphasize greater theological training for and involvement of young people in congregations, a proactive ministry with young people as they transition from high school to college or work, prioritization of relationships over programs, and guidance and encouragement for parents. [313]

As we rightly worry about the diminishing number of younger members, it is also important to ask how we could better address the widespread phenomena of delayed marriage ages, rising percentages of individuals who do not ever marry, and cohabitation before (or in place of) marriage. Are our churches perceived as welcoming to such folks or is there an implied expectation that younger *Christian* adults should be married—period. Kiessling and Shults offer a pertinent suggestion: "Congregations must be safe places for young people to wrestle with life and faith."[314]

What seems to be less apparent to us in the LCMS, however, is how we ought to address the task of evangelism and outreach. Given the changing demographics of the United States, our outreach focus does not fit present realities well. The LCMS *ought* to realize that the US is rapidly becoming a human mosaic as the racial and ethnic balance of the country shifts.[315]

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[312] Kiessling and Shults, "Search for Young People," 19–32.

[313] Kiessling and Shults, "Search for Young People," 23–31.

[314] Kiessling and Shults, "Search for Young People," 26–29.

[315] See "What Is Going On" section above.

"How Might We Respond?" Reflection on the LCMS Demographic Profile

What might be the response to the demographic changes in America today? Lyman Stone rightly suggests a three-pronged focus:

> If LCMS conversion rates double to approximately 30 new members per 1,000 existing members per year, and LCMS families increase their childbearing by one additional child on average from about 1.5 to 2 children per woman to 2.5 to 3, and if youth retention rates return to their pre-1960s level over 80%, then by 2070, numeric decline will cease and growth will resume[.][316]

Stone's prescription is helpful because it acknowledges the validity of the work like that of Hawley and MacPherson: that an increase in birthrate would indeed benefit the Synod. It also acknowledges the importance of retention of youth, which is necessary if birthrate increases are to be maximized. And third, it emphasizes the importance of conversions. However, it is necessary to see the most obvious need: *to reprioritize our domestic mission efforts toward the America that is expanding rapidly,* to the America that is young and urban, and Black and brown and every hue beyond "non-Hispanic White." This would require something of a theological mind-shift toward the celebration and prioritization of the catholicity of the Gospel and the Church—remembering that a central aspect to the praise of "the angels, archangels, and all the company of heaven" is the fact that heaven's multitude is "from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages" (Rev. 7:9). In other words, the church is *catholic.* All people alike can claim the Lamb as "*our* God" (Rev. 7:10). The presence of so many peoples and tongues and nations in our cities *ought* to be a clarion calling to us to devote heavy attention, prayer, time, and resources to mission in our cities. Such a task is not hopeless. Similar work is bearing fruit.[317]

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[316] Stone, "What Is Our Life Together?" 57.

[317] As a case in point, note Marilynn Johnson's article about the growing number of believers in the diverse churches of greater Boston. Marilynn S. Johnson, "'The Quiet Revival': New Immigrants and the Transformation of Christianity in Greater Boston," *Religion and American Culture* 24, no. 2 (2014): 231–58, doi:10.1525/rac.2014.24.2.231.

CHAPTER FOUR

CATHOLICITY AND THE CHURCH

The preceding chapters consider the state of the Christian church in general and the LCMS in particular, but only from the standpoint of demographic data and trends. That is to say, the foregoing is primarily sociological, not theological. That is evident in several ways. First, the material is descriptive of the church as an institution with a certain number of adherents who are self-identified in response to survey questions. They claim adherence even though it is likely that some or even many would not be counted as church members by any denomination.

Second, the "churches" in the preceding material include any institutions that identify *themselves* as a church. That includes religious groups—such as the Church of Jesus Christ of Ladder Day Saints (LDS) or Jehovah's Witnesses—that have been viewed as heretical sects or even cults by most Christian denominations because the groups have repudiated doctrines that have consistently been held by the majority of Christians throughout history. The groups are included herein because data about churches collected by Pew or Gallup includes them.

Third, some surveys do make an attempt to go beyond self-identified adherence to measure commitment (usually in terms of attendance patterns but perhaps also in frequency of prayer, and other practices). This cannot, however, measure the presence or lack of faith, for only God can judge the heart (Prov. 21:2; Ps. 44:21; Heb. 4:12).

These examples of the limitations of sociological data might recall Jesus' parable of the net in Matt. 13:47–50. The net of demographics scoops up all kinds of information about people who have some connection to the "church." But to try to sort things out, theology is required—and even then, the full truth will be known only when God with his angels renders final judgment.

None of this is intended to discount the contributions of sociology and demography to the

task of ecclesiology, but it is necessary to state the obvious: that having looked at what is going wrong in the LCMS from a sociological standpoint, we haven't truly realized what the Synod ought to do. As Hawley noted in his reply to Rebekah Cook, while sociological measurements and recommendations have their place, it is necessary to "ensure that the Gospel remains the denomination's primary guide and inspiration."[1]

As Hawley suggests, therefore, this chapter addresses the question, "What is the church?" for the sake of the gospel—the message of salvation in Christ Jesus for all the nations.[2] In the Nicene Creed we answer that question by characterizing the Church of the Triune God with four attributes. It is "one, holy, catholic, and apostolic." The importance of these four adjectives not only help in understanding the church, but each of these attributes also enables us to see that the church is inextricably bound to Christ.

This is plain when one considers that the Church is one. Its unity is not organizational—as an individual church with an institutional shape. Rather, the Church (as *Una Sancta*) is one because it is "one body and one Spirit" with "one Lord" (Eph. 4:4–5). The Church, despite its inclusion of Jew, Greek, slave, free, male, and female is ever and only *one*, "one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). The church is one *only* in Christ as it holds fast to him despite countless outward differences and even divisions.

So also its holiness. The Church is Christ's bride, his body, *sanctified* (made holy) *only* by him (Eph. 5:25–27). There is no holy Church apart from Christ and his word, specifically his justifying word wherein he bespeaks us righteous—holy—forgiven—saints by grace through

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[1] Hawley, "Responses," x.

[2] For the sake of clarity, Church herein appears with an upper case C when it refers to the whole people of God in Christ Jesus—all believers. Also sometimes referred to as the *Una Sancta* or, in much of LCMS history as "the invisible Church," this is Church as confessed and believed. It is, therefore, distinct from "churches" or individual confessing groups (e.g., the Lutheran church, the Presbyterian church, and so forth).

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faith in him whose blood cleanses us from all sins (1 John 1:7; Rev. 1:5).

Just as certainly, the church is catholic because of Christ. The confession of Christ Jesus is the confession of the Word made flesh, God's Son made manifest—God with us, with all of us, with the entire world. This is the gospel, and it is the whole truth for the whole world. James G. Bushur states it well:

> However, the mystery of the Gospel is that the Son of God has become flesh so that His own unique sonship from the Father might be accessible *to all people* in the Holy Spirit. Through His crucified and risen body, Jesus opens up His own filial generation from the Father *to all nations*, who receive this sonship in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19).[3]

Apostolicity also stands on Christ, who alone calls and sends his apostles to make disciples of the nations. The apostolic Church is grounded in the truths Christ Jesus reveals (Acts 1:2), and the church continues to be founded on the teachings of the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures alone (Eph. 2:20). This is the testimony delivered to us—the witness of those who ate and drank with him, whom he personally called to be his chosen emissaries (see, for example, Luke 1:1; Acts 1:8; 1 John 1:1–3; 1 Cor. 15:1–10; 2 Peter 1:16).

Each of the four attributes—one, holy, catholic, and apostolic—is of obvious and equal importance for the right understanding of ecclesiology, but one is particularly important for this dissertation: the Church's identity as catholic. The Greek adjective καθολικός is a combination of κατά ("about") with ὅλος ("whole") and thus carries the sense of "according to the whole" or "on the whole." The most common synonym for catholic in English is "universal."[4] Its earliest

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[3] James G. Bushur, "The Genealogical Identity of the Church," in *Luther's Large Catechism with Annotations and Contemporary Applications*, ed. John T. Pless and Larry M. Vogel, (St. Louis: Concordia, 2022), 310; emphasis added.

[4] Stephan Bevans notes that universality is an apt synonym for catholicity to a point, but qualifies it by adding that the Church's catholicity is *not* a denial that the church catholic also has a particular character and a "rich diversity." See *Models of Contextual Theology,* rev. and exp. ed., Faith and Cultures Series (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002), 14, Kindle.

theological use is by Ignatius of Antioch who says "wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the catholic Church."[5] Ignatius is concerned with the integrity of the church in a particular locale and connects that directly with a faithful bishop who oversees its life and gathers it to himself, just as Christ gathers the entire "catholic Church." Thus, catholic as a mark or attribute of the Church indicates wholeness, completeness, and universality. "In saying that the church is catholic we are affirming that its message is valid and relevant to every age and every situation."[6]

The importance of the Church's catholic dimension is defined in an incomparable manner already by Cyril of Jerusalem. In his *Catechetical Lectures* he writes of the Church:

> It is called "catholic" then because it extends over all the world, from one end of the earth to the other, and because it teaches universally and completely one and all the doctrines that ought to come to human knowledge, concerning things both visible and invisible, heavenly and earthly. It is also called "catholic" because it brings into subjection to godliness the whole race of humankind, governors and governed, learned and unlearned, and because it universally treats and heals the whole class of sins that are committed by soul or body and possesses in itself every form of virtue that is named, both in deeds and words and in every kind of spiritual gifts.[7]

Note Cyril's stress on catholicity or wholeness and universality in a dual manner. First, its teaching is catholic in that it is universal and complet in having "all the doctrines that ought to come to human knowledge." Second, the church is catholic in that it exists for "all the world," for "the whole race of humankind," and "the whole class of sins."

This duality in catholicity is evident in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*:

> 'Catholic' is, according to the Catechism, 'universal' in two meanings: first, as the one in which Christ is present with the fullness of the means of salvation, such as a correct and complete profession of faith, an integral sacramental life and the ministry

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[5] *To the Smyrneans,* 8:2; regarding a "proper Eucharist," Ignatius insists that either the bishop or his representative must administer it. "Let nothing be done without the bishop." https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0109.htm. Ignatius's comment is also quoted in Angelo Di Berardino, ed., *We Believe in One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010), 72.

[6] Alister McGrath, *I Believe: Understanding and Applying the Apostles' Creed* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 120.

[7] Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lecture* 18.22–25 as quoted in Di Berardino, *We Believe,* 75.

of ordination in apostolic succession; second, as "sent by Christ to the whole human race," that is to say, characterized by a universal, unlimited range.[8]

Of course, the perspective of the *CCC* assumes that "a correct and complete profession of faith" is the entire confession of Rome and therefore adds Roman Catholicism's assumptions regarding "an integral sacramental life and the ministry of ordination in apostolic succession." Nevertheless, the core perspective of catholicity as dual in nature—involving the fullness of Christ and the means of grace on the one hand and the "universal, unlimited range" of the mission—is on the mark.

The Orthodox theologian Patrick Henry Reardon also identifies and describes this dual sense nicely. He refers to an "ample sense" of catholicity, so that it both references "the *catholic faith*" and "the Church's role as the proper home of all the nations."[9] This dual dimension of Christ's Church is its wholeness in both of these aspects.

What the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* calls the Church's "unlimited range" and what Reardon calls "the Church's role as the proper home of all the nations," captures what I refer to as the horizontal aspect of catholicity. When Christ sends the apostolic church to all nations (Matt. 28:19), radiating from Jerusalem to Judea, Samaria, and, ultimately, beyond the horizon to the ends of the earth, the Church is marked as a catholic communion. She is the "home of all the nations," the fulfillment of the promise that the Lord of Israel's "salvation may reach to the ends of the earth" (Isa 49:6).

As has been noted, the two dimensions of catholicity are distinguished herein by the terms vertical and horizontal. The vertical reality is catholicity in the sense of the Church's doctrinal

[8] Andrzej Persidok, "'According to the Whole': The 'Catholicity' of the Church in the Theology of Henri de Lubac," *Wrocławski Przegląd Teologiczny* 28, no. 1 (2020): 133–53, doi:10.34839/wpt.2020.28.1.133-153.

[9] See *Christ in the Psalms* (Ben Lomond, CA: Conciliar Press, 2000), 171.

wholeness and completeness—Cyril's "all the doctrines." The Church, extending back through time, consists of those who hold the catholic faith—the doctrines necessary for salvation from the "whole class of sins." As a horizontal reality, catholicity is the Church's universal outward reach because it includes the whole people of God from all the world, from every tribe or nation—Cyril's "all the world" and "whole race of humankind." This horizontal dimension requires particular attention in this dissertation and *will be* the primary focus in what follows.

Stephen Bevans writes about catholicity as an aspect of contextual theology: "A fourth dynamic internal to Christianity that calls for a contextual approach to doing theology is the catholicity of the church. First used to refer to the church in the early second century, catholicity reflects the essence of what the church of Christ should try to be."[10] Note the last phrase in the quote—"catholicity reflects the essence of what the church of Christ *should try to be*" (emphasis added). Bevans then quotes Avery Dulles who says that catholicity means

> narrowness and particularism have no place in the true church of Christ. …To be qualitatively catholic the church must be receptive to the sound achievements of every race and culture. Catholicism pays respect not to the mind alone, nor only to the will and the emotions, but to all levels and aspects of human existence.[11]

Such receptivity to different races and cultures means that catholicity is central to a responsible consideration of the currents of demographic change. Every church that confesses the Nicene Creed does so to speak of who God is and what he does. And as the Creed comes to its close, believers confess faith in the Church that God has established. As such, they also confess their intent to be part of that Church, which is not only one, holy, and apostolic, but also catholic—a church that is faithful to the *whole* of Christ's teaching and to his mission to the *whole* world.

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[10] Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology,* 14, Kindle.

[11] Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology,* 14, Kindle. The Dulles quotation is from *The Reshaping of Catholicism: Current Challenges in the Theology of the Church* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988), 71.

And, at this point, we must acknowledge the particular intersection between the statistical data—the demographics—of the church and her ecclesiological character, her catholicity. As we will see particularly in Acts, catholicity and demography have an undeniable relationship. When Luke traces the movement of the church from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria to Rome and beyond, in every place some few or many numbers are added to the faith. So, Jaroslav Pelikan can say:

> There is, therefore, undeniably some sense in which "catholic" as an attribute of the church does carry an almost statistical connotation, so that the fulfillment, already within human history, of the eschatological vision of "a great multitude which no man could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues" (Rev. 7:9), as faith in the gospel has spread to all the continents and to the islands of the sea, is also the concrete realization of the catholicity that was predicated of the church already in some of its earliest creeds.[12]

This ample sense of the Church's catholicity is well-attested both in Scripture and in the theology and teachings handed down to us.

Holy Scripture

We turn then to the Church's catholicity as it unfolds in Holy Scripture. To portray the biblical doctrine of the church is a task far too great for this dissertation. Nevertheless, it is important to provide at least a cursory look at the church as portrayed in Scripture, particularly regarding its catholic dimension. But to speak of Scripture's *catholic* dimension, as argued above, is to speak of a bi-directional element or emphasis in which there is, first, the whole truth of the Triune God's saving work in Christ and, second, the truth that this saving work is for the whole world of every nation. Christopher J. H. Wright expresses this dual truth in this way: "The proper way for the disciples of the crucified and risen Jesus to read their Scriptures, is

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[12] Jaroslav Pelikan, *Acts* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005), 243.

messianically and *missionally.*"[13]

The Hebrew Scriptures

The Hebrew Bible is foundational for the catholicity and mission of the Church. All of humanity finds its source in the creation of the man and the woman of Eden who are made in God's image. Despite the fall, the *Imago Dei* has continuing relevance for the whole of humanity (Gen. 9:6): Human beings following the fall and the flood continue to be human beings in their constitution and in their responsibilities.[14] The Fall, which divides brother from brother (Gen. 4:1–10) and, eventually, nation from nation and tongue from tongue (Gen. 11), is addressed by humanity's Creator through what may at first appear to be only a narrowing of his grace with a focus on Abraham and his seed. Indeed, Abraham is called by God and set apart from all the nations, but God's purpose is not a narrow one affecting only Abraham's line: "I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen. 12:2–3; see 18:18; 26:4).

Abraham's lifelong journey from Babylon (Ur) to Haran to Canaan to Egypt back to Canaan is mirrored in the slow sojourns of Abraham's descendants from Canaan to Egypt back to Canaan to Assyria to Babylon and back to Canaan over the centuries of the OT narrative. It is never forgotten that throughout these journeys the same nations who serve both as the instruments and objects of the LORD's judgments are also to be the beneficiaries of his universal

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[13] Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 30. Wright elegantly summarizes the Bible's story in a sentence (p. 357): "The Bible is essentially the story of God, the earth and humanity; it is the story of what has gone wrong, what God has done to put it right, and what the future holds under the sovereign plan of God."

[14] Samuel H. Nafzger, ed., *Confessing the Gospel: A Lutheran Approach to Systematic Theology* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2017), 1:225.

grace and mercy. God's works throughout make known his name (Exod. 9:16) and his mighty hand (Josh. 4:24) in all the earth. His redemptive work for Israel is so that he would be exalted also among the nations (Ps. 46:10). In the history of God's just rule with Israel—and especially in the One who is bears that judgment in sacrifice (Isa. 53) and abandonment (Ps. 22)—all the peoples and nations come to worship Israel's King as their own Ruler (Ps. 22:27; 86:9). In this King "all the nations are blessed" (Ps. 72:17).

Thus, Isaiah is not only a prophet to Israel, but an evangelist to the nations. He proclaims a time when the nations would flow to Israel's God (Isa. 2:2) and tells of a coming Servant who will be a light for all the nations, extending his justice to all who have their breath from God (Isa. 42:1–7). The prophet preaches a victory for all the world in Israel's God—a victory that extends even to death's shroud that drapes over every person (Isa. 25:7). For Yahweh's Servant serves more than Israel: "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth" (Isa. 49:6). And "the time is coming to gather all nations and tongues. And they shall come and shall see my glory" (Isa. 66:18).[15]

The LORD's prophets are not just prophets to the Hebrews, but to all the nations (Jer. 1:5), for "nations shall bless themselves in him [the LORD], and in him shall they glory" (Jer. 4:2). Ezekiel also envisions a day when the nations will know the LORD (Ezek. 38:23; 29:7). Similarly, God's work in the time of Daniel makes known that he is Lord of all nations (Dan. 7:14). Micah tells of when nations come to the house of Jacob's God to learn his ways and walk

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[15] See also Paul R. Raabe, "Christ and the Nations: Isaiah's Gentile Oracles," *Concordia Journal* 39, no. 1 (2013): 25–33. Raabe shows that also in the Gentile oracles of Isa. 13–23, where judgment is pronounced on the nations that oppress Zion, God's universal and ultimately gracious rule is in effect. See p. 26: "this God of Israel is not some parochial deity, concerned only about Israel. The God of Israel is the Lord over all nations, and all nations are accountable to him. Hence Isaiah devotes a lengthy section to non-Israelite nations."

in his paths (4:2). Zechariah also sees that day when the nations "join themselves to the LORD" (2:11), the time when Malachi says the name of the LORD will be great among all the nations (Mal. 1:11).

Thus, the "BC Scriptures" direct the reader beyond the world of Israel to anticipate a fulfillment found in a gathering of God's people from all the nations. To see Israel "according to the flesh" (1 Cor. 10:18) as the object of God's work is to miss his purposes entirely. This is not to deny the particular importance and role that Israel plays in God's saving work for all the world. Rather, as Christopher Wright convincingly argues,

> The distinctiveness of Israel from the nations within their Old Testament history was essential to the mission of God. But the mission of God was that the distinction would ultimately be dissolved as the nations flowed into unity and identity with Israel. Only the New Testament gospel would show how that *could* happen. And only New Testament mission would show how it *did* and will continue to happen until their ingathering is complete.[16]

So we turn now to the Gospels and the New Testament to see how the vision of the Hebrew Scriptures for the nations is fulfilled.

The Gospels

The coming of Israel's Messiah might at first seem to stand in an uneasy relationship with the universal mission of the God of Israel or the catholicity of the Church. Jesus responds to the Gentile woman who begs for his help: "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt. 15:24). Geographically, he limits his travels largely to Galilee and Judea and his attention to Jews. He sets his face to Jerusalem and its temple for the culmination of his work (Luke 9:51).

However, the Gospels also show that the Messiah of Israel is the Light of the world and its salvation—obviously including Gentiles. John's majestic prologue speaks of "the true Light

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[16] Wright, *Mission of God,* 500, emphasis original.

which gives light to every man" (1:9) and declares without limitation God's love for "the world" and that all who believe—whether Jew or Greek is of no account—will have eternal life (3:16). John later, in 10:16, records Jesus telling his Jewish hearers, "And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd." Luke tells of Simeon's prophetic blessing of the Infant who is salvation for all peoples (2:29–32). Matthew reports Jesus marveling at the faith of a Gentile and his prediction that, "I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 8:11; cp. Luke 13:29).[17] Mark notes that in teaching the disciples about purity, Jesus removes one of the barriers to Gentile mission by declaring all foods clean (Mark 7:19). Moreover, Jesus' three journeys into Gentile territory show that while the Jew is first in his ministry, Gentiles are by no means excluded from the kingdom he proclaims.[18]

All of these are indications that Jesus' prioritization of Israel in his ministry is not a rejection of the nations. Then, to crown the four narratives, each Gospel includes a catholic shape for the ongoing mission of the people of Christ. Matthew 28:19 is clearest: Christ's disciples have the mandate to make disciples of *all nations* by baptizing and teaching in the Triune Name. Mark's Gospel is appended early on with a similar mandate (16:15). Luke closes his Gospel with the Easter evening teaching of Jesus "that repentance and the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations" (24:47)—and then, of course, Luke goes on to tell the story of the earliest proclamation in the Acts of the Apostles. In drawing his Gospel to a close John includes Jesus' words in 10:16: "I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring

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[17] On this, see Wright, *The Mission of God,* 243–44.

[18] See Kelly R. Iverson, *Gentiles in the Gospel of Mark: Even the Dogs Under the Table Eat the Children's Crumbs* (New York: T&T Clark, 2007).

them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd." John also

tells how Jesus sends the disciples "to forgive the sins of any" (20:23) and how he then blesses

all those who have not seen and yet believe (20:29). Thus, there is a clear sense of the catholic

dimension of those who will follow Christ in the time after his earthly ministry concludes.

The Acts of the Apostles

Just as the Gospels overflow with both direct and indirect attention on the church as

catholic, so does the rest of the New Testament. Arguably, the entire book of Acts is given to

underline this fact for, as noted above, Luke's Gospel closes with our Lord firmly teaching that

the whole of Scripture is being fulfilled in his suffering, death, and resurrection *and* as

repentance for the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to the nations (Luke 24:46–47). English

translations (e.g., ESV and NIV) tend to separate the passion and resurrection from the preaching

somewhat, suggesting that the Scriptures are fulfilled by the former, while the latter is simply a

command of Jesus. But the Greek text links the fulfillment of the entire Hebrew Scriptures to the

whole—to Christ's passion and resurrection together with preaching the message and effect of

his work to all the world.[19] So, as Acts begins, the work of proclaiming the message of

fulfillment in the passion, resurrection, and salvation for all nations is reasserted as the risen

Jesus promises that the apostles will be his witnesses to the end of the earth (Acts 1:8). The

entire Acts narrative is then a story of the unfolding fulfillment of the promise. As Wright says,

> The things that happen in Luke's story, from John the Baptist to Paul, are not just an
> exciting narrative. They are "things that have been fulfilled." They bring the whole

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[19] Dr. Jeffrey Oschwald first brought this insight to my attention. Our Lord teaches that all the things written of him "in Moses, the prophets, and the psalms" must be fulfilled. The Greek text links three infinitives describing what has been written and what must necessarily be fulfilled: the Messiah is "to suffer," "to rise after three days," and in his name "repentance is **to be proclaimed** to the nations." (καὶ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς ὅτι οὕτως γέγραπται παθεῖν τὸν χριστὸν καὶ ἀναστῆναι ἐκ νεκρῶν τῇ τρίτῃ ἡμέρᾳ, καὶ κηρυχθῆναι ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματι αὐτοῦ μετάνοιαν καὶ ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν εἰς πάντα τὰ ἔθνη—ἀρξάμενοι ἀπὸ Ἰερουσαλήμ.) Oschwald contends that Luke 24:46–47 is something other than a prophecy or a commission. Rather, Jesus is affirming something like a continuing three-fold fact: his passion, his resurrection, and the preaching of repentance to the nations.

Old Testament story of Israel to its climax and destination, as the purpose for which God created Israel in the first place—the blessing of all nations—now becomes a reality through the mission of the church.[20]

In other words, the Acts narrative is the unfolding story of the church's catholicity. Beginning at Pentecost (Acts 2) Jews from a panoply of nations witness signs of the Holy Spirit and then hear the preaching inspired by the Spirit in Peter. Although they are all Jews, the astounding reality is that this international audience hears the Gospel proclaimed in their adopted languages: "we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God" (2:11). This is a powerful hint of what is to come as the Gospel is preached in their own lands.

This is an element of the central truth that Peter preaches in Acts 2. He declares that Jesus of Nazareth, the Man crucified 50 days before, could not be held by death and was not abandoned to Hades but has been raised from the dead—of this Peter and other apostles can attest as eyewitnesses. This Jesus is now ascended to the Father's right hand from where he pours out the Holy Spirit and his shocking signs (2:22–35). The story of Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and ascension is grounded in the promises of the BC Scriptures that show that the signs they are witnessing mark the culmination of God's promises to David. The Son of David whom God has raised up is now made "both Lord and Christ" (2:36), but not just of Israel, since Peter began with Joel's prophecy: "it shall come to pass that *everyone* who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (2:21; see Joel 2:32, emphasis added). On this glorious assurance stand baptism's promises of forgiveness and the gift of the Holy Spirit--promises not only for the people gathered that day and their children, but "for *all who are far off, everyone* whom the Lord our God calls to himself" (2:39, emphasis added). Thus the birth of the catholic church!

Acts' continuing narrative then bursts with a level of catholic inclusivity that this brief

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[20] Wright, *Mission of God,* 514.

overview can never capture, but several points demand attention. In chapters three to eight, Luke documents the initial significant opposition to the apostles' message: after Peter and John heal a beggar, they face the opposition of the Council (Acts 3–4); further preaching, signs and wonders lead to arrest (Acts 5); Stephen's powerful ministry leads to his seizure, sermon (an apologetic for the Gospel), and stoning. Stephen's *apologia* focuses on the pattern of God's saving work with an Israel that opposes God time and again. Stephen condemns the forefathers for their opposition first to Joseph, then to Moses, and finally his own generation's opposition to "the Righteous One," Jesus the Messiah (Acts 7). But opposition will not defeat God's mission. As soon as Saul, the opponent of the church is introduced, attention turns to the geographic expansion of the church *because of persecution.* The expansion begins in Samaria, just as Jesus had promised (Acts 8). And as quickly as the Gospel goes north to Samaria, it also journeys south toward Gaza and a God-fearing Ethiopian Gentile's chariot where Philip shows that Isaiah was speaking of Jesus—a message that certainly includes the assurance of the inclusivity of baptism since the Ethiopian confidently expects that there is nothing to prevent his reception of its life-giving cleansing (even though he is both a Gentile and a eunuch; see 8:16–40).

What began in Judea has moved south to Africa. Or, more biblically speaking, with the Ethiopian's "conversion, the gospel reaches south into Africa, the land of Ham. It was already reaching the lands of Shem. And soon, under Paul, it would go north and west to the lands of Japheth."[21] But before Europe, the land of Japheth, can follow, a central figure in the Gospel's journey there must be prepared. Chapters nine to fifteen unfold the Spirit's preparation not only for Paul and his eventual journey to Europe (Macedonia), but also for the apostolic church's affirmation that the Gospel is intended for all people. The conversion of a "Hebrew of Hebrews"

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[21] Wright, *Mission of God,* 516.

is related in Acts 9 (see Phil. 3:3–6). Immediately after, the untitled head of the apostles, Peter, is led to full appreciation of what he preached at Pentecost and affirmed also in Acts 3:25 where he reminded his hearers that in Abraham "all the families of the earth" would be blessed. The Holy Spirit will allow no denial of this truth. Separate visions to two men—Cornelius, a Gentile God-fearer, and Peter—comprise the Holy Spirit's method of showing God's saving intent for all peoples (Acts 10). Cornelius is told to send for Peter. Peter is told to take and eat from a feast of previously forbidden foods, because the Lord makes clean all that had been unclean. And with that every obstacle that stands between Peter and Cornelius and then the entire Gentile world is removed. As the two men meet, Peter fully understands what God is about. "Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him" (Acts 10:34). Peter then preaches in Caesarea to Gentiles about "Jesus of Nazareth," the crucified and risen Lord, who is "the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead. To him all the prophets bear witness that *everyone* who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name" (Acts 10:42–43; emphasis added).

Others take this same catholic faith to Antioch, sharing it now not only with Jews, but also Gentiles, where the former opponent Saul now emerges, joining Barnabas and others to preach to "Hellenists" (Acts 11:19–30). Despite persecution (Acts 12), the Spirit provides Saul and Barnabas to carry the message forward (Acts 13:2). They journey far—to Cyprus, Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe and beyond—drawing not only converts, but controversy as some of the Jewish Christians grow uncomfortable, culminating in the Jerusalem Council's recognition that the Holy Spirit is the author of this catholicity (see Acts 13–15).

> Since we have heard that some persons have gone out from us and troubled you with words, unsettling your minds, although we gave them no instructions, it has seemed good to us, having come to one accord, to choose men and send them to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord

Jesus Christ. We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will tell you the same things by word of mouth. For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay on you no greater burden than these requirements: that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell." (Acts 15:24–29)

With these moves in the first half of Acts, the Holy Spirit has emphatically asserted that the truth of God's saving work in Christ is for all the world. Moreover, the "new reality inaugurated by the Messiah [has] rendered proselyte requirements unnecessary."[22] The Spirit has effectively "forced the issue" of catholicity, pushing the church out of Jerusalem by means of persecution, sending Phillip miraculously to Gaza, Peter to Cornelius, and now Paul and his companions on their journeys.

As Luke continues the story, he—a Gentile—joins in the missional task (the "we passages" begin in Acts 16) and the Holy Spirit once again intervenes directly to provide further catholic impetus. The Spirit "forbids" them to go to Asia and stops them from going to Bithynia, and instead reveals the course he has plotted by means of another vision—this time of a Macedonian man who calls, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." (16:9). As they heed the call, the Gospel has entered what is, today, Europe. And the Gentiles of Philippi who believe are accepted on the same basis as the believing Jews on Pentecost in Jerusalem: "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household" (16:31).

Once again opposition only hastens the catholic course of the mission: a beating in Philippi, a mob in Thessalonica, and agitation in Berea serve to send the proclamation to Athens itself. Paul's Acts 17 Areopagus speech shows that the catholic church is the result of a work of the God who "gives to all mankind life and breath and everything," who "made from one man

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[22] Wright, *Mission of God,* 517.

every nation," making all humanity "God's offspring" (17:25–26, 28–29). So it is: "The times of

ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands *all people everywhere to repent*, because he

has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has

appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead" (17:30–31).[23]

    The remainder of Acts cannot be explored here, but a final point is noteworthy. On two

occasions the Lord's words to Paul are directly related: Acts 18:9–10 and 23:11. In the first

statement the Lord tells Paul to stay and teach in Corinth for a time in that very Gentile city. In

the second direct word (23:11) the Lord tells Paul, "Have courage! For as you have testified

about me in Jerusalem, so it is necessary for you to testify in Rome." With these reassurances,

the Lord's words at Paul's conversion are confirmed. He was indeed chosen to be a central

instrument in the Lord's mission to the Gentiles (cf. 9:15; 22:21; 26:16–18). This is just as Paul

had spoken of the mission given in his third, most fulsome description of the Lord's appearance

to him on the Damascus road:

> [F]or I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness
> to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you,
> delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you
> to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of
> Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who
> are sanctified by faith in me. (Acts 26:16–18)

    Acts closes in Rome (chapter 28) with the fulfillment of the word of the Lord that "it is

necessary for you to testify in Rome" (23:11). There Paul preaches the good news of the

kingdom of God once more, as always beginning with the Jews. In an echo of our Lord's Easter

evening teaching about "everything written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the

Psalms" (Luke 24:44), Luke speaks of Paul teaching into the evening about Jesus both from the

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[23] Note especially the "all people everywhere," or, more literally, "he commands all people in all places to repent" (παραγγέλλει τοῖς ἀνθρώποις πάντας πανταχοῦ μετανοεῖν).

Law and the Prophets" (Acts 28:23). What begins with the Jews will not end with them, however. Paul will not let those who were not persuaded to become obstacles to the universal salvation won by Israel's Messiah. To those who reject the truth he says, "Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen" (28:28).

With that, the journey of the church's apostolic proclamation of repentance for the forgiveness of sins continues its fulfillment. For, as Wright notes, the book of Acts is about more than Paul since,

> Luke presents some of the key apostles of the early Christian movement: Peter, James and Paul. And he shows them united in these great biblical and missiological convictions. All that the Old Testament Scriptures had envisioned of God's plans for the future of the nations in the eschatological age of salvation must be fulfilled. Since Jesus, through his cross and resurrection, is to be proclaimed and worshiped as Lord and Christ, that new age has now dawned.[24]

Epistles of Paul and Hebrews

The epistles of Paul are similarly rich in emphasizing the Church's catholicity. The vertical dimension—an emphasis on the teachings that are handed down and believed by all the redeemed is evident throughout his writings. Hence his focus, for example, on the doctrine of justification of the ungodly through the atoning death and resurrection of Christ, by grace and faith alone (e.g., Rom. 1–5; 1 Cor. 1:10–2:5; 15:1–5; Gal. 1:1–4:7; Eph. 1:1–2:10). Throughout Paul's epistles the doctrine portrayed is that which is supported by the entire biblical narrative, which is centered in the God of Israel, fully revealed in the person of his Son, and portrayed by the working of the Holy Spirit. But, once again, the focus here is on the Spirit's work in and for the Church, which is gathered from all the nations—the horizontal dimension of the Church's unity and being.

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[24] Wright, *Mission of God,* 521.

And, once again, only a brief look is possible. As is evident in this entire section on the scriptural foundation for horizontal catholicity, Wright's *Mission of God* is featured. Since Paul's epistles comprise more than half of the material in the New Testamen epistles plus Revelation, Paul's thought also emphasizes the horizontal catholicity of the church. Wright summarizes the message Paul proclaimed in six points: (1) the "one supreme God" (2) shows every other god to be false and unable to help people. (3) The true God fulfilled his promises to Israel by sending Jesus, his own Son (4) whose death and resurrection makes possible forgiveness, life, and salvation to all people (5) who become part of God's redeemed people through faith. (6) Only such repentant faith in Jesus and none of the requirement of the Law is needed for the nations to be part of God's covenant people.[25] The first two points are made with sharp words as Paul provides the rationale for the catholic outreach of the church in Rom. 1. He cites the paradox of a world that "knew God" but has suppressed the truth about him and now stands under his wrath, having been delivered to corrupt idolatrous minds (Rom. 1:16–32). Only the Gospel has the power to save—and to save both Jew and Greek (Rom. 1:16). The polemic against idolatry echoes from the Hebrew prophets and is vital for understanding catholicity. The truth that all the gods are idols flows from the reality that there is only one true God—one God for all the world, a truth so ably sung in Psalm 96, long before Paul. Only one true God can lay a universal claim on humanity (points 1 and 2).[26] The one, universal God rightly claims acknowledgement and obedience from *all* people. But it is also universally true that all people—both the nations *and Israel* alike—are incapable of such obedience or of escaping God's just wrath (Rom. 2:1–3:20). Therefore "*all*, both Jews and Greeks [Gentiles], are under sin" (Rom 3:9, emphasis added;

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[25] Wright, *Mission of God,* 191–92.

[26] For more on the biblical response to idolatry, see Wright, *Mission of God,* 179–88.

πάντας ὑφ᾽ ἁμαρτίαν εἶναι).

It is the third through sixth points of Wright's summary—righteousness for all nations through faith alone in Jesus, the Messiah of Israel—where Paul is most emphatic. This is the central message of Romans (3:21–5:27). In 1 Cor. 15 he dwells on the importance of Christ's death and resurrection and devotes the epistle to the Galatians to his uncompromising understanding of the saving work of Christ for sinners that can never be gained by works of the law, but only freely received "by faith in Jesus Christ" (2:26). Together with this, Paul stresses the Gospel's universal effect.

> [F]or in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise. (Gal 3:26–29)

The apostle calls on not only Abraham, but also Sarah and Hagar (4:21–31) to testify to this catholic truth whereby all who believe, Gentile as well as Jew, are like Isaac "children of the free woman, born through promise" (4:25; cp. 4:31).

This is all the great "mystery" of Ephesians—how God in Christ brings everything together in heaven and earth (1:10). According to God's own mysterious purpose he raised his Son from the dead and with him by grace through faith raises all who are dead in trespasses and sin (1:20–2:10). Christ's work not only redeems individuals from sin, but also ends the division between Jew and Gentile:

> Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called "the uncircumcision" by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands—remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might

> reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. (Eph 2:11–22)

The breaking down of "the dividing wall of hostility" (2:14) culminates in the final fact of "the mystery of Christ": "The Gentiles are coheirs, members of the same body, and partners in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel" (Eph 3:6–7). In light of this reality—Gentiles as coheirs with Israel—it is necessary for Paul to emphasize the need for humility, gentleness and patience toward fellow believers (4:2) and the important fact that amid this striking diversity, "There is [still only] one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope at your calling—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all" (4:4–6). This echoes the oneness of the Church that Paul had stressed in Gal. 3:26–29 where neither geography nor ethnicity divides those baptized into Christ. It also reveals that horizontal and vertical catholicity never contradict one another.

The one God who has unmasked all the false gods as frauds is the God who humbled himself, even to "death on a cross," only to claim the name above all names and the confession of all the world "that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:11). Paul's Philippian correspondence reflects his firsthand experience that Jesus is Lord of Gentile and Jew from the conversion of Lydia and the Roman jailer (Acts 16:11–34). In a similar way he writes to Colossae of the Christ through whom all things "have been created," in whom they "hold together" (Col. 1:16–17), and by whose blood everything is reconciled to God, including those who "were alienated and hostile" (1:21). Paul rejoices "to make known among the Gentiles the glorious wealth of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27).

Writing to the Thessalonians, Paul is again quite obviously addressing Gentiles since they have "turned to God from idols" (1:9). Yet, there is little sense of any distinction between Jew and Gentile since he just as clearly thinks of them as full partners in a complete unity, as one people of God whom he urges to no longer live like "Gentiles who do not know God" (4:5). This sense of the unity of the one faith that binds diverse people together is made all the more obvious by the term brother(s) throughout his two letters to Thessalonica (1 Thess. 1:4; 2:1, 9, 14, 17; 3:1, 7; 4:1, 6, 10, 13; 5:1, 4, 12, 14, 25, 27; 2 Thess. 1:3; 2:1; 13, 15; 3:1, 6, 13).

Paul's letters to Timothy are heavy on key points of doctrine and life (vertical matters—the truths handed down), but it is noteworthy that Timothy is the son of a Jew and a Gentile, ministering in Ephesus, a center of Gentile culture. To Timothy Paul emphasizes a universal message: that "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (1 Tim. 1:15) since God "desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (2:4). We see that there can be no divorcing of vertical from horizontal catholicity because "there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (2:5). This teaches about

> how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth. Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness:
>
> He was manifested in the flesh,
>   vindicated by the Spirit,
>   seen by angels,
> proclaimed among the nations,
>   believed on in the world,
>   taken up in glory. (1 Tim. 3:15–16)

Although Paul insists on nothing of the ceremonies of Israel to Timothy and his congregation, he nevertheless thanks "God whom I serve *as did my ancestors,* with a clear conscience" (2 Tim. 1:3, emphasis added). So the "pattern of the sound words [sound teaching]" (1:13) is centered in the "good deposit" entrusted and preserved by the Holy Spirit (1:14). This is truth for all the

world. Even though many of Paul's coworkers and friends have abandoned him, he can add that "the Lord stood by me and strengthened me, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it" (4:17). Note that the message is not "fully proclaimed" without its being heard by Gentiles!

Paul writes to Titus on the basis of the "common faith"—the catholic faith (Titus 1:4). That catholic faith stands in sharp contrast with the message of "the circumcision party" (1:10) which would stymie the gospel's promises to the uncircumcised nations. Sound doctrine according to the catholic truth is not a matter of works of the law, but neither is it antinomian (hence the direction regarding lives that are "self-controlled, upright, and godly"; 2:4). Such virtue adorns the "the doctrine of God our Savior" whose grace "has appeared, bringing salvation for all people" (2:11).[27]

Hebrews is noteworthy because of its insistent emphasis on how the old covenant from the Hebrew Scriptures points to Christ Jesus. He is the Son above all angels (1:5–14). To him "all things" are subjected and in him all that exists find the source of their salvation since he has "tasted death for *everyone"* (2:9, emphasis added). The author then calls on the whole people of God to learn from Israel's failure to heed the Lord and instead to enter the promised rest (chapters 3–4). The rest is provided by the Great High Priest according to Melchizedek (4:14–8:6). His is a heavenly priesthood that mediates a better covenant with "better promises" (8:7; cf. 8:7–9:28). All this comes by way of a perfect sacrifice—a singular sacrifice for all the sins of the world (chapter 10), that is given to those who believe (chapter 11).

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[27] A somewhat similar call to a radical life of faith, rather than to works of the law is evident in the plea to Philemon.

Catholic Epistles and the Apocalypse

The term "catholic" is applied to the remaining seven epistles of the New Testament: the epistle of James, the two epistles of Peter, the three epistles of John, and the epistle of Jude.[28] The use of the term catholic here implies general and not universal, since from the early church on some have questioned the apostolic authenticity of certain of them.[29]

James teaches nothing directly relevant to the horizontal catholicity of the Church. Instead, his specific teachings deal with such matters as trials, obedience to the word, avoiding favoritism, faith that shows itself in works, wisdom in speech and conduct, humility, accepting the will of God, truthful and prayerful speech. But note that James writes these things "to the twelve tribes of the Dispersion" (1:1). Although some might initially see this as referring only to the Jews dispersed world-wide,[30] that view becomes untenable since these "twelve tribes" are all his "brothers" (1:2) and he identifies himself as "a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ." And there is no doubt about the type of family James has in mind: "My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory" (2:1). His brothers are those who hold to Christ Jesus together with him. Thus, the "twelve tribes of the Dispersion" must mean the *whole* people of God in Christ Jesus—the *catholic* people of God. It is then no surprise that James, whom some count as a representative or leader of an anti-Pauline party, says nothing of circumcision or obedience to the Mosaic regulations regarding ritual or custom. Gentile Christians would find nothing in the epistle that would question the validity of their

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[28] Eusebius refers to "the seven so-called catholic epistles." Eusebius Pamphilus [of Caesarea], *Ecclesiastical History,* 2.23, § 25 in NPNF, Series II, 1:128.

[29] With the exception of 1 Peter and 1 John, at least some church fathers expressed doubts about the other five Catholic Epistles as well as the book of Hebrews and Revelation. See Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 1:330.

[30] Many Early Church Fathers viewed both James and Peter as apostles to the Jews and therefore viewed both the epistles of James and 1 Peter as addressed to a Jewish audience. See Gerald Bray, ed. *James, 1-2 Peter, 1-3 John, Jude*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, New Testament XI (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 65.

participation in the household of faith.

Peter's first epistle evokes Israel of old as he writes to people who are the "chosen" or "elect exiles of the Dispersion" (ἐκλεκτοῖς παρεπιδήμοις διασπορᾶς, 1 Peter 1:1), but his audience seems to be Gentile rather than Jewish for he says, "Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy" (2:10).[31] These are God's children not because of physical descent from Abraham, but because they were "born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1:3), by the word that "is the good news that was preached to you" (1:25). This expanded people of God, like the people of Israel, will be "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that [they] may proclaim the excellencies of him who called [them] out of darkness into his marvelous light" (2:9).[32] Second Peter is a call to confirm this election as the people of God in Christ Jesus—people who await new heavens and a new earth" (2 Pet 3:13)—rather than the restoration of Israel's earthly kingdom (see Acts 1:6).

John's epistles are addressed to a people whose identity stems from fellowship with the eyewitnesses of Christ and, thereby, fellowship "with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3). Such fellowship with the God who is love calls for a fellowship of love for one another (4:7–12). This expansive view of love is at the heart of catholicity, whereby Christ's people receive the love that is "made manifest" as the Father sends the "Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (4:9, an inheritance central to the faith—vertical catholicity) and we in

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[31] Although, as noted in n30, Early Church Fathers thought Peter was writing to Jews, later commentators differ, arguing persuasively that Peter's primary audience is Gentile. See e.g., R.C.H. Lenski, *I and II Epistles of Peter, the Three Epistles of John, and the Epistle of Jude* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1966), 13; Edmund Clowney, *The Message of 1 Peter* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 18; I. Howard Marshall, *1 Peter* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991), 14–15.

[32] In Exod. 19:3–6 Yahweh declares Israel to be "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." See CTCR, *The Royal Priesthood: Identity and Mission* (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod, 2018). Note also the promise in Isa. 66:2 that when Yahweh brings the nations to Zion, some would be priests.

turn recognize this inheritance is not for us alone, but for all, since the "the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of *the world*" (4:14, emphasis added). Thus, John's universal appeal is grounded in Christ, the source of life for all who believe (5:10–12). In his brief second epistle there is the echo of catholicity as John rejoices in those who "abide in the teaching of Christ" and hold to the commandment of love for one another that "we have from the beginning" (2 John 4–5, 9).[33] Then, writing to Gaius, the echo sounds once more as John commends those who welcome and support "strangers" (3 John 5).

Jude introduces his little epistle by mentioning that he had wanted to write "about our common salvation" (τῆς κοινῆς ἡμῶν σωτηρίας)—seemingly an intention to explain more fully something akin to the catholic faith as it was understood then. Instead, Jude found it necessary to urge his hearers into battle for that faith that had been "once for all delivered to the saints" (verse 3). Jude is thereby emphasizing the vertical catholicity of the Church—the catholic faith—on which all "saints" (all Christians, the whole Church) stand.

The glorious visions of John's Apocalypse provide a fitting culmination not only to the entire biblical narrative, but also to the teaching of the horizontal catholicity of the Church. John's focus is intensely catholic in that he is teaching about how *all things* come to fulfillment and new beginning. God has given John "the apocalypse [revelation] of Jesus Christ" and the knowledge of what "must soon take place" (1:1). The scope of the vision is both particular (to the seven churches) and universal. It is grounded in Christ Jesus, who loves, frees from sin, and makes a priestly kingdom (1:5–6). So goes the universal dimension, but the particular is also evident as John addresses seven churches, and then speaks to individuals: "Behold, I stand at the

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[33] On this, Bede writes: "Look how all catholic Christians everywhere follow a single rule of truth, whereas heretics and unbelievers do not all agree on what they reject and attack each other just as much as they attack the truth." From Bede, *On 2 John,* quoted in Bray, *James, 1–2 Peter, 1–3 John, Jude,* 232.

door and knock. If *anyone* hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me" (3:20, emphasis added). He is coming for the purpose of a universal judgment, but with reconciliation open to any person.

The universal dimension is all the more evident as John describes his first vision of heaven in chapters four and five. The Spirit reveals "one seated on the throne" in glory (4:2), surrounded by four creatures and twenty-four elders on their thrones, all of whom sing praise to "our Lord and God" (4:11). But the vision is made clearer as John sees the Lamb who takes the sealed scroll, only to hear the echoing chorus of creatures and elders giving praise to him who is worthy to open the seals,

> "…for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God
> from every tribe and language and people and nation,
> and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God,
> and they shall reign on the earth." (5:9–10)

John's vision of the people of God therefore is explicitly and universally catholic—those ransomed by Christ are from every people and place. They, like Israel in the wilderness, have been made "a kingdom and priests" to the one God whose redeeming work is accomplished by the Lamb.

Universal judgment and a universal saving grace then are the Revelation's catholic focus. God's wrath against the sin of the world is depicted symbolically by the four horsemen and four winds of chapters six and seven and the "destruction and suffering" that they bring.[34] Yet, in the midst of his wrath, God "seals" his saints (7:2–3). And who are these saints? They are "the church of Jesus Christ, *both Jews and Gentiles.*" They are the "144,000 from every tribe of

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[34] Louis A. Brighton, *Revelation*, Concordia Popular Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia, 2009), 125. Brighton adds that the four horsemen parallel the four horses and chariots of Zech. 6:1–8 and the winds fulfill Jeremiah's word that the Lord would send four winds to destroy and scatter (49:36–39).

Israel," but this too is "symbolical and not literally numerical."[35] The symbolism is twofold, first in the designation of Israel's "twelve tribes" since "to the Christians (Jews and Gentiles in Christ)" Israel was a theological reality as the sons of Abraham by faith.[36] Second, the number 144,000, the multiple of the 12 tribes and each tribe's 12,000 representatives ("depicted as male virgins" in Rev. 14:1–5), is also symbolic of the completeness—of the *wholeness*—of the Church.[37] Thus the 144,000 give way to an unnumbered multitude:

> After this I looked, and behold a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" (Rev. 7:9–10)

They are heaven's throng, serving God on his throne without hunger or thirst or any sorrow because the Lamb is their shepherd. As Brighton suggests, the 144,000 and the white-robed unnumbered multitude are "the church militant and the church triumphant."[38] The grace that counters the wrath of God in John's apocalyptic vision has at its heart this catholic dimension of God's completed work. As John's vision unfolds, it is evident that every nation and all people stand under God's judgment and his "rod of iron" for every rebellion against the one God and his Lamb (see Rev. 10:11; 11:1–2, 9, 18; 12:5; 13:7). But the Lamb's redemption is also for every nation—for the whole people of God. The gospel is for the nations that have been led astray by Babylon the great (14:6, 8; 18:3, 23). God is their king, too, and they will worship him (15:3–4). They, too, having suffered God's wrath, will know his healing:

> Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city;

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[35] Brighton, *Revelation,* 130.

[36] Brighton, *Revelation,* 130. As support for this NT view of "Israel," Brighton cites Matt. 19:28; Luke 22:28–30; Rom. 4:1–12; 9:6–8; 11:11–27; Gal. 3:26–29; 4:21–31; and Phil. 3:3.

[37] Brighton, *Revelation,* 131.

[38] Brighton, *Revelation*, 122–42.

also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. *The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations*. (Rev. 22:1–2, emphasis added)

In summary, the Holy Scriptures provide a narrative for understanding all of life for all the world—a narrative that is centered in the person of Jesus Christ as the revelation of the only God, made known by the action of the one Spirit. The implications for this can hardly be appreciated. By proclaiming this message David Bosch says that the apostolic church "rejected all gods and in doing this demolished the metaphysical foundations of prevailing political theories."[39] He adds that such teaching was accompanied by changes in behavior that were simply astonishing to the world at that time.

> The revolutionary nature of the early Christian mission manifested itself, *inter alia,* in the new relationships that came into being in the community. Jew and Roman, Greek and barbarian, free and slave, rich and poor, woman and man, accepted one another as brothers and sisters.[40]

Paul Raabe also summarizes the astounding message of Scripture to the world. The message is, in the wisdom of God, marked by "the scandal of particularity" in the call of Abraham and his descendants—a particularity that is then paradoxically coupled with a catholic breadth that ultimately includes all nations.

> The Creator of all made Himself the God of Israel. He entered into a special covenant relationship with one specific people and in the fullness of time fulfilled His covenant through Jesus of Nazareth. And through Jesus of Nazareth, the Creator blesses the entire human race. Although human reason is scandalized by such particularities, faith extols them.[41]

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[39] David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991, 2011), 48.

[40] Bosch, *Transforming Mission,* 48.

[41] Paul R. Raabe, "Look to the Holy One of Israel, All You Nations: The Oracles about the Nations Still Speak Today," *Concordia Journal* 30, no. 4 (October 2004): 336.

Tradition

The following consideration of catholicity in the tradition of the church is, of necessity, even more cursory than the scriptural overview. My concern in this subsection is to consider the primary understanding of the attribute "catholic," and especially the concept of horizontal catholicity, as it is applied to the church. That does not mean that the terms catholic or catholicity will necessarily appear. What is important is the significance of the idea that the redeeming work of Christ is for all people—for all nations everywhere—rather than only for certain peoples or nations or countries. Furthermore, my intention is to get a sense of the significance of catholicity that is evident in several periods of church history: first, in some of the writings of the early church from the end of the New Testament period to about the sixth century; second, the understanding of catholicity in the medieval period (roughly from the sixth to the Reformation), but with a focus on Thomas Aquinas; third, the view of Luther and the Wittenberg Reformation; then, fourth, the understanding at work in the Missouri Synod and Synodical Conference from its inception to the present. Lastly, there is a discussion of the idea of catholicity in contemporary Christianity and theology focused on three particular theologians.[42]

Catholicity in the Early Church[43]

At Constantinople (AD 381) the orthodox bishops added to the confession of Nicaea (which had no article on the church) that the church was "one, holy, catholic, and apostolic."[44] In

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[42] This approach roughly parallels the approach of Bosch. He speaks of six paradigms for mission: Greek (Patristic), medieval, Reformation, Enlightenment, postmodern, and "an emerging ecumenical paradigm." Bosch is, in turn, influenced by the six periods of Christian history that Hans Küng suggested: primitive, patristic, Roman Catholic, Reformation, Enlightenment, and ecumenical. See Bosch, *Transforming Mission,* 185–87.

[43] I am grateful to Dr. Joel Elowsky who suggested both specific church fathers and the excellent work of Angelo Di Berardino, ed., *We Believe in One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010).

[44] Εἰς μίαν, ἁγίαν, καθολικὴν καὶ ἀποστολικὴν Ἐκκλησίαν. The "Creed of 318 Fathers" confessed at Nicaea

that same century, as already noted in the initial section of this chapter, St. Cyril of Jerusalem (c. 313–86) explained the third identifying adjective: 'The Church "is called 'catholic' then because it extends over all the world, from one end of the earth to the other, and because it teaches universally and completely one and all the doctrines that ought to come to human knowledge, concerning things both visible and invisible, heavenly and earthly."[45] Thus, the twofold wholeness of the church—wholeness of extent (horizontal catholicity) and wholeness of teaching that addresses the whole needs of humanity (vertical catholicity)—is at work during this early period of church tradition.

One need not wait for these fourth century witnesses to see the notion of catholicity at work, however. As noted above, Ignatius of Antioch (died ca. 140) is the first to use the specific term, drawing an analogy between the congregation and bishop parallel to the church and Christ: "Wherever the bishop appears, there let the congregation be; just as wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the catholic church."[46] The connection between bishop and catholicity might seem obscure, but it is there. Although he speaks of a singular bishop, it was the office of bishop that held together the churches of a city or region in one doctrine, and it was in the relationship of

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in AD 325 includes nothing about the Church. It ends with, "And [we believe] in the Holy Spirit." However, the 318 fathers did then declare that "the Catholic and Apostolic Church anathematizes" those who deny the eternal generation of the Son, fail to acknowledge that he is of the same ousia as the Father, and so forth. See J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, 3rd ed. (London: Longman, 1973), 216; also John H. Leith, ed., *Creeds of the Churches: A Reader in Christian Doctrine from the Bible to the Present*, rev. ed. (Atlanta: John Knox, 1963, 1973), 31. In his consideration of the phrase, "the apostolic church," Hermann Sasse also suggests how the companion adjective catholic worked its way into the Constantinopolitan confession of the Church, arguing that it is of Alexandrian origin. See Hermann Sasse, *We Confess Jesus Christ*, 88–92 (originally published in 1984) in *We Confess Anthology* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1999).

[45] Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lecture* 18.22–25 as translated in Di Berardino, *We Believe,* 75. See pp. 260 above and also Catechesis XVIII in *The Works of Saint Cyril of Jerusalem,* trans. L McCauley and A Stephenson (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1970), 2:132. For comments on Cyril's explanation see Bo Giertz, *Christ's Church: Her Biblical Roots, Her Dramatic History, Her Saving Presence, Her Glorious Future*, trans. Hans Andrae (Eugene, OR: Resource Publications, 2010), 62–66.

[46] Ignatius, *To the Smyrnaeans,* 8:2, in Michael W. Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations,* 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 255.

bishops who acknowledged one another that the church was seen to extend into the world.[47]

Alberto Garcia adds a further insight after noting that the context for Ignatius' comment is his

opposition to the *merismoi* (divisions) in the church:

> The difference between Ignatius and his critics is clear. Ignatius holds to a vision of
> the church that is "catholic," i.e. one that is holistic. The holistic vision is not generic.
> It is a catholicity that etymologically understood affirms the local witness of faith
> communities. Ignatius affirms as "catholic" doctrine the entire catholic "witness" of
> the "entire" catholic Church whereas his opponents hold to the partial opinion held by
> a particular group.[48]

> Also, as the second century *Epistle to Diognetus* puts it, Christians dwell as both citizens

and aliens wherever they dwell. Christians conform to any land's customs all-the-while showing

> the remarkable and admittedly unusual character of their own citizenship. They live
> in their own countries, but only as nonresidents, they participate in everything as
> citizens, and endure everything as foreigners. Every foreign country is their
> fatherland, and every fatherland is foreign.[49]

The Church is thus truly catholic, having a place among all nations and peoples since "every

foreign country is their fatherland." She is created and enabled to live in any and every place,

among any and all people, precisely because "every fatherland is foreign."[50]

Lamin Sanneh shows the merger of universality and unity in the church according to

Irenaeus of Lyons—the same bond that connects vertical and horizontal catholicity.

> For although the languages of the world are varied, yet the meaning of the Christian
> tradition is one and the same. There is no whit of difference in what is believed or
> handed down by the churches planted in Germany or in Iberia or in Gaul or in the
> East or in Egypt or in Libya or in the central region of the world. Nay, as the sun

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[47] On this see Giertz, *Christ's Church*, 42.

[48] Alberto L. Garcia, "The Local Church: A Critical Point of Departure for a World Ecclesiology," in *Critical Issues in Ecclesiology: Essays in Honor of Carl E. Braaten,* ed. Alberto L. Garcia and Susan K. Wood (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 122.

[49]*The Epistle to Diognetus* 5:4–5; in Holmes, *Apostolic Fathers*, 703.

[50] See Pelikan, *Acts*, 242. He notes that catholicity has its roots in a tension that is evident in the New Testament, e.g., in Paul walking the fine line between his Roman citizenship (e.g., Acts 16:37; 25:11) and his citizenship in heaven (Phil. 3:20).

remains the same all over the world so also the preaching of the church shines everywhere.[51]

Di Berardino shows that the idea of catholicity is at work in the 2nd century *Martyrdom of Polycarp,* where there are references to the "catholic church in every place,"[52] to "the whole catholic church throughout the world,"[53] and to the particular "catholic church that is in Smyrna."[54] The addition of the phrases "in every place" and "throughout the world," indicate the horizontal dimension of catholicity while "the catholic church that is in Smyrna" indicates the dimension of authenticity because of the one universal faith that is held.

Some may suppose that the Apostles' Creed would be an important early source for the view of catholicity in the early church since its predecessor creed, the Old Roman Creed dates from the 2nd or 3rd century. That does not seem to be true, however. This is not the place to discuss the complex history of the Apostles' Creed,[55] but this much should be stated. While this briefest of the three creeds has roots in the earliest centuries of the Western church as a baptismal creed from Rome, it had no fixed form for centuries. Various versions were used throughout the Western church, and it was not acknowledged as a creed of the whole church until the papacy of Innocent III (1198–1216). Moreover, that endorsement only applied to the Western church since the East never affirmed it. Finally, and more to the point of this dissertation, the earliest versions of the predecessors to the Apostles' Creed as we know it speak of "the holy church," but not of "the holy *catholic* church." For example, one of the earliest commentaries on a version of the

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[51] Lamin Sanneh, *Disciples of All Nations: Pillars of World Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 23.

[52] *Martyrdom of Polycarp,* 1; in Di Berardino, *We Believe,* 72, 73.

[53] *Martyrdom of Polycarp,* 8, in Di Berardino, *We Believe,* 72.

[54] *Martyrdom of Polycarp,* 16, in Di Berardino, *We Believe,* 73.

[55] See Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, 100–204; H. Thurston, "Apostles' Creed" in *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: Robert Appleton, 1907); accessed September 10, 2022, New Advent, http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01629a.htm.

Apostles' Creed (a Latin commentary by Rufinus of Aquila, 344/345–411) speaks only of "the holy Church" ("*sanctam ecclesiam*"), without the additional adjective, "catholic." The earliest Greek example of the same creedal pattern, from Marcellus of Ancyra (AD 340), also does not include catholic, speaking only of the holy church ("ἁγίαν ἐκκλησίαν").[56] It is not until the 6th century that various regional baptismal creeds that Kelly cites include catholic.[57] However, this is not a denial of the idea that the church is catholic in the horizontal sense. For example, while Rufinus does not apply the term catholic to church, he does indicate the idea when he says that the incarnation by virgin birth is "for the renewal and restoration of the whole world."[58]

Another document deserves mention in the discussion of catholicity in the early church. *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles and Holy Disciples of Our Savior, a*lso called the *Didascalia Apostolorum,* dates from the third century AD and includes numerous references to "the Catholic Church."[59] The expression Catholic Church indicates the entire elect (Chapter I), all the faithful (Chapter VIII), the elect successors to the "church" of the "former" (that is, Old Testament) people (Chapter IX), the "daughter of the Lord God" (Chapter X).[60] The *Didascalia* strongly warns those who might scatter the Catholic Church (Chapter XI) and undo what the apostolic church has done gathering all people of all nations and tongues:

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[56] According to Kelly, a Latin creed from the Balkans (dating from about the end of the 4th or early 5th century) is the first to employ catholic in reference to the church. See Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds,* 175.

[57] Kelly provides the texts of a sixth century Spanish creed, a creed from the Mozarabic Liturgy, and a French creed from Arles, all of which include *sanctam ecclesiam catholicam* in their confession. See *Early Christian Creeds,* 177–79.

[58] Rufinus, "The Creed of Aquileia," NPNF, vol. 3 (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing, 1892), New Advent version, rev. and ed. Kevin Knight, http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/2711.htm. Di Berardino, *We Believe,* 72, titles this work "A Commentary on the Apostles' Creed."

[59] The *Didascalia Apostolorum* is part of the *Apostolic Constitutions.* There are 17 instances of the word catholic in the Clarendon edition, which is always capitalized and is combined with Church ("Catholic Church.") in 13 instances. The remaining four occurrences are "Catholic Didascalia," also in caps. See R. Hugh Connolly, *The Catholic Didascalia: That Is Teaching of The Twelve Holy Apostles and Disciples of Our Saviour* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1929), published online at https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/didascalia.html.

[60] Connolly, *Teaching of the Twelve*, Chapter I, 2; Chapter VIII, 33, Chapter IX, 37; Chapter X, 49.

For we by the power of the Lord God have gathered (men) from all peoples and from all tongues, and have brought them to the Church with much labour and toil and in daily peril, that we might do the will of God and *fill the house with guests* [Mt 22.10], that is His holy Catholic Church, that they might be glad and rejoicing, and be praising and glorifying God who called them to life.[61]

Chapter XXIV claims to be a self-description of the twelve Apostles, who claim authorship of this "Catholic *Didascalia*."[62] Chapter XXV closes with a reiteration of the identity of the Catholic Church as the pure church, because she accepts the universal teaching of the true Church—the Catholic *Didascalia*.[63]

Despite the use of capital letters in the Connolly edition, the combination of catholic and church does not seem to indicate a title. It should be evident that, for the most part, catholic is used to modify church in the *Didascalia* as a means of emphasizing the *true* Church which holds to apostolic doctrine. Thus, the vertical element of catholicity is primary. However, the block quotation from Chapter XI (above) shows that the element of horizontal catholicity is also distinctively present in the *Didascalia.*

The notion of horizontal catholicity can be surmised from the early church's frequent focus on the image of the Church as both virginal Bride of Christ and our Mother. Augustine, for example, explains the identity of the Church in light of Ps. 113:3.

> We constitute the church, but I do not say "we" in such a way as to include only those who are here, who now hear me. I include as many faithful Christians as are here, by the grace of God, in this church, that is, in this city, as many as are in this region, as many as are in this province, as many as are across the sea, as many as are in the whole world, since "from the rising of the sun unto the going down of the same, the name of the Lord is worthy of praise." Thus, the catholic church, our true mother, true bride of her spouse, exists today. Let us honor her because she is the bride of so great a Lord." And what shall I say? Great and unique is the condescension of her spouse; he found her a courtesan and made her a virgin. She should not deny that she

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[61] Connolly, *Teaching of the Twelve*, Chapter XI, 55–56.

[62] Connolly, *Teaching of the Twelve*, Chapter XXIV, 102–3, 105.

[63] Connolly, *Teaching of the Twelve*, Chapter XXV, 107.

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was a courtesan, lest she forget the mercy of her liberator. How was she not a courtesan when she committed fornication in the pursuit of idols and demons?[64]

Augustine's striking message is echoed by other fathers.[65] It is important because the images of church as bride and mother are another means of expressing the idea of catholicity both vertically and horizontally. The virginal Bride is a way to speak of the vertical catholicity of the Church. It refers to the Church in her purity—a purity bestowed only in Christ—and so a virginity that is due to her holding the truth of one Lord and one faith. That she is also "our true mother," however, reminds us that the catholic church includes "as many as are in the whole world" who sing the praises of the name of their one Lord.

Another reference is necessary here, namely the fifth century Vincentian Canon. In his *Commonitory,* Vincent of Lerins famously writes that "in the Catholic Church itself, all possible care must be taken, that we hold that faith which has been believed everywhere, always, by all."[66] Vincent here certainly affirms horizontal catholicity, but his emphasis throughout the *Commonitory* is vertical catholicity—true doctrine's broad consensus and its antiquity. He is arguing against novelty in theology rather than arguing for the church's mission to all peoples everywhere.[67]

Finally, brief mention of the Athanasian Creed is in order, especially since it also probably

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[64] Augustine, Sermon 213.7 quoted in Di Berardino, *We Believe,* 40–41.

[65] See Di Berardino, *We Believe,* 42–50.

[66] Vincent of Lerins, *Commonitory [Commonitorium]: For the Antiquity and Universality of the Catholic Faith Against the Profane Novelties of All Heresies*, chap. 2, 6, NewAdvent.org, https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3506.htm.

[67] Vincent was therefore invoked against the Reformation. On the response to the Roman Catholic use of the Vincentian Canon in opposition to the Reformation, Chemnitz and other orthodox Lutheran fathers responded by emphasizing what the true church and true teachers taught in antiquity—a modified understanding of the *consensus partum.* See Quentin Stewart, "Catholicity or Consensus? The Role of the Consensus Patrum and the Vincentian Canon in Lutheran Orthodoxy: from Chemnitz to Quenstedt." PhD Diss., Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 2006. http://scholar.csl.edu/phd/54.

dates from the fifth century (and might even have some connection with Vincent of Lerins).[68]

Given that the Athanasian Creed includes no statement on the church, it is relevant here only because it twice uses the phrase "the catholic faith," a clear reference to catholic in a vertical sense as the confession and teachings that are handed down.

In summary, the early church clearly affirms an understanding of catholicity that holds universal, catholic doctrine and universal, catholic expansion in both balance and tension. Neither the vertical nor the horizontal aspect of catholicity is missing. Indeed, these two aspects are mutually dependent since the one Gospel of one God at work in Christ (vertical catholicity) is the means of salvation for the entire world and all its peoples (horizontal catholicity). Without such a catholic faith there would be no church catholic. But there is also a certain tension between the vertical and horizontal. The vertical is not an all-inclusive teaching that would affirm a universalist approach to religion. Rather, the catholic truth is one of particular and specific teachings—apostolic *didascalia*, if you will. Therefore its inclusive intent as a word of salvation for all nations is also restrictive since only those who believe this catholic faith are within the catholic church.

Catholicity in the Medieval Church

The medieval period (the Middle Ages) is a period of about a millennium. Rather than attempt even a scan of the idea of catholicity in the period from about AD 500 to 1500, there follows only a glimpse of the understanding of the Western Catholic Church.[69] Such an attempt

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[68] K-W, 21. As for authorship, *Encyclopaedia Britannica* online notes: "In 1940 the lost *Excerpta* of Vincent of Lérins (flourished 440) was discovered, and this work contains much of the language of the creed. Thus, either Vincent or an admirer of his has been considered the possible author." See The Editors of Encyclopaedia, "Athanasian Creed," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 2 January 2020, https://www.britannica.com/topic/Athanasian-Creed.

[69] Given the constraints of this dissertation and its focus on the LCMS, the eastern church and its views of catholicity must be neglected and attention can be given only to the western church.

would be challenging not only because of the length of the period in question, but also because, according to Hermann Sasse, the medieval doctrine of the church is assumed more than it is articulated. "Article VII of the Augsburg Confession is the first doctrinal statement ever made in Christendom about what the church is and wherein is her unity." Medieval Christianity is content to repeat the identifiers "one, holy, catholic, and apostolic" as its confession of the Church. Despite some discussion of the Church by theologians Sasse adds: "Yet they did not feel it was necessary to have a doctrinal definition of what the church is, not even in the Catholic Church or churches (they were not always in church fellowship with each other)."[70]

In terms of the leading lights of medieval Christian thought, both Hans Küng and David Bosch consider Augustine's work to be the starting point for medieval theology and the work of Thomas Aquinas to be its climax.[71] Having given some consideration to Augustine in the previous subsection, what follows here will focus briefly on the greatest of the medieval Scholastics, Thomas Aquinas.

In his commentary on Eph. 2, Aquinas discusses Paul's words about the exclusion of the Gentiles who were without hope and having "no God in the world," separated by "the dividing wall of hostility" (2:14) during the period that he refers to as "the Old Law." Thomas explains:

> What is said here should be understood in this way. For the world is likened to a field: "The field is the world" (Mt 13:38), this field of the world is crowded with men, "Increase and multiply, and fill the earth" (Gen 1:28). A barrier, however, runs down the field, some are on one side and the rest on the other. The Old Law can be termed such a barrier, its carnal observances kept the Jews confined: "Before the faith came, we were under the guardianship of the law, confined in anticipation of the faith which was to be revealed" (Gal 3:23). Christ was symbolized through the Old Law: "See, he stands behind our wall" (Cant. 2:9). Christ, however, has put an end to this barrier and, since no division remained, the Jews and the Gentiles became one people.

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[70] Sasse, *We Confess the Church*, 42 in *We Confess Anthology*.

[71] See Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 242.

This is what he says **I affirm that he has made both one** by the method of **breaking down the middle barrier**.[72]

Here Aquinas touches on the notion of the catholic reach of the church as the world crowded with men is no longer divided between Jew and Gentile. The division ends in Christ and his work. All people now have access to the one God, so "**Now therefore you are no more strangers and foreigners**.… [B]oth Jews and Gentiles are united and are reconciled to God" and "they both have access in one Spirit to the Father." So "they are confirmed to the whole Trinity; to the Father whom they approach, to the Son through whom, and to the Holy Spirit in whom they have access in unity."[73] Note that the worldwide wholeness or vertical catholicity of Christianity depends on the "wholeness" of God—the "whole Trinity."

In the extensive work of Aquinas, it is striking that there is no single treatise or other writing on the church *per se*. This is not because the church is unimportant to him. Indeed, he vigorously defends the idea that there is no salvation apart from the church. He supports this fact by virtue of his understanding of faith. Faith is above all submission to the church's teaching:

> Now the formal object of faith is the First Truth, as manifested in Sacred Scripture and the teaching of the Church. Consequently whoever does not adhere, as to an infallible and Divine rule, to the teaching of the Church, which proceeds from the First Truth manifested in Sacred Scripture, has not the habit of faith, but holds the [other articles] of faith by a mode other than faith.[74]

Bryan Cross explains that for Thomas, "What makes faith to be faith is not merely believing the content of divine revelation, but adhering to it through the teaching of the Church,

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[72] Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians*, trans. Matthew L. Lamb, O.C.S.O (Albany, NY: Magi Books, 1966; HTML ed. Joseph Kenny, O.P.), chapter 2, lecture 5, emphasis original; https://isidore.co/aquinas/SSEph.htm.

[73] Aquinas, *Epistle to the Ephesians,* chapter 2, lecture 6, emphasis original.

[74] In Bryan Cross, "St. Thomas Aquinas on the Relation of Faith to the Church," Called to Communion: Reformation Meets Rome, (February 13, 2010), https://www.calledtocommunion.com/2010/02/st-thomas-aquinas-on-the-relation-of-faith-to-the-church/. Cross is quoting from Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* II–II Qu.5 article 3.

on the basis of the Church's divinely given authority to articulate and define the articles of

faith."[75] The question is whether one has faith or opinion.

> So likewise, it is manifest that he who adheres to the teachings of the Church, as to an
> infallible rule, assents to whatever the Church teaches; otherwise, if, of the things
> taught by the Church, he holds what he chooses to hold, and rejects what he chooses
> to reject, he no longer adheres to the teachings of the Church as to an infallible rule,
> but to his own will.[76]

Thus, for Thomas, the Church's teaching deserves universal—catholic—adherence, since

the Church alone dispenses the truth. It also becomes evident that for him, the matter of how the

Church is understood will be the deciding factor in determining the meaning of catholicity. One

can see this in *Summa* II–II Question 1, as Aquinas touches on catholicity indirectly (and

somewhat obscurely), in the context of the question: "Whether it is suitable for the articles of

faith to be embodied in a symbol?" In answering six objections to the suitability of a symbol (a

creed), the first objection to a symbol is that the "articles of faith" are embodied in Scripture as

the rule of faith, so no further rule of faith is needed lest something be added to the "one faith."[77]

Central to the rejoinder from Aquinas is the authority of the "universal Church."

> The universal Church cannot err, since she is governed by the Holy Ghost, Who is the
> Spirit of truth: for such was Our Lord's promise to His disciples (Jn. 16:13): "When
> He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will teach you all truth." Now the symbol is
> published by the authority of the universal Church. Therefore it contains nothing
> defective.[78]

The "universal church" rightly proposes the truth of Scripture—the truth that must be proposed

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[75] Cross, "Relation of Faith to the Church."

[76] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* II–II Qu.5 article 3 co., in Cross, "Relation of Faith to the Church."

[77] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* II–II Qu.1 article 9, Objections 1 and 2; *The Summa Theologica* (Benziger Bros, 1947), https://isidore.co/aquinas/english/summa/. Further objections are that people without "living faith" use the symbol and falsely say, "I believe in God" while yet another rejects the symbol of Nicaea since it omits an article of faith (the descent into hell). Another quibbles that one shouldn't say I believe "***in***" anything other than God (in opposition to belief "in" the Church). Lastly, there is a complaint about how a symbol would be used. See objections 3, 4, 5, 6.

[78] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* II–II Qu.1 article 9, Objections 1 and 2.

so that a person can believe it. The symbol is "the necessary clear summary" of biblical teaching and also the answer to errors. As errors increase, additional symbols answer them. The confession of faith in a symbol is spoken "in the person, as it were, of the whole Church." And when faith is confessed in "the holy Catholic Church" that is ultimately directed to the Holy Spirit who is guiding the church.

Implicitly, therefore, Thomas indicates that the universality or catholicity of the Church is a matter of it being sanctified by the Holy Spirit and led into the one, common, universal truth. This vertical emphasis is coordinated with the horizontal dimension of catholicity since it declares the one faith that all the world "should endeavor to acquire."[79] But his understanding of the Church—universal Church—"holy Catholic Church," is still not fully evident.

Aquinas provides an unambiguous statement on the Church as he is explaining the Apostles' Creed. However, despite the title, Aquinas' teaching on the third article's confession of the Church is based on the words of the Nicene Creed, not the Apostles' Creed, as he discusses the "four essential conditions" of the church—"one, holy, catholic, and apostolic." On the Church's oneness, Aquinas first excludes from the Church "various heretics" who "have founded various sects." He then writes that the Church has a threefold unity, of faith (by which he means doctrine), of the hope of eternal life, and of charity or "mutual love" for God and one another.[80]

The Church is holy, says Aquinas, because it is cleansed both materially and by having been "anointed with a spiritual unction"—"the grace of the Holy Spirit." But holiness also results because the Trinity dwells in the place or house of the Church and, fourthly, because "God is

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[79] This summarizes Thomas' response in *Summa Theologica* II–II Qu.1 article 9,

[80] Thomas Aquinas, *The Apostles' Creed,* trans. Joseph B. Collins (New York, 1939), Art. 9; https://isidore.co/aquinas/english/Creed.htm.

invoked in the Church."[81]

And now to his view of catholicity. Thomas writes:

> The Church is Catholic, that is, universal. Firstly, *it is universal in place, because it is worldwide*. This is contrary to the error of the Donatists. For the Church is a congregation of the faithful; and since the faithful are in every part of the world, so also is the Church: "Your faith is spoken of in the whole world" [Rm 1:8]. And also: "Go into the whole world and preach the gospel to every creature" [Mk 16:15]. Long ago, indeed, God was known only in Judea; now, however, He is known throughout the entire world. The Church has three parts: one is on earth, one is in heaven, and one is in purgatory. *Secondly, the Church is universal in regard to all the conditions of mankind; for no exceptions are made, neither master nor servant, neither man nor woman*: "Neither bond nor free; there is neither male nor female" [Gal 3:28]. *Thirdly, it is universal in time.* Some have said that the Church will exist only up to a certain time. But this is false, for the Church began to exist in the time of Abel and will endure up to the end of the world: "Behold, I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world" [Mt 28:20]. Moreover, even after the end of the world, it will continue to exist in heaven.[82]

On the one hand, you see in Thomas a clear emphasis on horizontal catholicity. The Church is first, "universal in place, because it is worldwide," and second, universal in that it includes "all the conditions of mankind; for no exceptions are made, neither master nor servant, neither man nor woman." The third aspect of universality is vertical—the Church endures through the ages, beginning with Abel and forward into eternity. This vertical dimension is not given clear definition in his discussion of catholic, but it becomes clear as he continues on to discuss the fourth mark: apostolic.

In Aquinas, the primary synonym for apostolicity is firmness. "The Church is firm." How? It is firm principally because it is built on Christ and secondarily because it is built on "the Apostles and their teaching." So the Church stands firm in the face of persecution and errors and "the temptations of the demons" and Satan. But note well: "And thus it is that only the Church of

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[81] Aquinas, *Apostles' Creed,* Art. 9.

[82] Aquinas, *Apostles' Creed,* Art. 9, emphasis added.

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Peter (to whom it was given to evangelize Italy when the disciples were sent to preach) was always firm in faith. On the contrary, in other parts of the world there is either no faith at all or faith mixed with many errors. The Church of Peter flourishes in faith and is free from error." Thus, it is "only the Church of Peter" that has been "always firm in faith." While elsewhere "there is either no faith at all or faith mixed with many errors." [83] In these comments we see that for Thomas the only truly catholic church is the Petrine or Roman church. Moreover, catholicity does not apply to a church where there is faith mixed with error.

Overall, the perspective of Thomas Aquinas is the perspective of the Western medieval church. He writes after the division of east and west, so while he acknowledges that there are other apostolic churches, they are now marked by error. Only Peter's church remains a true church. This is corroborated by his insistence on a single universal authority in the *Summa Theologica,* where he writes

> Hence since the whole Church is one body, it behooves, if this oneness is to be preserved, that there be a governing power in respect of the whole Church, above the episcopal power whereby each particular Church is governed, and this is the power of the Pope. Consequently those who deny this power are called schismatics as causing a division in the unity of the Church.[84]

Thus, for Thomas Aquinas and the medieval church, catholicity belongs only to the Roman church—the See of Peter—headed by the pope. Only the pope is truly apostolic. Only the pope's church could be truly one or holy. And only the pope's jurisdiction is catholic. That false claim was to be one of the errors the Reformation sought to correct.

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[83] Aquinas, *Apostles' Creed,* Art. 9.

[84] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* II–II Qu.40 article 6; quoted in Cross, "Relation of Faith to the Church." Cross provides further quotations from *Summa Contra Gentiles* to the same insistence on the necessity of the pope.

The Reformation and Catholicity

Martin Luther's Small Catechism set a precedent that continues today with respect to the

catholicity of the Church. In his translation of the Apostles' or Children's Creed, he used

"Christian" (*christliche*) rather than "catholic" (*katholische*) as the second adjective describing

the Church. Despite the common perception that this substitution was his own innovation, Luther

makes no such claim. Rather, as he confesses "one single, holy, Christian, Apostolic Church" in

his "The Three Symbols or Creeds of the Christian Faith," he includes this gloss:

> "Christian" [*Catholica*] can have no better translation than "Christian," *as was done*
> *heretofore*. That is, although Christians are to be found in the whole world, the pope
> rages against that and wants to have his court alone called the Christian Church. He
> lies, however, like his idol, the devil."[85]

From this quote, we see that Luther was accepting an earlier practice of rendering catholic

(*katholische*) with Christian (*christliche*). The practice, "as was done heretofore," predates

Luther. Gordon Jensen documents sources which employ Christian for catholic prior to Luther,

showing that "Luther is not the first to make this switch." Jensen mentions "the popular

Vocabularius predicantium, a handy dictionary that translated various biblical and ecclesiastical

terms (mainly from Latin) into German, compiled by Johannes Melber and the Heidelberg

humanist Jodocus Eichmann." He also includes "the *Manuale curatorum* of Johann Ulrich

Surgant," Jensen adds that "until the end of his life, when he [Luther] wrote in Latin, he

continued to use the phrase, *sanctam catholicam ecclesiam*. He did not, therefore, reject the idea

of the church catholic by his translation of catholic as Christian in the German language."[86]

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[85] Martin Luther, "The Three Symbols or Creeds of the Christian Faith" (1538), in LW 34:229. Emphasis added, brackets original.

[86] Gordon A. Jensen, "The Gospel: Luther's Linchpin for Catholicity," *Concordia Journal* 39, no. 4 (Fall 2013): 284. Also note Eamon Duffy on the development of vernacular English religious instruction, chapter 2 in *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England c.1400–c.1580* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 53–87.

Rather than repudiating the catholicity of the church, Luther insisted on a right understanding. The substitution of "Christian" for catholic helped him to affirm authentic horizontal catholicity, since "Christians are to be found in the whole world," and to oppose the papacy's false claim that its sovereignty defined catholicity (wherein the pope wants "his court alone [to be] called the Christian church").[87] "The Three Symbols" clearly indicates that Luther rejects the Medieval view of Aquinas and others that only the Roman church is catholic. Interestingly, in looking at the modifiers "catholic and apostolic" in the Nicene Creed, both Aquinas and Luther interpret catholicity in light of their understanding of apostolicity. For Aquinas, apostolicity is based on the centrality of Peter and his successors in Rome, and thus catholicity is only *Roman or Petrine catholicity*. Luther clearly identifies apostolic as a reference to the apostolic gospel and so establishes a completely different criterion than papal authority as the basis for a true Christian or universal, catholic church. As Jensen puts it: "Luther sought to recover the apostolic message *of the gospel* as a condition of the church's catholicity. Apart from the apostolic message, the people of God cannot be catholic."[88]

As early as 1520, Luther affirmed an understanding of the church's universality or catholicity, without using such exact terms. His "On the Papacy in Rome against the Most Celebrated Romanist in Leipzig" takes aim at the false view of "Christendom" trumpeted by Rome. Luther says this about Scripture's view of the church:

> Christendom means *an assembly of all the people on earth who believe in Christ*, as we pray in the Creed, "I believe in the Holy Spirit, the communion of saints." This community or assembly means *all those who live in true faith, hope, and love*. Thus the essence, life, and nature of Christendom is not a physical assembly, but an assembly of hearts in one faith, as St. Paul says in Ephesians 4[:5], "One baptism, one faith, one Lord." Accordingly, *regardless of whether a thousand miles separates them physically*, they are still called one assembly in spirit, as long as each one preaches,

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[87] Luther, "Three Symbols," LW 34:229.

[88] Jensen, "Linchpin for Catholicity," 284, emphasis added.

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believes, hopes, loves, and lives like the other. So we sing about the Holy Spirit, "*You have brought many tongues together* into the unity of faith."[89]

Note Luther's references to "an assembly of all the people on earth who believe in Christ," "all those who live in true faith, hope, and love," "regardless of whether a thousand miles separates them physically," "'You have brought many tongues together.'" This is the church catholic, both vertical and horizontal.

From 1522 through 1534 Luther worked on translating the Scriptures into German, laboring to render the first German New Testament and then to make "Hebrew writers talk German."[90] Luther's commitment to the vernacular in his translation of Scripture as well as in his preparations of German worship and catechetical materials are evident corollaries of his commitment to the horizontal catholicity of the Church. In so doing, he is exhibiting a fidelity to the New Testament itself, written in the Greek vernacular, not the Aramaic of first century Palestine or the Hebrew of the Old Testament. This vernacular principle is an element of catholicity, for the Church must speak the languages of the nations to whom it is sent. Its re-emergence during the Reformation would be an important step in a growing commitment to the mission of the church catholic.[91]

In 1525 Luther wrote "A Booklet for Laity and Children," a precursor to his Small Catechism. In it he provides a beautiful explanation of the third article. He begins by devoting one paragraph to the Holy Spirit's person and his gracious work to "stir up, awaken, call, and

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[89] Martin Luther, "On the Papacy in Rome against the Most Celebrated Romanist in Leipzig" (1520), LW 39:65. Emphasis added.

[90] Quoted from Luther's 1528 letter to Wenceslaus Link in E. Theodore Bachmann's Introduction to Luther's Prefaces to the Books of the Bible, LW 35:229.

[91] On the importance of translation into the vernacular and missions, See Lamin Sanneh, *Disciples of All Nations: Pillars of World Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 154–55, 178–81, 306.

beget new life in me and in all who are his."[92] Luther then adds four paragraphs about the church.

Among them is this confession:

> I believe that throughout the whole wide world there is only one holy, universal, Christian church, which is nothing other than the gathering or congregation of saints—[righteous] believers on earth. This church is gathered, preserved, and governed by the same Holy Spirit and is given daily increase by means of the sacraments and the Word of God.[93]

One can scarcely imagine a more emphatic affirmation of horizontal catholicity as it confesses a church "throughout the whole wide world" that results from the one common faith (vertical catholicity) handed down by the one Holy Spirit through the means of grace.

Luther's catechisms, both published in 1529, also indicate his understanding of catholicity. First, the whole enterprise of preparing a catechism is catholic at its heart. That is certainly true in terms of vertical catholicity. As Charles Arand says,

> Since Luther considered himself a catholic Christian, it is only natural that he would incorporate the Creed and the Lord's Prayer into his catechism. In doing so he confessed that he stood squarely within the catholic tradition of the church and has not in fact left the church.[94]

In addition, the preparation of the catechisms in German must be acknowledged as an affirmation of horizontal catholicity. The faith of the Church is not simply to be preserved as handed down. It is to be proclaimed in new tongues, to new peoples, in new places. As was the case with translating Scripture, the vernacular principle of catechesis is also horizontal catholicity at work.

His preface to the SC chastises the Roman bishops' neglect of catechesis on the basis of

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[92] Martin Luther, "A Booklet for Laity and Children," in Robert Kolb and James A Nestingen, eds., *Sources and Contexts of The Book of Concord* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 6.

[93] Luther, "Booklet for Laity," 6. Note that, arguably, Luther here renders "one, holy, catholic, and apostolic" with "one holy, universal, Christian."

[94] Charles P. Arand, *That I May Be His Own: An Overview of Luther's Catechisms* (St. Louis: Concordia, 200), 34. See also p. 38 where Arand shows that Luther's inclusion of the Commandments was similarly in keeping with the catholic tradition.

longstanding, *catholic* practice, such as the practice of the "dear church Fathers."[95] He then refers to how the Holy Spirit establishes the catholic church "as he calls, gather, enlightens, and makes holy *the whole Christian church on earth* and keeps it with Jesus in the one common, true faith."[96]

In the LC, Luther builds on the analogy of the holy Church as bride and thereby effectively endorses horizontal catholicity. He says that the Church as mother "begets and bears children" to the Lord throughout the world.

> Learn this article, then, as clearly as possible. If someone asks, What do you mean by the words "I believe in the Holy Spirit"? you can answer, "I believe that the Holy Spirit makes me holy, as his name states." How does he do this, or what are his ways and means? Answer: "Through the Christian church, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting." In the first place, *he has a unique community in the world, which is the mother that begets and bears every Christian through the Word of God*, which the Holy Spirit reveals and proclaims, through which he illuminates and inflames hearts so that they grasp and accept it, cling to it, and persevere in it.[97]

Here it is the Word of God that determines the vertical dimension of catholicity and, as the means by which the Word is made known, the church "begets and bears" believers, forming the horizontal catholicity of the church throughout the world.

Further along in the LC, Luther emphasizes horizontal catholicity without neglecting the vertical as he describes what we ask in the second petition:

> We ask here at the outset that all this may be realized in us and that his name may be praised through God's holy Word and Christian living. This we ask, both in order that we who have accepted it may remain faithful and grow daily in it and also in order *that it may find approval and gain followers among other people and advance with power throughout the world*. In this way many, led by the Holy Spirit, may come into

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[95] SC Preface, 8, K-W 348.

[96] SC Creed, 6, K-W 355–56.

[97] LC II 40–42, K-W 436; emphasis added.

the kingdom of grace and become partakers of redemption, so that we may all remain together eternally in this kingdom that has now begun.[98]

He then articulates the second petition, beginning with, "Dear Father, we pray, give us first Your Word, so that the Gospel may be preached properly *throughout the world*."[99] Klaus Detlev Schulz summarizes Luther's view of the second petition of the Lord's Prayer in seven specific points, the first of which is: "The movement of the Gospel is universal. The preaching of God's Word should go on everywhere in the world, and it is ongoing to areas that have not yet been reached. Mission is still in progress."[100]

On the basis of three sources from the 1530s, Jensen builds his case that Luther understands the gospel as the basis for catholicity: Luther's 1535 meeting with the papal nuncio Vergerio, his 1537 Smalcald Articles, and his 1539 *On the Councils and the Church.* The council that Vergerio was proposing on behalf of Pope Paul III was, in Luther's estimation, no council at all because the gospel would not be given consideration. Only the apostolic message of the gospel creates the church, and there could "not be a truly ecumenical and catholic council unless the church gathered around the gospel, the apostolic message."[101]

Luther maintains this view of a legitimate catholic council in the Smalcald Articles (1537), reiterating it in his preface.[102] He then states the same concept with utter simplicity: "God be praised, a seven-year-old child knows what the church is: holy believers and 'the little sheep who

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[98] LC III 54, K-W 447; emphasis added.

[99] LC III 54, K-W 447; emphasis added.

[100] "The Second Petition: Mission as the Expansion of the Kingdom of God," 529; in Pless and Vogel, *Large Catechism with Annotations.*

[101] Jensen, "Linchpin for Catholicity," 286. It is of interest to note that Vergerio himself later became an evangelical preacher in northern Italy.

[102] Martin Luther, SA, Preface, 10–15, K-W 299–300.

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hear the voice of their shepherd.' "[103] Such a church of little believing sheep is the one, holy, catholic church. The church throughout the world has this in common: it is created by the power of the gospel, for faith comes only by the gospel.

> We now want to return to the gospel, which gives guidance and help against sin in more than one way, because God is extravagantly rich in his grace: first, through the spoken word, *in which the forgiveness of sins is preached to the whole world* (which is the proper function of the gospel); second, through baptism; third, through the holy Sacrament of the Altar; fourth, through the power of the keys and also through the mutual conversation and consolation of brothers and sisters. Matthew 18[:20*]: "Where two or three are gathered …"[104]

In his *On the Councils and the Church* (1539)*,* Luther simply defines his understanding of catholic: "Now there are many peoples in the world; the Christians, however, are a people with a special call and are therefore called not just *ecclesia*, 'church,' or 'people,' but *sancta catholica Christiana*, that is, 'a Christian holy people' who believe in Christ." Note that while he avoids the term catholic, his real quibble here is with the word "church" in the "Children's Creed," suggesting that the wording in the third article might be clearer if one said "I believe that there is a holy Christian people." [105] Then he goes even further, saying that the Roman *ecclesia* is no church at all. "Therefore they are not entitled to the name 'Christian church' or 'Christian people,' if for no other reason than that 'Christian church' is a name and 'Christian holiness' an entity *common to all churches and all Christians in the world*; therefore it is called 'catholic.'[106]

Luther continues in identifying seven marks that make a church catholic and unfailingly show where holy Christian people are to be found. First is the "holy word of God," by which the

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[103] Luther, SA III, Third Part, 12, 1–2, K-W 324–25. See also Luther's paraphrase of Luke 24:47 where he refers to Jesus commanding that repentance and forgiveness be preached "to the whole world," SA III, Third Part, 3, 6, K-W 313.

[104] SA III, Third Part, 4, K-W 319; emphasis added.

[105] Martin Luther, *On the Councils and the Church"* (1539), LW 41:143.

[106] Luther, *On the Councils*, LW 41:145; emphasis added.

church is recognized even when "not all have it in equal measure."[107] Second is holy baptism, which belongs not to the one who administers it, but "to the disciple who hears and believes it."[108] The same is true of the third mark, the Lord's Supper, for it, too belongs to the one who receives, not the administrant.[109] Fourth is the keys, publicly exercised, which means that sin is forgiven and reproved either "publicly or privately." When you see that, "you may know that God's people are there."[110] The fifth mark is the ministry—when preaching and the sacraments are "entrusted to one person." But do not suppose that pope or title makes the ministry.[111] The sixth mark is public praise and prayer.[112] And last of all, "the holy possession of the sacred cross."[113] Such are Luther's marks of the catholic church throughout the world.

Luther consistently held to such an understanding of the church. As late as the year before he died he affirmed the one catholic church "on earth." "There is indeed only one catholic church of Christ on earth, but to that the heretical and idolatrous Louvainists do not belong with their abominable idol, the pope."[114] So, for Luther, the answer to, "Is the pope catholic?" is an emphatic, "No."

The whole of the Lutheran Confessions indicate a concern for catholicity. From the beginning that was evident in the way Philip Melanchthon crafted the Augsburg Confession. As Robert Kolb says, "Melanchthon established the catholicity of the Lutherans by confessing the

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[107] Luther, *On the Councils*, LW 41:148.

[108] Luther, *On the Councils*, LW 41:151.

[109] Luther, *On the Councils*, LW 41:152.

[110] Luther, *On the Councils*, LW 41:153.

[111] Luther, *On the Councils*, LW 41:154–64.

[112] Luther, *On the Councils*, LW 41:164.

[113] Luther, *On the Councils*, LW 41:164.

[114] Martin Luther, "Against the Thirty-Two Articles of the Louvain Theologists" (1545), LW 34:357.

doctrine of the Trinity" at the very beginning of the AC. He continues throughout the Augustana to argue that the Wittenberg theologians are standing in the vertical catholic tradition of central Christian truths.[115] The same concern is evident in the *Book of Concord,* which begins with the confession of the ecumenical creeds and the "catholic faith."[116]

Although the affirmation of the creeds and the trinitarian teachings of the early church may suggest that only vertical catholicity mattered to the Lutheran confessors, that is not the case. One of four documents which were important precursors of the Augsburg Confession was the *Torgau Articles* of 1530. Note the understanding of "Catholic Church" employed under the article, "Of the Doctrines and Ordinances of Men."

> If we are commanded to believe that the church is catholic, then *the church is in the whole world and is not bound to a single place. Rather, everywhere, wherever God's Word and ordinances are, there the church is.* Since external human ordinances are not the same everywhere, it follows that such variance is not contrary to the unity of the church."[117]

The horizontal dimension is first noted as Torgau affirms "the Church in the entire world and not bound to one place." This horizontal element is the result of the vertical dimension—the one "Word and ordinances" that have been given by God. And it results in varied "external human ordinances."

The Apology, articles VII and VIII, affirms and expands this seamless view of catholicity that never divorces the vertical from the horizontal.

> This [third] article in the Creed presents these consolations to us: so that we may not despair, but may know that the church will nevertheless remain; so that we may know that however great the multitude of the ungodly is, nevertheless the church exists and

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[115] Robert Kolb, *Confessing the Faith: Reformers Define the Church, 1530–1580* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1991), 32.

[116] See the first words of the Athanasian Creed.

[117] "The Torgau Articles," in Kolb and Nestingen, eds., *Sources and Contexts*, 95. See also J. M. Reu, *The Augsburg Confession: A Collection of Sources* (St. Louis: Concordia Seminary Press [Reprint], 1966), 81; emphasis added.

Christ bestows those gifts that he promised to the church: forgiveness of sins, answered prayer, the gift of the Holy Spirit. *Moreover, it says "church catholic" so that we not understand the church to be an external government of certain nations. It consists rather of people scattered throughout the entire world who agree on the gospel and have the same Christ, the same Holy Spirit, and the same sacraments, whether or not they have the same human traditions.*[118]

Similarly, in Article XIV of the Apology, Melanchthon insists that the Augustana is "true, godly, and catholic"—that is, faithful to the catholic faith handed down from the apostles themselves (vertical catholicity)—and that the church exists *wherever* people "rightly teach the Word of God and rightly administer the sacraments" (the horizontal dimension). He writes:

We have clear consciences on this matter since we know that our confession is true, godly, and catholic. For this reason, we dare not approve the cruelty of those who persecute this doctrine. We know that the church exists among those who rightly teach the Word of God and rightly administer the sacraments; it does not exist among those who not only try to destroy the Word of God with their edicts, but who also butcher those who teach what is right and true.[119]

Furthermore, Melanchthon sometimes argues from the horizontal catholicity of the church to defend the vertical catholicity of Reformation church practice. For example, in article XXVIII he defends the Wittenberg understanding of the power of bishops, which denies that bishops can establish practices contrary to the gospel or institute ordinances that the church must obey, because they "were adopted contrary to the custom of the universal Christian church."[120] And because he understands that the churches of the East are truly part of the catholic church, he defends the Reformation's opposition to private Masses because its opposition agrees with eastern practice: "The fact that we celebrate only the public or common Mass among us does not contradict the catholic church. For even today, Greek parishes do not hold private Masses."[121]

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[118] Ap VII and VIII 9–10, K-W, 175, emphasis added.

[119] Ap XIV 3–4, K-W 222–23.

[120] Ap XXVIII 72, K-W 102.

[121] Ap XXIV 6, K-W 258.

All this amply shows that an emphasis upon catholicity, both vertical and horizontal, was a feature of Luther's theology and the Lutheran Confessions.

The Synodical Conference and the LCMS

It would take me too far afield to examine the history of the Lutheran Church after the Reformation relative to the topic of catholicity. Plus, the pertinence of such a study would necessarily focus only on the dogmatic writings of Lutheran Orthodoxy, since it is the work of the Orthodox dogmaticians that is directly influential to the LCMS. Fortunately, Quentin Stewart's dissertation has looked at the importance of catholicity in Lutheran Orthodoxy. To summarize, Stewart shows that Lutheran Orthodoxy showed high regard for the catholicity of the church in terms of teaching—vertical catholicity. That catholicity, however, was for Lutheran Orthodoxy not a matter of a doctrinal consensus that one could trace back through the centuries—the kind of consensus that the Vincentian Canon saw as a set of teachings that could claim antiquity, universality, and consent—"that which has been believed everywhere, always and by everyone." The Lutherans all saw and could easily show that such a consensus did not exist. As much as Lutheran Orthodox stalwarts like Chemnitz, Gerhard, and Quenstedt gladly cited the church's early fathers, they recognized that the fathers did not all believe and teach the same things about everything. Rather, from Melanchthon to Flacius to Chemnitz to Gerhard to Quenstedt, the Lutheran dogmatic tradition saw catholic teaching as enduring throughout church history to a greater and lesser extent, depending on the author, the context, the writing, and so forth. Therefore, the Orthodox rejected any and every charge of novelty. They claimed true catholicity since in order to be truly catholic or universal truth, doctrine must be scriptural. They saw that scriptural truth was never entirely lost, even in the grimmest ecclesial age, so catholic doctrine did endure—as witness especially the ecumenical creeds and trinitarian theology. The

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church's truly catholic consensus must always be the consensus of Scripture.[122]

This quick survey cannot neglect to point out the obvious. The matter of catholicity in the period of Lutheran Orthodoxy was strictly vertical in nature. It was also an academic matter and seemingly divorced from the daily life of the church and, even more, from the church's mission to the world. Horizontal catholicity is noted for its absence.

It is one thing to describe and confess the Church and its catholicity, and another thing to *pre*scribe the priorities and shape of a church body that seeks to be faithful to her Lord. The goal of such a prescription is not the temporal well-being of an institution, as much as we understandably desire that. Rather, "our" prescriptions for the church must simply echo what God has revealed to us—his intentions for *his* church, the *Una Sancta*.

As one part of the *Una Sancta*—the holy catholic, or Christian, Church on earth—the LCMS at its best has sought more than institutional survival. It has sought to shape itself in ways that are consistent with the church as portrayed in the Word of God and as we confess it to be. One needs to look no farther than the Preamble of the LCMS Constitution, which gives this as the first reason for the formation of the Missouri Synod: "The example of the apostolic church. Acts 15:1–31."[123] This citation from Acts 15 is important to this study for two reasons: first, it provides an example of the apostolic church addressing a practical question about how to conduct itself. It does so by means of prayerful consideration, seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit. More importantly, the questions the apostolic church faced are of profound importance. They were questions of catholicity—was the church to be, indeed, universal? For all people?

Acts 15 describes a gathering of "apostles and elders" (15:6) in Jerusalem. At the

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[122] Stewart, "Catholicity or Consensus," 297–320.

[123] LCMS, *Handbook*, 9. See above p. 263 for a brief consideration of Acts 15.

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"Jerusalem Council," as it came to be known, the gathered assembly addressed the question whether Gentile believers in Christ should be circumcised and keep the law of Moses (15:5). The matter was settled when Peter reminded the assembly that *God* had chosen or elected (ἐξελέξατο) the Gentiles to hear the gospel and believe (15:7) and that *God* gave "them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us, and he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith" (15:8). Therefore, to put some other "yoke" on the Gentiles would be to put "God to the test" (15:10), since "we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will" (15:11). This decision helped set the course for the early church's missionary work throughout the ancient world—a work in keeping with Christ's own direction to the apostolic church: "you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8). By its affirmation of this example, the LCMS states its intention to be part of this same mission—a mission to all the world.

The Synod has, again and again, sought the guidance of the Holy Spirit in addressing various matters of doctrine and life according to Holy Scripture. The LCMS has always affirmed and never denied the mission of the Church to the nations—that is, it has never denied the horizontal catholicity of the Church. Our approach to this second point, however, has tended to be more a matter of passing intellectual assent than of searching introspection. Although the Creeds, rightly understood, explicitly acknowledge that the Church is made up of all nations, the Missouri Synod has given this fact little attention in its catechesis. Moreover, the actual history and ecclesial patterns of our denomination foster a rather different picture—one that is mono-cultural and ethnically narrow. And "mission" has often seemed to be more of an auxiliary function—a project—of the congregation or of the church body rather than something

constitutive of the church and therefore the real work of congregational ministry.[124] This is

despite the fact that early in Synod's history, mission was central to the work of the Missouri

Synod. Its focus for nearly a century was to gather immigrants into churches. But even then (like

many American denominations), the work was ethnically narrow, understandably centering

above all else on German immigrants. The Synod's original name said as much: The "*German*

Evangelical Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States."[125] Outreach and mission efforts toward

other races and ethnicities was treated as a special project or an occasional foray.[126]

The following two subsections will provide surveys of the catechisms and dogmatics texts

used in the Synod. This history illustrates the fact that catholicity and mission have been more

tangential than central to Missouri's understanding of the Church. If catechesis is instruction in

the basic beliefs of a church, then marginalizing our Lord's intention to gather the nations into

his flock is a significant omission. The same is true when one considers the problem of minimal

attention given to horizontal catholicity and mission in the dogmatic theology texts we have used

to prepare pastors and other church workers.

Catechisms

The primary catechisms used for the instruction of Missouri Synod catechumens provides a

glimpse into the significance of catholicity in LCMS history. Michael Reu touches briefly on

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[124] Robert Newton has argued that the Synod has, in its overall practice, tended toward a view of mission to the nations as something that plays "an adjunct or supporting role" within its life, rather than something essential to our biblical and confessional hermeneutic. See p. 31 of his essay, "He Opened Their Minds: The Missio Dei as Interpretive Lens for God's Word and World," in *LCMS: Model Theological Convocation—2008* (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 2008), http://www.lcms.org/Document.fdoc?src=lcm&id=3472.

[125] Emphasis added. The name, in German, was *Die Deutsche Evangelisch-Lutherische Synode von Missouri, Ohio und andern Staaten.* For the first constitution of the Missouri Synod, where the name was determined, see W. G. P[olack]., "Our First Synodical Constitution," *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* 16, no. 1 (April 1943): 1–18, Online at http://www.ctsfw.net/media/pdfs/lcmsconstitution.pdf.

[126] For example, the Wyneken mission to Native Americans, the sending of the first foreign missionaries to India, and "Negro Missions" (inspired by Rosa Young).

early Missouri Synod catechisms: "The Missouri Synod first used the Dresden

Kreuzkatechismus. This was soon replaced by Dietrich which was for decades the official

catechism." [127] He adds that the Wisconsin Synod used the *Kreuzkatechismus* for a longer period

while the Ohio Synod used Dietrich. Reu is correct as far as he goes, but he neglects to mention

the exposition initially prepared by H.C. Schwan.

David Aaron Fiala has researched the history of the English editions of Luther's Small

Catechism used in the Synodical Conference and LCMS.[128] He says that Missouri produced "four

major editions of Small Catechism Explanation texts and two distinct versions of the Small

Catechism in the English language."[129] Of the two English translations of Luther's Small

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[127] M. Reu, *Dr. Martin Luther's Small Catechism: A History of Its Origin, Its Distribution and Its Use* (Chicago: Wartburg, 1929), 282. Note that the *Kreuzkatechismus* is so named because it was prepared at Holy Cross Church in Dresden. See: Martin Luther and Christian Gottlob Hilscher. 1773. *D. Martin Luthers Kleiner Catechismus auf Churfürstl. Durchl. zu Sachsen gnädigsten Befehl Vom Ministerio zum Heil. Creutz in Dreßden durch Frag und Antwort erläutert, auch mit angeführten Sprüchen Heiliger Schrift bekräftiget, und nach vorher gegangener Des Kirchen-Raths und Ober-Consistorii, Auch beyder Theologischen Facultäten, Leipzig und Wittenberg, Censvr und Approbation in Kirchen und Schulen zum allgemeinen Gebrauch eingeführet und von Druckfehlern gesäubert.* (Dreßden: Hilscher, 1773). http://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:gbv:3:1-160800. (Roughly translated: Dr. Martin Luther's Small Catechism, at the Electoral Highness of Saxony's most gracious Order, from the Ministers of Holy Cross in Dresden, explained through Question and Answer, also confirmed with saying of Holy Scripture, and after previously going to the church Councils and high Consistories, and both the faculties of Leipzig and Wittenberg, censored and approved for introducing in the churches and schools for general use, cleansed of printing errors.)

For the "Dietrich Catechism" (so named for its author Conrad Dietrich or Dieterich), see Martin Luther and Conrad Dieterich, *Dr. Martin Luthers Kleiner Katechismus in Frage und Antwort gruendlich ausgelegt von Dr. Johann Conrad Dietrich, weiland Superintendent zu Ulm, mit Zusaetsen aus dem Dresdner Kreuz-Katechismus und den Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche, und mit Spruechen der heiligen Schrift versehen, nebst dreifachem Anhange* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1902). (Dr. Martin Luther's Small Catechism in Question and Answer, thoroughly interpreted by Dr. Johann Conrad Dietrich, former Superintendent of Ulm, with additions from the Dresden Cross-Catechism and the Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, and with saying of holy Scripture, along with three appendices.)

[128] David Aaron Fiala, "Martin Luther's Small Catechism: A History of English Language Editions and Explanations Prepared by The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod," *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* (Winter 2016): 19–54. Abbreviated as "LCMS Catechism History." See also his early MAR thesis by the same title, "Martin Luther's Small Catechism: A History of English Language Editions and Explanations Prepared by the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod," Capstone Paper, M.A.R. Thesis, Concordia University Chicago, 2013. Abbreviated as "English Editions and Explanations." Fiala does not mention the use of the *Kreuzkatechismus* as Reu noted, no doubt because it was never translated into English for use in the synods that came to make up the Synodical Conference. Note that the title page of Dietrich's catechism, however, says that it includes material from the *Kreuzkatechismus*.

[129] Fiala, "LCMS Catechism History," 27.

Catechism that he identifies, the first originated in the Ohio Synod which published an English translation of the so-called "Dietrich Catechism" in 1872. That text was available for use by Missouri and the rest of the Synodical Conference. Concordia published the same translation beginning in 1895. The Synod again used the Dietrich text of Luther's Enchiridion in its revised explanation of the Small Catechism published in 1905 (the so-called "Schwan Catechism") and then used it once more with minor changes in its 1943 exposition of the Small Catechism (the "Blue Catechism"). It was not until 1986 that the LCMS produced a second English translation of the Small Catechism itself. This translation included significant changes from the Ohio Synod's 1872 translation, but also retained much of the language from that translation.[130]

With respect to editions of explanatory catechetical texts, Fiala, writing in 2016, mentions four, starting with an edition of "The Dietrich Catechism." The first Missouri version was from 1858 in German.[131] An English translation was published in 1872. A second explanatory text was published in 1896, once again in German with an English translation following in 1900. This was the so-called "Schwan Catechism"—so named informally because H.C. Schwan had been commissioned to draft a new explanatory edition of the Small Catechism that was to be briefer and easier to comprehend than the Dietrich Catechism.[132] This edition was followed by another revised explanatory text, published with Luther's text only in English in 1943. And in 1991 the Synod published a fourth explanatory version of the Small Catechism using the 1986 translation

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[130] Fiala, "LCMS Catechism History," 27–29.

[131] According to Arand, Walther revised this version for use in the Synod. Arand, *That I May Be His Own,* 17.

[132] The Dietrich Catechism was considered to be too advanced for younger readers and more of a systematic theology than a simple text for catechizing children. Schwan's version, however, was revised considerably after he completed it—adding more questions and answers and also returning much of the dogmatic material. The changes were so significant that Schwan did not approve of the final product. Nevertheless, while never officially attributed to him it was commonly known as "the Schwan Catechism." Fiala, "English Editions and Explanations," 36n93.

of the Enchiridion itself.[133] In 2017, a year after Fiala's article was published, the LCMS published a fifth explanatory version of the Small Catechism.[134]

Thus, the Missouri Synod has used six different versions of Luther's Small Catechism with explanations: (1) the *Kreuzkatechismus* (only in German); (2) the "Dietrich Catechism" (in German and English); (3) the "Schwan Catechism" (in German and English); (4) the "Blue Catechism" of 1943 (only in English); (5) the 1991 Catechism (in English); and (6) the 2017 Catechism (in English).[135] I am aware of no data about how widespread the usage of each of these texts for catechetical instruction may have been. Reu indicates that the *Kreuzkatechismus* seems to have had only limited use in Missouri, while the Dietrich Catechism and the Schwan Catechism were in turn dominant for a little under half a century each. Dietrich was used when the Missouri Synod was still predominantly German-speaking and the Schwan Catechism was the primary instructional text during the transition from German to English. Its publication with German and English texts on facing pages made it an ideal tool for that transition.[136] It was first published in 1905 with the German text given priority on the left-hand page and the parallel English text following on the right-hand page.[137] But in 1912, less than ten years later, the very same texts were published in reverse, with English prior to German, perhaps indicating an expectation that more LCMS catechesis was being conducted in English than in German.[138] By

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[133] Fiala, "English Editions and Explanations," 47.

[134] *Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2017).

[135] The Synod and synodical entities have published copies of the Catechism with explanation in languages other than German and English, but that history is not germane to this particular section.

[136] On a personal note, I have my grandmother's copy of the Dietrich Catechism which was used in her instruction and my father's bilingual Schwan Catechism which was his instructional text.

[137] Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference, *Kurze Auslegung des Kleine Katechismus Dr. Martin Luther. Herausgegeben von den deustchen ev.-luth. Synode von Missouri, Ohio, u. a. Staaten.* (German-English Edition), (St. Louis: Concordia, 1905). Available electronically at https://archive.org/details/shortexposition00luth/mode/2up.

[138] Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference, *A Short Exposition of Dr. Martin Luther's Small Catechism:*

the 1943 edition the Synod had essentially completed the transition to English.

This translational history indicates that while the Missouri Synod was certainly desirous of adapting to the American environment, it seems evident that its primary intent in the introduction of English was to serve its own people rather than to have the ability to reach out to the other ethnicities of North America. The mission and catholicity of the church is not entirely ignored, however. The two earliest catechisms, the *Kreuzkatechismus* and Dietrich Catechism, both explicitly point out that the description of the Church as "Christian" in the Apostles' Creed as used in Germany was a replacement of the original term, "catholic."[139] Questions 288–90 in the *Kreuzkatechismus* address the confession of the "*Christian* Church," and question 288 asks: "Why do we call it a Christian Church?"[140] It answers:

> In the Latin and Greek languages the word catholic stands here which denotes universal. And the Church of Christ is called a catholic Church because of the universal faith: thereby to Christ all the faithful in all times and all places are attached as their only Head and Savior. Long before Luther this unknown word was replaced with the word Christian, which he wanted to retain for the sake of the simple, so as not to bewilder them. But the Church is called Christian, because it is founded on Christ alone and this Word.[141]

The answer acknowledges the original creedal reference to the Church as catholic, but also

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A Handbook of Christian Doctrine (English-German Edition), (St. Louis: Concordia, 1912). Ken McGuire points out that the 1912 edition had minor changes from the 1905 version in pagination, some use of italics instead of bold typeface, and provided consecutive numbering of the Bible passages cited. See McGuire, "A Short Exposition of Dr. Martin Luther's Small Catechism—Schwan," FaithlifeForums (November 24, 2012), at this link: A Short Exposition of Dr. Martin Luther's Small Catechism—Schwan - Faithlife Forums (logos.com).

[139] See above pp. 290–91.

[140] *Kreuzkatechismus, "Warum nennen sie eine Christliche Kirche?"* qu. 288, p. 99. Question 289, p. 100, asks, "How is the doctrine of the Christian Church conducive to a godly life?" (*Wie dienet uns die Lehre von der Christlichen Kirche zu einem gottseligen Leben?*) Question 290 (100) is: "How does the doctrine serve as powerful comfort to us?" (*Wie dienet uns die Lehre zu einem kraefftigen Trost?*)

[141] *Kreuzkatechismus,* qu. 288, p. 99. *In der lateinischen und grieschichen Sprache stehet zwar das Wort Katholische, welches so viel bedeudet, als allgemein und heisset die Kirche Christi eine Katholische Kirche, wegen des allgemeinen Glaubens, dadurch alle glaeubigen zu allen Zeiten, und allen Orten, Christo ihrem einigen Haupte und Henlund* [sic, Heiland?] *anhangen;un statt dieses unbekannten Wortes aber ist noch laengst vorluthero das Wort Christlich gesetset worden, welches er um der Einfaeltigen willen, sie nicht irre zu machen hat behalten wollen; Es heisset aber die Kirche Christlich, weild ste sich allein auf Christum und dessen Wort gruendet.*

provides an historical, practical, and theological defense of the use of Christian in place of catholic. It recognizes that the term Christian had preceded Luther, who retained its use for the sake of the common people. The aspect of universality found in the term catholic is acknowledged and described simply and accurately as "all the faithful in all times and all places." But the catechism clearly indicates a preference for the word Christian over catholic. The rationale for this preference is because the word Christian emphasizes that the Church "is founded on Christ alone and this Word."

The Dietrich version also directly addresses the terminology of Christian or catholic in question 300. "Why is it [the Church] called Christian or catholic?" Dietrich answers:

> It is called Christian or catholic, in general:
> (1) because it is gathered out of all kinds of people from the whole world;
> (2) because it unanimously professes the catholic doctrine of the prophets, Christ and the apostles and agrees to it. For which reason it is [also] called apostolic.[142]

The first element of the answer is a strong affirmation of horizontal catholicity. Then second affirms vertical catholicity and equates it with apostolicity.

Dietrich also emphasizes the mission of the church in his response to question 390 under the heading of the second petition of the Lord's Prayer. The question asks, "What does this petition require of us?" The answer: "We should be diligent not to cause the devil's kingdom to rise through our unbelief and ungodly way of life; rather, we should try to spread God's word, to increase the Christian church and therefore to convert more and more people to God and to be saved."[143]

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[142] Martin Luther, and Johann Conrad Dietrich, *Dr. Martin Luthers Kleiner Catechismus in Frage und Antwort.* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1895), question 300, p. 175, author's translation. The original reads: *Sie heisst christlich oder katholisch, d. i. allgemein: 1) weil sie in der ganzen Welt aus allerlei Volk gesammelt wird; 2) weil sie die katholische d. i. allgemeine Lehre der Propheten, Christi und der Apostel einmuethig bekennt und derselben heipflichtet. Zu welchem Sinne sie auch apostolisch heisst.*

[143] Luther and Dietrich, *Luthers Kleiner Catechismus,* question 390, p. 217, author's translation. The original

Mission and catholicity are not connected, but the emphasis on proclaiming the Gospel and converting others is nevertheless refreshing.

The two earliest synodical catechisms give some attention to the catholicity of the Church and its mission. That was not the case in the third catechetical text employed in the Missouri Synod. As noted earlier, the so-called Schwan catechism was designed from the start to be briefer and more user-friendly than the Dietrich catechism. Its title implies as much: *A Short Exposition of Dr. Martin Luther's Small Catechism.*[144] This is the first English translation of Luther's Small Catechism with additional explanatory questions and answers. First published in 1900, the book went through further editions in 1905, 1906, 1909, and then a final version in 1912.[145] Although H.C. Schwan was the author of the original text of the new catechism, the end product was significantly altered, to Schwan's disappointment—and even anger.[146] But, disappointment aside, *Cat1912* remained in use until 1943 in the LCMS. Perhaps because of its brevity the Schwan Catechism says nothing directly about either catholicity or mission. For example, question 190 asks, "Why do we say, 'I believe in a holy *Christian* Church'?" *Cat1912* answers: "Because the Church is built upon Christ, its sole Foundation."[147] The closest the catechism comes to emphasizing the catholic fullness of the church is when it defines the "*visible*

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reads: *Wir sollen uns mit Fleiss hueten, dass des Teufels Reich nicht durch unseren Unglauben und ungoettlichen Wandel gestaerkt wede; vielmehr uns bemuehen, dass Gottes Wort ausgebreitet, die christliche Kirche vermehrt und also immer mehr Menschen zu God bekehrt und selig werden.*

[144] Martin Luther, *A Short Exposition of Dr. Martin Luther's Small Catechism,* In the translation authorized by the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America [English-German Edition], (St. Louis: Concordia, [1912]). *Cat1912* is 153 English pages and 153 German pages in length (a total of 306 actual pages since each language is paginated separately).

[145] Fiala notes that the editions between 1900 and 1912 included only minimal changes. Fiala, "English Editions and Explanations," 32.

[146] Fiala, "English Editions and Explanations," 29–34.

[147] *Cat1912*, question 190; emphasis in the original. It was published in a bilingual, English and German format.

Church" as "The whole number of those who profess the Christian faith...."[148] The Church's mission to the world also goes without mention, apart from an appendix titled "The Evangelical Lutheran Church" that refers to Missouri Synod mission work "at home and abroad."[149]

The 1943 edition of the Missouri Synod's catechism was not only a new version, but also much longer than *Cat1912*.[150] In it, there are hints of horizontal catholicity. The missionary reach of the gospel is found in the answer to question 172, which repeats Luther's sentence about the Holy Spirit working toward the salvation of "the *whole Christian Church* on earth." Question 173 follows, asking whether the Holy Spirit desires to work faith in everyone and answers that the Spirit "desires to bring *all men* to salvation by the Gospel."[151] Then question 175 says that the holy Christian Church is "the *whole number of believers in Christ;* for all believers, and *only* believers, are member of this Church. (The invisible Church.)"[152] While the phrases "whole Christian Church on earth, "all men," and "whole number" could point to horizontal catholicity, that does not appear to be a matter of concern. Question 172 simply repeats Luther without drawing any catholic inference; question 173, in context, serves to deny double predestination more than to affirm mission to "all men"; and question 175 is focused on the invisibility of the Church, not its catholicity.[153]

Only when question 179 asks, "Why is the Church called the 'Christian' Church?" is the

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[148] *Cat1912*, questions 191.

[149] *Cat1912*, p. 151. There are hints of catholicity in the vernacular move to English and then in the fact that while the earliest editions of the Schwan Catechism gave the German text before the English text, by 1912 the order was reversed and the English text was prior to the German.

[150] Martin Luther, *A Short Explanation of Dr. Martin Luther's Small Catechism: A Handbook of Christian Doctrine* ((St. Louis: Concordia, 1943). *Cat1943* is about 70 pages longer than *Cat1912*.

[151] *Cat1943*, questions 172–73, emphasis original in both answers.

[152] *Cat1943*, question 175, emphasis original.

[153] Many have noted potential problems with the term, "invisible Church," and prefer instead "hidden Church." That is not a topic this dissertation can explore, however. Suffice it to say that the term invisible can at best only *imply* catholicity, but that is only a possible implication.

opportunity to stress the Church's catholic dimension given some attention. The answer is:

> It is called the *Christian* Church because it is *built upon Christ,* its one and only
> Foundation.…
> Note. – When the word "catholic" is used (see the Athanasian Creed, p. 53, in the
> *Lutheran Hymnal*), it means *universal* or *general,* because the Church is found
> wherever the Gospel is preached.[154]

While some gratitude for such attention is in order, the answer and accompanying note are, at

best, weak attempts to speak of the important fact that Christ's gospel is intended for all nations

and peoples, and that his Church is always defined by a catholic reach.

While there is little attention to the specific idea of catholicity, *Cat1943* does address

missions. First, while commenting on the third commandment, the catechism adds as a fourth

requirement of the command, "D. We should diligently spread the Word of God." In the same

place it adds Mark 16:15 followed by "(Missions.)" in support of the answer.[155] The idea of the

Church's mission appears again in point C. of question 186 on the proper use of the doctrine of

the Church. The third part of the answer—"C. When we do all in our power to *maintain,*

promote, and *extend* this Church by *prayer, personal service,* and *financial support"*—includes

Acts 8:4 and Matt. 28:19 among its proof-texts.[156] Lastly, the explanation to the second petition

includes this: "B. That He would extend His Kingdom of Grace *on earth (missions)*" and then in

support includes the "Mission prayer" from Acts 4:24–30.[157]

Overall, therefore, *Cat1943* is a significant improvement from *Cat1912* in the attention it

gives to the Church as missionary in nature even though it does not specifically address this in

terms of catholicity. This commendable step therefore lacks the particular nuance of horizontal

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[154] *Cat1943*, questions 179 and Note, 133–34; emphasis in the original.

[155] *Cat1943*, questions 51, D., 63.

[156] *Cat1943*, questions 186, C., 136; emphasis in the original.

[157] *Cat1943*, questions 223, B., 155–56; emphasis in the original.

catholicity—that the Church is for all the nations and all races, for every language and culture.

The next episode of the LCMS catechetical story began with the 1986 publication of the Missouri Synod's first completely new translation of Luther's Small Catechism since 1897. That translation, first requested by the Synod in its 1953 convention,[158] was incorporated into the 1991 edition of the next synodical catechetical text: *Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation*.[159] While the language in *Cat1991* is modernized, the content is changed minimally. As for the catholicity of the Church, there is again a hint of the idea of catholicity in the question about whom the Holy Spirit regenerates and renews as it quotes Luther's words about "the whole Christian church on earth" and then supports that with Ephesians 3:6—which refers to Gentile heirs of the promises in Christ.[160] A bit more on catholicity is added in the answer to why the Church is called "Christian" in the third article. The answer is very similar to 1943, especially in the note added to question 173.

> It belongs to Christ and is built on Him alone.…
> *Note:* The word *catholic,* sometimes used in creeds, means "universal" or "general."
> The Church exists throughout the world, wherever the Gospel is proclaimed.[161]

Once again, the substitution of Christian for catholic is explained in a way that has no actual connection to the definition of catholic with its sense of both a vertical connection to the church through the ages and a horizontal breadth that includes all of humanity of every race, tribe, language, and ethnicity. And the understanding of catholicity in the note itself stops at the geographic breadth of the Church and ignores its ethnic, linguistic, and cultural breadth.

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[158] Fiala, "English Editions and Explanations," 20, 44–45. See *Proceedings of the Forty-Second Regular Convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, Houston, TX, June 17-26, 1953* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1953), 606.

[159] Martin Luther, *Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1991).

[160] *Cat1991*, questions 166, 152.

[161] *Cat1991*, questions 173 and Note 156; emphasis in the original.

On the mission of the Church, *Cat1991* follows 1943 in some of the same points noted above. (1) It teaches that a requirement of the third commandment is that "D. We should diligently spread the Word of God." It again refers to Mark 16:15 as biblical proof (but does not add any reference to "Missions" as *Cat1943* did).[162] (2) The explanation to question 213 on the second petition includes two helpful points. In response to what we pray for in the second petition, *Cat1991* answer includes that that we ask God to "B. bring many others into His Kingdom of Grace" and also "C. use us to extend His kingdom of grace." Acts 4 is once again cited for support, but only in verse 29. Interestingly, there is no explicit use of the word "mission" or "missions" as there had been in *Cat1943*. Indeed, the word mission appears only in a reference to John the Baptist[163] and another to Confirmation. The latter instance explains that confirmation is "designed to help baptized Christians identify with the life and mission of the Christian community."[164] In light of that it is ironic that the catechetical text used to prepare people for confirmation fails to speak clearly about the mission of "the holy catholic Church."

The current catechetical text for the LCMS is the 2017 edition of *Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation.*[165] *Cat2017* provides the fullest and most explicit support for the horizontal catholicity of the Church. It does so in its response to question 202. "What is the Church?" The response clearly teaches that the Church is catholic when it answers the question with: "It is the Body of Christ—that is, all people whom the Spirit, by the Means of Grace, has gathered to Christ in faith throughout the world." Then, in support of this, it provides two foundational verses for horizontal catholicity: John 10:16 and Rev. 5:9. Lastly, it includes a note that reads:

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[162] *Cat1991*, questions 40, D., 70.

[163] *Cat1991*, question 252, Note under reference to Titus 3:5, 207.

[164] *Cat1991*, questions 306, 241–42.

[165] Martin Luther, *Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2017).

"The Creed in its original words speaks of the Church as 'catholic' (universal)—that is, existing throughout all time and throughout the world, including people who confess and believe in Jesus Christ from every background ('people and nation,' Revelation 5:9). Another way to say this is to speak of the 'Christian Church.'"[166] The emphasis here goes beyond the words of Luther about the whole Christian Church on earth in order to explain that this includes people from every people and nation—in other words, it reminds us that catholicity is not only geographic but also ethnic in its breadth.

It should also be noted that *Cat2017* emphasizes the teaching of the church's mission in its catechesis. It repeats an explanation of confirmation that is similar to the one in *Cat1991* with reference to teaching about "the confession, life, and *mission* of the Christian Church.[167] More importantly, it follows through with a question devoted specifically to mission:

> **214.** *What is the mission of the Church on earth?*
> The Church's mission is to confess and proclaim the forgiveness of sins for Jesus'
> sake (1) by preaching the Word, administering the Sacraments, sending missionaries,
> and establishing new congregations and (2) by the daily witness of the baptized
> children of God, His royal priesthood.[168]

Supporting passages are Matt. 28:19, Acts 2:42, and 1 Peter 2:9. Additional narrative sections of Scripture are also added to this question and answer: "Read **Acts 8:26–35**, where Philip witnessed to the eunuch, and **Acts 4:23–30**, where Christians prayed for the Gospel to be proclaimed; see also **Acts 8:1, 4; 13:2; 1 Peter 3:15**. Within his or her vocations in life, every Christian has the duty to speak the Gospel to others."[169]

Further support for the importance of proclaiming the gospel comes in response to question

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[166] *Cat2017*, questions 202, 206–7.

[167] *Cat2017*, question 14, 51; emphasis added.

[168] *Cat2017*, question 214, 215–26; emphasis original.

[169] *Cat2017*, question 214, 216; emphasis original

215, about the privileges and responsibilities of church members. Part D. says, "We should tell others about Jesus, participate in works of mercy and service, and support the ministry of the church with prayer and financial gifts."[170]

One additional hint of catholicity and mission appears in *Cat2017* when it discusses the second petition and explains that one of the things we seek when we pray it is that "God's Word would be proclaimed throughout the world—also by us—that His Spirit might bring others under His gracious reign."[171] Unfortunately, however, while both *Cat1943* and *Cat1991* touched on the idea of mission and sharing the Word in discussing the third commandment, *Cat2017* did not do so.

Doctrinal Theology

For the doctrine of the Church in the Missouri Synod, it is necessary to begin with two early LCMS fathers. First, C.F.W. Walther, whose *Kirche und Amt (Church and Ministry)* or *(Church and Office)*[172] provided theses on the church that are still affirmed by the LCMS today. Next, Wilhelm Loehe, whose *Three Books on the Church*[173] provides a perceptive consideration of the catholic attribute of the Church that deserves far more attention than it gets today.

Walther's *Church and Office* has no thesis that is focused on catholicity or, for that matter, the mission of the church. There is, however, some allusion to catholicity in Thesis I on the Church when he defines it as "the entirety of all those who, called out of the lost and condemned human race by the Holy Spirit through the Word, truly believe in Christ and by faith are

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[170] *Cat2017*, question 215, 217.

[171] *Cat2017*, question 256 B, 249.

[172] References herein are to C.F.W. Walther, *The Church and the Office of the Ministry:* Kirche und Amt*: The Voice of Our Church on the Question of Church and Office*, trans. John Theodore Mueller, ed. Matthew C. Harrison (St. Louis: Concordia, 2012).

[173] Wilhelm Loehe, *Three Books about the Church,* trans. James L. Schaaf. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969).

sanctified and incorporated in Christ."[174] By this, Walther means "the invisible Church" which he refers to as the Church "in the proper sense of the word."[175] But his reference to the entire "human race" means one can extrapolate from this a sense of horizontal catholicity.

A second allusion is found in Thesis VI, which refers to the church in an "improper sense as "all who confess and adhere to the proclaimed Word and use the holy Sacraments." This is "(the universal [catholic] Church)." Note the insertion of "catholic" here in the Harrison revised edition. Walther himself prefers the word "universal," but several of the "witnesses of the Church that he cites to support Thesis VI refer to the catholic church. We should note that Walther's point in Thesis VI is to distinguish the visible from the invisible Church. His citations are in keeping with this purpose. Thus, references to the "catholic Church" are "to those who are legitimately baptized," according to Aegidius Hunnius—supporting Walther's view of the visible church.[176] But Johann Gerhard is quoted as saying the Church is catholic because "it embraces all true believers in Christ"—supporting the invisibility argument a bit farther.[177] The citation of Georg Zeämann provides the only explicitly horizontal perspective on catholicity:

> But since the true catholic Church now in the New Testament is spread throughout the world in all particular churches, found here and there all over the earth, and it is not to be looked for outside the assembly of the called, therefore, at times, by the [term] catholic, church there is designated in a wider sense the whole multitude of Christians, called by the Word and baptized, throughout the world, and so all Christendom or the entire Church of the New Testament.[178] (Thesis VII)

In Walther's citations supporting Thesis VII there is one mention of catholicity when Abraham Calov distinguishes "what remains of the **catholic** in the Roman religion" from "what

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[174] Walther, *Church and Office*, Thesis I, 3.

[175] Walther, *Church and Office*, Thesis I, II, and III, 3.

[176] Hunnius is denying that Rome consists of the whole catholic Church. Walther, *Church and Office*, VI, 71.

[177] Walther, *Church and Office*, VI, 72.

[178] Walther, *Church and Office*, VI, 73.

is papistic." By this Calov means that there are some true believers in the Roman church because "it teaches some chief parts of the faith."[179] This affirms the essence of both vertical and horizontal catholicity.

Walther's focus in *Church and Office* is arguably more apologetic than dogmatic. He writes to defend the Missourian approach to the challenges Lutherans were faced in the new American environment. He stresses both the royal priesthood and the divinely mandated public office of preaching. He is not presenting a full ecclesiology. For Walther, then, allusions to catholicity are incidental. He acknowledges a universal dimension of the Church, however, under his distinction of the visible and invisible traits of the church.

Walther also does not explicitly connect mission with his doctrine of the Church in *Church and Office.* At the same time, however, it must be stressed that Walther certainly supported the mission of the Church to the unbelieving world.[180] He clearly saw it to be essential, as Leopoldo Sánchez notes, showing that Walther holds doctrinal unity and mission in harmonic synthesis:

> C.F.W. Walther can call Synod to "promote the growth of its members in *the knowledge of the truth* in every possible way," and to "strive for peace *and unity in the truth,"* at the same [time], he can remind Synod about "being intent not so much on its growth but rather on the growth of Christ's kingdom and the salvation of souls" and therefore to "be intent on using the Gospel in all its purity and fullness to win souls and keep them." Like love and marriage, unity in the Word and mission that delivers the Word go together like a horse and carriage.[181]

Wilhelm Loehe certainly has nothing like the influence of Walther in the Missouri Synod of today. Loehe, who in life and in death has been both revered and scorned within the Synod,

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[179] Walther, *Church and Office*, VII, 88; emphasis added.

[180] See Walther's sermon on this: C.F.W. Walther, "Holy Desire and Duty of All Christians to Lead Souls to Christ." This sermon, preached in 1842, was published in Walther's sermon collection, *Gnadenjahr. Predigten über die Evangelien des Kirchenjahrs* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1891), trans. Bruce Cameron for *Missio Apostolica* 6, no. 1 (May 1998): 10.

[181] Leopoldo A. Sánchez M., "Toward an Ecclesiology of Catholic Unity and Mission in the Borderlands: Reflections from a Lutheran Latino Theologian," *Concordia Journal* 35 no.1 (2009): 17. The quotations are from the Constitution of the LCMS, originally drafted by Walther. Emphasis added by Sánchez.

nevertheless both directly and indirectly influenced generations of pastors with his theological and ecclesiastical priorities.[182] In the early years of the Missouri Synod, he sent numbers of men to serve as emergency pastors (*die Nothelferin*). He enabled the establishment of the practical training school that would become Concordia Theological Seminary. He helped to revive and enrich Lutheran liturgical worship and the practice of private absolution. He fathered the deaconess movement, and—most importantly for this study—he was an ardent and explicit proponent of mission with a vigorous sense of the catholicity of the Church.

In the Introduction to Loehe's *Three Books about the Church,* James L. Schaaf emphasizes Loehe's concern for missions, noting: "The isolated community of Neuendettelsau became the hub of a missionary movement which encircled the globe."[183] The Church's mission was no special project for Loehe, but rather it was constitutive for the Church's very being, flowing directly from the Church's catholicity. The term "catholic," he says, "designates the glorious difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament church."[184] Loehe cannot hide his passionate devotion to this truth.

> The church of the New Testament is no longer a territorial church but a church of all people, a church which has its children in all lands and gathers them from every nation. It is the one flock of the one shepherd, called out of many folds (John 10:16), the universal—the truly catholic—church which flows through all time and into which all people pour. This is the great concept which is still being fulfilled, the work of God in the final hour of the world, the dearest thought of all the saints in life and in death, the thought for which they lived and still live, died and still die. This is the thought which must permeate the mission of the church or it will not know what it is

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[182] See John T. Pless, "Wilhelm Loehe and the Missouri Synod: Forgotten Paternity or Living Legacy?" (International Loehe Society, Wartburg Theological Seminary, July 12, 2005), http://www.ctsfw.net/media/pdfs/PlessLoeheMissouriSynod.pdf. This brief, helpful overview of Loehe's life and work gives particular attention to his influence in Missouri both before and after his conflict with C.F.W. Walther

[183] Wilhelm Loehe, *Three Books about the Church,* trans. James L. Schaaf. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969), 17–18.

[184] Loehe, *Three Books,* 60.

or what it should do. For mission is nothing but the one church of God in motion, the actualization of the one universal, catholic church.[185]

For Loehe, "Mission is the life of the catholic church."[186]

Loehe goes on to speak of the bright and clear "center" of the Church, that is, the apostolic Word, delivered with complete reliability and truth in the Scriptures.[187] The clear, shining Word calls all of humanity to salvation—"The call is universal"—and it calls them to a Church that is both visible and invisible.[188] The distinction leads to Loehe's second "book," "About the Churches." There he affirms that "the church" is present even among heretics with their "tiny bit of truth."[189] Yet one church must have precedence over the others—that church which rightly confesses and teaches the apostolic Word. So Loehe is not averse to sounding parochial, and affirming the "Lutheran" church because of its confession of faith. The Lutheran church, he argues, is the truly catholic church because it is not antiquity or duration or numbers or any other supposed mark that determines the church that is truly catholic. Rather, it is fidelity to the scriptural gospel.[190]

So Loehe then turns to "The Lutheran Church" in the third book. And in so doing, he returns to catholicity. He speaks of catholicity on the basis of his argument that the Lutheran church is the true church and therefore truly catholic because the truth it confesses is the truth that alone can lead to faith and thus to the believers who are the church. He has already pointed out that to whatever degree the truth continues among other Christian churches, they too are

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[185] Loehe, *Three Books,* 59.

[186] Loehe, *Three Books,* 59.

[187] Loehe, *Three Books,* 61–75.

[188] Loehe, *Three Books,* 87–91.

[189] Loehe *Three Books,* 94, see pp. 92–99.

[190] Loehe, *Three Books,* 107–48.

genuinely churches, but his focus is on the Lutheran church, which confesses the whole of

Scripture rightly. Lutheran doctrine is complete, but it is applied incompletely. How? "In a word,

our church has the doctrine which should be followed. If it is the pure church, why not the one

church? If it is apostolic, why not catholic?"[191]

Despite the small size of the Lutheran church and the paucity of its efforts in its missionary

work, Loehe reminds us that the Lutheran church is to "Be a Blessing to the Heathen."[192] This

responsibility flows from catholicity. He rejects the Roman assertion that Lutherans and others

are not catholic because their churches do not have the geographical reach of the Roman

churches. He grants this, but notes that the Reformation's doctrine is pure and that doctrine is

what "must be applied everywhere."[193] Since the Lutheran church and its doctrine "is apostolic,

why not catholic?" By this he means that church doctrine can be applied fearlessly and it can

make use of forms and externals beyond those that have been used since the Reformation.

> Let us import from other lands whatever will be of benefit. Let us export what will
> serve and help others. Let us build and establish the church on the secure foundation
> of its doctrine, and let us never forget that he who helps it places its light upon a stand
> so that all nations may see it and rejoice over this refuge for the suffering, over this
> church which has freely received and freely gives that which makes men blessed.[194]

In this same spirit Loehe is generous toward the missionary endeavors of non-Lutheran

churches: "We know that all other confessions which preach to the heathen bring them the

possibility of salvation. Therefore, we are pleased with missions of all confessions, even though

we regret their doctrinal deficiencies and the errors they practice."[195]

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[191] Loehe, *Three Books,* 152.

[192] From the title for chapter 4 of the third book. Loehe, *Three Books,* 162.

[193] Loehe, *Three Books,* 154.

[194] Loehe, *Three Books,* 155.

[195] Loehe, *Three Books,* 162.

Even as he rejoices in mission, he confesses the failures of Lutheran mission efforts: "We pray the Lord to forgive our sin for having done too little for the salvation of the heathen."[196] At the same time, he does not want the Lutheran church to neglect ministry in established congregations. "We pray that the Lord will gather one holy church among the heathen, and are we then to let established congregations fall prey to this temptation? …We should not do one and forget the other!"[197]

Francis Pieper's *Christian Dogmatics* deserves significant attention since it has been the primary text used in the training of Synod's pastors since its publication during the early 20th century.[198] Pieper speaks indirectly about catholicity far more often than he addresses it head on. As far as vertical catholicity is concerned, he quotes Luther and Melanchthon approvingly regarding the Reformation claim not to have departed from any teaching of "the Church Catholic."[199] Thus, despite his obvious attention to the importance of the specifically Lutheran doctrinal heritage, his view looks farther back historically and insists that Lutherans "continue in the ways of the Early Church, of the Church of the Reformation, and of the fathers of our Synod." And then he adds, "Finally, we dare not lose sight of the welfare of the Church Universal.[200] Note his positive mention of the Early Church, and also his sense that Lutheran theology owes a responsibility to the wider church of the present-day. As it did for Luther, his

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[196] Loehe, *Three Books,* 162. Loehe displays a sense of balance through his work.

[197] Quoted from Loehe's missionary appeal, published in 1840, by James L. Schaaf in the Introduction to Loehe, *Three Books,* 19.

[198] Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics* 3 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia, 1950–1957). The three volumes are a translation from the German text: Franz Pieper, *Christliche Dogmatik* (St. Louis: Concordia) which was published in three installments: vol. 2 in 1917, vol. 3 in 1920, and vol. 1 in 1924. See the Synodical Centennial Committee Foreword to *Christian Dogmatics,* v, and Pieper's own explanation of the reason the volumes were published out of order, ix-xi.

[199] Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 1:132.

[200] Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 1:167. "Church Universal" is a favored term for Pieper and appears to have the same meaning as "Church catholic."

view of "the teachings of the Church Universal" is essentially the same as the essence of the apostolic attribute, namely, all that Scripture says. Thus he roundly rejects any Roman view that Paul's epistles often have only local validity (e.g., communion in both kinds) and no authority for the universal church. Apostolic teaching is universal teaching, the teaching of the whole church catholic.[201]

While Pieper occasionally alludes to the vertical catholicity and more often refers to the universality of the Church, his most frequently mentioned churchly attribute is invisibility. Indeed, in his description of the Church's attributes, Pieper precedes his discussion of the Constantinopolitan four attributes—one, holy, catholic, and apostolic—by making invisible the first attribute.[202] The invisible church is, of course, all those who by faith are justified in Christ. This invisibility is truly the chief attribute for Pieper. It is distinctive from, but it does not negate, the other four attributes. In the case of catholicity, invisibility actually leads to an unstated emphasis on horizontal catholicity: "Membership in the Christian Church is not established by nationality, natural descent, external fellowship with the Christians, or any other human relationship.… Membership in the Church is in every case the result of faith in Christ."[203] And since this justifying faith comes through means—the Word and Sacraments of Christ—this means that catholicity and mission are the result.

> Hence Christ commission His Church not to remain at home, but to go into all the world with the preaching of the Gospel (Mark 16:15–16), to preach repentance and remission of sins among all nations (Luke 24:47). Hence also the description of the nations who lack the Gospel as people who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death (Luke 1:78–79; Is. 9:2; 60:2), though they have the light of the material sun and

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[201] Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 1:227–28.

[202] Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 3:408–12.

[203] Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 2:413.

though they have the witness of God in His giving them the things needed for this temporal life (Acts 14:17).[204]

When Pieper does specifically address the catholic attribute, his focus is horizontal because of the invisibility factor of faith in the heart. "The Church is *universal,* or *catholic* (*ecclesia universalis sive catholica*), because it embraces all believers in Christ, of all eras, among all nations, and at all places."[205]

Pieper tends to speak of mission only in passing. Perhaps his most emphatic point is that the "heathen" and all who follow religions other than "the religion of the Gospel" are lost. There are "but two essentially different religions. This is apparent from the divine mission of the Christian religion to displace all other religions."[206] The Christian faith, in turn, is made known only by means of God's Word in Scripture without which "darkness covers the earth." "For this reason the Church of Christ must continue her mission work among all nations, to the ends of the earth, to the end of time, no matter what and how much is happening among them in history and in the realm of nature."[207] It is therefore of utmost importance not to deny the inspiration of Scripture because, among other catastrophic results, "we relinquish the one effective means of doing mission work, which consists in teaching men to observe all things whatsoever Christ has commanded His Church (Matt. 28:19)."[208] But Christianity's mission work at home and abroad is not based on rational arguments proving Scripture's truth. Rather, it consists of preaching "repentance and remission of sins."[209] Pieper scolds those who fail to support missions

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[204] Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 3:135; see also 2:340; 3:399.

[205] Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 3:410.

[206] Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 1:10.

[207] Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 1:68.

[208] Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 1:305.

[209] Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 1:313.

monetarily.[210] Thus, Pieper is certainly committed to the mission mandate Christ gives to his

Church—to go and preach the gospel. However, as was the case with the Church's catholic

character, there is no focused attention given to this work. It gathers only passing mention and is

never developed.

Edward W.A. Koehler prepared a summary of Lutheran confessional teachings in 1939

designed especially for the training of teachers in Lutheran schools. He began to revise the book

shortly before his death and his son completed and published the second revised edition in 1951.

A third revised edition by Brent W. Kuhlman was published in 2006, illustrating the significant

staying power of Koehler's summary. Because of its role as a textbook in Synod, it deserves

brief mention here regarding the matter of catholicity. He mentions the Church's catholic

attribute with two paragraphs. His focus there is strongly horizontal. The vertical dimension

comes second, not under the label of catholic but in accord with the fact that believers extend

backward and forward in time.

> The Church is *catholic* or *universal*, because she is gathered together from every nation under the sun. She embraces all true Christians in the past, present, and the future. Believers in Christ belong to this church regardless of the time and place in which they live, their race or nationality, or the confession to which they belong. In this sense the word "catholic" aptly describes the universal character of the hidden/invisible church. This church had her beginning with Adam and Eve, who trusted in the promised Seed of the woman (Genesis 3:15). The church includes all the believers of the Old Testament (Acts 10:43; Romans 4) and all the believers to the end of time (John 17:20).[211]

Somewhat surprisingly, Koehler's clear emphasis on the Church being gathered from all nations

and peoples is not coupled with an emphasis on the mission of the church.[212]

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[210] Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 3:49–50.

[211] Edward W.A. Koehler, *A Summary of Christian Doctrine: A Popular Presentation of the Teachings of the Bible,* 3rd rev. ed., Brent W. Kuhlmann (St. Louis: Concordia, 2006), 317.

[212] Koehler, *Summary of Christian Doctrine,* 361, briefly mentions Christian witness as a responsibility of the royal priesthood.

Kurt E. Marquart authored vol. 9 of the Confessional Lutheran Dogmatics, *The Church and Her Fellowship, Ministry, and Governance*.[213] Marquart devotes chapter five to the church as "one, holy, catholic, and apostolic." His comments are worth noting in full:

> The pre-theological, purely linguistic gist of "catholicity" is simply wholeness or completeness ("καθ' ὅλης," Lk. 4:14; 23:5; Acts 9:31.42; 10:37; or "καθ' ὅλην," Lk. 8:39). Applied to the church, catholicity is above all a qualitative wholeness or integrity, and only secondarily and accidentally does it refer to universality or extension throughout the inhabitable world ("οἰκουμένη," hence "ecumenical"). The reason for this is that Christ is indivisible. Where He, the Head is in the midst of His "two or three" (Mt. 18:20), there His body is in its wholeness. Each local church is the whole, i.e. catholic, church at that place, not a mere fragment or splinter. The connection between this wholeness and the oneness of the church becomes especially clear when we consider catholicity in time as well as in space. When Thomas Aquinas and Luther both trace the church back to Abel, they stand on common patristic ground. In this sense catholicity is but the oneness of the church throughout time and space. The church triumphant in heaven and the church militant on earth are one festal throng or ἐκκλησία (Heb. 12:23).[214]

Here Marquart defines catholicity with an emphasis on the vertical sense (catholic in time)—as the qualitative mark that the church is bound to Christ as head, citing Ignatius' dictum: "Wherever Christ Jesus is there is the catholic church."[215] Somewhat curiously, he sees catholicity as primarily synonymous with oneness and integrity. Indeed, the vertical is so emphatic for Marquart that catholicity "only secondarily and accidentally" refers "to universality or extension throughout the inhabitable world." But this goes too far. It makes the catholic attribute essentially redundant (it is essentially synonymous with unity and apostolicity). The vertical link binds the church not only to Christ, but to all the saints of the past (including Abel) to all the saints of heaven. The vertical axis cannot be understood without the horizontal, and vice versa. Here Marquart stands apart from Loehe, Pieper, and Koehler for whom the horizontal

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[213] Kurt E. Marquart, *The Church and Her Fellowship, Ministry, and Governance* (Fort Wayne, IN: The International Foundation for Lutheran Confessional Research, 1990).

[214] Marquart, *Church,* 26–27.

[215] See Marquart, *Church,* 26n3.

is the starting point without in any way minimizing the vertical.

Robert Kolb's popular exposition of Christian teaching, *The Christian Faith,* deserves brief mention. The book is a college-level presentation of dogma that is easily read and comprehended. It is often used in college level instruction in Synod's Concordia University System and in District-sponsored lay training programs. It has also been translated into a number of languages and is in use by LCMS partner churches and others.[216] Kolb gives only a single mention of the catholicity of the church, saying, "The church is catholic; it has spread to the ends of the earth and has continued to exist in all periods of human history since Pentecost."[217] In so doing, his whole emphasis is horizontal. But he also emphasizes the work of mission in a section titled "The Royal Priesthood" and another titled "The Church Witnesses." In the former section he hints at horizontal catholicity: "God has brought both Jew and Gentile near to himself through Christ's blood." Then he alludes specifically to both a vertical and a horizontal dimension to Christ's holy people:

> The church is the assembly of all those whom God has chosen to be his own, all those who trust in him. The church is thus, at its root, a matter of the *vertical* relationship. Yet, because God joins us to his family as well as to himself, it becomes immediately a matter of the *horizontal* relationship as well. The royal priesthood describes the vertical relationship that the believer has with God. It also involves the horizontal calling to share his word with others and live together with fellow believes in mutual love.[218]

Under the subheading, "The Church Witnesses," Kolb reminds us that, "The church is a light to the world"; and that, "Believers live as missionaries at all times." "Through the church he [Christ] continues to open believers' minds to the scriptures so that they may share the message

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[216] Robert Kolb, *The Christian Faith: A Lutheran Exposition* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1993). The author is personally aware of the role Kolb's book has played in Taiwan and mainland China.

[217] Kolb, *Christian Faith,* 268.

[218] Kolb, *Christian Faith,* 257–58; emphasis added.

of his suffering and resurrection."[219] In including this subsection, Kolb effectively makes mission to all nations a locus of ecclesiology.

Another popular exposition of Lutheran doctrine is Concordia's *Lutheranism 101*. The volume does not mention the words catholic or catholicity, but it does address the mission of the church under the heading "We Tell Others," in Part Six: Living as Lutherans. The section uses an image common also to Luther of the Word creating a ripple effect like a stone dropped in water as it extends first to the near neighbor, but eventually to the whole world.[220]

Ecclesiology is one of the topics in volume 2 of *Confessing the Gospel: A Lutheran Approach to Systematic Theology.*[221] Although the explicit terminology of catholicity is not frequent in *Confessing the Gospel,* the concept is there in significant ways, together with a clear emphasis on the church's mission. In keeping with the title of the work, the authors unfold the doctrine of the church from the article of justification—from the gospel. The "progression of thought" is from the *CA*: forgiveness comes by grace through the gospel of Christ's sacrifice (*CA* IV); this promise is received by faith, which believes the gospel and sacraments (*CA* V); the church is the assembly in which the gospel is preached and the sacraments are administered (*CA* VII). "The gospel gives the church its very life and its reason for existence. It lives by the gospel, and it lives for the gospel."[222] So "The church does not keep the gospel to itself, but declares the message of reconciliation to all nations."[223]

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[219] Kolb, *Christian Faith*, 263–64.

[220] Scot A. Kinnaman, ed., *Lutheranism 101* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2010), 250–52. See p. 481 on the ripple analogy in Luther.

[221] Nafzger, ed., *Confessing the Gospel,* 2:897–959. It may be noted that the approach in Nafzger for each doctrinal topic (locus) goes from Scriptural Foundation to Confessional Witness to Systematic Formulation to Historical and Contemporary Developments.

[222] Nafzger, *Confessing the Gospel,* 2:897.

[223] Nafzger, *Confessing the Gospel,* 2:898. Note also this important thought (also on 898): "The intimate

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Given such a starting point, it is good to read the succinct understanding of the Apostles' Creed's phrase "the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints" in the subsection, "The Ecumenical Creeds." The writer states: "the church is one because it is the body of Christ; it is holy because it is indwelt by the Spirit and is the fellowship of all believers in Christ; and it is universal (catholic) because it consists of God's chosen people throughout the world who are united with Christ and with one another in a 'communion of saints.'" The view of catholic is essentially horizontal but without, of course, denying the vertical dimension. Then, commenting on the Nicene Creed's formulation, the volume wonderfully integrates the four attributes.

> As the body of Christ, the church has many members, yet this does not divide its unity. It is integrally one and undivided. The preservation of its oneness is the focus of Christ's High Priestly Prayer, and there are no external factors or circumstances— such as race, gender, politics, or socio-economic status—that can divide it. Nor do the many denominations in Christendom nullify its unity as the body of Christ. The church is also "apostolic," for it is founded on the inspired writings of the apostles and continues to share the faith confessed by them.[224]

In the fuller systematic section that follows there is a longer development of each of the four attributes. Here the term "universal" is used rather than catholic as the third attribute. The focus this time perfectly connects the vertical and horizontal, but ends with the horizontal dimension's focus on the Church's inclusiveness toward all peoples and nations:

> The Christian church is universal because it enfolds all true believers in Christ, that is, all who trust in him and in his vicarious atonement for sin, regardless of temporal, physical, sexual, social, and geographic differences (John 3:16–17; 17:20; Acts 2:38– 39; 10:43, 45; 11:18). The one, holy, Christian church crosses even the barrier of death to embrace the whole family of God in heaven as well as on earth (see Eph 3:15).

> The universality of the church rests on the sure foundation of the gospel. The gospel promises that God's grace is universal, that the benefits of Christ's work of redemption are intended for all humanity, and that the sanctifying power of the Holy

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connection between justification and church is vital as Christians today seek answers to the perplexing problems regarding the church's identity, unity, and mission."

[224] The comments noted here are both from the "Confessional Witness" piece in Nafzger, *Confessing the Gospel*, 2:916.

Spirit reaches out to all the world. The church's universality is evident also from the ascending Christ's commission of his church to make disciples of all nations. By the power of the Holy Spirit working through the Word, the church continues to grow as believers are gathered from every period in history, race, nation, and social class (Matt 28:19–20; Acts 1:8; 2:30; 11:18; 2 Cor 5:19; Gal 3:7–9); and all are one in Christ Jesus (Gal 3:28).[225]

It is refreshing to see this balanced, articulate understanding of the catholic mark/attribute (even if the term catholic is avoided[226]). The Church is "universal," extending horizontally to and enfolding peoples of every race, nation, gender, and people. But not indiscriminately, for the people it enfolds are Christ's people. That catholicity is utterly dependent on Christ flows from the Church's essential identity as his body, but also from his commission to proclaim his gospel to the world.

The significance of this teaching is not ignored. The first of "The Implications for Life and Ministry," is that of making disciples: "Proclaiming the gospel to all nations has never been optional. Rather, it is pivotal and central in the life of the church."[227] And while there can be no compromise with false doctrine, a true ecclesiology also implies that the Lutheran church cannot be satisfied to be an ecclesiastical ghetto isolated from all other believers. Rather, the church has a responsibility toward other confessions, erring though they may be, and dare not succumb to arrogant separatism.[228]

This review of LCMS catechetical and doctrinal theology texts indicates the theological problem identified in the thesis. The LCMS has tended to have a minimal understanding of the

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[225] Nafzger, *Confessing the Gospel*, 2:930. I note only in passing my curiosity over the fact of the preference for the word "universality" and the seemingly studied (?) avoidance of the terminology of catholic and catholicity.

[226] While this substitution of universal for catholic is generally acceptable, one wonders why it was preferred. Is it simply following the tradition of Pieper? It should be noted that universal does not effectively communicate wholeness, which is where the term catholic so helpfully requires both a horizontal and vertical dimension.

[227] Nafzger, *Confessing the Gospel*, 2:956.

[228] Nafzger, *Confessing the Gospel*, 2:959.

catholicity of the church—particularly its *horizontal* catholicity. While there is an emphasis—even a vigorous one—on an aspect of *vertical* catholicity in the Synod's focus on purity of doctrine, the avoidance of the term catholic has also handicapped the Synod in that regard. In the catechisms, Luther's emphasis on the Word of God and its gospel center are helpfully explained in places such as the third commandment, the third article, and the second petition. But that the catholic faith has endured through the ages of the church is given minimal attention. Similarly, LCMS catechesis has most often ignored the horizontal dimension of the Church and its inclusivity toward all nations and peoples and it has given minimal attention to the Church's mission of proclaiming the Gospel to the world. Doctrinal theology texts have generally provided a more accurate sense of the important confession that the Church is catholic. But there also the topic of catholicity has most often been almost incidental or of secondary importance.

Perhaps more importantly, the notion of the Church's ethnic, racial, and cultural catholicity, if it is mentioned at all, is merely descriptive. Thus, we affirm that believers of color and of other tribes and nations are part of the Church catholic. But any *pre*scriptive weight tends to go no farther than to foreign missions. One finds no mention that catholicity indicates the importance of welcoming those who are unlike us into our congregations and fellowship.

Yet, there is reason for some optimism. *Cat2017* is much improved on the topics of catholicity and of mission. Wilhelm Loehe's rich devotion to the Church is perhaps being slowly restored to greater influence. And the impressive volumes of *Confessing the Gospel* have the potential to heighten the appreciation of catholicity in the future.

Catholicity and the Contemporary Church

The preceding historical scan of the Church's attribute of catholicity in Scripture and the Western tradition culminated in a consideration of Lutheran Christianity and, ultimately, in the

Missouri Synod. Even though the sketch narrowed to one single denomination, however, we should be aware from that survey that catholicity is not an exclusive term. Indeed, a central task for Luther and the whole reform movement was to dispute that very claim made by the medieval Roman Catholic Church. It is ironic therefore that a similar claim is sometimes made by other groups. As Dana L. Robert argues: "The selfish tendency to see catholicity fulfilled by one's own group is a trend that must be challenged, if World Christianity is to attain any kind of united witness." He chides his own United Methodist Church and some Pentecostals for the claim that they are catholic because of worldwide membership before saying: "Can catholicity exist without oneness and holiness? Rather than an exclusive party term, catholicity ideally keeps our eyes fixed upon the reign of God, which has already broken into the *oikumene*, the whole inhabited world, through the life and sacrifice of Jesus Christ."[229]

Because catholicity is not an exclusive term, it is appropriate that we listen to both Lutheran and non-Lutheran voices in order to expand our understanding and appreciation for the fact that the holy Church is catholic. To illustrate that fact, the contributions of three different scholars to the matter of catholicity are included here. One is the LCMS scholar, Leopoldo A. Sánchez M. The other two are Lamin Sanneh, a Roman Catholic, and Soong-Chan Rah, an evangelical.

<div align="center">Lamin Sanneh</div>

In the quotation given above, Dana Roberts speaks in terms of "world Christianity." The late Lamin Sanneh is one of the people who used that term to develop important ideas relevant to this dissertation. One work deserves particular attention: Sanneh's *Disciples of All Nations:*

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[229] Dana L. Robert, "Witness and Unity in 21st Century World Christianity," *Transformation* 30 no. 4 (October 2013): 250.

Pillars of World Christianity.[230] Sanneh views Christianity as "World Christianity" because it

now extends throughout the world and is no longer merely a Western religion. "The religion is

now in the twilight of its Western phase and at the beginning of its formative non-Western

impact. Christianity has not ceased to be a Western religion, but its future as a world religion is

now being formed and shaped at the hands and in the minds of its non-Western adherents."[231]

He names traits of world Christianity such as the diversity of languages used in reading

Scripture, in evangelism, and in prayer and worship. Moreover, alongside the growth of

traditional denominations is the emergence of uniquely new Christian churches and movements

originating in the Third World. Perhaps most significantly for the future of Christianity, he

names the missionary zeal of the Third World churches. All of this is catholicity writ large.

This "new" reality is actually old. Sanneh's book provides an historical sketch of how

Christianity developed throughout the world. He sets the stage in the Introduction as he

emphasizes Peter as the "architect of the Gentile mission," and Paul as the insistent theological

voice for the message of salvation "by faith, not by national custom and social affiliation." This

new birth of faith, in contrast to the Judaic notion of religion as a birthright, would demand

"inculturation."[232] This echoes Sanneh's earlier book, *Whose Religion Is Christianity?* There too

he sees the roots of World Christianity in the New Testament itself.

> Being the original Scripture of the Christian movement, the New Testament Gospels
> are a translated version of the message of Jesus, and that means Christianity is a
> translated religion without a revealed language. The issue is not whether Christians
> translated their Scripture well or willingly, but that *without translation there would be
> no Christianity* or Christians. Translation is the church's birthmark as well as its

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[230] Lamin Sanneh, *Disciples of All Nations: Pillars of World Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

[231] Sanneh, *Disciples of All Nations,* xx.

[232] Sanneh, *Disciples of All Nations,* 4, 8, 11.

missionary benchmark: the church would be unrecognizable or unsustainable without it.[233]

Sanneh reiterates this in *Translating the Message*:

The central thesis of this book is that Christianity, from its origins identified itself with the need to translate out of Aramaic and Hebrew, and from that position came to exert a dual force in its historical development. One was the resolve to relativize its Judaic roots, with the consequence that it promoted significant aspects of those roots. The other was to destigmatize Gentile culture and adopt that culture as a natural extension of the life of the new religion.[234]

Sanneh confirms the contention of Harnack that Christianity had from the beginning a natural "versatility" which was as constitutive for it as its monotheism and its gospel of salvation. For Sanneh, the versatility is evident since Christianity was, from its very beginning, always a translated and translatable religion. It was therefore necessarily universal (or horizontally catholic).[235] Sanneh also argues that Christian mission was inherently "syncretistic." By this he means that old religions served to dispose people to accept Christianity's message.[236] He is not unaware that this syncretistic versatility presents a challenge. Elsewhere he notes the presence of "two impulses" at work in early Christianity. "One was the urge to spread the message with every available facility. The other was the desire to regulate the emerging community of believers whose religious life was lived first in the shadows of the synagogue and then in spontaneous cells of devotion scattered along the trails of the Diaspora."[237] These two impulses—the importance of a rule of faith and the promotion of a translated faith—sometimes stand at odds and other times merge.

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[233] Lamin Sanneh, *Whose Religion Is Christianity? The Gospel beyond the West* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 97; emphasis added.

[234] Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (Maryknoll, NY Orbis, 2004), 1.

[235] Sanneh, *Disciples of All Nations,* 28–29.

[236] Sanneh, *Disciples of All Nations*, 39.

[237] Sanneh, *Translating the Message,* 35.

Like Judaism and Islam, Christianity was committed to monotheism but, unlike both of them, it found translation to be the method best suited to spreading the gospel. However, translation made Christianity vulnerable to secular influences and to the threat of polytheism.[238]

Thus, Sanneh's look at early Christian history shows something of a "pillar of empire" in that Rome's environment was significant to the ability of the early church to take root and expand.[239] But more significant to this period was the translatability of the Christian religion— the "vernacular pillar." This is what leads to a concluding thought about the "Gentile Pillar" and Christianity's "living, dynamic character": "the religion has grown and multiplied, thanks to the unqualified Gentile benchmark it adopted." That is, Gentiles bonded to Christianity not because of the Jewishness of Jesus, "but by clothing themselves with the authentic vestments of their own culture."[240]

As he traces Christian history onward from the early church, Sanneh hits key aspects of different periods that affect world-wide church development. Thus, in chapter 2: "The Christian Movement in Islamic Perspective," he speaks of a "Comparative Pillar" and addresses how the rise of Islam influenced the church. Perhaps most significantly, wherever Islam gained political ascendency and imposed restrictions, the church turned inward and developed a "deep sense of inferiority" and became an "'enclaved' religion," restricted especially in terms of mission beyond itself.[241] Elsewhere, the Western church came to be focused on fear and hostility toward Islam, resulting not only in the Crusades, but also serving as primary motivations for New World

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[238] Sanneh, *Translating the Message,* 37.

[239] Sanneh, *Disciples of All Nations,* 13–20. See also pp. 49–55 where he discusses the "Pillar of Historical Intelligibility," where he explores further the relationship of Christianity and empire.

[240] Sanneh, *Disciples of All Nations,* 55.

[241] Sanneh, *Disciples of All Nations,* 83.

exploration.[242]

In examining the "Trans-Atlantic Pillar" (chapter 3), Sanneh exhibits a balanced view of European exploration that shows the extent to which it opened the door to world Christianity— but does so without neglecting the ugly side of Western colonialism. He reveals a continuing point of tension within the missionary movement between service to political and economic forces on the one hand and service to the Christian faith on the other.

> When it succeeded in breaking free of crown control, the Western missionary movement in both its Catholic and Protestant forms carried the intellectual seeds that transformed Christianity into a world religion, though the mental habits of Christianity as Christendom, of Christianity as political kingdom or as cultural domain, concealed from people the force of that fact.[243]

Key to breaking the force of "crown control" was "when, finally, New World ideas of freedom combined with the revival message of redemption and personal promise to declare reprieve for outcasts, the downtrodden, and the bound and gagged."[244]

Further reflection on the "Colonial Pillar" (chapter 4) leads Sanneh to assert even more the subversive power of the missionary movement as "colonialism's Achilles' heel, not its shield." "The missionary movement turned colonial empires into cathedrals of variety, difference, and irony, making religion in the empire a Trojan horse." "In its local and localized form, religion demonstrated the limitations of power to trample on the subject races."[245]

The movement from colonial forms of Christianity to the variety of forms in the colonies is nowhere more evident than in the "Pillar of Charismatic Renewal" (chapter 5). To use the example of Africa, bitter experience led African Christians to realize that while missionaries

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[242] Sanneh, *Disciples of All Nations,* 85–88.

[243] Sanneh, *Disciples of All Nations,* 94.

[244] Sanneh, *Disciples of All Nations,* 115–16.

[245] Sanneh, *Disciples of All Nations,* 135, 149.

emphasized sound doctrine, they "often failed to undertake a just and loving treatment of others." The result was for the Africans "to reengage the gospel afresh," resulting in such movements as the East African revival.[246] Such movements would easily prepare the way for widespread Pentecostal inroads and growing numbers of independent churches that did not rely on affiliation with Western missionaries. Such movements were paralleled and in some sense preceded by the Great Awakening in the Americas as well as by the long-standing African American adoption of revivalism.[247]

Staying with Africa, Sanneh moves on to the "Primal Pillar" (chapter 6). He discusses the ways that African Christians came to proclaim the God who condemned long-standing polytheistic tribalism together with its poisonous fruit of cooperation in the slave trade.[248] They developed indigenous theologies and practices. Their approaches were generally opposed by Western Protestant groups, but Roman Catholics were far more receptive to such African variety.[249] The chapter includes an insightful analysis of Wade Harris and the revival he spawned that is both appreciative and critical.[250]

In chapter 7 Sanneh wrestles with two ideas: that world Christianity is forever bound to "its formative Western character"—namely, to colonialism and its legacy; and that "Christianity became a world religion only because Europe was a world power."[251] He calls the Protestant missionary Roland Allen and the Roman Catholic missionary Fr. Vincent Donovan to his support here. Allen's early 20th century missionary work and theories were a reassessment of practices of

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[246] Sanneh, *Disciples of All Nations,* 167.

[247] Sanneh, *Disciples of All Nations,* 172–73, see also 177.

[248] Sanneh, *Disciples of All Nations,* 185–87.

[249] Sanneh, *Disciples of All Nations,* 192–93.

[250] Sanneh, *Disciples of All Nations,* 193–215.

[251] Sanneh, *Disciples of All Nations,* 218.

missionary work that was sponsored by and cooperative with colonial powers. He saw that the culture of the missionaries was an obstacle to the Christian message and that their work often resulted in more of a social than a spiritual conversion. Converts were drawn away from their communities and cultures and suffered isolation, hostility and even persecution as a result. Such missions were "strangling the gospel."[252] He argued that a radical change in methodology was necessary if Christian missions were to be salvaged. Such rescue would happen only on the basis of "their vernacular character as locally led churches."[253] Such a change would require that missionaries forsake the idea of "the superiority of Western civilization" and acknowledge that their task was not to civilize, but to proclaim the gospel and to recognize that growth would come without foreign direction.[254]

Fr. Donovan experienced a similar intellectual journey away from control by the Western church—in his case Roman Catholic. Donovan also acknowledged a hard truth:

> Western missionaries must renounce the view that civilization was required to disinfect indigenous people and render them tidy enough to receive the gospel. It was more consistent and truer to the New Testament spirit to assume that the message of Christianity in terms of God's revelation "was for everyone, for the entire human race, for every people in every segment of that human race—as they are, where they are, now."[255]

This new direction—advocated by Allen and Donovan alike—was occurring with or without Western advocacy. Sanneh notes the *World Christian Encyclopedia* from the 1980s showing a gathering momentum of growth in Christianity throughout the developing world.[256]

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[252] Sanneh, *Disciples of All Nations,* 218–25. Sanneh relates the views of Allen as seen most particularly in the book, Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962).

[253] Sanneh, *Disciples of All Nations,* 228.

[254] Sanneh, *Disciples of All Nations,* 231, 233.

[255] Sanneh, *Disciples of All Nations,* 236; quotation from Vincent Donovan, *Christianity Rediscovered* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1978).

[256] Sanneh, *Disciples of All Nations,* 242.

That growth was, surprisingly, taking place also in China, despite Mao's ongoing attempts

to identify Christianity as an alien, Western subversive force. Chapter 8 explores this under the

heading of the "Bamboo Pillar." The growth of Christianity in China is stunning not only

because of overt Marxist opposition, but also because of the bitter history of China with

missionary efforts and the West—a history marked by opium wars, the Taiping Rebellion, the

Boxer Rebellion, and China's admiration of the Bolshevik rebellion for casting off religious

superstition. The sense in much of China was that Christianity had failed in Europe and was

"without intrinsic merit."[257] "By September 1966, all the churches were closed, their leaders

rounded up, and their properties confiscated."[258] Such harsh measures actually found some

measure of Western support from Christian progressives. Sanneh notes the joint statement of

Lutheran World Federation and *Pro Mundi Vita* in support of the new gospel of Mao, claiming it

as part of God's providential work. They "issued a call to end missions to China, to reject the

need for the survival of the church in China, and to affirm God's redemptive action in the

Chinese revolution."[259] But their vision was rejected by the people of China. In an ironic twist,

the church not only survived, but prospered, and in time even some Marxist leaders came to

believe and confess their sins and their faith. "It is a strange irony that Chinese leaders should be

willing to repent while Western theological leaders persisted in extolling China's controversial

record."[260]

The awakening since the 1970s in China has been profound. And it has occurred not

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[257] Sanneh, *Disciples of All Nations,* 243–47.

[258] Sanneh, *Disciples of All Nations,* 251.

[259] Sanneh, *Disciples of All Nations,* 253. Sanneh quotes from the statement: "The liberation movement in China led by Mao Tse-tung is not excluded therefore from our understanding of God's saving work in history." The joint statement was published as "The Louvain Consultation," *Pro Mundi Vita Bulletin* 54 (1975): 1–38.

[260] Sanneh, *Disciples of All Nations,* 256.

because of Western "Christendom," but despite it. The church in China is Chinese, not Western. And its effect is profound. "As Huo Shui, a former government political analyst, observes, the Christian idea of love has introduced a new value system in China, including the idea of repentance 'which is lacking in Chinese culture.'"[261] Sanneh thus closes on a note of optimism, for China at the time of his writing is a prime example of World Christianity[262]

Sanneh never writes explicitly about the doctrine of catholicity, but his contribution to the concept is certain. He reveals the rapid growth of Christianity outside the West. He shows that it is grounded in devotion to Christ, but not necessarily to the Western catholic theological traditions. Thus, the importance of his work is an affirmation of horizontal catholicity, rather than vertical catholicity, yet it is not divorced from the Christian tradition. As he would put it, what is happening in "is the contemporary replay of themes and issues familiar to us under the rubric of Christian origins in the Mediterranean world and beyond, but without the corresponding Roman and Hellenic compass to guide our thinking and give us the symmetry of reason and revelation."[263] Sanneh provides historical balance regarding missions—showing both the negative and positive elements of missionary efforts through the ages. He warns of the danger of turning inward and becoming an "enclaved" religion. Instead, the central positive force at work is a commitment to the vernacular in language, of course, but also in matters of culture. He strongly suggests that the vernacular principle is the dominant force in every period of Christian growth; and, therefore, it rightly claims a place as a prominent aspect of horizontal catholicity. And, above all, Sanneh shows that the Christian faith truly has permeated the world—that World

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[261] Sanneh, *Disciples of All Nations,* 270.

[262] Sadly, another chapter on the Chinese church is being written today—this time featuring a new oppressor, Xi Jinping. See pp. 72–73 above.

[263] Lamin Sanneh and Joel Carpenter, eds., *The Changing Face of Christianity: Africa, the West, and the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 5.

Christianity is a fact and that the nations truly are the church and not a project of Christendom.

Soong-Chan Rah

There is an irenic, balanced quality to Lamin Sanneh. He writes with the patience of a great teacher and befriends his readers along the way. Soong-Chan Rah, however, writes prophetically, unafraid to offend, more polemical than apologetic in spirit. He admits that he intends "to provoke" and that he at times seems "angry and confrontational" because he sees no other path to reconciliation, transformation, and renewal.[264] Rah never addresses the topic of catholicity by name. But his focus is consistently on the diversity of the church—on its horizontal catholicity as it embraces immigrants, people of color, the poor, the marginalized. What follows is an overview of one book—*The Next Evangelicalism*—as a synopsis of Rah's perspective and suggestions, with occasional references to his other work.

Rah is a disquieted evangelical—an evangelical who considers White Christianity—and White evangelicals—to be complicit in injustice and privileged paternalism toward marginalized communities both in the past and the present. Rah rejoices that evangelicalism is changing—that it is growing increasingly diverse. He notes, for example, that as Christianity has experienced a steep overall decline in affiliation in the Northeast US, evangelicals increased in number, primarily because of membership growth among immigrants. He longs for the next chapter in that transition.[265] But he bristles that while evangelicalism grows among non-Whites, evangelical leadership is mostly White. "Western, white" Christianity, he argues, holds the church in "cultural captivity." Remembering Luther's *Babylonian Captivity of the Church,* and R.C.

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[264] Soong-Chan Rah, *The Next Evangelicalism: Freeing the Church from Western Cultural Captivity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 23.

[265] Rah, *Next Evangelicalism*, 16–17.

Sproul's "Pelagian Captivity of the Evangelical Church," he warns of "the danger of the church being defined by an influence other than the Scriptures" and sees that in cultural captivity.[266] He warns that "I will use the term *white* captivity as a synonym for *Western* captivity…. to remind us that Western culture has been dominated by Whites throughout its history."[267]

What does Rah mean by "Western, white culture"? He identifies, first, individualism, "the central theme of Western philosophy." It directly affects the church: "The American church, in taking its cues from Western, white culture, has placed at the center of its theology and ecclesiology the primacy of the individual."[268] He distinguishes individuation from individualism—the former allows for and encourages a personal faith relationship and is appropriate. "However, this individuation does not need to occur at the expense of an appreciation of a corporate point of view."[269] That is where the danger of individualism lies for the church. It reads the Bible as if its focus is exclusively individual without a concern for the whole of God's people. It encourages a narcissistic kind of music—centered on "me." It undermines corporate identity and any sense of the church beyond one's individual, narrow field. So it is unable to address social needs or structural evils. Nowhere is this clearer than in evangelicalism's inability to see the societal and corporate aspects of racism.[270]

Consumerism or materialism is the second cultural value captivating the American church. Rah identifies this in such things as the belief that capitalism is the most Christian economic

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[266] Rah, *Next Evangelicalism,* 21.

[267] Rah, *Next Evangelicalism,* 22, emphasis original. It should be noted, however, that Rah has a broad enough view of cultural captivity to cite similar concerns from those on both the political right and left: Nancy Pearcey, Gibson Winter, and Cornel West (see p. 21)

[268] Rah, *Next Evangelicalism,* 29.

[269] Rah, *Next Evangelicalism,* 33.

[270] Rah, *Next Evangelicalism,* 33–45.

system; in the approval of church shopping for a church that meets *my* desires; in identifying church success with buildings, budgets, and attendance; and in churches designed as mini malls.[271]

Rah turns next to racism as a Western trait and as "America's original and most deeply rooted sin."[272] He recognizes the common visceral reaction against any assertion of societal, structural, or historical racism, but forges ahead to make his case. He argues for an understanding that goes beyond individual racism in such simple but obvious ways as the fact that virtually all real estate in America was claimed by coercion from the period of European exploration onward, that wealth and poverty are both passed down generationally and therefore past racial inequities lead directly to many present inequities, and that dominant groups inevitably create favorable, privileged positions for their descendants, friends, and acquaintances.[273] But racism goes beyond the continuing influences of past periods. It also includes present negative reactions toward non-European immigrants—seeing them as non-Whites who import "alien" cultures and habits. Immigrants and ethnic minorities are viewed with suspicion and surveys indicate that evangelical Christians are among the most suspicious about immigration.[274] The bias continues in skepticism toward theology that comes from non-White scholars and groups. "What is considered good, sound, orthodox theology is a Western theology that emphasizes a personal relationship with Jesus, with its natural and expected antecedent of an individual sanctification and even an individualized ecclesiology."[275]

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[271] Rah, *Next Evangelicalism,* 46–63.

[272] Rah, *Next Evangelicalism,* 68.

[273] Rah, *Next Evangelicalism,* 65–73.

[274] Rah, *Next Evangelicalism,* 71–77.

[275] Rah, *Next Evangelicalism,* 77.

Church practices have also furthered racism. Rah names the homogeneous unit principle and other ideas of the church growth movement.[276] Then he turns to the Emergent Church—which he sees as no less captive to Western White culture. He sees the Emergent movement dominated by Whites, acknowledging pluralism but never addressing it. He does see some hope in the movement because at least one of its leaders—Brian McLaren—seems to want to learn from non-White theology.[277]

Rah sees promise in globalization: "individuals, people groups and nations can now share their culture, their values and their way of life with others in a proactive and positive way."[278] But he rues the fact that in reality Western culture predominates in the "sharing" to the point of a "cultural hegemony."[279] In his estimation, things are no different with global Christianity, where once again Western church practices are transmitted to non-Western churches, without an equivalent response. His prime example is the prosperity gospel of American megachurches into the two-thirds world. In a positive vein, he suggests that Gen. 1:28 is a command to establish culture—it is a cultural mandate. "The creation of culture becomes a central expression of humanity and God's image and spirit at work in humanity."[280] From this he then infers that no culture is superior to another, and every culture interacts with and contributes to the proclamation of the gospel. An example is translation (citing Sanneh's work), in which every new language enables the hearing of the gospel and, to some extent, reshapes the gospel in unique ways. Acts 15 is the scriptural warrant for the necessity of opposing cultural imperialism.

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[276] Rah, *Next Evangelicalism,* chapter 4: 91–108.

[277] Rah, *Next Evangelicalism,* chapter 5: 109–26.

[278] Rah, *Next Evangelicalism,* 128. His discussion of globalization is in chapter 6, 127–40.

[279] Rah, *Next Evangelicalism,* 129.

[280] Rah, *Next Evangelicalism,* 134.

"The challenge of the next evangelicalism is to empower the marginalized to recognize the gift that is the cultural mandate—that their culture is an expression of being made in the image of God and must be represented at the table of believers."[281]

He offers three examples of "Freedom from the Western, White Captivity of the Church": (1) learning suffering and celebration from the Black and Native American communities; (2) learning holistic evangelism from immigrant Christians; and (3) learning multiculturalism from second generation immigrants.[282] Rah goes to some length to identify ways that Whites enjoy upward mobility and are thus insulated from suffering because of their physical and economic mobility, avoiding urban centers and impoverished communities, able to afford wide suburban spaces and technology that entertains and lulls. Western culture lives in a theology of glory as it flees the very suffering that Christ embraces as he goes to the outcast and the abandoned, and ultimately to the cross. The suffering peoples see that truth in Christ more clearly than the rich. As such they are better equipped to teach the White church than the White church is to teach them.[283] As examples he points to African American and Native American Christians. Both groups have persevered through suffering and have truths to be shared. He mentions the power of Black Gospel music and the deep joy of its celebrations in contrast to the superficial joys of White evangelicals. Here—somewhat uncharacteristically—he pauses and says, "I do not mean to disparage the very real suffering that middle-class White Americans may endure."[284] But, his

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[281] Rah, *Next Evangelicalism,* 139

[282] Rah, *Next Evangelicalism,* Part Three of the book explores these three groups in three chapters, 143–99.

[283] Rah, *Next Evangelicalism,* 146–55.

[284] Rah, *Next Evangelicalism,* 159. Yet, it is hard to ignore that Rah consistently fails to acknowledge that many Whites are not middle class. A Rand survey indicates that barely 50% of Whites are middle class. Jeffrey B. Wenger and Melanie A. Zaber, "Most Americans Consider Themselves Middle Class. But Are They?" The Rand Blog (May 14, 2021), https://www.rand.org/blog/2021/05/most-americans-consider-themselves-middle-class-but.html.

point is that Black theological and societal contributions are generally ignored by the Western White evangelical church and it fails to acknowledge the privileges Whites enjoy.[285]

The Next Evangelicalism has only a couple of pages about Native American Christianity, but Rah later coauthored the book, *Unsettling Truths*, with Mark Charles, a Christian of Navaho and Dutch American descent.[286] The book is a sharp attack on the notion of the European discovery of the "New World." It is largely polemical in tone, charging that a faulty "dysfunctional theology" of Christendom stemming from Eusebius, Augustine and Aquinas encouraged the genocide of native peoples and theft of their homelands. Charles and Rah consider Abraham Lincoln a false messiah whose myth mollifies White American guilt when in truth he was a White supremacist who denied human equality, ended slavery only partially and as a matter of political expedience, and supported the genocide of Native Americans.[287] The book hints that Robert McNamara was comparable to a Nazi leader and Lincoln to Hitler, and then adds: "The United States of America does not hold a morally exceptional position greater than Nazi Germany."[288]

In the final two chapters the authors take a turn away from the polemical. The Native peoples of America have suffered a long and deep trauma because of the real events of the far distant and more recent past. But White American people have a different trauma—the ugly chapters of their history traumatizes them—that trauma also induces a sense of damage and hopelessness.

> The goal is not to force a label on white America, but instead, to offer people of color the opportunity to view white Americans from a fresh perspective. In treating white

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[285] Rah, *Next Evangelicalism,* 157–63.

[286] Mark Charles and Soong-Chan Rah, *Unsettling Truths: The Ongoing, Dehumanizing Legacy of the Doctrine of Discovery* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019), Kindle edition.

[287] Charles and Rah, *Unsettling Truths,* chapters 1–10, pp. 13–163.

[288] Charles and Rah, *Unsettling Truths,* 163.

people as a traumatized people, people of color have the authority to maintain their own agency and humanity in a way that has not been accessible before.[289]

In the final chapter Charles and Rah identify the pervasiveness of the "Christendom Worldview." A central aspect of this is the failure of White American Christians to see the Body of Christ as inclusive of people different from themselves and a failure to see it as a global body. Here again is horizontal catholicity by another name. As a result, White Americans cannot accept the truth that their history is colored by injustice—that the lands they consider their own were stolen and that the theft has never been acknowledged. But the truth must be confessed. Lament is in order. "The hope for America does not come from a land covenant with God—it comes from the character of God. And the character of God is not accessed by our exceptionalism but through a humility that emerges from the spiritual practice of lament."[290]

Returning to *The Next Evangelicalism,* Rah commends the immigrant churches for a holistic form of evangelism—an evangelism that cares about the whole of life and helps people to find a home and security here and now and not only in the life to come. It fosters meaningful community—familiar foods and customs, meaningful vernacular worship, recognition of social status—and in so doing invites not only into a congregation but also into the heavenly communion of saints. He warns that when White churches and denominations decide to start "ethnic ministries" according to the customs they know, they often fail to see that immigrants themselves know best how to minister to their community.[291]

In the final chapter, Rah explores the coming contribution of "next generation" immigrants. He is optimistic that the children and grandchildren of immigrants will lead the way into

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[289] Charles and Rah, *Unsettling Truths,* 176.

[290] Charles and Rah, *Unsettling Truths,* 188.

[291] Rah, *Next Evangelicalism,* 164–79.

multiethnic church life. He expects this in part because the second generations are "insiders" in the immigrant culture and the dominant culture, yet are also "outsiders" because they do not fully belong to either. This "triple-consciousness" is akin to "*mestizaje* in the formation of Hispanic identity."[292] A similar consciousness is there in mixed race or bi-racial individuals. This means a growing number of individuals for whom culture is fluid and receptivity to variation is significant. Rah views such persons as a hope for Christianity—and not just immigrant Christianity. "The second-generation immigrant… has the great potential to reach a Christian community in decline: white evangelicals." "Even as the demographics of the United States change, the second-generation progeny of immigrants are uniquely poised to serve as leaders of the next generation."[293] But this may not be an easy transition. "The next evangelicalism will require that white Christians be willing to submit to the authority and leadership of nonwhite Christians."[294]

At times it seems that Rah wants only to condemn and castigate, but that is not the case. He is dedicated to the development of the "next evangelicalism"—the multiethnic, multicultural church akin to one he planted in the Boston area and has continued to encourage as a teacher. He knows the challenge of establishing and maintaining ministries that go beyond White America. Toward that mission he has offered "cultural intelligence and competence" in *Many Colors: Cultural Intelligence for a Changing Church.*[295] *Many Colors* is a hopeful and constructive primer of sorts, explaining what culture is and how it affects the church, offering a paradigm for a multicultural worldview and then describing how to put cultural intelligence into action.

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[292] Rah, *Next Evangelicalism,* 182–84.

[293] Rah, *Next Evangelicalism,* 192, 193.

[294] Rah, *Next Evangelicalism,* 195.

[295] Soong-Chan Rah, *Many Colors: Cultural Intelligence for a Changing Church* (Chicago: Moody, 2010), 11–13.

In another book, Rah develops the concept of lament as a way toward healing in the fractured American church—both for White and for multiethnic evangelicals. Rah encourages lament as an antidote to the triumphalism of the American church. He writes about lament because, "The triumph-and-success orientation of our typical church member needed the corrective brought by stories of struggle and suffering."[296] Here again we see Rah at his constructive best.

It is hard for a White American Christian to read Soong-Chan Rah without taking offense. His slash and burn polemics are often hyperbolic and he frequently tends more toward stereotyping than in-depth, objective analysis. He is often superficial and one-sided in his discussions of "Christendom" and "culture." Nevertheless, Rah speaks truths that ought to be heard. He is willing to share not only the raw pain of groups that have suffered past injustices at the hands of White, American Christians, but also the offense that White Christians continue to cause so often in unthinking paternalism and assumptions that "we" are the good guys who have the means to help the downtrodden. He brooks no messiah but the Lord Jesus!

And to the point of this dissertation, Rah is a loud witness to the important *catholic* reality that the church is not White evangelicalism (or for that matter, the Missouri Synod) or anything less than the Body of Christ inhabited by people of every tribe and nation. Secondly, he shows convincingly that it is among non-White Christians—the churches of immigrants and "minorities"—where some of the brightest lights of hope are shining in our day. Thirdly, he compels us to see that to take catholicity seriously is to take the cultural and theological contributions of the *whole people of God* to heart.

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[296] Soong-Chan Rah, *Prophetic Lament: A Call for Justice in Troubled Times* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 20; Kindle Edition.

Leopoldo A. Sánchez M.

The writings of Leopoldo A. Sánchez M. feature concerted attention to pneumatology and ecclesiology. He is the author of three important volumes on the Holy Spirit: *Receiver, Bearer, and Giver of God's Spirit* (2015)*, Sculptor Spirit* (2019), and *T&T Clark Introduction to Spirit Christology* (2022).[297] Sánchez's work on the Holy Spirit may be characterized as attempting to address "a partial eclipse of the pneumatic dimensions of his [Christ's] life and mission."[298] His work in Spirit Christology is not in conflict with, but complementary to and compatible with Logos Christology. Sánchez's approach to the Holy Spirit, while highly academic, is also strongly practical—just as one might expect when he confesses faith "in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church." To speak of the Spirit of Christ is to speak of the Body of Christ. Here Sánchez draws a host of lessons that pertain to horizontal catholicity, most especially in his perspective on hospitality, second, in his direct reflections on the relationship between the church's unity and its catholicity, and third, in his consideration of culture.

In "The Church Is the House of Abraham" Sánchez, with Luther, is focused directly on the theme of hospitality.[299] "Luther sees the virtue of hospitality as a mark of the church, 'so that those who want to be true members of the church' (*Qui igitur Ecclesia membra vera esse cupiunt*) remember and are 'encouraged' to practice it."[300] There is a special responsibility to care for the household of faith, but Luther does not limit hospitality to believers. "For instance, if a

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[297] *Receiver, Bearer, and Giver of God's Spirit: Jesus' Life in the Spirit as a Lens for Theology and Life* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2015) Kindle edition; *Sculptor Spirit: Models of Sanctification from Spirit Christology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019); *T&T Clark Introduction to Spirit Christology* (London: T&T Clark, 2022) Kindle edition.

[298] Sánchez, *Receiver, Bearer, Giver,* Kindle "Introduction."

[299] Leopoldo A. Sánchez M., "The Church Is the House of Abraham: Reflections on Martin Luther's Teaching on Hospitality Toward Exiles," *Concordia Journal* 44, no. 1(Winter 2018): 23–39.

[300] Sánchez, "The House of Abraham," 27; citing Luther at *LW* 3:178 (WA 43.3.5–8).

'Turk or Tartar' came to us as a 'stranger' and 'in distress' we should not disregard him 'even though he is not suffering because of the Word' (LW 3:183–184)."[301]

In his reflection on hospitality we see that for Sánchez this often-ignored virtue rises to the level of being a model of sanctification. Sánchez defines hospitality simply in *Sculptor Spirit* as "welcoming outsiders" and "embodying God's concern for forgotten neighbors."[302] Hospitality is particularly evident in the ministry of Jesus who "mirrored Yahweh's heart for marginalized neighbors."[303] So also the church: "As a marginal community of disciples in the world, the church is called to embody her Lord's own concern for outcasts."[304] Further reflection on concern for outcasts leads Sánchez to the intersection of hospitality with immigrants.[305] He introduces the concept of *mestizaje,* which comes from those "theologians whose life experiences in the world have made them especially aware of the pain of exclusion and the gift of a welcoming community." Specifically, Justo González is cited for his work on *mestizaje* as "the coming together of races and cultures as a result of the conquest and colonization of the Americas."[306] This marginalized experience belongs to the *mestizo* who lives an "ambivalent reality" due to a mixed heritage—part Spanish, part native, part slave. It is only multiplied in the case of the "Mexican-American," for example, who is neither Mexican nor American. But this experience

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[301] Sánchez, "The House of Abraham," 31.

[302] Sánchez, *Sculptor Spirit,* 144. For further reflection on models of sanctification see Leopoldo A. Sánchez M., "Life in the Spirit of Christ: Models of Sanctification as Sacramental Pneumatology," *Logia* 22, no. 3 (Holy Trinity 2013): 7–14.

[303] Sánchez, *Sculptor Spirit,* 146. He affirms Virgilio Elizondo's characterization of the "Galilee principle" in the ministry of Christ; *Galilean Journey: The Mexican-American Promise* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1983).

[304] Sánchez, *Sculptor Spirit,* 147.

[305] Sánchez, *Sculptor Spirit,* 159–68. As he states in a footnote, much of this material is from an earlier article: "Can Anything Good Come Out of _____. Come and See! Faithful Witness in Marginality and Hospitality," *Concordia Journal* 41, no. 2 (2015): 111–23.

[306] Sánchez, *Sculptor Spirit,* 160–61. Strictly speaking, *mestizaje* refers to the phenomenon of the mixing of Spanish and indigenous peoples in the Americas due to colonization and conquest.

has meaning for the church as a whole. To be *mestizo* Christian is bittersweet, coming from a heritage of often violent "evangelization," yet "under the sign of the cross" it is "a sweet event. A new creation still came about in spite of violence and death."[307] So it is that

> …the Hispanic experience of *mestizaje* deepens the church's understanding of her own identity *as a catholic or universal church*, which in turn reminds her to live according to her identity as a global church of many languages and cultures. The church learns that she herself is *mestizo.* She is neither monocultural nor monolingual.[308]

> Sánchez develops the important connection of *mestizaje* and catholicity even further.

> First, the Hispanic experience of mestizaje reminds the Christian church of her own *catholic* identity in the world. We might say that Hispanic mestizaje is a sign— though an imperfect one, for sure—of the *catholicity* of the church."[309]

> Second, the Hispanic experience of mestizaje reminds the Christian church in the world of her intercultural identity…. Interculturality moves beyond recognition of the other's presence and learning about the other towards joint collaboration with the other whenever possible. Like an effective sports team, intercultural engagement uses the gifts and strengths of each partner or player in developing a common project or vision, avoiding the danger of unilateral border crossings.[310]

Thus, by reading the Scriptures through "marginal eyes," Sánchez shows the Sculptor Spirit at work in the hospitality of the church creating the *catholic* church. The Spirit of Jesus sees the Galileans, the lepers, Samaritans, and every Gentile, man and woman, slave and free as people who need welcome, belonging, acceptance. Of such is the kingdom of God; of such is the catholic church.[311]

Sánchez's interest in the catholicity of the church is not limited to the thematic lens of hospitality and *mestizaje*. He addresses catholicity directly in a 2009 article wherein he says, "I

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[307] Sánchez, *Sculptor Spirit,* 161–62.

[308] Sánchez, *Sculptor Spirit,* 162, emphasis added.

[309] Leopoldo A. Sánchez M., "Hispanic Is Not What You Think: Reimagining Hispanic Identity, Implications for an Increasingly Global Church," *Concordia Journal* 42, no. 3 (Summer 2016): 231.

[310] Sánchez, "Hispanic Is Not What You Think," 232, 233.

[311] Sánchez, *Sculptor Spirit,* 164–68.

hope to show that, in light of the increasingly ethnocultural diversity of our future, unity and

mission language in synodical ecclesiology will need to be broadened and deepened critically

and constructively with language that fosters the catholicity of our Synod's identity and task in

the church, the world, and the marginalized areas between the two."[312] At the time of the article's

composition, the LCMS was engaged in discussions about unity and mission. Sánchez's

contribution is self-consciously one of a Lutheran who is a Latino immigrant and systematics

professor. He is also aware of the demographic picture at that time as it pertained to the Synod.

Over 15% of the country was Latino, but less than ½ of a percent of the LCMS shared that

heritage. He contrasts a focus on the centrality of mission with focus on unity as two current

views. But the contrast does not imply contradiction. "Unity…. Mission…. As a systematic

theologian, I am interested in going a bit more deeply into the relationship between the two.

These are both dimensions that are part of any serious Lutheran ecclesiology."[313] But Sánchez is

a *Latino* theologian, leading him to ask how the priority on unity affects the immigrant world:

> In the face of unity discourses, Lutheran immigrants ask: when does "unity of
> confession and practice" language become effectively a rigid cultural uniformity
> dictated by a majority group's questions, theological interests, and/or preferences in
> theological articulation and practice? When does a somewhat abstract but pious
> enough term such as "church culture" become confused with only one of a variety of
> cultural expressions of the church's catholicity that are all equally faithful to the
> Scriptures?[314]

Sánchez goes further. He notes approvingly J.A.O. Preus III's suggestion that the Synod

needs "a Lutheran 'theology of difference' that does not go against our confessional unity in the

faith," but then adds that "the term 'difference' does not lend itself to the deeper, classic

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[312] Leopoldo A. Sánchez M., "Toward an Ecclesiology of Catholic Unity *and* Mission in the Borderlands: Reflections from a Lutheran Latino Theologian," *Concordia Journal* 35, no. 1 (2009): 17–34.

[313] Sánchez, "Catholic Unity *and* Mission," 23.

[314] Sánchez, "Catholic Unity *and* Mission," 26.

language of 'catholicity,' which can include complementary theological, liturgical, and pastoral ways of expressing the one true faith—as long as these are faithful to the Holy Scriptures—in response to various challenges and in the context of various cultures." The concept of catholicity is necessary to prevent the view that Latino or other immigrant groups in the church represent no more than a "token diversity" rather than seeing them as the church proper. [315]

> As a U.S. Latino systematic theologian, I find it indispensable to complement and shape unity discourses with catholicity as another defining and indispensable quality of the church. In other words, catholicity too, as God's gift, is of the *esse* of the church, and any discourse on synodical unity that does not take stock of the catholicity of the church past and present is saying too little. Such catholicity takes various ethnic, cultural, and linguistic forms, but also contributes to the church at large through liturgical expression, pastoral practice, and gifts of theological reflection proper. As a task in response to what God has given us, one can foster catholicity through a basic openness to hearing what the Spirit of Christ has to say through the Word spoken in the margins of the church, from various constituencies that are often seen as the weakest or least powerful in our midst.[316]

Sánchez himself illustrates the essential value of catholicity with his "gifts of theological reflection proper" and his "openness to hearing what the Spirit of Christ has to say through the Word spoken in the margins of the church." He offers the crucial insight that while much of Missouri's attention is given over to the church's conflict with prevailing secular culture, most of the immigrant world in our midst is not coming from a Western materialist worldview, but from a far more religious and "sacralized world." To evangelize the "lost" immigrant is a different challenge than evangelizing the lost secular materialist. It is the richness of catholicity that enables such insights from a theologian *because* he is Latino.[317]

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[315] Sánchez, "Catholic Unity *and* Mission," 27. The phrase "theology of difference" is from Preus. See J.A.O. Preus, III, "A Reflection on Ayer' por Justo González. Bajo la Cruz de Cristo (Hebrews 13:8)," in *Under the Cross of Christ—Yesterday, Today, and Forever: Reflections on Lutheran Hispanic Ministry in the United States.* Monograph series no. 6. (St. Louis: Concordia Seminary Publications, 2004), 51–64. Sánchez unfolds it further as an element of catholicity.

[316] Sánchez, "Catholic Unity *and* Mission," 27–28.

[317] Sánchez, "Catholic Unity *and* Mission," 28–30. In closing this important article Sánchez offers three

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Any consideration of horizontal catholicity demands consideration of culture. In a world in which many churches, including the LCMS feel culturally embattled, to speak clearly and soberly about culture is a challenge and a necessity. Here, too, Sánchez makes important contributions. He sees the danger of being led into a view of culture that suggests a black and white alternative between contemporary American culture (understood negatively) and what is thought to be a more traditional culture or even the church's culture. He warns that, for example,

> Countercultural proponents may argue for the preservation of the church's identity in the midst of an unholy world through appeals for uniformity in worship. A call for the preservation of "church culture" typically accompanies such arguments. While there is a salutary place in Lutheranism for liturgical unity and identity for the sake of the gospel and love, *a narrow countercultural position might dismiss engaging present contexts for the sake of a broader catholicity* in service to the word and people from various cultures in our midst.[318]

Sánchez speaks here as both a theologian and a musician. He does not dismiss a certain value of liturgical uniformity, but clearly sees the danger of sanctifying some idealized church culture of the past. To do so is to be monocultural at best and anti-cultural at worse—but above all else, it is to exclude the trait of catholicity.

> The danger of countercultural attitudes does not lie in their concern for good theology, church unity, or even wholesome past tradition in the face of a culture that is hostile to the gospel. Rather the danger lies in seeing all culture as bad or hostile to God. In such cases, countercultural becomes anti-cultural and monocultural, making the church *sectarian rather than catholic*, and leading her to summarily exclude the contributions of other cultures to the proclamation of the gospel in the church through various forms of music.[319]

In place of some simplistic countercultural views, Sánchez suggests an understanding of

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"ideas for consideration." First, the recognition that to consider catholicity to be of the essence of the church implies that the church should think and speak in terms of ministry *with* not *to* Latinos and other minorities. Second, he sees a need for deployed ministry leadership that lives and works "in the margins" and not from far-off offices. Third, he urges the Synod to retain its form of polity that grants its smallest congregations the same voice as the largest, so that immigrant and minority voices are not silenced. See 31–32.

[318] Leopoldo A. Sánchez M., "Theology in Context: Music as a Test Case," *Concordia Journal* 38, no. 4 (2012): 216–17, emphasis added.

[319] Sánchez, "Music as a Test Case," 217, emphasis added.

cultural engagement on three levels: multicultural, cross-cultural, and intercultural. In a video

presentation titled "I Believe in One Catholic Church: Thinking About Diversity as a Christian,"

he explores these three levels in a consideration of unity and catholicity.[320] In a presentation for

the Wabash Center, Sánchez further explores his three-fold view of cultural engagement.

> In our seminary's latest round of curriculum review, cultural health became one of seven desirable health outcomes in the formation of our students for pastoral ministry. I was assigned to assist first-year incoming students with an initial way to assess their levels of cultural engagement. As a theoretical framework for this initial self-assessment, I suggested thinking in terms of three levels of interaction with the cultural other, namely, multicultural, cross-cultural, and intercultural engagements—the third option being the more involved or deeper (and yes, healthier) form of interaction to work towards.

> The *multicultural* level merely signals an awareness of the presence of people from multiple cultures in our midst. Such an awareness is a first step in cultural engagement and may lead to knowledge of the other at a theoretical level. The image that comes to mind is that of *parallel planets* (worlds) that are aware of each other from afar but do not have meaningful contact with one another. It is the least demanding form of cultural health.

> The *cross-cultural* level moves beyond awareness of the cultural other toward movement into the other's cultural world. An apt image for this level is a *bridge*, which provides a path from one world into the next. Although cross-cultural language can promote more involvement with the cultural other, it can also fall prey to unilateral forms of engagement where the "higher" culture crosses into the "lower" culture to change it—a one-sided crossing that gives rise to unhealthy paternalism and dependency.

> Which leads us to the *intercultural* level, the most demanding engagement. The image of a *team* working together toward a common goal, with each member contributing something unique to the community, best gets at the goal of intercultural collaboration. Hopefully, such collaboration leads to deeper relationships of mutual interdependence in which cultural others move from being strangers toward living as neighbors and friends.[321]

> Note that for Sánchez, it is *catholicity* that demands a level of engagement with other

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[320] Leopoldo A. Sánchez M., "I Believe in One Catholic Church: Thinking About Diversity as a Christian," (2020), *Other Faculty Scholarship*. 9. https://scholar.csl.edu/ofs/9. The presentation was for the Equip Conference of the Florida-Georgia District of the LCMS.

[321] Leopoldo A. Sánchez M., Concordia Seminary, Blog Series: Re/Kindling Creativity and Imagination February 23, 2022, https://www.wabashcenter.wabash.edu/2022/02/salsa-music-and-cultural-health/.

peoples and cultures as essentially equal partners. For the church, properly speaking, is the

assembly of all tribes and nations and cultures and languages who share one Lord and one faith.

It should be evident that Sánchez's contribution to this dissertation is enormous. His value

comes via his identity as a Lutheran theologian with a Latino heritage, his deep interest in the

Holy Spirit and its work in the church, and his specific concern to emphasize catholicity as a

constitutive, defining trait of the church.

Summary: Catholicity in Scripture and Tradition

Bishop Bo Giertz reminds us that catholic means "all-inclusive" or "embracing the

entirety." The catholicity of the Church "*flows out of her fellowship with Christ*."

> Since the Church is Christ's body, she possesses the richness of his fullness. This is the "entirety," the fullness that she embraces. Therefore she is catholic in her essence.

> It was God's eternal counsel that in the fullness of time He "would bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ" (Eph 1:10). Being the vehicle for this all-embracing salvation, the Church must reach out to all people everywhere and in all times to be what she truly is. And that is catholic.[322]

This chapter has shown, first, that the catholic essence of the Church is evident throughout

the Scriptures. The Church's horizontal reach is evident from the ministry of Jesus and

particularly in his words of resurrection and ascension. The history of the church throughout time

is one of catholic intent—of understanding that the faith of the apostles is the faith that is to be

delivered to all of humanity. There are certainly times when that truth is not emphasized or

enacted, but it is never denied. Nonetheless, a danger becomes evident in church history: it is a

temptation to claim the faith as somehow most especially the possession of this or that segment

of the church, whether determined by theological expression, political reach, geography,

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[322] Giertz, *Christ's Church,* 61.

language, custom, or some other criterion.

That temptation is not foreign to Lutheran churches. Though the Wittenberg Reformation sought to stay within catholic tradition, political and other pressures kept it from any heavy attention given to extending the gospel to the nations even though catholicity is constitutive for what the church has been and what she ought to be. At various times the Lutheran churches were fighting just to survive, and that was the case for Missouri in its early years as it struggled to lay claim even to being a church, and then struggled to determine how its Lutheran confession would adapt to a new land. Outreach soon occurred at a vigorous rate, but its focus was predominantly toward German immigrants. Yet, whether it was Loehe's efforts with Native Americans or the Synodical Conference's efforts planting churches and schools for African Americans in the South, there were at least some efforts to reach beyond Germanic immigrants and horizontal catholicity was certainly not denied. But neither was it given much attention, either in catechetics for the laity or in doctrinal theology. Hence, mission was more project than anything else and there was little sense that the true church is essentially, by definition and constitutively Christ's communion for all the world—that the church is catholic in its *esse*.

For decades Missouri could count on numerical growth. Its outreach among a rapidly growing number of German immigrants made it one of the fastest growing denominations in America for about a century, and the high birth rates it enjoyed and the denominational loyalty it fostered only added to the solid immigrant foundation. The decline over the past half-century has been painful and shocking to many, but its cause is no mystery. Yes, birth rates have declined. So has membership retention, but above all else, Missouri has struggled to reach out to the nations—the nations here in the United States who comprise the fastest growing segment of US population. That is to say, the Synod has struggled to be catholic—struggled to see the necessity

of welcoming the present peoples and cultures of America, or to recognize that to turn from them is to fail to be what we confess the Church to be: one, holy, *catholic,* and apostolic.

There are many contemporary voices that can help us. Many are outside our fellowship—people like Lamin Sanneh or Soong-Chan Rah. Some are in our communion—someone like Leopoldo Sánchez. It is hard to listen to "outsiders," especially when their voice is harsh and accusatory, but catholicity itself suggests that we may be able to learn even from those whose confession is identical with our own. And we certainly can learn from those in our fellowship.

Another "outsider," Stephan Bevans, is worth hearing. He speaks directly to the topic of catholicity and reminds us that catholic universality is not a perfect uniformity of language or custom, but it also fosters some of what is *particular* in various peoples and cultures. "Only if every group in the church—Vietnamese, Laotian, Filipino, Salvadoran, European, North American, Ghanaian, and so forth—is included in its particularity will the church be able to be truly *the church.*"[323] That is not mere theory. It is a calling for a Synod that seeks to live as a part of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic people of God.

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[323] Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology,* 14.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The New America and the LCMS: Acknowledging the Problems

The membership decline of the LCMS is the reality that this dissertation has addressed in several ways. On one level the decline of the Synod largely reflects the demographic transition that is occurring throughout the developed world—Europe, the Americas, and Asia in particular. In the United States the DT is most obvious in the White, non-Hispanic population. The population growth or "baby boom" that marked the 1940s through the 1970s leveled off dramatically and by now the White, non-Hispanic population has begun a slow decline that will continue, absent significant immigration from Europe or a dramatic and immediate rise in birthrates. Since the Missouri Synod is largely part of White America, its population reflects the same traits: low birthrate and smaller families.

The second aspect of synodical decline reflects another aspect of the changing demographic reality of the United States. The US is not declining in overall population only because there is a growing non-White population. More and more of the US population is Black, Hispanic, Asian, or immigrants from other parts of the world such as Africa, India, and the Middle East. Only those church bodies and religious groups that are effectively reaching the so-called "minority" populations are experiencing stability or growth in membership. The LCMS is attempting to reach such diverse groups, but it has not succeeded to a degree that offsets its declining White population.

The third way this dissertation has sought to address LCMS membership decline is theological. I have argued that the Synod has given minimal attention to the catholicity of the church in its teaching both to laity and clergy. Little attention has been given to the truth that the

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Church—the *Una Sancta*—is *by definition* constituted by men and women of every color, tribe, language, and culture. There is no Christian church that is not part of the holy *catholic Church—* the Church of the nations. A failure to emphasize this teaching prevents us from seeing that mission is not a church project, but the reason every local church exists. Failure to take it to heart has tempted us to abandon cities, people of color, the poor, and others, and to be satisfied with suburban church planting as a way to insure institutional survival.

The Demographic Dilemma—Transition

The LCMS is to be commended for the significant attention it has given to its declining membership. The studies conducted by Ryan MacPherson and George Hawley were beneficial in many ways. Each man provided assessments of what was happening in terms of LCMS membership and identified certain reasons for that decline.

Both showed that declining birth rates are a reality in the Synod and explained (at least in one significant way) why the LCMS has declined in membership over the past fifty plus years. Both dig deeper than just providing data and show the ways that changes in marriage and family life have a significant effect on birth rates, church membership, involvement in church, and retention of the faith intergenerationally. MacPherson, in particular, provides a number of suggestions for how the Synod might more effectively hand down the faith.

Implementing Merits of MacPherson and Hawley

Although I have earlier critiqued the ideas promoted by Drs. Hawley and MacPherson and also affirmed many of their ideas, a brief recap in this final chapter is worthwhile.[1] MacPherson's emphasis on declining births is legitimate. So also are the benefits he cites that result from large,

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[1] See the affirmation and critique provided above on pp. 218–33.

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stable families. I do not affirm his implication that changing teachings on contraception undermine the vocations of marriage and parenthood. In my view the Synod was right to determine that it could not issue a blanket condemnation of all birth control methods. However, MacPherson's implication that there is an unthinking acceptance of contraception in the LCMS has merit. My own pastoral experience indicates and available data implies that many if not most couples assume that two or three children at most is the right number and that more than that are too many. That may reflect current customs, but it has nothing to do with biblical teaching and it suggests a perspective that is less than appreciative of children as a gift of God.

I noted in the discussion of MacPherson my agreement with his rejection of the claim that LCMS membership loss is due to conservative theology. On its face, such a suggestion is to be rejected because other Christian churches with conservative theology are continuing to grow. However, while overall conservative theology does not lead inevitably to decline, I have also shown that conservative theology is *one reason* for some Millennials and Gen-Xers leaving Christianity. Obviously, the Synod should not discard its biblical and confessional theology, but neither should the Synod be oblivious to the challenge of retaining its theological foundation while trying to reach those who consider "conservative" to be unappealing.

MacPherson's most helpful perspective is his overarching concern for developing and maintaining strong intergenerational ties in the church. Regardless of the feasibility of the specific suggestions he offers for achieving that goal, the goal itself is worthy of ongoing attention. Segmenting the church by generational groups not only is potentially problematic in its effects on families. It is also contrary to the horizontal catholicity of the faith. Christianity is for all people, not only in terms of ethnicity or cultural group or language, but also for all ages. For the tiniest infant and the aging woman with Alzheimer's. We should be grateful for

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MacPherson's challenge to take "generational generosity" more seriously.

Hawley's suggestions are also by no means to be discounted or ignored. He too rightly connects LCMS decline with a declining birthrate. While I disagree with some of the suggested priorities he offers the LCMS, I do not dispute the potential value of pro-natalist, family-focused efforts or the importance of church planting by Midwestern LCMS districts. Overall, Hawley's perspective is wider than MacPherson's. Hawley encourages further research into the matter of race and ethnicity and also urges further evangelistic outreach beyond the White non-Hispanic population. Moreover, his book *Demography, Culture, Decline* is far more balanced in explaining membership decline in most American denominations. There, as noted in chapter three, Hawley emphasizes the high rate of correlation between diversity and growth and also between religious commitment and growth.[2] His attention in the book therefore offers a healthy balance. His research on the importance of strong religious commitment as a growth factor deserves further study in terms of its relevance for the LCMS.

It is evident that both Hawley and MacPherson came to their assignments from the Synod with far more than merely academic or scholarly goals. MacPherson exhibits a commendable love for orthodox Lutheranism, for the family, and for meaningful intergenerational relationships in congregations. Hawley provides in-depth research on US counties with an evident goal of wanting to foster LCMS growth in the future through successful church planting in optimal locations. Neither man gives glib, pollyannish counsel. They take seriously the problem Synod is facing and offer sober counsel and direction. One can only be grateful for the commitment and the gifts they brought to their research on behalf of the LCMS. Moreover, I endorse their

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[2] Hawley, *Demography, Culture, Decline,* 107. As noted earlier, Hawley identifies three key variables that correlate with denominational growth: large families, racial/ethnic diversity, and high religious commitment. See *Demography, Culture, Decline,* 113.

recommendation that the Synod find ways to encourage younger members to fully appreciate the gift of children, rather than automatically following societal views about limiting family size. Their positive recommendations should not be mocked or ignored.

Catholicity Ignored

Both Hawley and MacPherson identify one of the reasons for LCMS membership decline and, for that reason, their research and recommendations are worthy of careful consideration and potential implementation. However, both also share the same weakness: their inattention to outreach beyond the White, non-Hispanic population of the US. This results in a failure to recognize the one growing segment of American Christianity. As Yonat Shimron stated recently, "Participation in congregational services has not kept up with overall population growth. However, religious groups drawing large numbers of immigrants have seen steady growth."[3]

To be sure, neither MacPherson nor Hawley in any way opposes mission and outreach to non-Whites. But it is also the case that, at least in their reports to the Synod, neither sees the failure to reach beyond White America as a central reason for LCMS decline. Moreover, neither thinks that such efforts can be very successful. As a result, outreach to the non-White population is given priority by neither scholar. In addition, ministry to urban America is also given minimal attention.

In theological terms, therefore, neither Hawley nor MacPherson gives any real consideration to the horizontal catholicity of the Church. Of course, that was not their task. They were asked to address the decline of the Synod as an institution. Moreover, neither purports to be a theologian. Although MacPherson has much to say about the Synod's doctrine and life, he does

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[3] Shimron, "Religious Groups with Immigrant Members."

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not venture into ecclesiology. Nevertheless, there is little sense in either report that the Synod is in some way part of the *Una Sancta*, or that the Synod's cultural and racial narrowness identifies a weakness in how it reflects the *catholic* Church that we confess in the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds.

Taking Catholicity to Heart: Remembering the Forgotten

A recent informal survey of some LCMS pastors and leaders corroborates much of the material in this dissertation. Responses summarized in "A More Hopeful Future for the LCMS" indicate that many see the demographic changes in the US as mission opportunities, a need to reach out to those unlike us, a recognition of the Synod's strengths in its laity and theology as well as various "mission service agencies" (such as Lutheran Hour Ministries). Respondents were not blind to challenges, but were certainly hopeful.[4]

Figure 32 is a visual reminder of the reality facing the LCMS. The 2020 Census showed the growing diversity of the US. The figure shows the "diversity index" for the country as a whole and for individual states. It measures the likelihood that two randomly chosen individuals will be from *different* racial or ethnic groups, converted to a percentage. In the ten years between the 2010 and 2020 census, the average diversity of the entire US changed from 54.9% to 61.1%. Individual states, varied, of course, from Maine, at 10.8%, to Hawaii, at 75.1%.[5]

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[4] Robert Scudieri, Daniel L. Mattson, Jon Diefenthaler, and Andrew H. Bartelt, "A More Hopeful Future for the LCMS," *Lutheran Mission Matters* 26, no. 2 (November 2018): 168–86. The survey was based on an admittedly selective group: "We cobbled together various email lists of Synod and District officials, the general readership of *Lutheran Mission Matters (LMM),* and others in various networks. . ., " 174. For that reason it cannot be considered a random sample or representative of LCMS leaders overall. It does, however, suggest a significant level of concern for the Synod to readjust its mission focus.

[5] For the original interactive version of the figure shown in Figure 21 and for an explanation of the diversity index, see USCB, Racial and Ethnic Diversity in the United States: 2010 and 2020 Census (August 12, 2021), https://www.census.gov/library/visualizations/interactive/racial-and-ethnic-diversity-in-the-united-states-2010-and-2020-census.html.
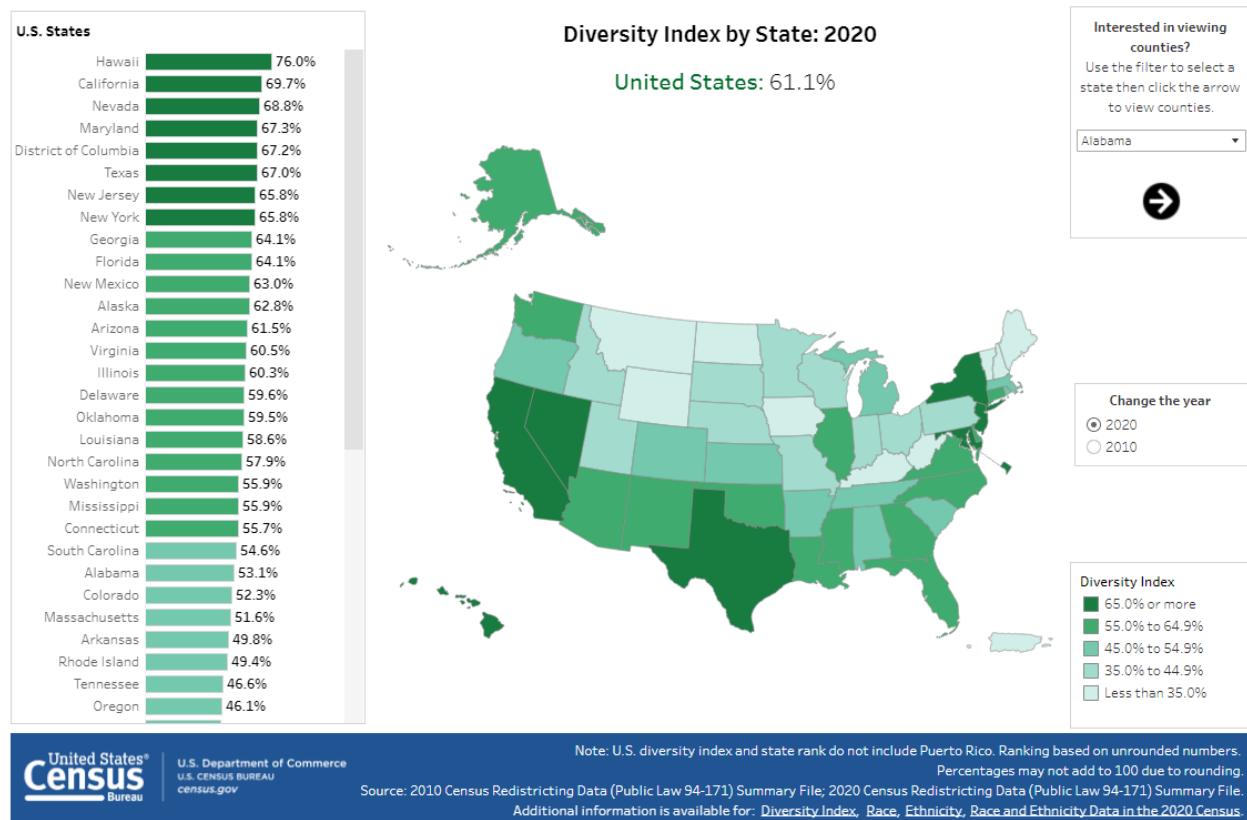
Figure 32. 2020 Census—Diversity index by State.[6]

This beautifully diverse America is the setting into which God has placed the LCMS at the present time. To minister effectively in this setting demands that the Synod take to heart its confession that the church is catholic—and thus the refuge for such varied and diverse people—and to pray that the Holy Spirit would bring this truth to our remembrance. After his survey of the LCMS, Lyman Stone says, "The deepest divides in the LCMS are not between 'Confessional' and 'Missional' Lutherans, but between 'Do something' and 'Do nothing' Lutherans."[7] This dissertation seeks to be an aid for "Do something" Lutherans. Toward that end some suggestions and questions follow.

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[6] Fugure from USCB, "Racial and Ethnic Diversity in the United States: 2010 and 2020,"

[7] Stone, "What Is Our Life Together?" 5.

So what shall we do? The second of the Synod's constitutional objectives is to "Strengthen congregations and their members in giving bold witness by word and deed to the love and work of God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and extend that Gospel witness into all the world."[8] The objective stresses the work of "congregations and their members." The conclusion of this research is that the LCMS will not be able to engage in effective mission outreach unless it forthrightly addresses the changing demographic reality of the United States. There is no reason for the LCMS to forsake its constitutional objectives such as promoting doctrinal unity while avoiding unionism and promoting mission. But when we give minimal attention to the doctrine of catholicity are we meeting our second objective? Will we take to heart Leo Sanchéz's reminder "that, in light of the increasingly ethnocultural diversity of our future, unity and mission language in synodical ecclesiology will need to be broadened and deepened critically and constructively with language that fosters the catholicity of our Synod's identity and task in the church, the world, and the marginalized areas between the two"?[9] Note: he emphasizes "identity and task." It is essential for the LCMS to understand that to take its second objective to heart requires the Synod fully to appreciate and to teach that catholicity is of the *esse* of the Church—it is an element of identity. And, as such, it implies a task: giving attention to places and people we have largely forgotten.

Who are they? This dissertation has emphasized the obvious: that catholicity includes people of different races and ethnicities: Asians, Blacks, Hispanics, immigrants from so many places. Figure 32 reminds us that the population of the US is increasingly one of groups

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[8] Article III Objectives, Constitution of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, in *Handbook: Constitution, Bylaws, Articles of Incorporation* (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 2019), 11.

[9] Leopoldo A. Sánchez M., "Toward an Ecclesiology of Catholic Unity *and* Mission in the Borderlands: Reflections from a Lutheran Latino Theologian," *Concordia Journal* 35, no. 1 (2009): 17–34.

categorized as minority races and ethnicities, while the Synod is 95% White and non-Hispanic.

In 25 of the 50 states, plus the District of Columbia, non-Hispanic Whites are a *minority* of the

total population at less than 50%. And in only nine states is the non-Anglo population less than

one-third. This is America today and the reality will not change. The failure to see this

demographic reality is to fail to see our mission.

There is more to see when we look through the lens of catholicity. Hawley reminds us that

the Synod's socio-cultural makeup as a White, non-Hispanic church body includes traits beyond

race and ethnicity: we are largely Midwestern, heavily suburban and small town, and rural. We

should add that we are largely middle-class economically. While racial and ethnic diversity is

central to the idea of horizontal catholicity, that is not the whole of this matter. Often a failure to

include the "nations" in our churches is also a failure to serve the poor and the disadvantaged.

The church's catholicity—its inclusiveness—involves different socio-economic groups.

When Jesus says that we will always have the poor with us (Matt. 26:11; John 12:8), he is not

inviting his disciples to neglect care for the poor in favor of gifts to him. Rather, he contrasts the

beauty of a gift given at an opportune time (the woman's anointing of her Lord) to a *constant*

concern for the poor. How right it is for the Church both to adorn its worship with the most

beautiful sights and sounds, and to do so all-the-while regularly seeking ways to include and to

assist those who struggle with poverty and other immediate needs. To take catholicity to heart as

a Synod would therefore require a sober assessment of our abandonment of the poor, whether

rural or urban, although special attention herein has been given to cities. The evidence of LCMS

membership patterns in five major cities provided earlier is sobering evidence of the extent to

which the Synod has abandoned the urban centers of America and their peoples. It is in large part

a simple matter of geography. When LCMS church members avoid poor neighborhoods whether

for living or visiting, or even passing through, they are acting in ways that every middle-class

person would defend. Such behavior is a form of self-preservation—poverty and crime are often

companions. Cities are viewed as dangerous—and too crowded as well.

What comes of such fear? Urban churches in impoverished neighborhoods struggle and

shrivel. Often the problem is not so much too few people, but too little money. A real world

example may help: a congregation with thirty-five in worship in an upper middle-class New

York area suburb was able to support its ministry without a problem, while a congregation in

Queens with about thirty-five members could barely cover the cost of utilities and insurance. The

Synod is congregations walking together—united in doctrine. But doctrine does not stand alone.

Orthodox teaching is for living. What happens to *life together* when we avoid urban communities

and churches? Without regular articulation of the catholicity of the church, our practice has too

often been to let the urban congregation close because it cannot support itself economically.[10]

Imagine if congregations in different socio-economic settings would instead regularly meet

together, building relationships, sharing strengths and weaknesses with one another—

interculturally, as Sánchez would say. Such connections would be both spiritually and socially

beneficial to both churches.[11]

Isn't this a matter of catholicity? Isn't the middle-class avoidance of cities and the poor a

failure to take catholicity to heart? If so, it requires a reassessment of both congregational

independence and of how we conduct pastoral ministry. Willingness for the economically strong

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[10] I lived this experience in the 1980s when I was called as missionary-at-large in Queens, New York City. Only by means of a district subsidy did Redeemer survive for several years until membership growth and part-time work on my part enabled us to become self-supporting.

[11] A study of the sociological factors that help economically disadvantaged children to improve their economic status in adulthood shows the benefit of friendships between children from lower economic circumstances and children from higher economic circumstances. Raj Chetty, Matthew O. Jackson, Theresa Kuchta, *et al.*, "Social Capital I: Measurements and Association with Economic Mobility," *Nature* (2022), https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-022-04996-4.

to support struggling ministries is required—but that can happen only when district and circuit leadership recognizes that our different congregational populations are all part of the same catholic church. Self-sufficiency may be an American value, but should it be an ecclesial norm? Recognition that an economically disadvantaged minority or an urban Black, Hispanic, or another immigrant congregation has gifts and strengths to share with an economically prosperous church is a dimension of catholicity.[12]

To avoid cities is to miss the greatest opportunities for mission and outreach, as Leo Sánchez has emphasized. In a recent essay he implies that the mark of catholicity impels the church to recognize the importance of the people of the cities—our neighbors—in the work of the kingdom.[13] He recognizes the cities, soon to be home of about 70% of the world's population, as "the church's most obvious mission field, but also the most visible expression of the church catholic proper and the launching pad for mission to the world in its own right."[14]

Taking the catholic intent of the gospel to heart means urban ministry, but not only urban ministry. A recent visit to the Rio Grande Valley in southern Texas was a reminder that small towns and rural areas are also often the homes of significant minorities or even large *majorities* of non-Anglo populations. In the Valley, White congregations, including LCMS churches, are in communities with large evangelical and Roman Catholic Hispanic churches. But the unchurched also abound—mostly Hispanic. There, too, the mark of catholicity calls the LCMS into mission.

The catholic calling to the LCMS means returning to cities and other places with non-

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[12] This is not to encourage overly dependent ministries, or to deny the value of something like the "three-self formula" of Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson. It is simply a recognition that in the American context urban churches are frequently economically vulnerable.

[13] Leopoldo A. Sánchez M., "Who Is the City? Theological Approaches to the City," *Concordia Journal* 48, no. 1 (Winter 2022): 3–52.

[14] Sánchez, "Who Is the City?" 49.

Anglo populations. It means recognition of people of color throughout our communities. It means recognition that the poor will not be forgotten by God, nor are they to be forgotten by us. And it will require workers who can joyfully accept these tasks.

The Work of Catholicity

To be sure, a return to urban centers and responsiveness to the catholic calling for the LCMS will include not only a focused effort to maintain current urban congregations that are struggling to survive because of economic disadvantages, but also the planting of new congregations. All of that will take workers—dedicated evangelists and missionaries and church planters. And this implies a challenge to typical LCMS patterns for pastoral ministry—to both recruitment and training. Since our congregations are heavily middle-class and White, so are the majority of seminary candidates. And, speaking of seminary, the high value we place on a residential graduate level seminary preparation is legitimate. Pastors must be apt to teach and our seminaries are superb at the task. But preparing men for ministry is more than a mere academic requirement. More than anything, the aptitude to teach requires a love for Christ and the catholic Church throughout the world—a love that approaches the ministry not as a career, but as a calling that is worthy of any sacrifice (Acts 20:24). Finding men who are willing to serve in racially, ethnically, and economically "different" settings is an obvious and ongoing challenge. It requires an additional sort of aptitude for teaching.

Such ministry involves an aptitude for communicating with the "other," and specifically with the people to whom one is called. As Sanneh shows, it involves vernacular language abilities. And it requires a commitment to working together interculturally, as Sánchez notes. Such aptitude is not uniform. Because of how God creates and sustains this world, a Korean pastor is more likely to be an effective minister in a Korean community than a White pastor. The

Synod cannot ignore such realities if it is to return to North American cities with their diverse communities. Thus it cannot scorn "alternative" routes for recruiting and preparing pastors.

The value of residential seminary education should not be minimized, but we dare not place that training tradition on the level of necessity. Throughout most of church history, beginning with the New Testament, pastors have been prepared in a variety of ways. The New Testament itself shows an organic manner of training involving "men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom" (Acts 6:3). The first step in having workers for a more catholic Synod, then, is to identify individuals with a proven commitment to Christ and his Church: future pastors whom the Holy Spirit is preparing even before anyone has thought to "recruit" them, and future deaconesses who are likewise experiencing the Holy Spirit's formation, to say nothing of evangelists, teachers, and other workers. It is crucial that people of color be identified—men and women for whom ministry in their own communities will be less of a cultural challenge.[15]

The challenge of education for pastors and deaconesses remains. In many cases, to remove a budding leader from an urban congregation may cause harm to that ministry. In many other cases minority individuals will be deterred from the long road to seminary because of minimal or inadequate undergraduate education, the personal and economic costs of four years of advanced studies, and the intimidation factor of studying in an environment that often feels alien. To fail to encourage residential seminary education would be a grave mistake, but it would also be wrong to fail to recognize that, for too many, the residential route to the pastor office becomes a road less traveled—if not simply impossible.[16] For such reasons it is critical that the Synod continue

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[15] A caution is in order, however. One's identity as a member of a minority group does not automatically make him an effective minister to that community. The Synod benefits when a pastor who is not White serves a White congregation, and White men can also effectively and joyfully serve in minority settings.

[16] Two young men that I encouraged to "go to seminary" came away from visits to one or the other of our seminary campuses with the feeling that they could never adjust to the atmosphere there. However, another young

its Specific Ministry Pastor (SMP), Ethnic Immigrant Institute of Theology (EIIT), and Center for Hispanic Studies options for the pastoral office, as well as considering ways to foster and encourage colloquy for minority ministry candidates.

Alongside the preparation of pastors, other church workers are needed—deaconesses and Directors of Christian Outreach, for example. But the Synod would do well also to explore an office of evangelist, taking a leaf from the mission efforts of the churches of Africa and elsewhere.[17] Evangelism that is geared toward church plants is of inestimable worth. Lutheran churches in Ethiopia, Tanzania, and Madagascar are prime examples, but not the only ones.

Nor should the catholic mission task of the American church be confined to those who are called workers. The Synod rightly holds the office of public ministry in high regard. But such regard for pastors should not discourage a concerted effort to utilize the gifts and abilities of the royal priesthood in the work of outreach.[18] Indeed, because of our fallen natures, those of us who are ordained too often fall into the sin of pride that may ignore the role of the laity in the work and mission of the gospel. Alberto Garcia reminds us that Luther has something to say about such pride: "In contempt of those who became so proud, the Lord, however, often aroused humble, common people who belonged to neither the prophetic nor priestly order."[19] How vital is the royal priesthood and the labor for the Lord given by "humble, common people" today!

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man boldly left his career and completed both undergraduate and seminary studies, refusing to be put off that he was one of the few Black men on both campuses.

[17] Note Recommendation 7 in the "Report of the 2013 Res. 4-06A Task Force," 247–48 in LCMS, *Convention Workbook: Reports and Overtures* (2016), https://files.lcms.org/file/preview/F839DE65-FDAD-4C82-BC44-3123ABF90F9A. And see the CTCR report, *The Royal Priesthood: Identity and Mission* (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 2018), https://files.lcms.org/f/56837ECC-9BB3-4356-A704-2D9200A37E7B.

[18] Note Recommendation 8 in the "Report of the 2013 Res. 4-06A Task Force," 248–50.

[19] Martin Luther, *Lecture on the Minor Prophets I: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Micah, Nahum, Zephaniah, Haggai, Malachi, LW* 18:139. Quoted by Alberto Garcia, "*Simul Justus et Peccator:* God's Mercy for a Culture of Violence and Death," in Alberto L. García and John A. Nunes, *Wittenberg Meets the World: Reimagining the Reformation at the Margins* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017), 52.

Race—an Ongoing Challenge

"Why is there so much public and private conversation in the United States, including among Christians, about race and ethnicity?" asks John Nunes.[20] In answer he suggests the contrast between the "unparalleled opportunities" for the many peoples of the US and the "pockets of resistance" stimulated by racism and by supporters of exclusion. He then offers a re-translation of Lutheran theology "spoken anew in application to today's pluralistic contexts."[21]

In "today's pluralistic contexts" catholicity means the Church extends to those we do not know—those for whom we have little or no cultural, social, or economic affinity. Catholicity means the Church includes the stranger—specifically, people who are strangers to me. As such, catholicity can be frightening. We are raised with such slogans as "Stranger, Danger." We feel drawn to those who look and speak and act the way we do. To confess the catholic Church is therefore to challenge a human instinct—a sense of self-protection based on familiarity. Here, too, Nunes offers a salutary warning that our affinity for our group "tends to confirm original sin" in terms of an inward turn (*incurvatus in se*) rather than recognition that the Church is a fellowship not of ethnicity, but of baptismal rebirth.[22]

To oppose racism or other bigotries is a matter of confessing catholicity.[23] In chapter three I noted some of the many ways the Synod has expressed its opposition to racism. I also suggested, however, that in spite of such opposition a form of racialization is a partial explanation for the

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[20] John A. Nunes, "*Koinōnia* and Diversity: Postcolonial Poetics of the Possible," in García and Nunes, *Wittenberg Meets the World*, 140.

[21] Nunes, "*Koinōnia* and Diversity," 140–42.

[22] Nunes, "*Koinōnia* and Diversity," 144.

[23] Black American Christians are highly sensitive to the importance of catholicity, even though they may not use the term itself. For example, while 68% of White Christians believe that opposing racism is "essential to their faith," 75% of African-American Christians believe this. Pew Research Center, "Across Religious Groups, a Majority of Black Americans Say Opposing Racism Is an Essential Part of Their Faith," by Kiana Cox (October 19, 2021), https://pewrsr.ch/3jjmDyT.

Synod's membership being so dominantly non-Hispanic and White, with small minorities of Blacks, Hispanics, Asians, and others. Racialization as I have characterized it is essentially the result of a bias for sameness. We look for neighborhoods, homes, schools, friends, and work where we see people like us. Few strangers. No dangers. Or so we hope! Therefore in a White, middle-class denomination, it is no surprise that our geographic and social circles—the neighborhoods and communities where we live and work—are frequently isolated from where Blacks, Hispanics, and other minority groups predominate.

This search for sameness is so "natural" that it goes unquestioned. Thus our need for the Word of God—both its law that identifies not only the most glaring personal sins, but also the commonly ignored sinful patterns that we simply assume as the only way to live—patterns that prevent me from recognizing my neighbor (Luke 10:25–37). Such patterns deafen us to the gospel that is intended to bespeak righteousness and forgiveness for all tribes and peoples and to make known to me that my neighbor is that person who seems utterly unlike me.

In discussing the PCA, I have shown the significance of that denomination's willingness to come to grips with the matter of race, to acknowledge the reality of racism in its corporate life, and to confess it. Together with that, the PCA took concrete steps to refocus its mission in a catholic manner—going beyond the southern US to plant churches in cities and among people of color. This bold step of acknowledging insularity, biases, and racist complicity is one that the Synod would do well to emulate, not as a matter of lip service, but as a step toward refocusing some of its missional priorities. The PCA's public confession of sins toward Blacks and others was a significant element of a rethinking about mission in a catholic direction—with its turn northward and into cities from its roots in the South and smaller communities.

Is such a step possible for the LCMS? The assertion herein is that we ought to repent of our

failure to teach and to practice the catholicity or universality of the church and our failure to

prioritize intercultural outreach locally and nationally. How might that happen? No meaningful

change in the church occurs without the word of God. The Synod has historically prioritized the

importance of doctrine, and rightly so. But if we have indeed failed to emphasize catholicity, that

is a doctrinal weakness. We have often failed to give due consideration to the New Testament

church's demographic inclusivity or to the fact that this inclusivity has grown throughout the

world, among the diverse tribes and peoples and tongues that have come to faith and baptism.

Despite many concerns raised about the Church Growth Movement, the Synod has

subconsciously enacted one of the Church Growth Movement's central principles—

homogeneity. Don Hogard, pastor of a multicultural congregation, writes:

> We would rather be in a church with people like us, who share in our interests, than
> to receive people who are different from us in any way. However, the church is never
> static. It is never homogeneous. It is always changing. At one point, we were the
> new—different people whom Christ called. Today He is calling people who are
> different from us. He is forming one church out of many kinds of people. It is a
> blessing from God when our congregations are as multicultural as our Lord's
> church.[24]

There are matters that are worthy of repentance, but there are also reasons to be skeptical

that we would be able to recognize this need. When it comes to race, much of the Synod seems

to share the opinion of many political conservatives that antiracism efforts are themselves racist

and that any attention to structural or systemic racism is inherently anti-American. It is

understandable that some feel threatened when some proponents of Black Lives Matter or

Critical Race Theory charge that it is bigotry to teach as the Synod does that homosexual

behavior is sinful, that marriage is only between a man and woman, or that sexually determined

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[24] Dan Hogard, "Cross-Cultural Missions Is Building the Body of Christ," *Missio Apostolica* 20, no. 2
(November 2012): 122–23. https://lsfm.global/uploads/files/MA-11-12_Online_with-hyperlinks.pdf.

roles are sometimes valid (e.g., that only men should be ordained).[25] There can be no

compromise with false teaching on these issues.

Yet, as much as we may oppose some ideas of the Black Lives Matter *organization* or

many tenets of Critical Race Theory,[26] is that all we should say about race? When we raise such

valid objections to versions of what is claimed to be the only valid view of race, it is incumbent

upon us also to identify even more emphatically a Christian vision of how Blacks, Whites,

Asians and other colors ought to relate. I contend that such an emphatic vision should start with

vigorous teaching about catholicity. To do so will involve firm assertions that Black lives do

matter—that police misconduct cannot be ignored—that American structures of housing,

education, and politics often contribute to and sometimes directly cause disparities and inequities

that impact minorities significantly.

One must be hopeful that such a measured response to the matter of race is possible for the

Synod. Heath Curtis, in an article on LCMS membership decline, says that Synod's demographic

downturn is a judgment of God on the LCMS for a failure to welcome children as a gift of God

and therefore calls for repentance.[27] In my view, there is merit in this charge. But might a call to

repentance have been accompanied by a further acknowledgment that the failure to prioritize the

Church's catholicity and therefore the Synod's mission to the forgotten minorities of the US is

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[25] See for example Matthew C. Harrison, "The Sin of Racism: A Gospel Response," *Reporter* (September 2022), 1, 4. Harrison both strongly rejects racism and raises many concerns about Ibram X. Kendi's antiracism arguments.

[26] The Black Lives Matter slogan and movement and Critical Race Theory have resulted in significant critiques. There is no doubt that one can find troubling elements in some proponents of both these examples, such as Marxist connections and vilification of Whites as a group at times. But a fair assessment would recognize valid concerns in such movements or theories.

[27] Heath R. Curtis, "Demographic Decline," *Gottesdienst: The Journal of Lutheran Liturgy* 21, no. 2 (Trinity 2013): 13–14. Curtis applies the past description of the US Episcopal church to the LCMS as "The Republican Party at Prayer. We are a white, culturally right-of-center, Midwestern church body" (14). His article seems to imply, however, that addressing LCMS sameness is a hopeless undertaking.

also subject to God's judgment?

<center>Challenging Political Polarity</center>

Is the LCMS willing to engage in vigorous opposition to racism and the problems of

Blacks and other minorities? To his credit, President Harrison issued statements of concern after

the Michael Brown shooting, the murder of George Floyd, and the Buffalo shootings as well as

other events that aroused fear and anger in Black America. But little else has happened on the

synodical level. The Synod seldom gives much attention even to something as relatively benign

as Black History Month, even though Black pastors have urged such recognition.[28] While articles

are published and district resolutions are passed that question or condemn Critical Race Theory,

how much attention is given to the critical reality of racial division in society *and in the church?*

The Synod regularly condemns such evils as abortion and gay marriage—but is largely silent on

the evils of racial discrimination, and poverty.

It takes no stretch of imagination to wonder why the LCMS decides when to speak most

loudly and when to mute its voice on societal evils. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that our

position on such matters is motivated by a realistic assumption that our membership is far more

likely to be politically conservative and Republican than it is to be liberal Democrat. President

Harrison said as much in a 2016 *Reporter* article: "It's a fact that the overwhelming majority of

LCMS clergy are Republicans." He rightly warns against open support for political candidates or

parties and condemns anyone who says that a vote for a particular candidate means someone is

not really a Christian. Then he adds:

> What can we preach? We can urge our people to be politically active and to stand in
> the public square for what accords with reason and the Ten Commandments. We can
> preach that we as Christian citizens will join with all people of good will to promote

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[28] Keith Haney, BHM (February 24, 2021), https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=277241727079335.

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and care for life, from womb to grave; we will support traditional marriage, and we shall oppose laws, courts and governments restricting our God-given rights — rights that were acknowledged by the Bill of Rights as inherent (not granted!). We shall urge our people to be knowledgeable about candidates' positions on issues that the Bible speaks about and on which the church has taken a stand, and to take these issues into consideration as they make their choices. [29]

The article is commendable in many ways, but in conversations with several Black LCMS pastors, they pointed out that the examples cited—abortion and traditional marriage—are issues that would resonate with conservative Republicans. Left unmentioned were issues that resonate with many African Americans and other minorities: poverty, racism, and other inequities.

For the LCMS to be more catholic in its reality—more inclusive of the peoples and populations that comprise the America of today—it cannot be deaf to the concerns of minority populations. Blacks are unlikely to feel at home in a church body that questions whether there is still a race problem. Hispanics and other immigrants are unlikely to find a home if a church body trumpets immigration law without any desire to welcome the refugee and the immigrant. This makes it a matter of high importance for the Synod to scrupulously avoid any appearance or hint of political endorsement. What do people hear if the Synod, for example, speaks approvingly of efforts to curb illegal immigration without a hint of compassion for the many reasons people struggle to enter the US that are grounded in a desire to protect themselves and their families? What do they hear if we condemn Black Lives Matter? Or Critical Race Theory? Many members of minority groups will not hear such statements as politically neutral. And this is not just a matter of concern when it comes to "official statements." Pastors should be cautioned about how we speak in sermons, newsletters, Facebook posts, and so forth.

In other words, an exceptional modesty is called for as Christians tiptoe into the political

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[29] Matthew C. Harrison, "President Harrison Provides a Lutheran View of Church and State," *Reporter* (March 3, 2016), https://reporter.lcms.org/2016/president-harrison-provides-a-lutheran-view-of-church-and-state/#:~:text=(Not%20too%20long%20ago%2C%20a,less%20intensity%20than%20the%20clergy.

realm. As Joel Lehenbauer notes. We are always walking by faith, not by sight, even then:

> It is also important to recognize that—in a fallen world—there is a hiddenness to God's rule in both realms. In both realms God's activity is discerned by faith—on the basis of His Word—and not merely by sight. God's gracious rule in the Church is hidden under suffering and the cross, and under unimpressive earthly elements (water, bread, wine, words), administered by fallible human beings within imperfect churchly assemblies and institutions. God's merciful rule in the world is hidden under fallen and often deeply flawed leaders, citizens, and structures. In both realms, it takes Spirit given faith to say, "See how well and wonderfully God is ruling and working here for the blessing and benefit of its citizens!" If in the Large Catechism (and elsewhere) Luther's praise of God's work in both realms sometimes seems overly positive and even excessive, it is because Luther wants to remind us constantly to "walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Corinthians 5:7) in both kingdoms.[30]

Thoughts on Further Research

In this research a couple of questions have come to mind—matters to be considered for further research. One is the question whether the Lutheran understanding of the "marks of the church," both as identified in *CA* VII and VIII and in Luther's writings (e.g., *On the Councils*) have unintentionally led Lutheran theology to fail to take fully to heart the Nicene Creed's four attributes of the Church. It seems that the emphasis on the two marks of Word and Sacrament led somewhat directly to a focused attention on the church as visible and invisible. Has that focus prevented attention to unity, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity?

Another question is far more practical. What course shall we follow to increase the level of racial and ethnic diversity in the Synod. It seems to me that the model of mission that is illustrated by the church-planting efforts of the Texas District is worthy of further study. And, parallel to that, should we not identify and give greater attention to LCMS churches that are successfully multi-ethnic? In almost every US city one can find a congregation or two that meets that criterion.

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[30] Joel D. Lehenbauer, "The Second Petition: The Two Kingdoms," 535, in Pless and Vogel, *Large Catechism with Annotations*.

A third question that seems worthy of attention is for us to look at how best to retain the vertical catholic traditions of liturgical worship that have marked Lutheranism's history without falling prey to the kind of cultural imperialism that demands a monocultural approach to liturgy. Here one would hope that a search of successful intercultural models would take place.

Learning Catholicity

Increasing catholicity will require a willingness to recognize that the catholic theological task demands not only orthodox teaching on the Trinity, the person of Christ, justification, infant baptism, and the bodily presence of Christ, but also an ecclesiology that is as broad as the gospel. Catholicity means listening to someone like Lamin Sanneh and his emphasis on the vernacular. It means learning the importance of the languages of different peoples. Learning to speak requires learning to listen, not just to different words, but to different expressions of concern and need. It means learning to appreciate different cultures. Sanneh's focus on the Christian confession of salvation "by faith, not by national custom and social affiliation" leads inexorably to the catholic necessity of both vernacular and cultural inclusivity.[31]

Catholicity also requires a willingness to listen to harsh critics such as Soong-Chan Rah, who demands attention to problematic aspects of Western culture *and Western Christianity* that ought not be ignored if the church is to be for all nations. Neither should Rah's significant note of hope be ignored: "Even as the demographics of the United States change, the second-generation progeny of immigrants are uniquely poised to serve as leaders of the next generation."[32] The Synod cannot ignore Lutheran history or its own history when it comes to attitudes, practices, and patterns—whether that is 16th century diatribes against Jews and

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[31] Sanneh, *Disciples of All Nations,* 8–11.

[32] Rah, *Next Evangelicalism,* 192, 193.

peasants, or 19th century support of slavery by church fathers, or 20th century patterns of White flight. Nor should we take offense when a brother or sister who is Black or brown or Asian raises questions about such matters.

Catholicity means listening as one of our own brothers, Leo Sánchez, gently urges a greater attention to the Spirit's work in and through the church. He helps us to see the catholic virtue of hospitality to strangers—that welcome to outsiders is a mark of the Church. His melding of unity and catholicity can enable the LCMS to see that its first ("unity of the true faith") and second ("bold witness by word and deed") objectives[33] are not just two items on a list of disparate objectives. No, these objectives are firmly bound together. Theology and mission are equal handmaids to each other. Sánchez is able to open our eyes to concepts such as *mestizaje,* that are born from different realities than most of us in the Synod have experienced. He can help us wrestle with the line between valid concerns about value of the catholic liturgical tradition of godly worship practices and an unthinking insistence on a particular liturgical tradition. His focus on interculturality in missions can help us to avoid the paternalism that often marks LCMS relationships toward minority groups in the US and partner churches in other countries, especially in Africa and Asia. Our partners regularly ask for LCMS assistance in theological education—something we have rightly sought to provide—but we should be careful not to assume such requests mean that we do not have much to gain from pastors and theologians who represent marginalized and oppressed people. Indeed, to cite one example, given the growth of Lutheran churches in Africa, the intercultural approach that Sánchez advocates has the potential to greatly enhance LCMS ministry in African Immigrant communities.

Catholicity, then, is a matter of both teaching and life—vertical *and* horizontal. It is faithful

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[33] LCMS, *Handbook* (2019), 11.

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to God's truth *according to the whole* of our teaching and it is faithful to God's mandate to proclaim his gospel *to the whole of* humanity. Catholicity holds doctrine and life together, with Luther. As Volker Stolle says: "Luther's repeatedly renewed reference to the necessity that a missionary witness must be credible is significant. Doctrine and life must agree."[34]

Above all, catholicity means the ongoing mission of the church to *all* people.

> With this message or preaching, it is just as if one throws a stone into the water. It makes waves and circles or wheels around itself and the waves roll always farther outward. One drives the other until they reach the shore. Although it is still in the middle, the waves do not rest; instead, the waves continue forward. So it is with the preaching. It is started through the apostles and always proceeds and is driven farther through the preacher to and fro in the world, driven out and persecuted; nevertheless, it is always being made more widely known to those that have never heard it before.[35]

I recently attended an LCMS service in south Texas. The congregation had been steadfastly White for generations, despite the growth of a Mexican-American population in the Rio Grande Valley. Indeed, when a mission to Spanish-speaking immigrants was planted by the Texas District, the mission and the White congregation had almost no interaction for many years even though they were located across the street from one another. But the Word bears fruit. Things have changed—a bilingual pastor now serves a dual ministry. Lay leaders have changed—hearts have changed. On the Sunday when I attended the little congregation consisted of some remaining 30 Whites, but also Hispanic people. And, wonderfully!, it was welcoming a dozen Mexican-American youth and adults through confirmation. God is at work.

> God be gracious to us and bless us,
> And cause His face to shine upon us— *Selah*
>
> That Your way may be known on the earth,
> Your salvation among all nations.
> Let the peoples praise You, O God;

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[34] Volker Stolle, *The Church Comes from All Nations: Luther Texts on Mission* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2003), 104.

[35] Martin Luther, "The Movement that Began with the Apostles Continues until Judgment Day," in Stolle, *Church from All Nations,* 24.

Let all the peoples praise You.
  Let the nations be glad and sing for joy;
For You will judge the peoples with uprightness
And guide the nations on the earth.   *Selah.*

  Let the peoples praise You, O God;
Let all the peoples praise You.[36]

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[36] *New American Standard Bible:1995 Update* (La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995), Ps. 67:1–5, emphasis added

How Racially Diverse Are U.S. Religious Groups?

% of each religious group in each racial/ethnic category, and each group's diversity score on the Herfindahl-Hirschman index

	White	Black	Asian	Mix/Other	Latino	Index
Seventh-day Adventist	37%	32	8	8	15	9.1
Muslim	38	28	28		3 4	8.7
Jehovah's Witness	36	27	6		32	8.6
Buddhist	44	3	33	8	12	8.4
"Nothing in particular"	64	12	5	5	15	6.9
Catholic	59	3	3	2	34	6.7
All U.S. adults	*66*	*12*	*4*	*4*	*15*	*6.6*
Assemblies of God	66	3	5		25	6.2
Church of God (Cleveland, Tenn.)	65	3	3		28	6.2
Churches of Christ	69	16		4	10	6.1
American Baptist Churches USA	73	10		5	11	5.5
Atheist	78	3	7	2	10	4.7
Agnostic	79	3	4	4	9	4.5
Presbyterian Church in America	80	6	3	5	6	4.4
Orthodox Christian	81	8	3	2	6	4.2
Anglican Church	83	12			4	3.7
Church of God in Christ	5	84		4	8	3.5
Southern Baptist Convention	85	6		5	3	3.4
Mormon	85			5	8	3.4
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)	88	5		3	4	2.8
Church of the Nazarene	88	2	3		7	2.7
Unitarian	88			7	4	2.7
United Church of Christ	89	8			2	2.5
Jewish	90	2	2	2	4	2.3
Episcopal Church	90	4	3	2		2.3
Hindu	4	2	91		2	2.1
United Methodist Church	94			2	2	1.4
African Methodist Episcopal Church	2	94			3	1.4
Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod	95			2	2	1.2
Evang. Lutheran Church in America	96				2	1.0
National Baptist Convention	99					0.2

MORE DIVERSE ▲ ▼ LESS DIVERSE

Source: 2014 Religious Landscape Study.
Note: Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding. Blacks, whites, Asians and others/mixed include only those who are not Latino. Latinos include people of all races.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Figure 33. Racial diversity of US religious groups.[1]

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[1] Figure from Pew Research Center, "Racial and Ethnic Composition," Washington, DC (May 12, 2015) https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/racial-and-ethnic-composition/.

APPENDIX TWO

AMERICAN GENERATIONS

There is no exact way to define generations. Only one generational name has any kind of

official sanction in the United States, and that is the Baby Boom generation or Baby Boomers, so

named by the US Census Bureau to apply to the children born in the post-World War II birthrate

surge between 1946 and 1964. Over recent decades, however, certain other names and ways of

defining Americans by generation have become common. This dissertation follows the

terminology and definitions adopted by Pew Research Center. Michael Dimock has provided a

helpful article and graphic (fig. 34).[1]
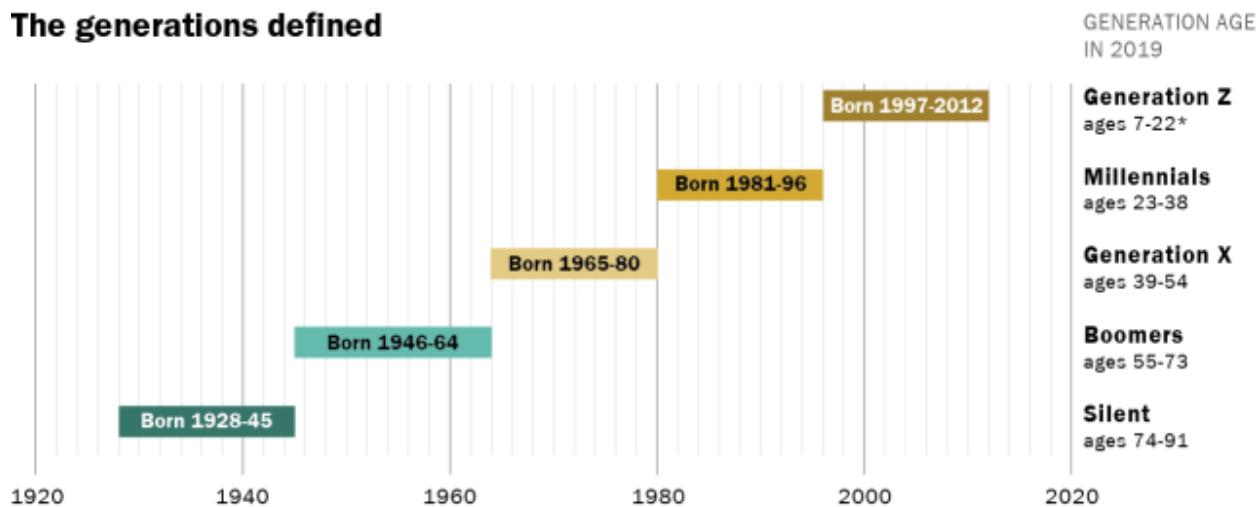
Figure 34. The generations defined. From Pew, "Defining Generations."

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[1] Pew Research Center, "Defining Generations: Where Millennials End and Generation Z Begins," Michael Dimock (Washington, DC, January 17, 2019), https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/01/17/where-millennials-end-and-generation-z-begins/.

DIST_ID	DIST_ABBR	Congs	Number of Congregations by Baptized Membership					
			<50	50-99	100-249	250-499	500+	No Data
3	AT	98	18	27	22	14	17	0
5	CNH	182	46	42	58	21	10	5
7	PSW	271	64	53	84	36	29	5
12	EA	121	14	25	45	23	13	1
14	EN	162	33	39	43	25	17	5
16	FG	196	36	31	61	43	20	5
20	CI	151	12	20	45	41	32	1
22	NI	210	16	30	66	50	45	3
24	SI	93	9	12	26	23	22	1
26	IN	226	22	29	72	48	53	2
28	IE	117	14	16	36	34	17	0
30	IW	167	19	20	50	46	31	1
32	KS	159	20	22	55	34	28	0
37	MI	351	30	54	94	79	93	1
38	MDS	123	25	29	32	29	7	1
39	MNN	196	26	37	69	40	24	0
41	MNS	233	13	24	69	63	64	0
43	MO	291	40	44	94	49	64	0
44	MT	68	23	14	18	8	5	0
47	NEB	237	21	32	79	56	48	1
49	NE	68	13	9	29	14	3	0
51	NJ	50	9	12	16	9	2	2
53	ND	78	13	15	29	11	10	0
55	NOW	250	47	57	88	41	12	5
56	OH	155	12	27	66	27	23	0
58	OK	78	12	13	29	18	6	0
60	RM	168	34	42	45	30	15	2
61	SD	105	16	20	36	17	16	0
63	SE	219	39	40	64	47	22	7
65	SO	150	40	34	53	17	4	2
67	TX	389	70	63	115	50	59	32
76	NW	216	16	34	70	55	41	0
78	SW	202	11	23	66	57	45	0
79	WY	60	13	15	19	10	3	0
97	SELC	53	7	14	19	6	6	1
TOTALS		5893	853	1018	1862	1171	906	83
Share of the whole			0.14	0.17	0.32	0.20	0.15	0.01

Figure 35. LCMS congregational data from LCMS Rosters and Statistics (August 4, 2022).

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Pless, John T. and Larry M. Vogel, eds. *Luther's Large Catechism with Annotations and Contemporary Applications.* St. Louis: Concordia, 2022.

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