

Mission and Ministry



The Christian mission in every era is to acclimate the citizens of the kingdom of this world into the language and custom of God's eternal kingdom. In Woodford and Senkbeil's forthcoming book, *Textualization: Courageous Witness in a Mashed-Up Culture*, they outline a strategy toward just that mission.

by LUCAS WOODFORD
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God's intent is clear. No matter the time, the culture, the language or the nation, He desires all people to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4) through the suffering, death and resurrection of His beloved Son. This Gospel remains the power of God for salvation in every era, even our own rapidly shifting times.

The two of us come from radically different worlds. One grew up during the Eisenhower administration; the other during the Reagan years. We were both farm boys, yet one remembers a team of horses doing the fieldwork while the other always had giant tractors leading the way. One is a grandpa; the other the father of five, including a new baby. One's idea of rock-n-roll is Buddy Holly; the other's is Def Leppard. We're separated by a full generation, but we share a common passion for proclaiming the Gospel and giving care in our Savior's name to souls—both lost and found—in these rapidly changing times.

We do so in a mashed-up culture. This is what happens when bits and pieces of pop culture are taken and remixed together; all sorts of wide-ranging entertainment, technologies, truths, moralities, deities and meanings (or the lack thereof) are compressed into a commonly shared experience. It's a riff off what the first MP3 players did to "mash up" emerging digital music culture, mixing and matching diverse artists in playlists that might include both Buddy Holly and Def Leppard, along with the likes of Mozart, Katy Perry and Weird Al Yankovic. It's also what DJs and artists do now to create mashed-up music by layering the vocal track of one song seamlessly over the instrumental track of another. So too, all sorts of clashing and conflicting ideas and experiences converge in our mashed-up culture. And though at first one of us thought "mashed-up" was a potato dish, both of us now live and move amid these mashed-up times.

That's true of the Holy Christian Church as well. These days, the Church is called to proclaim the unchanging truth of the eternal Gospel in a chaotic and rapidly shifting culture—mashed up, in other words. And her churches face the perennial temptation to mimic their surrounding culture; that is, to "contextualize" themselves and the Gospel they proclaim so that the message is more appealing to the culture. As well intentioned as this may seem, eventually some churches end up with

an impulse and identity that matches our times: mashed up. A mashed-up church breeds confusion, uncertainty and division. It needn't be that way. We'd like to chart a unifying way forward that combines both biblically faithful foundations and culturally sensitive approaches.

Of course, it's essential to communicate the Gospel in clearly understood language to actual contemporary circumstances; we simply call this "common sense contextualization." But we also contend that the text of Scripture must remain central; we need a clearly biblical and Christ-centered confession for our contemporary world without apology or compromise, saturated with compassionate care for the souls of our troubled age.

The real challenge is not to contextualize the Gospel but to textualize people; that is, to wrap them into the life of the Holy Trinity by means of the divine Word. In a very real sense, faithful proclamation and catechesis is always countercultural; it seeks to remedy the misbelief and idolatry

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embraced by each succeeding human culture in turn. Two elements have always been critical in the Church's mission: culturally sensitive, yet pointed catechesis together with vivid, visceral proclamation of Jesus Christ, crucified and risen. Through such clear, substantial teaching, unapologetic preaching and passionate care of souls in this our time, we welcome rootless and nomadic refugees from our transient world to find their home in the transcendent city with foundations, whose maker and builder is God (Heb. 11:10).

These may be the times that try men's souls, but they are God's times, and we have come to the Kingdom for just this time. With open and fraternal discussion of the challenges before us, and through collegial exploration of what we as Lutherans believe, teach and confess on the basis of Holy Scripture, we're persuaded that the Church can reclaim and celebrate what it takes to engage our contemporary culture faithfully with the unchanging Gospel. Too often, mission and doctrine are pitted against each other, yet God Himself has joined them together. Loving the Lord, loving people and loving our Lutheran theology, we can rise to the challenge of a mashed-up world without mashing up the Gospel. Rather than contextualizing the Gospel by reshaping it to make it more culturally acceptable, we're called to welcome exiles from our collapsing world and textualize them into God's transcendent kingdom that never fades.

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