ECCLESIAL LUTHERAN IDENTITY AND THE CHURCH'S MISSION IN THE FACE OF THE REALITY OF FAVELAS[1]

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Resumo: A Igreja Evangélica Luterana do Brasil (IELB) enfrenta muitos desafios na cidade, tendo em vista sua origem rural e a complexidade do Brasil urbano. O isolamento no contexto rural, a experiência imigrante e o princípio de missão que deu início à IELB levaram a uma forte mentalidade de autopreservação. A complexidade do mundo urbano envolve a realidade das favelas, que representa um dos maiores desafios à igreja enquanto ela busca pregar 'Cristo para todos'. Como então alcançar os moradores de favelas em grandes metrópoles brasileiras? Na busca por ajudar a responder a este desafio, levando em consideração os aspectos acima, o presente artigo oferece uma visão integrada da teologia de Lutero quanto à relação entre os dois tipos de justiça e o Credo Apostólico. Esta abordagem serve para ampliar a reflexão teológica sobre igreja e missão colocando o Primeiro Artigo a serviço da eclesiologia e da missiologia. Assim, embora não se pretende responder a todas as perguntas que surgem no debate que ocorre na intersecção destas duas disciplinas, o objetivo é avançar na reflexão a fim de fundamentar o pensamento sobre igreja e missão numa Teologia sólida que abrange nosso entendimento de Deus e da vida humana. O resultado disso é uma abordagem à missão que leva em consi-

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deração as culturas, facilitando a presença da IELB em missão no contexto de grande diversidade cultural brasileira das favelas, onde o cruzar de fronteiras culturais é necessário para se pregar o evangelho.

Palavras chave: Presença engajada cruciforme. Igreja. Missão. Cultura. Favela.

Abstract: The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Brazil (IELB) faces many challenges in the city, given its rural origin on the one hand and the complexity of urban Brazil on the other. The isolation in the rural context, the immigrant experience, and the mission principle that gave birth to the IELB all led to a strong self-preservationist mentality. The complexity of the urban world includes the reality of favelas, which represents one of the biggest challenges to the church in its attempt to preach 'Christ to all'. How then to reach favela dwellers in big Brazilian metropolises? In trying to help answer this challenge and taking all the above into consideration, this article offers an integrated view of Luther's theology in respect to the relation between the two kinds of righteousness and the Apostles' Creed. This approach then expands the theological reflection by putting the First Article to the service of ecclesiology and missiology. Although the approach won't answer all the questions raised in the debate at the intersection between these two disciplines, the goal is to advance in the reflection in order to anchor the theological thinking about church and mission in a solid theology that comprehends our understanding of God and of human life. The result of all this will be an approach to mission that takes cultures into consideration, facilitating the IELB's presence in mission in the midst of the strong Brazilian cultural diversity of favelas, where to cross cultural boundaries is necessary for the sake of the gospel.

Key words: Cruciform engaged presence. Church. Mission. Culture. Favela.

INTRODUCTION

To speak of an ecclesial Lutheran identity and the reality of *favelas* requires a reflection about the church's presence in mission in an environment that is very different from the one where the Lutheran church first emerged in Brazil. *Favela* is a housing category that refers to an urban built environment where one encounters a rich ethnic and cultural diversity, and often the

problems of violence and poverty. The Lutheran church in Brazil, on the other hand, emerged in a rural setting marked by a built environment that resulted from the immigrant experience of isolation from the larger society. It was in this monocultural context where a LCMS pastor started a missionary effort among Lutherans who did not have a pastor in their midst to care for them in 1900. This effort initiated a mission work which later on became the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Brazil (known by the acronym IELB). Today, the IELB is present in Brazilian metropolises and faces many challenges in this context. One of these challenges is that the church needs to cross cultural, social, and even geographic boundaries to fully account for the reality of *favelas* in its mission practices.

To help answer this challenge, this paper focuses on a dimension of mission which Klaus Detlev Schulz calls "mission as crossing boundaries" (SCHULZ, 2009, p.23) and can be situated at the intersection between ecclesiology and missiology. As a result, this paper will not fully engage in scholarly conversation with those who reflect on Lutheran identity specifically. Rather, it will offer an integrated view of Luther's theology in a way that the starting point of Lutheran ecclesial identity – justification by grace through faith—is preserved and emphasized, and that the church's presence and action in the world is also affirmed. In addition, given the focus of this paper, this view needs to comprehend a theological understanding of culture and to offer criteria for assessing cultural developments.[3] In order to offer such an integrated view, the paper will show that by making explicit the relation between Luther's view of human life as two-dimensional – vertical and horizontal – and his understanding of the Apostles' Creed reveals a strong theology of presence and engagement in the world. This theology will be captured in this paper in terms of 'cruciform engaged presence' (of the church) in the world. Second, the paper will offer a brief mission history of the IELB to point out its strengths and reveal some of the church's challenges when it comes to the crossing of cultural boundaries. And finally, the paper will offer an overview of *favelas* and show how Luther's theology as captured in terms of cruciform engaged presence can help the IELB account for this reality more fully.

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3 This paper presupposes Kevin Vanhoozer's definition of culture in terms of "works and worlds of meaning". In Vanhoozer's understanding, culture is the result of human activity and, at the same time, the framework for this activity. It means that we shape cultures and cultures shape us. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, ed., *Everyday Theology: How to Read Cultural Texts and Interpret Trends* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010), Loc. 279, Kindle edition.

LUTHER'S THEOLOGY AS CAPTURED IN TERMS
OF CRUCIFORM ENGAGED PRESENCE IN THE WORLD

Luther's understanding of human life in terms of the two kinds of righteousness, which the reformer called "our theology" in 1535 (LUTHER, 1963, p.7), has already been explored and articulated by Robert Kolb and Charles Arand.[4] This paper assumes their articulation of this theology and explores further how Luther's Trinitarian theology relates to it. In order to do it, a concise summary of Kolb's and Arand's articulation of Luther's two-dimensional theology is necessary. Luther's framework postulates that humans are relational beings in the sense that we relate both to God and to creation, and each of these two relations implies different ways of interaction. Within the vertical relationship one relates to God in a passive way. Within the horizontal dimension, on the other hand, one lives in active love toward the neighbor. While in the passive interaction humans are receivers of God's gifts, both the creaturely gifts as well as the gift of salvation, in the horizontal dimension the Christian actively shares what he or she has received with others, guided by the Spirit through the Word. This two-dimensional theology is usually represented by a vertical axis and a horizontal one, and this representation then makes the shape of a cross, a "cruciform" shape. Therefore, one could say that Luther's framework understands the Christian life as a "cruciform life". Later I will show that the term "cruciform" also evokes Luther's theology of the cross. Now, it is necessary to show the relation between this two-dimensional theology and the Creed.

Luther's explanation of the Apostles' Creed in both Small and Large Catechisms stresses God's works as Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier. Under each article, the reformer describes God as the One who does good things for and to his creatures, while the creatures passively receive God's gifts. As Luther makes that confession, however, he also affirms the presence of the church, both as individuals and as community, in the world under God's design and rule.

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4 According to Kolb, this distinction is rooted in Luther's sermons already in 1518 and 1519, and can be identified throughout the reformer's carrier mainly in his lectures on the Bible and in his sermons. The mature expression of this twofold distinction in Luther's theology can be seen in the reformer's 1535 Galatian commentary. See Robert Kolb, "Luther on the Two Kinds of Righteousness; Reflections on His Two-Dimensional Definition of Humanity at the Heart of His Theology" *Lutheran Quarterly* XIII (1999): 449-66. Arand has also demonstrated the trajectory of this two-dimensional theology in Luther's thinking and the importance of this framework in the Lutheran Confessions. The scholars have co-authored a book in which these two dimensions of human life are more fully developed as a theological anthropology. Charles Arand and Robert Kolb, *The Genius of Luther's Theology. A Wittenberg Way of Thinking for the Contemporary Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008).

Let us first look at the passive nature of our relationship with God in the three articles. In the First Article, Luther speaks of God as the one who creates and sustains his creatures "out of pure, fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me" (LUTHER, 2000, p.354). Notice that Luther is teaching the church that we passively receive from God all the creaturely gifts. In the Second Article, God in the person of the Son redeems his creatures while we were still, in Luther's words, "a lost and condemned creature" (LUTHER, 2000, p.355). This point stresses the atoning death of Christ in our behalf. In other words, Luther is describing Christ's work situating it within the passive, vertical relation of the cruciform life. And under the third article, Luther confesses that, "I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord. But the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel…". (LUTHER, 2000, p.355). Here again, one can see the passive nature of our relationship with God. Luther's theology, in continuity with Scripture, considers faith as a sheer gift. This logic of all three articles, thus, reflect the passive nature of our relationship with God in the human cruciform life.

But how exactly do these articles affirm life and presence in the world? And how does the engagement for the good of the neighbor enters this picture? In the first article, Luther also strongly affirms bodily life and offers a list of concrete gifts necessary for this life along with our horizontal interpersonal relationships of the home: "He has given me clothing and shoes, meat and drink, house and home, wife and children…". (LUTHER, 2000, p.354). These are all good things to be enjoyed and for which we give thanks. In other words, the reformer affirms the goodness of God's creation in the First Article, in spite of the reality of sin.

The Second Article also has to do with presence in the world. In this article, the reformer describes Christ's work as delivering us from our captivity "under the power of the devil". In doing this, Christ brings us "under his dominion", as he becomes "Lord" over all things. Notice, therefore, that Luther understands Christ's work not in terms of a rescue mission to take us from the world. Rather, he becomes Lord over all things. This same understanding of redemption is further explained in the Larger Catechism. After stating that we first had received "all kinds of good things" from the Father at creation, "the devil came and led humans into sin, death and all misfortune". But Christ "came down from heaven to help us," and, "Those tyrants and jailers have now been routed, and their place has been taken by Christ, the Lord of life…[who] assumed dominion at the right hand of the Father" (LUTHER, 2000, p.433 e 435). Note that Christ's mission, again, is not to take us from

the world but to take creation back from Satan's dominion. That is why we now "serve Christ in eternal righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as he is risen from the dead and lives and rules eternally" (LUTHER, 2000, p. 355). Therefore, being redeemed by Christ means in no way an escape from the world. Rather, it means that now we live under the lordship of Christ, who has dominion over the entire creation.

This understanding of redemption leads the reformer even to counter escapist theologies of his time with second-article theology. An example from Luther's commentary on Galatians, where his two-dimensional theology is fully expressed, can clarify this point. The reformer criticizes the monastic practice of escaping the everyday places of life and activities as a means to achieve merit before God and associates this escapist view to a way of doing theology. Under such a theology, one would try "to stray into heaven with our idle speculations, there to investigate God in His incomprehensible power, wisdom, and majesty…". (LUTHER, 1963, p.28). Notice that Luther associates the escapist attitude of monks to what he had much earlier in his career called "theology of glory" (LUTHER, 1959, p.53), a theology whose starting point is a supposed human ascent to God. But notice also how the reformer answers this problem of theological method which had led to escape from everyday life in the world:

> Therefore begin where Christ began – in the Virgin's womb, in the manger, and at His mother's breasts. For this purpose He came down, was born, lived among men, suffered, was crucified, and died, so that in every possible way He might present Himself to our sight. He wanted us to fix the gaze of our hearts upon Himself and thus to prevent us from clambering into heaven and speculating about the Divine Majesty (LUTHER, 1963, 28, 29).

There are two important points to highlight from Luther's words here: First, Luther is rejecting monastic escapism as works righteousness and contrasting it with the Incarnation of Christ. Thus, he is situating the Incarnation within the vertical dimension primarily (and not merely as an example for us to follow in our horizontal relationships). Second, in this way, Luther poses his two-dimensional theology within the broader context of his theology of the cross. It goes beyond the scope of this paper to explore this theology. But it is important to recall that the framework of the two kinds of righteousness is an expression of Luther's *Theologia Crucis,* whose starting point is God's descent

to us.[5] The term "cruciform," in addition to expressing the two-direction axes that represent Luther's two-dimensional theology, also evokes the theology of the cross that points to God's presence within the world to restore our relationship with Himself. This is a theology whose starting point is God's presence in the crib, on the cross, and in the tomb (which was left empty). Luther's theology, therefore, starts with God coming to us, with his presence in concrete places within created reality, in the world, and shows that the church does not need to escape the world to serve him.

Going back to the Creed, in the Third Article, to be "called by the Gospel" implies a calling into a community of believers, given that the Spirit also, "calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church" (LUTHER, 2000, p.330). Notice therefore that the Christian is present not only in the world as an individual (1st Article) who believes in Christ and lives under his ruling (2nd Article) but also within a gathered community that lives by the Word (proclaimed and visible). In the Large Catechism Luther stresses that this community is ordered in such a way that, "everyone may fully obtain daily forgiveness of sins…". (LUTHER, 2000, p.438). The receiving of forgiveness daily stresses the passive nature of our vertical relationship of the cruciform life. But toward the end of his explanation, the horizontal dimension is brought to the fore, as the reformer reveals how to properly understand the commandments after believing the articles of the Creed. First Luther highlights that the commandments fail to make one a Christian, while the Creed does it. And then, second, the reformer explains how, once one has knowledge of and believes the articles of faith of the Creed, one comes to "love and delight in all the commandments of God…". (LUTHER, 2000, p.438). This means that this community of faith which lives on the basis of daily forgiveness around the Word now also lives in the world with God's "gifts and power, to help us keep the Commandments" (LUTHER, 2000, p.440). Therefore, to put all this in other words, the community which is called and gathered by the Spirit through and around the Word, now looks also to the reality beyond itself, to the reality of the neighbor, in light of the commandments.[6]

All this shows that this integrated approach to Luther's theology offers a framework for human life that is cruciform (related to God passively and relat-

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5 See Robert Kolb, "Luther on The Theology of the Cross," *Lutheran Quarterly* XVI (2002): 443-66. See also Gerhard O. Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross, Reflections on Luther's Heidelberg Disputation, 1518* (Grand Rapids. Eerdmans, 1997).

6 For a deeper analisis of the relations between these elements in Luther's theology, see Charles Arand, *That I May Be His Own* (Saint Louis: Concordia, 2011), and Albrecht Peters, *Commentary on Luther's Catechism: Creed* (Saint Louis: Concordia, 2011).

ed to others and the world actively). It stresses our relationship with God and thus preserves and emphasizes justification by grace through faith, the starting point to discuss Lutheran ecclesial identity. But it also gives attention to the reality of one's neighbor. As a result, this theology fosters presence (in the world and in the church, which is also spatially located in the world). This cruciform presence is understood within the narrative of salvation, opening human life to both creation and mission engagement. To these two kinds of engagement we now turn the attention.

ENGAGED PRESENCE: THE TWO GREAT COMMISSIONS AND THE NARRATIVE OF SALVATION

The engagement of the church in the world can be discussed according to the two Great Commissions, as proposed by Arand and Kolb. To look at these commissions in light of the theology offered above allows one to talk about a 'cruciform engaged presence' of the church in the world. This kind of presence helps the church cross cultural boundaries in the city to attend creaturely needs of urban dwellers and, more importantly, to carry out the distinctive task of preaching the gospel.

THE FIRST GREAT COMMISSION IN LIGHT OF THE CRUCIFORM PRESENCE OF THE CHURCH IN THE WORLD

Let us first look at the first Great Commission in light of the theology offered above. This commission regards God's words in the creation narrative, when he created humans in his image and said that we would have dominion over the creation (Gen 1:26). In Kolb's and Arand's words: "As Christians re-enter creation; they find that they are now in a position to properly carry out the first Great Commission, to exercise dominion over the earth by serving it and preserving it (Gen 1.26)" (KOLB e ARAND, 2008, p.113). The exercise of this dominion involves service in and preservation of creation, but it is not limited to these aspects. Luther calls this dominion "the physical blessing," which he applies to many activities we do and to things we develop or create out of God-created things, from cultivating the soil to the building of cities (LUTHER, 1958, p.204 e 311). Therefore, this commission has to do both with one's service to care for other creatures and with culture. This theology then helps the church

reflect on human cultures as congregations attempt to cross cultural boundaries in their mission efforts.

Let us first look at how then culture is considered under the First Commission in light of the theology offered above. Kolb and Arand recall that the harsh realities encountered by Christians due to the reality of sin sometimes lead people to either desire to escape culture or to attempt to transform it into something Christian. But the affirmation of presence in creation in the Three Articles of the church's Creed does not allow the church to escape the surrounding cultures. At the same time, seeing cultural activity under the first Great Commission, in light of the First Article as God's good gifts, frees congregations from thinking that they need to ignore the cultures they encounter in order to be faithful to their core identity or from the idea that mission involves a transformation of the local cultures by necessity. Under the First Article, the cultural characteristics congregations encounter in the surrounding community can be seen as God's good gifts, and God-given things do not need to be transformed into something "Christian". On the other hand, because the reality of sin is not only a problem on the vertical relationship but is reflected on or even embodied in horizontal relationships and cultures, congregations need to assess cultural developments to know when to question and reject them.

But how exactly can this assessment be carried out? There are two major aspects to be considered in assessing cultures from a Lutheran perspective. First, from Luther's theology of creation, one learns that God has established fundamental structures for human life and activity, which comprehend the family in the home, the economic activity in the workplace, political and social organization in public space, and religious communities in religious spaces. This means that in planning the course of action in a particular locality where many cultural activities already take place, congregations need to observe whether certain activities enhance or diminish these basic "vocational structures" (KOLB, 2013, p.133, 134). If any activity affects these structures negatively, congregations will need to challenge the local culture through the church's teaching and practices. The preservation of these basic structures configure one criterion to assess the local culture.

Second, in addition to paying attention to how God has structured human life, Christians are guided by the Ten Commandments in their engagement in culture. In Luther's Small Catechism, Christians are instructed not only to avoid doing evil but also to act for the benefit of the neighbor. Under the Fifth, Seventh, Ninth and Tenth Commandments, Luther teaches the church to "prevent or resist evil" which the neighbor might suffer in his body or in his property (LUTHER, 2000, p.380). This may involve to denounce and oppose those nor-

malized practices that embody the so-called structural sins, and to work toward the well-being of the weakest ones. In other words, the benefit and well-being of the neighbor is another criterion to assess whether a given cultural development can be affirmed or needs to be questioned.

This emphasis on the benefit and well-being of the neighbor found in Luther's understanding of the Commandments sheds light on how the first Great Commission speaks to one's service and care for the creation. While the exercise of dominion comprehends the care of creation in general, Luther includes under this dominion the governing of a house, for instance, which requires one to care for the neediest one in this house, like a baby who needs the dippers changed. This means that Luther extends this dominion over creation to speak not only of the care of the natural environment and animals but also of the care we provide to fellow human creatures in need. Therefore, in attending the first Great Commission in light of Luther's emphasis on the neighbor, one is led to think also of the neediest ones in society. Thus, as congregations engage their surrounding realities and need to figure out about the course of their actions, they are guided by the commandments to answer the problem of poverty in the city as well. This is of great relevance for the present purpose because in *favelas* one encounters not only cultural diversity but also the harsh reality of poverty, which can be answered under the first Great Commission.

In addition to the guidance offer by the Commandments to engage the reality of the neighbor, in Luther's theology, reason plays an important role in engaging this reality. Kolb and Arand recall that, for the reformer, although in the vertical dimension "reason is blind" and "will lies in bondage to sin," in the horizontal dimension "reason still has some ability and freedom" (KOLB e ARAND, 2008, p.114). This means that when congregations engage their surrounding reality to attend people's creaturely needs, their leaders will use common good reason to identify problems and find solutions in dialogue with the community. As it will be discussed further when the reality of *favelas* is treated, good reason can help avoid that the church's actions toward answering the creaturely needs of impoverished people fall into a paternalistic, caritative work.

Therefore, when the first Great Commission is seen in light of the cruciform engaged presence, one is enabled to reflect theologically about cultures and about the importance of attending the creaturely needs of fellow urban dwellers. In doing this, the Christian lives the cruciform life present in the world and actively engaged in culture for the sake of the neighbor. But this engagement is not limited to responding to sinful cultural develop-

ments and helping the needy. This engagement first and foremost involves the preaching of the gospel, which can be carried out under the second Great Commission, through which the Church' distinct, vital task is carried out toward those who have not yet heard the gospel. To this commission we now turn the attention.

THE SECOND GREAT COMMISSION IN LIGHT OF THE CRUCIFORM PRESENCE OF THE CHURCH IN THE WORLD

The second Great Commission, also called the Gospel Commission, goes back to the task Jesus gave the apostles at the end of the gospel narrative to make disciples from every nation by baptizing and teaching (Mat 28:18-19). This commission leads the church to, always again, proclaim the message that tears down the most fundamental boundary, that is, the one which separates us all from the Creator. Therefore, this commission is fundamental for considering congregational presence and action in the city.

This response to the boundary of sin in terms of Gospel Commission follows very logically from Luther's theology captured here in terms of cruciform presence in the world. Having been called by the Gospel and made church by the Spirit's work, the church both as individuals and as community is led toward the neighbor. Arand puts it very clearly: "The church *coram deo* lives from the Word of God, and *coram mundo* it lives to deliver the Word of God to others" (ARAND, 2007, p.163). Notice that the Word is central in the life of the church. But while in the vertical dimension of the cruciform life this Word encounters us where we are, in the horizontal dimension we live and work to serve Christ so that through us the Word continues encountering the neighbor where he or she is.

A few examples from Luther's *Genesisvorlesung* can substantiate this point. These lectures reveal Luther's strong theology of creation and stresses the church's presence within creation. By reading them, one can perceive that in Luther's thought, life under justification is lived not in escape or isolation but in the very places of everyday life. Note, for instance, how the reformer talks about the life of the Patriarchs in the midst of other people in the world:

> The holy patriarchs were especially zealous in endeavoring to bring as many as possible to the knowledge of God. There-

fore, Abraham not only takes care of his household, but he also builds an altar. There he teaches the true religion; there he calls upon God; there he publicly practices the outward forms of worship. The Amorite Mamre and his brothers join him, and so a large church is established (LUTHER, 1960, p.363).

It is important to note that Luther first emphasizes the Patriarch's faith as the only means to be considered "righteous" before God. Then, after stressing justification through faith alone, Luther focuses on Abraham's life in the world, pointing out that he did not confine the faith to the limits of their homes and family relations, but shared what he had received with others.

At another point, commenting on Abraham's building of an altar in Bethel (Gen 13), Luther affirms that Abraham "preached the name of the Lord" (13:4) primarily to his household and then to the neighboring Canaanites. And he concludes by saying that,

> Abraham is praised in this passage because he did these things, not in some corner – for fear of the threats or the violence of the heathen – but in a public place, in order that by his own example and that of his people he might lead others to the knowledge of God and to true forms of worship (LUTHER, 1960, p.332).

Notice that for Luther, the understanding that God has justified us results in that God's people is to "lead others to the knowledge of God," even in the face of real danger. The Patriarchs, who for Luther represent the "true church," lived not in escape or isolation. Rather, they lived side by side with other people groups, who worshiped false gods, and that presence among others opened doors for witnessing. By being cruciformly present in the world and engaged toward the neighbor, they tried to witness their faith, bringing others to the faith in the true God.

These examples show the very point that has been affirmed at the beginning of this paper, namely, that what configures the starting point of Lutheran ecclesial identity – justification by grace through faith – leads to a proper understanding of the church's presence and action in the world. This core identity and the consequent presence and action of the church are captured by the term 'cruciform engaged presence.'

Ultimately, this cruciform engaged presence of the church in the world is intended to help the IELB to have a kind of presence in Brazilian metropolises that account for the reality of *favelas*. To the presence of this church body in Brazilian soil we now turn the attention.

OVERVIEW OF LUTHERAN PRESENCE AND MISSION IN BRAZIL

As indicated above, the Lutheran church first emerged in Brazil as the result of LCMS missionary effort in a setting that is very different from the reality of *favelas*. Before offering an overview of this reality, it is important to briefly explore the mission history of the IELB to identify challenges this church body faces in the city. In doing this, this section shows how Lutherans have attended both creaturely needs of and faithfully preached the gospel to people from a German background. Still, when one thinks of the Brazilian urban context, one notices some limits in terms of crossing boundaries in terms of mission and service to other people groups.

Let us first look at how Lutherans have faithfully attended the Two Commissions in its mission history. When Lutherans first arrived in Brazil, the Brazilian constitution allowed non-Catholics to immigrate to Brazil, but it did not permit these immigrants to publicly profess their faith. In addition to this limited tolerance, at the time non-Catholics were less than fully citizens; Immigrant Protestants were inhabitants of Brazil but did not have access to the basic services that the State provided (BEOZZO, 1993, p.32, 33). And since most of them had been placed in rural, isolated areas, they had to provide for themselves and organize life their own way. Thus, they built their own schools, cemeteries, and later on also church buildings. This kind of built environment served as the religious, social, and cultural centers of Protestant immigrants in Brazil (BEOZZO, 1993, p.51). In establishing these settlements or colonies in this way, the first Lutherans who inhabited Brazil focused their attention on both the preaching of the gospel and on their creaturely needs. The building of a temple on the one hand, and of the school and cemeteries, on the other, shows these two concerns Lutherans had.

This was the reality of many German Lutheran immigrants who received pastoral care from LCMS pastors starting in 1900. A few months after the arrival of the first LCMS missionary in Brazil, the Rev. Rev. Carl J. Broders, a congregation was organized in the colony of São Pedro along with a parochial school (REHFELDT, 2003, p.63-65).[7] Two years later, Rev. Wilhelm Mahler, first missionary to reside in Brazil after Broders' return to the USA, started first a school and then a congregation in the city of Porto Alegre, in a neighborhood

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7 Four years later, the first synodical district of the LCMS in Brazil was founded. Rehfeldt offers a detailed account of this event. He recalls that on June 25, 1904 the new district was named *Der Brasilianische District der deutschen evangelisch-lutherishen Synode von Missouri, Ohio und andern Staaten.* See Rehfeldt, *Um Grão de Mostarda*, 63-65.

where half of the dwellers were German immigrants. For Rev. Mahler, "the beginning [of a new congregation] needs to be with a school" (REHFELDT, 2003, p.51, 52). The same kind of effort was made when the church administration noticed that Germans were moving to the cities. When the secretary of missions of the LCMS Brazilian district heard that small numbers of German Lutherans had migrated to the metropolises of Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, and Belo Horizonte in the 1930s, the church sent pastors to start schools and congregations among them in these cities (REHFELDT, 2003, p.123-125). In Rio de Janeiro, Rev. Rodolfo Hasse would also even go to the port which was the gateway for immigrants in Brazil and approach Teuto-Russian Lutherans at the very occasion of their arrival, an strategy that resembles the "port city immigrant missions" in the LCMS (LUEKING, 1964, p.59-63). At these occasions, the pastor first "performed services and [then] directed them to pastors of the Missourian synod in Brazil". The immigrants who were placed in Southern Brazil, for instance, would enter the state through Porto Alegre, where another pastor would receive and help them (REHFELDT, 2003, p.123-125).

These examples show that the Lutheran church was answering both commissions toward the German Lutherans in Brazil to some extent. The pastors preached God's Word. The people gathered around this Word, built temples for this purpose, and built schools to answer the creaturely need for schooling. The parochial schools, in turn, served the purpose of teaching the Catechism to the kids. In addition, pastors provided a certain social assistance to just-arrived immigrants, along with pastoral care, and all of this, in turn, served the mission of the church under the mission principle which guided the LCMS mission efforts at the time, the so-called "home mission principle".[8] Therefore, to put all this in other words, the emerging church body was intentional in its mission toward German Lutherans and used well-thought strategies that would work for that purpose. In this sense, the Lutheran church was being faithful both to its theology and to the task of crossing that which is the most fundamental boundary, the boundary of sin, as the church kept preaching the gospel, calling people to repent and proclaimed the forgiveness of sins daily.

But what about the crossing of geographic and cultural boundaries to preach to those from a different background and context? How did the church

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8 This principle was primarily intended to gather, preserve or generate orthodox Lutheranism among German Lutheran immigrants spread throughout the world. Dean Lueking, *Mission in the Making: The Missionary Enterprise among Missouri Synod Lutherans 1846-1963* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1963)*,* 175. See also the concept of "Inner Missio", in SWELFLOW, August R. (Ed.), *Heritage in Motion* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1998). 316-18, and Rehfeldt`s description of the first fifty years of LCMS mission in Brazil. Rehfeldt, *Um Grão de Mostarda*, 7-12.

attend this commission toward other, non-Germans urban dwellers, for which the crossing of cultural, geographic, and social boundaries is necessary?

The assessment of the Lutheran church's mission practices made by church historians and Brazilian theologians reveal limits regarding the crossing of these boundaries due to a strong self-preservationist (immigrant) mentality. American church historian Dean Lueking, for instance, makes a comparison by saying that in São Pedro, "There was no… language, cultural or theological barriers to cross. Men could move from a rural Nebraska parish post to rural Brazilian pastorate without a break in their assumptions and practices" (LUEKING, 1964, p.181). This shows that in the historian's assessment, the strong German ecclesial culture brought from the homeland and preserved in that isolated colony facilitated a mission work that did not require the crossing of a cultural boundary.[9]

Another church historian, Brazilian scholar Paulo Buss, assesses the work of the church during a period of strong urbanization in Brazil, revealing the difficulty the church had to cross cultural and geographic boundaries. In reporting on the church's mission in the 1950s, Buss lists a few challenges to the church's indigenization. One of these challenges was "Germanism". This problem regards the maintenance of the German language in a time and place where to speak German was not even unnecessary but also a cultural barrier for outsiders. In addition, Buss also lists what he calls the church's "rural option" and a certain "regionalism" (BUSS, 2000, p.42). The historian notes how the Brazilian Missouri district had intentionally focused on rural areas. He quotes a representative of the LCMS, Rev. Harold Ott, who wrote a report after visiting Brazil, criticizing the Brazilian district: "To maintain the church ruralized is considered the ideal; to drive the work into the cities is considered a dangerous tendency" (BUSS, 2000, p.42). This shows that the Brazilian district was then failing to cross geographic boundaries in its mission efforts. In the perception of Rev. Ott, who could look at the IELB' work from an outside standpoint, the

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9 Even in the formation of the first Lutheran congregation among former slaves in 1926, one can notice that the first step toward crossing cultural boundaries was taken by the receivers of the gospel. It was in the colony of *Solidez*. This mission work started in 1919, when a member of a community of former slaves named Manuel Leal would stand by the door of a small chapel used by German Lutherans. The man would stand there to listen to the songs and the preaching. The man knew a bit of German and could understand the message because former slaves used to work for German farmers in that colony. See Ricardo Willy Rieth, "Evangélicos de 'alma Branca': os negros e o protestantismo no Brasil" in HOCK, Ingelore Starke. (Org.) *Brasil: outros 500. Protestantismo e resistência indígena, negra e popular* (São Leopoldo: Sinodal/EST, 1999), 172-200 and Dilza Porto Gonçalves, *A Memória na Construção de Identidades Étnicas: Um Estudo Sobre as Relações Entre "Alemães" e "Negros" em Canguçu* (master's thesis, Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio Grande do Sul, 2008), 62–64.

IELB seemed to be more concerned with its self-preservation than with reaching out to a massive population of migrants moving to metropolises. And finally, the other aspect listed by the historian – "regionalism" – regards the tendency of the church to focus its work on the Southern region of Brazil, on the states of Rio Grande do Sul and Santa Catarina, where most of the German immigrants were located, and German was more predominantly spoken. This geographic penchant reveals that the important concern with preserving congregational work among German Lutherans led to the problematic neglect of the important work toward those who had not been reached out with the gospel yet, like the massive urban population of Brazilian metropolises (BUSS, 2000, p.42).

More recently, efforts toward forming an urban missiology by the faculty members of the Seminary in São Paulo revealed some of the same challenges. In the 1990s, pastors and theologians of the IELB started voicing a criticism toward the fact that the IELB had moved to the city but had made little or no effort to become an urban church. It goes beyond the scope of this paper to assess whether this criticism was fair or not. Suffices it to say that this recent effort toward urban missions strongly emphasized the importance of crossing boundaries to carry out the mission of the church in Brazilian cities while recognizing that the IELB had failed to do it throughout its history.

A few examples demonstrate this point. In 1992, Leonardo Neitzel, then professor of the Seminary in São Paulo, published an article on the church's motto – "Christ for All" – and said that, "it points to the mercy of God in Christ reaching out to all people indistinctly, crossing cultural, social and geographic boundaries". What Neitzel was then saying is that for the IELB to carry out its mission inspired by its motto the church needed to cross these boundaries. About ten years later, Neitzel assesses the IELB's major mission strategies and points out that, "one still can notice the necessity of a stronger commitment of the congregation, the local leadership, and support so that the strategy may go beyond the families of the church and incorporate other families of the social community in the neighborhood" (NEITZEL, 1992, p.13-21). What is implicit in these words is that in the early 2000s the church was still failing to cross the geographic, social and cultural boundaries to fully account for the challenges of urban Brazil.

All this reveals that the Lutheran church has been faithful to its theology regarding serving as an instrument to crossing the boundary of sin among Lutherans. But the strong concern for self-preservation seems to have limited the church's action toward other people groups. Can the church attend the two commissions toward the urban neighbors of a different ethnicity, social status, and cultures? Our theology, as shown above, says "yes".

But what about the reality of *favelas* in particular? As already indicated, *favelas* represent one of the most difficult challenges to the Lutheran church in Brazil. In this recent effort toward forming an urban missiology, *favelas* are listed as one more problem that results from urbanization, but no specific attempt toward understanding and engaging this reality can be noticed. This does not mean that local congregations and their pastors have never done any mission work in *favelas* eventually. In fact, this researcher has noticed that many faithful pastors and church leaders have tried to develop some kind of mission work in these urban living spaces. But usually these attempts were uninformed in respect to the complex cultural and social reality, on the one hand, and ended up limited to working with those already Lutherans living close by, on the other. In other words, the cultural and social boundaries were hindrances to the gospel, to some extent. To fully account for the reality of *favelas* in the church's mission thinking and practice, congregations need to be aware of *favelas'* cultural and social dynamics. To this complex reality we turn now the attention in order to show how the cruciform engaged presence of the church can help cross social, cultural and geographic boundaries.

AN OVERVIEW OF *FAVELAS* AND THE LUTHERAN CHURCH'S IDENTITY AND MISSION

At the turn of the nineteenth century, while the school-church buildings and cemeteries were arising in rural Brazil as the immigrants' response to their own needs, an urban built environment for sheltering impoverished people began to emerge at the slope of hills and riverbanks in Brazilian Southeastern metropolises. In 1897, the first *favela* arose in Rio de Janeiro when former soldiers of the Brazilian Army, who had been promised urban land at the occasion of their enlistment, now return from their military service to the capital to receive the promise of place. The Brazilian government failed to fulfill this promise, and those soldiers were then authorized by their commanders to build temporary shelter for themselves and their families at the slope of the *Providência* hill, located nearby the headquarters of the Army. The problem, however, is that the promise was never fulfilled, and other impoverished people joined those former soldiers, increasing that kind of housing arrangement. With time, the precarious habitations developed and became permanent ones (QUEIROZ, 2011, p.33-48). In fact, this way of building represents well how *favelas* are built. People first aim at having

a space for shelter for their families, and so start building wherever they find urban land that is not under real-estate speculation, like the slope of hills and riverbanks. In order to do it, people first use fragments of material they find. Later, once the person is able to afford adequate materials, he or she begins replacing the old fragments, enlarging and improving the "shack". As a result, a single *favela* where thousands of people live can combine very precarious shacks with bricklaying houses, creating a strong spatial diversity that embodies their social and cultural diversity (JACQUES, 2001, Seção 1).

These living spaces called *favelas* have increased and spread throughout the country since its first beginning. Brazil's biggest metropolises serve as an example of this. Today, the city of São Paulo has about 12 million people, being 1.2 million *favela* dwellers, and the growth rate of *favelas* is higher than the growth of the rest of the city (2.2% each year in contrast to 1.9%, respectively) (FERREIRA, 2017, n.p). The same phenomenon is happening in Rio de Janeiro, where there are 6.3 million people, and *favela* dwellers already make up 18% of the population (VALLADARES, 2005, p.13).

Many Brazilian scholars have already offered detailed historical accounts about the emergence, development, and increase of *favelas*.[10] Also the limits and strengths of different kinds of sociological lens have been documented.[11] This section, while informed by this sociological scholarly conversation, looks at *favelas* in a way that reveals some of their basic characteristics and cultural dynamics which configure challenges to address or boundaries to cross.

FAVELAS' CULTURAL DYNAMICS

In order to cross the necessary cultural boundaries for congregations to engage the reality of *favelas* in mission it is necessary to perceive the ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity present in these living spaces. In addition, while this reality is very diverse in many aspects, *favela* dwellers in general cultivate a common strong relational culture which is embodied on the built environment. This relational way of living helps people face times of difficulties, the problem

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10 For a list of works on this topic, see Valladares' work, *A Invenção da Favela: Do mito de origem à favela.com*.

11 When one uses sociological dualistic ways of understanding the Brazilian society, the so-called theories of contrast in sociology, one ends up creating the binary opposition "city versus *favela*". Valladares, *A Invenção da Favela: do mito de Origem à favela.com*, *Introduction.*

of poverty, and the fear of violence related to drugs. These thus are important aspects to consider in thinking about congregational presence in *favelas* to preach the gospel and attend the needs of people.

Let us begin by showing why *favelas* are considered spaces of high ethnic, cultural and religious diversity. Studies about the urbanization of Brazil and the reality of *favelas* show that a great amount of *favela* dwellers today is made up of migrants coming from many different regions of Brazil. One of these studies, for instance, indicate that 52% of *favela* dwellers in São Paulo are migrants from different regions, most of them being from Northeastern Brazil. In Rio de Janeiro this number is 29% (MEIRELLES and ATHAYDE, 2014, p.33). This fact implicates that *favelas* have a strong ethnic and cultural diversity which represents the many cultures spread throughout Brazil, a country of continental proportions. The same study also shows that the *favela*-diverse demography entails ethnic and religious diversity as well. While today (2014) 67% of *favela* dwellers are "black [sic]," the rest consists of people from many different backgrounds, including Italian and German descendants (MEIRELLES and ATHAYDE, 2014, p.42). In terms of religion, the majority of people in these urban spaces are Roman Catholics, charismatic Pentecostals, and Afro-Brazilian spiritists.

These data show that entering this reality as congregations is very different from entering the monoculture of German immigrants in Brazil, like the one where Rev. Broders entered in São Pedro. Entering *favelas* for mission purposes is different also from the situation in which pastors attended German descendants living in Brazilian cities where they first built a school as a missionary strategy, the church building, and a church hall, establishing a less-complicated space, in comparison to the surrounding reality of Brazilian cities. To enter the reality of *favelas* requires a theology that leads neither to escapism, be it hermetic or self-preservationist escapism, nor ideals of transforming the culture into a 'Christian culture.' The cruciform engaged presence is what this paper proposes for this task. But before showing how this theology and the kind of presence that flows from it can in fact help with crossing boundaries and engaging this diverse reality, it is necessary to see another important characteristic of *favelas*.

In spite of all the diversity present in *favelas*, there is one common cultural thread among *favela* dwellers that deserves attention for the present purpose, namely, the strong relational culture cultivated in these living spaces and embodied in the built environment.

Consider, for instance, how the characteristics of houses and the spaces

between them embody and foster a relational culture. An example from a particular house of a *favela* in the city of São Paulo reveals this point. This is a description made by Brazilian Renato Meirelles and Celso Athayde, both former dwellers of these living spaces:

> The ground floor is archaic, [because its style] is a thing of the 1980s, the work of the couple. There is a second floor, [with a] better workmanship, whose walls exhibit another type of brick, and a grouting very well done. [That] is the dimension [or space] of the children [of the couple]. In the turn of the century, however, the grandchildren also wanted some retreat and privacy. In the house which, like a tree, grew toward the skies, now there is a third floor. This one now has plaster on the walls; it is a manifestation of esteem and respect for the boys (MEIRELLES and ATHAYDE, 2014, p.156).

Notice that the construction of this particular house was verticalized and enlarged to accommodate more than one generation in the same house, which is very common in *favelas*. Houses with such characteristics reveal what is usually called 'extended family,' which is characteristic of a relational culture and important to be considered here.

This relational culture is reflected not only in the residencies but also in the common spaces, the spaces in between the constructions. Because the pattern of building is informal and according to one's economic conditions and the size of the family, the spaces between houses form alleys where people walk and interact. These spaces serve as spaces of intense social interaction: "neighborhood relationships [are] marked by intense sociability, with a strong valorization of common spaces as place of co-living" (SILVA, 2009, p.23). Notice again that the apparent precarious space for circulation is seen from the perspective of *favela* dwellers as a place of cultivation of relationships with the neighbor next door who is probably from another background.

This relational culture embodied on the built environment also leads people to work together to overcome difficulties or accomplish projects. Consider the observations of Ruben Georg Oliven, in *Anthropology of Urban Groups*. Objecting to the view that the city necessarily fragments community life and leads to individualism by necessity, he mentions the experience of migrants to the city of São Paulo, where these people built their houses in the peripheries through *mutirões* ("popular joined efforts"). In these *mutirões*, groups of neighbors would come together to help one another, and the way to pay back

for the help received would be to join the group again when another neighbor would need help (OLIVEN, 2007, p.39). This is another aspect to be considered in the church's answer to the first Great Commission, which will receive attention shortly.

This relational culture used as a social strategy to answer *favelas* dwellers' needs is also of extreme importance to create a safe network to face violence related to drugs. In spite of the prejudices of the larger society, most of the people in *favelas* are normal, hardworking people who just want to raise their kids to be good citizens. But they happen to share common spaces with drug dealers who often recruit the kids for trafficking drugs. In the face of this reality, one wonders about the following question: how do these people can live and feel safe in such an environment? Brazilian Sociologist Cristina Vital da Cunha wrote a book as an answer to this very question. She demonstrates that the relationships people have in *favelas* sometimes are the only thing that makes them feel safe (DA CUNHA, 2014).[12] People create a network of relationships that helps solve internal conflicts and allows the people to be aware about when confrontations among drug dealer groups will take place. This means that, when one visits a *favela*, it is always better to be with someone from the community and walk side by side with this dweller, who will help build such a network. The experience of this researcher (who is also a pastor engaged in a *favela* in São Paulo in mission work with his congregation) is that, with time, to walk with a dweller is no longer necessary. Still, relationships are always of extreme importance (and will receive more attention shortly).

All this is important for the IELB to consider as it intends to have an engaged presence in the city in a way that accounts for the complexity of *favelas*. One could say that relationships are important today in any mission field, as contemporary urban missiology has already stressed.[13] But what this exploration of the social, physical, and cultural reality of *favelas* reveals, advancing the urban missiology's reflection, is that for the church to build this kind of relationships and engage the relational culture of *favelas*, congregations need to attend the following points: they need a theological understanding of cultures that values cultural diversity while still rejects whatever opposes God's

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12 In her ethnographic research, Vital da Cunha found out that the state is usually either absent or perceived as bringing more violence to *favelas* as far as the police is concerned..

13 See Paul Sparks, Tim Soerens, and Dwight J. Friesen, *The New Parish: How Neighborhood Churches Are Transforming Mission, Discipleship and Community* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2014) and Gea Gort, *God in the City: A Missional Way of Life in an Urban Context* (n.p. Harpon Digital, n.d.), Loc. 307, Kindle edition. These books exemplify this emphasis on relationships.

will; they need pastors and leaders who are able to spend time with people in *favelas*, who are willing to work with the people in attending the first Commission; in addition, congregations' leaders and pastors need to be willing to walk alongside a dweller for orientation and safety purposes. One way of starting to move toward these urban missional practices, while being faithful to the core Lutheran ecclesial identity, is through the cruciform engaged presence of the church in *favelas*.

THE CRUCIFORM ENGAGED PRESENCE OF THE LUTHERAN CHURCH IN *FAVELAS*

The cruciform presence of the church in the world emphasizes our relationship with God in which we are passively born into a community of faith, but this emphasis does not neglect our presence in the world through which the church looks at the reality of the neighbor and acts in love. In addition, this kind of presence is not triumphalist, but cruciform. As indicated above, "cruciform" also evokes Luther's theology of the cross, which affirms God's presence not only within creation in general but also in particular places in the world as the Word encounters sinners, even in the midst of suffering and misery (as the cross event does not let one forget). Therefore, what drives congregations to *favelas* is not a pretentious attempt to transform the culture neither to impose one. Rather, congregations can be present in *favelas* to serve as God's instruments so that the Word continues encountering sinners where they are, and so that God's creaturely gifts can be welcomed and shared. Therefore, in order to advance with the application of the theology offered above to the reality of *favelas*, I will treat the characteristics of *favelas* accordingly in light of the cruciform engaged presence of the church.

THE CRUCIFORM PRESENCE AND THE RELATIONAL CULTURE OF *FAVELAS*

To look at the reality of *favelas* in light of the understanding that human life is cruciform leads congregations to recognize that human beings are relational beings – in relationship with God and with creation, vertically and horizontally. This means, first, that congregations do not neglect that their distinctive task is the preaching of the gospel, which is the only means by which the Spirit kindles faith in people's hearts so that their relationship with the Creator may be restored. In addition, to affirm the vertical dimension as part of what it

means to be a human creature helps one understand the religious diversity in *favelas* while indicating that the church needs to continuous preaching. The fact that we are relational beings vertically implicates that we are essentially religious, which results in that humans either believe the true God or create their own gods to fill the void left by the separation from the Creator as the result of sin (which can be seen in Luther's understanding of the First Commandment). To understand the religious diversity in *favelas* within this dimension is important because it prevents one from thinking of all religious expressions in *favelas* as mere cultural diversity, which belongs to the horizontal dimension. Of course, one's belief system often is reflected in some cultural practices. The present point does not deny this fact. The purpose of this point is just to avoid the danger of situating idolatrous religious expressions within the ambit of human culture, resulting in that the sin of idolatry is no longer called out as such. To see life as cruciform avoids this danger, reaffirms the necessity of preaching the gospel, and all this without neglecting the horizontal relationships.

The cruciform life postulates that we are relational beings also in the horizontal dimension, and this leads congregations to cultivate good relationships wherever they are and, more importantly, to value the relational culture fostered and embodied in *favelas*. This means that congregations which intend to engage this reality in mission need to spend time with people to build relationships. In practical terms, this means that if a congregation is working toward planting a church in a *favela*, its pastor and leaders may need to be present there not only during the event of the worship service when the Word is being preached and the Sacraments administered; they need to be present there also to talk to people, to hear their stories or merely to play soccer with the youth. The experience of pastors who have worked in *favelas* has shown that pastoral care sometimes begins on the soccer field, because it is there where the kids perceive the pastor as someone who can be trusted. Of course, good interpersonal relationships do not make one a Christian and are not the distinct criterion to determine the existence of the Church in a particular place; it is only through the Word that God does it all. But it is important to recall that through the Creed we affirm life and presence in creation, which means that the characteristics of our humanity such as being a relational creature are of great importance for the church to better envision the scope of God's mission and the church's participation in it. In this way, by not neglecting the importance of presence and relationships, hopefully, by God's power, pastors may be able to continue the pastoral care started while playing soccer, now during the sermon, having the same youth present in the church during Service. When congregations value the horizontal relationships

of the cruciform life, they are enabled to make an effort to build relationship with people, helping with the church's presence in mission in *favelas*.

The importance of building relationships in this cultural setting, as just shown, is also a matter of safety. Although this is not a theological point, the presence of the church in a *favela* partially depends on understanding this point. In the sociological work of Vital da Cunha, she begins her book by noting that both high church Roman Catholicism and historical Protestantism are absent from *favelas*. The sociologist does not offer a straightforward answer for why these groups are absent from this context, but she implicitly indicates that they have assimilated a view of life that is typical of modern societies, a view that would explain the absence. In such societies, most of the citizens rely on the presence of the State through the police around their homes and workplace or on security technology in order to feel safe. If they cannot rely on either of these two mechanisms in a certain place, people avoid being there. Now, since in a *favela* one cannot rely on neither of the two, people avoid *favelas*. This then would explain why these two traditions (Lutherans included) in general are not present in *favelas*. Notice, therefore, why the church's presence in these living spaces to some extent depends on building relationships to carry out its mission. Sometimes theological discussions neglect these sociological aspects because the distinctive criterion to identify the existence of the church in a particular place is the Word and the Sacraments being faithfully preached and administered according to Scripture. But this sociological aspect reveals that without interpersonal relationships there isn't anyone to preach, as the church becomes absent from *favelas* because of the fear of violence. To put it in other words, if congregations neglect the horizontal dimension of the cruciform life and the characteristics of our humanity, which Luther teaches us to thank for in the Frist Article, this neglect hinders the distinctive task of the church, the preaching of the gospel.

This neglect of these aspects may explain why the faithful response to the two commissions toward the Germans did not go beyond the cultural boundaries in the city. Lutherans of the IELB are not against reaching out to people from another background. Quite the opposite, one can see tears in the eyes of Lutherans when congregations baptize and receive someone who had not been received in God's kingdom as a child, someone from a different background. But the fundamental emphasis on the passive nature of our relationship with God often becomes the only object of attention in theology and practice, and this then ends up neglecting important aspects of life in the world toward the neighbor. Through the understanding of life as cruciform, congregations can be

reminded that they live by the Word before God and also to share the Word with others before the world.

Therefore, the points above regarding the value of the relational culture existent in *favelas* can be welcomed and cultivated by Lutheran congregations because of the understanding of life as cruciform and the affirmation of presence in the world confessed by the Creed. But there are also other important aspects to be discussed in terms of attending the two Great Commissions in the face of the reality of *favelas*.

CONGREGATIONAL ENGAGEMENT IN *FAVELAS* AND THE FIRST GREAT COMMISSION

One of the points drawn from the exploration of the relational culture in *favelas* was that this way of living helps people respond to some of their own creaturely needs, and this is of great importance in the church's answer to the first Great Commission. As the reader may recall, many *favela* houses are built by popular joined effort of mutual help (*mutirões*). But how should this inflect a congregations' actions in *favelas?* To put this concisely, congregations should learn how to work WITH people and not merely do social work TO or FOR them.

Answering the first Great Commission in a way that accounts for this relational way of responding to their needs help congregations avoid falling into caritative paternalistic action. This is important because Christian institutional presence in *favelas* often are limited to social action that fall into these problems. One of the criticisms raised by sociological work toward Christianity is the fact that often Christian denominations act as if *favela* dwellers were the mere object of the church's piety and charity. But as the exploration above reveals, these dwellers cultivate ways of life that counter their hardships in life. Therefore, as the church enters this reality, it would be wiser to use this way of answering their creaturely needs. While people have this social strategy, not always do they have the financial and human resources to solve all their problems. This means in practical terms that congregations' leaders can try to identify areas in which the congregation can work WITH the people (and not TO or FOR them) to answer perceived needs without neglecting their own responsibilities in the face of personal and community problems. Such needs might go from improving one's house by joining the *mutirões* or raising resources for it on the one hand, to help care for local schools or offering school tutoring on the other. This is where the good use of reason becomes important in the decision process about the course of action to be taken.

Another characteristic of *favelas* is the strong ethnic and cultural diversity. As the reader can recall, quantitative researches have shown that *favelas* in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo are formed by migrants from all regions of Brazil from different ethnic background. Now, it is possible to apply the theology offered under the first Great Commission above in order to understand the data qualitatively from a theological perspective. The fact that people from all over Brazil came to live in *favelas* implies that they brought their particular cultures with them. This means that their dwellers have many cultural tastes, sing and enjoy music through many different instruments and rhythms, in addition to organizing community life in different ways. All these elements, when viewed in light of the First Article can be understood as part of God's good creaturely gifts. For the purpose of crossing boundaries, this means that, just as Lutherans in rural Brazil organized themselves according to the culture brought from the homeland, the creaturely gifts of *favela* dwellers can be put to the service of facilitating the preaching of the gospel in that locality, so that all in that emerging community of Lutheran faith may "fully obtain daily forgiveness of sins". To use these strategies to facilitate the Lutheran church's presence in mission in *favelas* can be seen as part of an intentional effort of congregations to engage this reality to serve and share the gospel, just as the church has already done when the focus of their missionary effort was to establish Lutheran congregations among German Lutherans throughout Brazil.

This reflection on cultural diversity from a theological perspective can inflect congregational decisions at many points in regards to how to organize a new congregation arising in a *favela*, from how the church building can be used to answer the creaturely needs of people to how local leaders need to be chosen and trained. In doing this, this reflection is speaking more to the how-question of ecclesiology – how to be a Lutheran church in mission in *favelas*. But due to the more specific purpose of this study, it is important to advance the reflection toward how the affirmation of the cultural characteristics of *favelas* can inflect those aspects that are more closely related to the distinct task of the church, as congregations answer the second Great Commission.

CONGREGATIONAL ENGAGEMENT IN *FAVELAS* AND THE SECOND GREAT COMMISSION

The major cultural characteristic of *favelas* identified above – the strong relational culture – inflects strategy and sheds light on theological reflection on aspects related to contextualization. Let us first look at how this particular

culture inflects strategy, using one particular example. One wide-spread mission strategy used in the IELB is the handing out of pamphlets in the streets. To hand pamphlets was part of one mission strategy when the mission work was oriented primarily toward German immigrants. In the "port city immigrant missions" mentioned above, pamphlets written in German would be handed to the just-arrived immigrants who could read and identify themselves as Lutherans. (LUEKING, 1964, p.59-63). The strategy then was very helpful. Today, handing pamphlets can still be useful for what one could call in-transit evangelistic activity. This activity regards the handing of material to those in the move, at train and metro stations in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, in their daily (in-a-rush) commute, for instance. In this case, people do not have time to stop and talk, and usually are suspicious of strangers that engage them in conversation. To these people under this circumstance, this strategy may be helpful, if the purpose is that more people have access to God's written Word. But in a strong relational culture like in *favelas,* the strategy might not be as helpful. This strategy presupposes the literacy of people and that everyone likes to receive such a material for free. But this assumptions should not be brought to a *favela* (maybe neither to any place in Brazilian cities), because not everyone can read in this context, and because the strategy might send the wrong message that the church wants people to believe the gospel but is not willing to relate with them closely. This would be problematic in any relational culture. But if congregations put their effort primarily to the building of relationships, then to give a Bible, a devotional book, or even a simple pamphlet, explaining how to use them, it might be very positive. In this second case, the material given would be perceived as real gift from someone with whom the receiver has a good relationship, as resulting from a relation mediated by trust.

And finally, the cultural characteristics treated above shed light in other, more crucial points. One of the appropriate concerns that faithful Christians have when they are crossing cultures to preach the gospel is that, in the attempt to communicate the biblical message in a way that people can understand, the biblical teaching ends up being adapted to the culture in such a way that the gospel is made captive to that culture. The same concern should be the object of the church's attention when entering the reality of *favelas.* As mentioned above, there is the danger that religious expressions which embody idolatry are viewed as horizontal, cultural aspects to be welcomed. This particular danger is avoided when the proper distinctions of the cruciform life are made, as already demonstrated. But still, how exactly can congregations engage *favelas* in mission in a way that the gospel is not made captive to the culture?

Considering the elements of cultural diversity mentioned above as part of God's good creaturely gifts sheds light on how pastors can develop their work so that the gospel is not made captive to any culture, neither to their own culture. If cultures can be understood primarily as God's good gifts, as part of the First Article and of humans' exercise of dominion over the creation, the primary concern when Lutherans enter new cultural contexts should not be regarding how to plant a congregation that will mirror congregations of Southern Brazil in every way. This would create a transcultural uniformity that elevates the cultural gifts of those who preach to the expanse of those gifts of the receivers of the gospel. Because of what Lutherans confess in the Creed, they should not deny or reject the cultural gifts they encounter in their mission practices. While the way the what-question of ecclesiology implies that the church be organized so that "everyone may fully obtain daily forgiveness of sins," centered in the Word (proclaimed and visible), this does not mean that the how-question of ecclesiology has to be answered in a way that the receivers of the gospel need to overcome cultural boundaries to be part of the church. Of course, people's daily practices will probably change as they are explained the Commandments and learn that we need to hear God's Word weekly and meditate on it daily. But their cultural gifts do not need to be replaced by cultural gifts from another culture, when such gifts do not deny or reject God's design for human life in both dimensions.

This means that, in the face of the reality of *favelas,* in trying to deliver a message that is faithful to Scriptures and in accordance with the Lutheran Confessions' understanding of them, the preacher and his congregation do not need to create another challenge, namely, the challenge of making the very diverse community of *favela* to cross the boundaries related to music, rhythm, instruments, perceptions of beauty or taste (which might never change). This self-imposed challenge would run the risk of making the gospel captive to a particular way of organizing the church in external things. For this reason, this paper proposes the following in this regard: it is more faithful to our confession of the Creed and the understanding of human life as cruciform to use the creaturely gifts of culture already present in *favelas* regarding these external things.

This therefore has implication for the worship service, and the examples below can help focus on that which is the most important things to avoid that the church's message becomes captive to cultures (both the culture of the receivers and of the senders of the message). Pastors and congregations do not need to concern about how long it is going to take for a person in the *favela* to want to

learn how to play the organ, and then to have the means to study the instrument and then, finally, to know how to play it. Rather, pastors will be able to focus their attention on how during the order of the Service the new community of believers being born by the gospel can sing led by their own musical instruments the words that give 'glory to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost,' using their gifts and inculcating on them that Christian Lutheran worship is primarily a Trinitarian Service. In order to do this, pastors may have to spend more time in the beginning of the mission work to prepare a liturgical order which helps the people to have a Trinitarian and Christocentric Service in a way that speaks to mind and heart. Pastor may have to spend more time teaching that it is important for everyone to be there when the Service begins, even if it stars a little later than planned. And the reason for this is that the beginning is when pastors, in behalf of Christ, will not only inform people about how to find forgiveness in Christ but also to forgive them, as if Christ were doing it. To focus on this would help also inculcate in them that the starting point of Lutheran Service is God coming to us and encountering us, sinners, where we are, in our sin and in our culture.

In other words, to reflect about an ecclesial Lutheran identity and the reality of *favelas* requires that those elements which configure the heart of Biblical teaching and of Lutheran theology are properly distinguished from those elements which are part of God's good creaturely gifts. Through the cruciform engaged presence of the church in *favelas,* this can be done in a way that cultural, social, and geographic boundaries are crossed, and the starting point of Lutheran ecclesial identity, from which flows "true forms of worship", is faithfully preserved.

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