Making Disciples Among American Evangelicals

Part 1: Through Catechesis

Rev. Dr. Matthew Richard
Disclaimer:

Sessions will be like drinking from a fire hydrant!
Suggestions:

*Drink Fast!*
Part 1: Making Disciples Among American Evangelicals

Objective:
What are the challenges of Lutheran Catechesis/Discipleship among those with an American Evangelical background.
Who Are These American Evangelicals?
Who Are American Evangelicals?

In assessing the various streams that make up American Evangelicalism, Harold Senkbeil identifies four streams:

1. New England Calvinists,
2. Arminian Revivalists,
3. European Pietists,
4. Fundamentalistic/Modernist Controversy.

Harold, Senkbeil, *Sanctification: Christ in Action* (Pages 19-52)
Harold Senkbeil’s Summary:

“Lutherans and Evangelicals may share a common respect for the authority of the Word of God and a common vocabulary in the proclamation of Christ’s atoning work, but they each breathe from different atmosphere.

Like Luther and Zwingli before them, they may shake hands but must unhappily conclude that they have a ‘different spirit.’ The differences are not incidental to, but rather integral to the gospel:

Is salvation God’s action or the believer’s?

That has been the basic issue all along. It continues to be.”

Harold Senkbeil, Sanctification: Christ in Action (page 52).
Who Are American Evangelicals?

Two popular and respected Calvinist theologians in America, R.C. Sproul and Michael Horton, have defined American Evangelicalism not by the influences of a movement but by a man, a man named Charles Finney.

Sproul states that Finney could be classified as “the patron saint of 20th century Evangelicalism; a Hall of Famer for Evangelical Christianity in America.”

Horton states that Finney is “the tallest marker in the shift from Reformation orthodoxy, evident in the Great Awakening (under Edwards and Whitefield) to Arminian (indeed, even Pelagian) revivalism, evident from the Second Great Awakening to the present.”

R.C. Sproul, “The Pelagian Captivity of the Church”
Michael Horton, “The Disturbing Legacy of Charles Finney”
Summary of Charles Finney:

- Denied the doctrine of original sin
- Denied Christ’ imputed righteousness
- Purported what can only be classified as Pelagian theology (i.e., a robust decision theology).
- Introduced many new measures within the revival ethos such as the anxious bench and altar calls.

Thus, mankind was elevated due to:

- Sin being downplayed,
- The means of grace being replaced with new measures,
- The work of the Holy Spirit in conversion being exchanged for the workings of mankind’s will.
Who Are American Evangelicals?

In my personal visits with Dr. Phillip Cary he has suggested that a major characteristic within what he calls ‘New Evangelicalism,’ comes forth from the Keswick Movement.

According to Cary, in the course of the interaction between the nineteenth-century American Revivalism and the holiness tradition growing out of Methodist perfectionism,

“YOU GET THE CRUCIAL INNOVATION
OF THE DOCTRINE OF THE
‘baptism of the Holy Spirit’ or
‘being filled with the Spirit’,

which fed into Pentecostalism, as well as Keswick and various offshoots of the Holiness Movement like the Nazarenes.”
Practically speaking, what this looked like was a two-tiered Christianity. The first stage could be classified as a ‘carnal Christianity,’ and the second stage could be classified as ‘spiritual Christianity.’

“To move from the lower to the higher state takes a definite act of faith or ‘consecration,’ the prerequisite to being filled with the Spirit. This consecration means an ‘absolute surrender,’ almost always described by the Biblical term ‘yielding.’”

George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 77-78.
Who Are American Evangelicals?

In my personal visits with Rev. Jonathan Fisk he has observed that present-day American Evangelicalism is effectively

• eighteenth-to nineteenth-century Wesley-Methodism (i.e., Christian perfectionism, revivalism, etc...)
  • with a strong emphasis of Baptist theology of Baptism (i.e., believer’s baptism only),
  • along with premillennial dispensationalism (i.e., *Left Behind* end times theology).
Who Are American Evangelicals?

Carl Trueman asserts the following about Evangelicalism:

Evangelicals have

- primacy of experience,
- are minimal on doctrine,
- have a high emphasis on conversion,
- and embrace activism, that is, the living out of the Gospel.

Carl Trueman, *The Read Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Pages 109-219)
Who Are American Evangelicals?

From the seven streams, as well as the feedback from six different theologians and pastors, I humbly set forth a theological definition of the current national-cultural form of American Evangelicalism as:

1. Having a diminished view of original sin and its consequences (i.e., inflated view of mankind and man’s abilities).
2. Having a semi-Pelagian view of free will (i.e., robust decision theology).
3. Focusing on the renewed Christian life by encouraging individuals to surrender to God (i.e., two-tiered Christianity).
4. Emphasizing personal experience over doctrine (i.e., looking inward instead of outward).
5. Practically functioning with a ‘gospel that works’ (i.e., pragmatism) in regard to evangelism and activism.
6. Being Premillennial Dispensational (i.e., Left Behind Books Theology)
7. Disregarding the central role of the sacraments and struggling to see them as efficacious.
The Great Divide

A growing divide is occurring between American Evangelicals and the sixteenth-century Reformation truths.

Otherwise stated, the growing distance between American Evangelicalism and its historical Protestant roots, as well as the increasing theological concerns, may not be the primary causes of the difficult journey into Lutheran thought; but surely these distresses contribute by not making a person’s pilgrimage any easier or less confusing.
Mark Noll’s Assessment:

If alive today, could the Reformers even identify any remnants of the sixteenth-century Reformation in American Evangelicalism?

In Mark Noll’s book *America’s God*, he states that

**If the Reformers were alive today, they would find themselves further removed from modern-day Evangelicalism than Medieval Roman Catholicism.**
The Gospel Coalition’s Assessment:

“The Gospel Coalition exists to promote Gospel centered ministry to the next generation.

We are a group of pastors that are committed to getting the Gospel right and getting the Gospel out.

We really don’t want to become a kind of hegemonic ministry that controls everything or a denomination or in any way take away from the priority of the local church.

We are simply a collection of Christian leaders who desire to serve the church.

We believe that Evangelicalism is adrift; having become a massive collection of lowest common denominator theological commitments.

It has become enamored with commercialism, theological fads, social issues, and other distractions away from the Gospel.

Evangelicalism suffers from an identity crisis.”

Tullian Tchividjian’s Assessment:

Tullian Tchividjian, a grandson of Billy Graham and pastor of Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church of Fort Lauderdale, Florida, began an organization—much like The Gospel Coalition—called Liberate.

In 2011 I had the opportunity to exchange several emails with Pastor Tchividjian, and in January 2012 I attended a conference where he was a speaker.

To my surprise, in his session he said that he saw himself and his calling to be an Evangelist to American Evangelicals, since the many Evangelicals that he had encountered over the years had either

lost the Gospel or

had the Gospel buried underneath layers of moralism.
The Alliance of Confessing Evangelical’s Assessment:

“Evangelical churches today are increasingly dominated by the spirit of this age rather than by the Spirit of Christ. As evangelicals, we call ourselves to repent of this sin and to recover the historic Christian faith. . . .

Today the light of the Reformation has been significantly dimmed. The consequence is that the word “evangelical" has become so inclusive as to have lost its meaning. We face the peril of losing the unity it has taken centuries to achieve. Because of this crisis and because of our love of Christ, his gospel and his church, we endeavor to assert anew our commitment to the central truths of the Reformation and of historic evangelicalism. These truths we affirm not because of their role in our traditions, but because we believe that they are central to the Bible.”

Ramifications of the Great Divide:

The assumption that we are working with is that the more different a person’s background is, the more difficult the journey will be (i.e., the greater the difference in epistemic assumptions and worldviews, the greater the difficulty it will be for a person to journey into new epistemological systems and dissimilar worldview lenses).

What does this mean?

American Evangelicals will need extensive Catechesis in coming into the Lutheran Church!
Are American Evangelicals Coming To Lutheranism?
David Kinnaman, the president of the Barna Group, recently published a book in which he interviewed thousands of individuals ages 18-29 who are leaving the church. In his book You Lost Me, he explores the drop-out problem among these young adults, showing that prior to the 1960s young adults were just as likely to attend church as older individuals.

However, Kinnaman shows that after the 1960s the trends diverge, and there began to be a significant disengagement of younger adults in the church. As a result, Kinnaman classifies these disengaged younger adults as nomads and prodigals.

David Kinnaman’s Assessment:

Kinnaman says the problem is that the church has abandoned these nomads. Thus, in a very striking conclusion Kinnaman states,

“After countless interviews and conversations, I am convinced that historic and traditional practices, and orthodox and wisdom-laden ways of believing, are what the next generation really needs.”

Rebecca VanDoodewaard recently stated in the Christian Pundit,

“young Christians are going over to Catholicism and high Anglicanism/Lutheranism in droves, despite growing up in low Protestant churches.”

Gracy Olmstead recently stated in the American Conservative,

“[Lee] Nelson believes a sacramental hunger lies at the heart of what many millennials feel. “We are highly wired to be experiential,” he says. In the midst of our consumer culture, young people “ache for sacramentality.”

“If you ask me why kids are going high church, I’d say it’s because the single greatest threat to our generation and to young people nowadays is the deprivation of meaning in our lives,” Cone says.

“In the liturgical space, everything becomes meaningful. In the offering up of the bread and wine, we see the offering up of the wheat and grain and fruits of the earth, and God gives them back in a sanctified form.”

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We’re so thirsty for meaning that goes deeper, that can speak to our entire lives, hearts, and wallets, that we’re really thirsty to be attached to the earth and to each other and to God.

The liturgy is a historical way in which that happens.”

The millennial generation is seeking a holistic, honest, yet mysterious truth that their current churches cannot provide. Where they search will have large implications for the future of Christianity. Protestant churches that want to preserve their youth membership may have to develop a greater openness toward the treasures of the past.

One thing seems certain:

This “sacramental yearning” will not go away.”

What Can We Expect From American Evangelicals Coming Into Confessional Lutheran Thought?
The purpose of my Major Applied Research Project was to:

Examine the journey of American Evangelicals into Lutheran thought.

Otherwise stated, the research project studied the emotional struggles, linguistic confusion, worldview changes, and epistemological shifts that happen during the pilgrimage between two theological traditions.
The Major Applied Research Project

The research findings are intended to identify valuable insights and provide avenues of comfort for those who are making this transition.

Furthermore, the findings of this research are intended to aid Lutheran pastors as they care for and shepherd individuals who are coming into Lutheranism from American Evangelicalism.
The Major Applied Research Project

The primary components of this study were the surveys. Three surveys were administered to 334 different individuals who have or presently are entering Lutheran thought.

In total, 714 surveys were completed by the research participants producing approximately 500 pages of multiple choice answers, Likert scale choices, text box responses, and essay replies.

An Analysis Team of nine men and three women (clergy, laymen, and church workers from four different denominations) was organized to assess the data.
The Findings: Sociological and Theological Synopsis

The participants stated that they were impacted on average by 3.8 different theological movements and influences.

The top four movements and influences were/are:

1. Revivalism (61.0%),
2. Attitudes flowing from certain streams of Pietism (60.3%),
3. Dispensationalism (55.1%), and
4. Fundamentalism (52.8%).
The Findings: Sociological and Theological Synopsis

The majority of participants stated that before beginning the journey towards Lutheranism, they were in American Evangelicalism for 15-30 years (49.8%) and were on average a part of approximately two denominational backgrounds.

The two most common denominational backgrounds were:
  • Baptist denominations (54.6%) and
  • Non-denominational churches (47.9%).
The Findings: Sociological and Theological Synopsis

Besides their backgrounds, 51.3% of respondents shared that the journey from American Evangelicalism into Confessional Lutheran thought lasted one to four years.

The other 48.7% indicated that the journey lasted from less than three months to more than ten years.
The Findings: Sociological and Theological Synopsis

Furthermore, the participant responses showed that the individuals came to the Lutheran church at any time in their journey.

Otherwise stated, they came into Lutheranism:

- When they first started to understand Lutheranism (32.3%),
- Somewhere in the middle of figuring out Lutheranism (24.3%),
- Or after they had spent a lot of time processing Lutheranism (20.3%).
Finally, 82.7% of all respondents that completed their journey into Confessional Lutheran thought found their home in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, while the remaining 17.3% found their home in other Lutheran Synods:

- The Evangelical Lutheran Synod (2.0%),
- Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (3.6%),
- Association of American Lutheran Churches (1.2%), and so forth.
The research participants were questioned why and/or what caused them to begin the journey into Lutheran thought. In response to this question they stated, generally speaking, that they were despairing in works righteousness and had an internal conflict, which resulted in a crisis of faith.

While the crisis of faith gave them instability in American Evangelicalism, they were influenced by family and friends, as well as Lutheran media and books, to begin the journey into Lutheran thought.
The Findings: Impressions of Journey

Generally speaking, the worst things for the participants were:

- Unsettledness coupled with the loss of family and friends
- Friction over doctrinal discussion
- Friction from the switching of churches.
- Lament over the lost time that they spent in synergistic beliefs.
- Struggle to quickly learn new things such as terms, Lutheran worship, music, liturgy, doctrines, etc.
Why Catechesis Is Important:

American Evangelicals face very large hurdles/obstacles and bring several presuppositions that need to be addressed and resolved during their Lutheran catechesis process.

**The following information is evidence of this large hurdle and the following material is valuable to consider during catechesis.**
Considerations During Catechesis: Ways of Acquiring Knowledge

A follow up survey for ‘The Becoming Lutheran Research Project’
was conducted January 4, 2014 to January 15, 2014. The survey was conducted among those who participated in the initial ‘Becoming Lutheran Research Project’.

According to this follow up survey, there is a clear indication that when entering Confessional Lutheranism from American Evangelicalism there is...
Considerations During Catechesis: Ways of Acquiring Knowledge

A decline in the use of Conventional Wisdom (73.3% decrease) and Mysticism (85.71% decrease),

while there are slight increases to the use of Logic/Reason (17.19% increase) and Revelation as expressed in God’s Word (10.68% increase).
Considerations During Catechesis: Ways of Acquiring Knowledge

SOME EXAMPLES Answering “HOW DO I KNOW?”

Conventional Wisdom:
Because nearly everyone in my community and church thinks so.

Mysticism:
I know because of the spiritual connection that I had with God through my inward contemplation and self-surrender to Him; I experienced God.

Logic:
Because, since A was greater than B, and B was greater than C, I concluded that A was great than C.

Revelation:
For the Bible tells me so; or, thus saith the Lord.
Things to Consider

What will be the results be upon a person who experiences a decline in mysticism and conventional wisdom, as well as an increase in revelation and logic?

Are these significant changes in how one acquires knowledge?
Considerations During Catechesis: Where They Acquire Knowledge

Before Journey:
Popular best-selling authors who seemed to be in Evangelical bookstore top-ten lists at one point or another. More specifically these authors are not historic, but currently alive, with the exception of C.S. Lewis and Francis Schaeffer. From what their local pastors were teaching.

During and After Journey:
Not from Top-ten authors but from dead Lutheran theologians, as well as from present-day teaching sources like *Issues, Etc.*, *Worldview Everlasting*, *White Horse Inn*, *Fighting for the Faith*, and *Concordia Publishing House*.

Furthermore, participants seemed to be much more specific and selective in what they read and who they learn from compared to how they operated before with American Evangelicalism.
More Things to Consider

What will be the result upon a person who has a shift in where they acquire knowledge?

Will this impact other things in their life (i.e., such as their worldview, language, and emotions?)
Considerations During Catechesis: Changes In Viewing The Bible

When asked what changes happened in how they read and understood the Bible, the research participants in the qualitative survey stated that:

The biggest change in how they read the Bible was in their new understanding of Law and Gospel.

Thus, this understanding of Law and Gospel helped respondents to see that they previously read the Bible as a ‘how to’ handbook on Christian living.

Now though, respondents see that the Bible is not about the Christian (i.e., me), but about Jesus Christ and His grace for them (i.e., for me).
Considerations During Catechesis: Changes In Viewing The Christian Faith

When asked what changes happened in how they viewed the Christian faith (i.e., God, Salvation, etc.), the research participants in the qualitative survey stated that:

The biggest change was in how they saw salvation

**NOT depending on themselves and their works, but on JESUS CHRIST and HIS atoning work FOR them.**

This change brought about tremendous relief and assurance, according to the participants.

Furthermore, there was a change in what respondents viewed as sacraments. While in American Evangelicalism, altar calls, sinner’s prayer, and making decisions for Christ had saving power. Since the journey into Lutheranism though, the Lord’s Supper and Baptism, along with the Word, are now viewed as God’s saving action.
Considerations During Catechesis: Changes In Viewing The Christian Faith

Furthermore, there was a change in what respondents viewed as SACRAMENTS.

While in American Evangelicalism, 

altar calls, sinner’s prayer, and 

making decisions for Christ 

were believed to have saving power.

Since the journey into Lutheranism though, 

the Lord’s Supper and Baptism, along with the Word, 

are now viewed as God’s saving action.
Considerations During Catechesis: Changes In Viewing The Christian Faith

When asked what changes happened in how they viewed themselves (i.e., their anthropology, opinions of self, etc.), the research participants in the qualitative survey stated that:

**The biggest change was in how they viewed their fallen-ness;**

They saw themselves much worse than they previously assessed themselves to be.

Also, the respondents expressed feeling relief and contentment since they learned that they didn’t have to strive and couldn’t acquire a sinless condition;

they now saw themselves simultaneously as a **sinner** and a **saint**.
Questions and/or Comments About Changes to Worldview?
Considerations During Catechesis: Changes In Language

Generally speaking, respondents shared that the biggest linguistic emphasis change was in WHO DOES THE VERBS.

Otherwise stated, in American Evangelicalism the respondents saw themselves doing the majority of Christian verbs, and within Confessional Lutheranism the respondents now see God doing the majority of the verbs.
Considerations During Catechesis: Changes In Language

Ascent theology vs. Descent theology

Is Christianity some kind of escalator endeavor where mankind strives “to rise up more and more, closer and closer to God’s level?” It may seem like it when the Christian is never the direct object of the verbs, but constantly the one who is to perform the verbs toward God.

Alas, Christianity is not the Christian ascending upon the Holy One; rather it is the Holy One descending to the Christian.

As proposed by Luther, Christianity is a pattern of continual receptivity as God delivers forgiveness to mankind.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>American Evangelical Emphasis</th>
<th>Confessional Lutheran Emphasis</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grace</td>
<td>Connected to my decision</td>
<td>God’s gift alone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faith</td>
<td>Self-generated</td>
<td>God’s gift to me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baptism</td>
<td>Mark of my obedience/my action</td>
<td>God delivering forgiving grace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communion</td>
<td>An act of my remembrance</td>
<td>Christ’s true body and blood for the forgiveness of sins</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sanctification</td>
<td>-After Justification</td>
<td>-Christ’s action along with</td>
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<td></td>
<td>-My work</td>
<td>Justification</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-Work of the Spirit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gospel</td>
<td>What we need to hear in order to make a decision</td>
<td>Christ Crucified for the forgiveness of our sins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sinner</td>
<td>Unsaved People</td>
<td>All People</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sin</td>
<td>-My Actions</td>
<td>-Very core of being</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Behavior</td>
<td>-Condition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocation</td>
<td>Serving God through a ministerial calling</td>
<td>Serving my neighbor through roles where I am placed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Means of Grace</td>
<td>Sinner’s Prayer and Altar Call</td>
<td>Word and Sacrament</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The changes in linguistics also demonstrate changes to the characteristics of American Evangelicalism.

The emphasis change shows:

• a strengthening of the participants’ understanding of original sin and its consequences.
• a dismissal of semi-Pelagian free will theology.
• a change in their views of the sacraments, and so forth.
Considerations During Catechesis: Changes In Language

Participants in the qualitative survey were asked which words are no longer being used in Confessional Lutheranism, only if this question was applicable to them. The most consistently listed words no longer used in Lutheranism, as indicated by respondents, are as follows:

decision, decision for Christ, free will, saved, baptism of the Holy Spirit, invitation, next level, accountability, rapture, anointed, born-again, revival, living the Gospel, altar call, sinner’s prayer, purpose, personal relationship, re dedicating life, spirit-led, surrender, and so forth.
Considerations During Catechesis: Changes In Language

Generally speaking, respondents indicated a diminishing of directional phrases and feeling phrases as they entered Lutheranism; phrases such as:

- going to the next level,
- God led me,
- the Spirit led me,
- God laid it on my heart,
- I feel led,
- I feel His presence, and so forth.

In the case of what words are no longer used, it is interesting to note the dismissal of Keswick language, as well as the dismissal of semi-Pelagian free will language, and even the dismissal of some Dispensational language and items of Finney’s new measures.
Considerations During Catechesis: Changes In Language

Participants in the qualitative survey were asked what new words they had to learn in Confessional Lutheranism, only if this question was applicable to them. Generally speaking, respondents indicated having to learn the following new words:

- Law and Gospel, means of grace, liturgy, vocation,
- simul iustus et peccator, catechism, synod,
- absolution, justification, sanctification, Lord’s Supper, confession, solas, creeds,
- 3 uses of the Law, indicative and imperative, various Latin/Greek phrases,
- various Liturgy words, and so forth.

Generally speaking, respondents indicated that the new words tended to be older and multisyllabic.
Things to Consider

Why is it important for pastors and parishioners to understand the different use of words when embracing former American Evangelicals in their Lutheran Churches?
Summary:

In thinking back to our original definition of an American Evangelical, when coming into Confessional Lutheran thought essentially each category is turned upside down and redefined.

This redefining is most evidently seen in the changes to their worldview and language.
Summary:

Please take a moment and read:

Summary of Qualitative and Quantitative Results of the “Becoming Lutheran Research Project”

Pastoral and Congregational Considerations for and During Catechesis of Former American Evangelicals
Questions and/or Comments?
Looking to Session 2

While Session 1 considers the challenges of Catechesis towards former American Evangelicals (i.e., former American Evangelicals just entering a Lutheran Church), Session 2 will explore the common misunderstandings, hesitations, and struggles of American Evangelicals who have joined a liturgical Lutheran Church (i.e., what happens as they encounter and live within the Lutheran Church).
Making Disciples Among American Evangelicals

Part 1: Through Catechesis

Rev. Dr. Matthew Richard