

# Finding regarding Renato Hoerlle's "LEME—Bringing the Message of Hope"

A document of the CTRE (Committee of Theology and Church Relations) of the Igreja Evangélica Luterana do Brasil (IELB)

## 1. Background

- 1.1 The origins of "LEME – LEvando a Mensagem de Esperança" extends over the past ten years. It all began when some pastors of the IELB participated in Evangelism Explosion clinics (EE), first as students and then as instructors. Rev. Renato Hoerlle was one of those who became intensively involved with EE.
- 1.2 When such involvement drew the attention of the IELB leaders, the professors of the Upper School of Theology in São Paulo (EST/ICSP) were asked "to provide a report about the so-called Evangelism Explosion method" (report introduction) in 1996. In their report, they asserted that it was not only a question of method but of a theology which does not conform to Biblical-Lutheran theology. Additionally, pastors Arnildo Schneider and Reinaldo Lüdke also produced an evaluation of EE (10/10/96) after having participated in a clinic at the request of the National Officers of the IELB (term 96-98). Like the EST report, they drew attention to the assertions made in opposition to Lutheran doctrine. After the publication of these documents, Rev. Renato Hoerlle wrote an "Apology on behalf of the Lutheran pastors who use the Evangelism Explosion training method" (April 1997; revised Nov. 1998). In this "Apology" Pastor Renato energetically defends the doctrinal integrity of the Lutheran adaptation of Evangelism Explosion. Comparing the "Apology" to the subsequent "LEME" document, one can see that concepts and definitions already articulated there come more clearly to light in the "LEME."
- 1.3 With the change in the leadership of the IELB, the current president saw the need to clarify the matter. To do this, he called a "theological meeting for the analysis of Evangelism Explosion (EE)." The meeting took place December 7-9, 1999. The resulting report articulates under its "considerations" that "the analyzed material of EE does not have Lutheran character," and, under the "recognitions," it states "the impropriety of using this material in the congregations of the IELB." In light of this, it proposes "not to use the material of EE further in our congregations" and "to prepare our own material for training in personal evangelism, and to charge Rev. Hoerlle with this task with assistance and support from the faculty of the Upper School of Theology in São Paulo and the pastors of the IELB who use EE."
- 1.4 After this meeting, the work to prepare "our own material for training in personal evangelism" was begun by Rev. Hoerlle, assisted by professors

Dr. Paulo W. Buss and Rev. Ari Lange, appointed by the faculty toward this end. The draft of this work appeared under the title “CLEP—Equipping laity for personal evangelism” (cf., Background of the meetings with Pastor Renato Hoerlle,” document of the faculty of the EST/ICSP for the National Officers and Coordination of the Evangelism and Stewardship Program (PEM) of the IELB, June 18, 2001, para. 1.1 and 1.2). After analysis, the professors, in a meeting with Rev. Renato, concluded that the material “had difficulties” and should not be tested in the congregations of the IELB (“Background,” para. 1.3). As a result, Rev. Renato continued the work and produced another manual, now under the title of “LEME – Bringing the Message of Hope.” This manual also, after an evaluation made on May 14, 2001, was considered “inappropriate for testing in the congregations, because it continues to be an adaptation (now explicitly so) of Evangelism Explosion” (Background, para. 1.6).

- 1.5 Due to the fact that, according to the professors, Pastor Renato was following his own path without consideration of their recommendations, “The theology decided to withdraw their support in the development of the manual” (Background, para 1.7), and to direct “the question to the National Officers of the IELB and to the National Coordination of the Evangelism and Stewardship Program (PEM) so that they might make a judgment about what would be better for the IELB” (idem.).
- 1.6 In the meeting of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTRE) of June 22-23, 2001, the president of the IELB, Rev. Carlos W. Winterle, presented the document from the faculty which declared the withdrawal of their support for the development of the evangelism manual by Rev. Renato Hoerlle. After hearing this report, the CTRE decided the following: “This same report will be handed over to Dr. Zimmer, who will evaluate whether the material could be used in accordance with the Biblical-Confessional self-understanding of the IELB” (para. 15 of the acts). In the following meeting, Sept 11-12, 2001, the CTRE heard a preliminary report with respect to the matter and decided the following: “LEME, A Manual for Personal Evangelism: Dr. Zimmer will study the matter and give his report to the CTRE. The remaining members of the CTRE will also study the matter” (para. 18 of the acts).
- 1.7 Between the two meetings of the CTRE, on the days of June 27 and 28, there took place a meeting between four pastors who were already evaluating and testing the material in the congregations in which they served and Rev. Reinaldo Lüdke, Coordinator of the PEM. In this meeting, the basic points of the material were analyzed and discussed. At the same time, there was a meeting with the National Officers in which the decision of the withdrawal of support from the theology faculty of EST/ICSP was communicated. At that time, the Officers also expressed the development of the matter in the CTRE.
- 1.8 Parallel to this, in spite of the fact that the pastors involved had come to know the position of the faculty of the EST and the development of the

matter in the CTRE, one of them proposed a motion (dated Aug. 5, 2001) to the Board of Directors of the IELB: “1. that the material for personal evangelism training “LEME”, its training methods, and mode of implementation in congregations be presented in the 57<sup>th</sup> national convention, April 29-May 4, 2002, by Rev. Renato Hoerlle, the one responsible for the compilation of the aforementioned project; 2. that the Board of Directors set a date for beginning the implementation process for training in personal evangelism “LEME,” in all the congregations of the IELB, to be conducted through the PEM.”

1.9 The Board of Directors (CD) of the IELB, in a meeting from October 10-14, 2001, after reviewing the above motion, made the following decision: “CD RES-13/2001 Motion 03 Manual in Personal Evangelism: The finding of the motion committee was approved to reject the motion, it having been determined that in the next specially called meeting of the CD a report about “LEME” would be presented by the CTRE and, if it should be approved, it would be implemented in those congregations which would so desire.”

1.10 After the meeting of the Board of Directors, Prof. Zimmer continued his examination of the “LEME” materials. Meanwhile, as part of his work for the Brazilian Bible Society, he had to travel to Cuiabá. There he took advantage of the opportunity to converse with Rev. Horst Musskopf about “LEME.” In this conversation, Prof. Zimmer expressed his primary observations about “LEME.” At the insistence of Pastor Horst and with the support of President Winterle, Prof. Zimmer held a meeting with Pastor Renato. The intention of these meetings was to anticipate the conclusions which would be drawn from an examination of “LEME” by achieving an overview taken from a fully pastoral perspective. At the conclusion of the meeting with Pastor Renato, he acknowledged the problems which had been pointed out and was ready to retract all the material by writing a letter before the report should be finished (cf., the reference he makes to this in his e-mail dated 12/20/01). Nevertheless, such a retraction never materialized.

## 2. General Analysis of “LEME”

2.1 The material is written by Rev. Renato Hoerlle, is titled, “LEME—Bringing the Message of Hope: Personal Evangelism Project,” and is composed of two volumes. The manual edition which has been analyzed is dated June, 2001. One is the instructor’s volume, which is also designated on the title page as “Text book.” On this page the following description also appears: “Didactic structure and outline adapted from Evangelism Explosion,” with the first official edition made by Elton R. Luithardt – CEL Pax, Concordia, SC; Horst S. Musskopf – CEL Pas, Cuiabá, MT; Itamar E. Schlender—CEL São Lucas, RS; Reinaldo Lüdke—Coordenador do PEM; Renato Hoerlle—CEL Bom Pastor, SP. The other volume is for the student, which has as a subtitle “GDT—Didactic Guide for Training.”

2.2 The “Text book” volume has eleven completed chapters and, in the summary, presents five more yet unwritten but “in progress”:

- Introduction
- 1. Bringing the Message of Hope (LEME)
- 2. Theological considerations
- 3. Outline presentation of dialogue evangelism
- 4. Learning and analyzing the approach
- 5. Learning and analyzing dialogue evangelism—the message of Law and Gospel
- 6. Learning and analyzing how to make contact
- 7. Requirements for a good contact
- 8. The expansion of the family – evangelism in day-to-day life
- 9. Personal testimony
- 10. Enlisting new laypeople for training
- 11. Dealing with objections
- 12. Religious consensus [in progress]
- 13. Practical suggestions [in progress]
- 14. Illustrations of support [in progress]
- 15. Structure of LEME [in progress]
- 16. Appendix [in progress]

As for the content of the “Text book,” one can see that there are various chapters in which the author attempts to give the fundamental theology for the project of personal evangelization (primarily in chapters 2, 7, 9, and 10), but all of the chapters reflect this foundation. On the other hand, the majority of the manual is reserved for what is called “dialogue evangelism” (chapters 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, and 11).

2.3 The student volume (“Didactic Guide for Training”) presents 16 units, preceded by “A report on personal information,” “Pre-Class: Getting to know each other,” and “Training commitment.” The units are as follows:

- 1. Getting to know the training program
- 2. Learning how to make contact
- 3. Writing my personal testimony
- 4. Polishing my personal testimony
- 5. The two diagnostic questions
- 6. Dialogue Evangelism: Eternal life and man
- 7. Dialogue Evangelism: God and Christ
- 8. Dialogue Evangelism: Faith
- 9. Mid-course exam
- 10. Concluding Dialogue Evangelism
- 11. Contact: on the day of the visit
- 12. Investing in making contact
- 13. Enlisting new students
- 14. Everyday testimony – the enlarged family
- 15. Dealing with objections
- 16. Final exam

It is very clear that in this volume practical training predominates. For this reason, the focus is, above all, on “Dialogue Evangelism,” which is addressed in every part of the manual.

- 2.4 Both the manuals and the conversations with pastors Renato Hoerlle and Horst Musskopf clearly demonstrated that the sincere intention was to prepare a guide for pastors in order to make the work of evangelism efficient and effective, having the objectives: “1. To train evangelists, that they may be effective witnesses of the Gospel in their everyday life; 2. To educate trainers of evangelists, helping to equip the people of God” (text book, p. 6). Or, as it is said on page 7: “The training is essentially practical. Bringing the Message of Hope is developed to be actualized in practice and in the discussion of evangelistic practice. One only learns to evangelize by evangelizing, that is, going on visits, making contact on the streets and in homes. We know that Christians are motivated to evangelize by the love of God in their lives. But many find themselves frustrated by not knowing how.”

### 3. Various Theological Problems

Upon examination of the content of the “Text book,” we can verify the presence of a series of theological concepts which diverge from what the IELB has historically maintained on the basis of the Holy Bible and the Lutheran Confessions. In this section, we present some of these concepts, although we do not intend to be exhaustive. These concepts are not always consistently maintained and they sometimes appear to be in perfect harmony with the Bible and the Confessions. At other times, however, they depart from this foundation.

#### 3.1 The Ministry

We can find a brief description of the doctrine of the ministry maintained by the IELB in the *Summary of Christian Doctrine* by Edward W. A. Koehler. To begin with, the *Summary* says “Through faith in Christ all Christians are royal priests before God,” which makes them “the royal possessors of the office of the keys and of all that this office implies.” Therefore, “In the home, among brothers and neighbors, in contact with the world, they ought to proclaim in word and deed ‘the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light’ (1 Pet. 2:9)” (p. 250). However, there is a difference between the royal priesthood of all Christians and the public ministry. The *Summary* says: “Whenever Christians perform their rights and duties of the royal priesthood, they act as private individuals, not as public officials of the Church . . . One acts as a Christian individual on the basis of the royal priesthood, which should in no wise be minimized; the other acts on the basis of the call received through other Christians. One acts, under God, in his own name; the other acts, under God, in the name of the congregation which called him” (pp.250-251). The IELB, therefore, maintains on the basis of passages such as Acts 14:23, 20:28, Eph. 4:11-13 and 1 Cor.9:14 that the office of the ministry is a “divine institution” (pp. 251-252; cf., the Smalcald Art., Of the Power and the Primacy of the Pope, p. 67). It can be defined in the following way: “it is the public administration of the means of grace for the sake of saving souls” (p. 256).

Now, what is the concept of the ministry in LEME? In the first chapter, it is said: “Bringing the Message of Hope is part of the ministry, for the task of enabling laity belongs to the pastor. The laity need to be prepared to bring the message of hope” (p. 6). Here it seems that the term “ministry” is used in the traditional sense.

However, when we go to page 32 (chapter 2), we read the following: “This being the case, LEME sees the role of the pastor as the primary one who disciples in evangelization. The pastor participates in a clinic for the implementation of this ministry in his Church.” Here “ministry” is no longer the pastoral office but LEME in particular (cf., 113, 124, 128).

This new concept of the “ministry” comes to clear expression in chapter 10: “Furthermore, for the goals of training, the development of this ministry ought to progress in a conscientious and planned way. When the pastor is beginning the training, he needs to be searching for students who will be able to give support to this ministry. It is important that he gathers a fundamental and structured team of good trainers, who apart from the gift of evangelism and teaching also possess the gift of leadership. For when the ministry multiplies, it will be necessary to have leaders as trainers . . .” (p. 127). It is apparent that author, in the beginning, tries to use the term “ministry” in the sense which the IELB normally understands it, but afterward shifts to use it in a different sense; the only possible result is confusion and disorientation in the minds of the students.

### 3.2 Discipleship

“Discipleship” is another troubling concept. In the Bible this concept is very clear. Although, in a few cases in the Gospels, the term “disciples” can be used for the small group of the twelve Apostles, the primary reference is to designate all who believe in Jesus. In Acts, this is the only meaning of the word (cf., “discipleship” in *A Theological Word Book of the Bible* by Alan Richardson). In other words, the term “disciple” refers to all who follow Jesus, that is, every Christian. For this exactly this reason, we read in Matt. 28:19-20, “Go, make disciples of (“disciple”) all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to keep all things that I have commanded you.”

This is also the sense in which the term is used in our dogmatic literature. Koeher, in the *Summary*, for example, affirms: “The Gospel ought to be preached and the sacraments administered for a very specific and practical purpose. We ought to turn people into disciples of Christ and teach them to keep all the things which Christ commanded (Matt. 28:19-20)” (pp. 255-256). Here it is very clear that upon conversion the person is a “disciple” of Christ (cf., *Christian Dogmatics* by John T. Mueller, vol. II, p. 237).

Now, observe the use of this concept in LEME. Already in the first chapter, it affirms: “Bringing the Message of Hope exercises three basic functions in the local church: First, to evangelize through the mobilization of the laity; Second, to disciple/to train the laity with respect to personal evangelism; Third, to strengthen the local church” (p. 6). Clearly, a distinction is made between two types of Christians, the evangelized Christian and the disciple. In the subsequent pages, the concept develops along the same line of thought, including arguments based on the practice of Jesus (cf., p. 7, 9, 10, 27). And, perhaps, the most categorical assertion about the matter is found in chapter 10: “One should remember that the group of disciples is not the same as the congregation in its entirety. Would that it were so. Unfortunately, there are many sympathizers in the Church who are not willing to submit to authentic discipleship. Although they are not the same thing, the group of disciples is present in the Church. The pastor will bring the Church to fulfill

the apostolic service through persons who allow themselves to be called to authentic discipleship and who, for this reason, let themselves be employed in the propagation of the Gospel” (p. 124).

One cannot but conclude that such a distinction, which is not biblical, would disseminate deadly discord in the midst of a congregation. The categorization of Christians as “authentic disciples” and as common/mere Christians would produce pride on one side and a sense of inferiority or despair on the other, resulting in tension or conflict. For the difference between the two is that one group “allows themselves to be called” and “lets themselves be employed” (purely a human virtue) and the others do not. Obviously, we are touching on the concept of “the Church,” which will be treated more extensively below.

### 3.3 The Sacraments

One rightly praises the attempt to relate the sacraments, Baptism and the Holy Supper, to the work of evangelism. This primarily takes place in chapter 2 (pp. 35-38). The conclusion appears on page 38: “Baptism initiates us into the kingdom of God. Its significance, the result of faith, expresses the daily death to all which does not belong to the kingdom of God. We are distinguished from the world, separated from it, but at the same time sent to the world. The strength for all this is found in the heavenly food which Jesus left for us, the Holy Supper. Therefore, the sacraments are of great importance for mission work” (p. 38). Nevertheless, there are affirmations here which are less than clear.

In relation to Baptism, the author makes use of a writing of Luther, in which Luther describes Baptism as a sign, a significance, and faith. However, what is articulated is not as clear as what Luther says. For Luther, the “sign” is the act of baptizing, the “significance” is to die and to rise with Christ, and the “faith” is the firm acceptance of the promise of God (cf., “Sermon regarding the holy and most venerable sacrament of Baptism,” *Obras Seleccionadas de Martinho Lutero*, vol. 1, p. 413ff.). The author of “LEME,” however, in speaking of the “significance,” says: “The will of God and authentic Christian life become visible in the community of the Baptized. This has to do with the *significance* of Baptism, which is the fruit of faith which clings to the promise of God” (p. 36). Apart from this, he makes assertions such as: “By means of Baptism it becomes apparent to all that believers allow themselves to be united in Christ and that, through him, they have disconnected themselves from worldly and wicked things” (p. 36). With such an assertion, Baptism is more a confession or a witness of a decision taken by the believer (synergism) than a means of the grace of God. Furthermore, it is argued that one ought not mention Baptism in dialogue evangelism with adults (cf., p. 37), a position that is difficult to accept from a Biblical-Lutheran perspective. The discussion of the Holy Supper suffers from the same lack of clarity. One ambiguous word leaves much to be desired.

Along the same lines, it is difficult to support the distinction made between the preaching of the word and the sacraments. In chapter 9, speaking of the kingdom of God, this assertion is made: “Although the kingdom is divine, it is nevertheless present in this world. It is established by means of the preaching of the Word, which accomplishes the task of extending the kingdom, and through the sacraments, which accomplish the task of communicating the kingdom. Through these means, the Church is sent and becomes a mediator. Through the Church,

God continues to be the one who sends, guides, and decides. The actions of God through the Church become manifestations of the kingdom of God in the form of visible signs to the unbelievers. We call these signs **witnesses**" (p. 114). What does this intend to say? From the point of view of the Bible and the Confessions, one cannot maintain this distinction between the "preaching of the Word, which accomplishes the task of extending the kingdom," and "the sacraments, which accomplish the task of communicating the kingdom." What is the difference?

In opposition to this, we read in *Christian Dogmatics* (Mueller), vol. 2: "On the basis of the Scriptures, (the dogmatists) acknowledge as means of grace ordained by God only the word (the Gospel) and the sacraments, Baptism and the Holy Supper, which two are the visible word (*Verbum visibile*). According to the Scripture, these means, divinely ordained, have a double function or power, namely, a) a power which presents, offers, and confers (*vis exhibitiva, dativa, collativa*) and b) an effective or operative power (*vis effectiva sive operativa*). The first consists in that through the means of grace the Holy Spirit sincerely offers the grace of God (*dei favor*) and the righteousness of Christ (*meritum Christi*) to those who hear or read the word; the second in that through the means of grace he effectively works, strengthens and maintains in human hearts a living faith in the gracious remission of their sins, so that they are converted, justified, sanctified, and, finally, glorified. For this reason, we rightly call the means of grace *media communicationis remissionis peccatorum sive iustificationis ex parte dei*" (pp. 121-122). Here one clearly sees that the distinction made above has no foundation in the Bible.

### 3.4 Demonology

Upon reading the "Text book," now and then one's attention is drawn to the power attributed to the devil. We do not want to imply that the devil does not exist or does not have power. We do, however, want to note a description of the devil which is very close to the treatment which the sects give him.

"Demonization" is a typical characteristic of sects. In what sense? In that the devil is awarded much more power than he really has. Let us not forget that the devil is a "creature" of God, he is a fallen angel. As a creature, he is not a second God and does not have power equal to God's. Now, let us see what is said about him in "LEME" in the discussion of the "satanic opposition to evangelization" (pp. 26-27). Five tactics used by Satan are enumerated: (1) "Satan deceives many Christians into thinking that only pastors may witness." (2) "Satan uses the 'lack of time' to convince some Christians that they are too busy for intentional witnessing." (3) "Satan appears to allow some Christians to live in the peace and comfort of an intimate spiritual relationship. . . as long as they make no effort to reach the lost with the Good News of salvation." (4) "Sometimes Satan can 'silence the saints' by nurturing human fears of rejection and weakness in us." (5) "Satan dances when the people of God suffer from the lack of evangelism training in the churches." In other words, to say that Satan brings **Christians** "to think," or permits them to live in peace and comfort, or "'silence the saints' by nurturing human fears of rejection and weakness in us" is to attribute to him a power far beyond that of the "creature" he is. In truth, it is to attribute to him a power like that of God's alone.

In the sects, this demonization does not take place without a reason. In truth, it intends to intimidate, to manipulate people, with the aim of placing them entirely

under the domination of the sect's leader. "LEME" does not go to this extreme. Yet, it is discomfiting that the "text book," in its current form, concludes exactly with a statement about the "strategy of Satan": "Whatever the objection may be, recognize it as a strategy of Satan to impede you from proclaiming the Gospel" (p. 136).

According to the Bible and the Confessions, Lutheranism recognizes three enemies which oppose the work of God, namely, the devil, the world, and our flesh (our old, sinful nature). When these enemies are not clearly distinguished, there is a tendency to demonize everything. To a certain degree, "LEME" suffers from this defect as well.

### 3.5 Dialogue Evangelism

As indicated in the "General Analysis of LEME" above, a great number of chapters, both in the "Text book" and in the "Didactic Guide for Training," focus on "dialogue evangelism." This dialogue is described as "an outline centered on the presentation of the Gospel to the degree that God grants the opportunities" (p. 14). It consists of a detailed dialogue which follows a pre-determined sequence with the aim to bring the candidate to conversion. Since such an outline could be considered "somewhat mechanical," the author asserts, "The use of the outline ought not lead to a mechanical presentation, a rigid structure which does not allow the flexibility attend to the particularities and the necessities of the person being visited. It is clear that we would be naive to think that such abuses could not take place with the use of the outline. But abuses happen in other areas of the Church as well" (p. 15). On the other hand, the author shows the advantage of following an outline, "the memorization of the outline allows the dialogue to be sustained as a body of organized ideas. When the outline is thoroughly known, there is a tremendous flexibility" (p. 15).

One senses the great effort taken to sequence the articulation of Law and Gospel in the dialogue, which is very commendable. All of chapter 5 serves this end. However, in spite of this effort, we also find an exhaustive series of additional recommendations, be they suggestions about how to conduct the dialogue (p. 55), or about the posture to adopt before or inside the prospective home (p. 59-60), what information should be passed over (p. 59) or subjects to be avoided (p. 64, Baptism and "the reason for your hope") in a given moment in the dialogue. Furthermore, proceeding from an extremely rationalized understanding of the process of conversion, the "dialogue" is composed of elements which come close to the methods of "conversion" typical of the sects. So as to reduce resistance, it moves toward a climax, until the final question which either will prove that faith has come into existence or, on the contrary, the offer of salvation has been rejected. For this reason, it is clear that what is happening does not conform to the common definition of a "dialogue," but is nearer a directing or manipulating speech, for it is led in such a way as to attain a pre-determined objective. The lasting impression is that the Holy Spirit will only be able to act, or perhaps act more effectively, after all the foreseen obstacles have been removed by means of a series of techniques inserted into the "dialogue." "Dialogue Evangelism," as such, is closer to a synergistic practice in which one presumes to be able to contribute to a person's conversion by means of these techniques than to the clear position of the Bible and of the Confessions which emphasize divine monergism in conversion through the

means of grace (John 6:44; Col 1:13-14; Eph. 2:8-9, 1:19; and 2 Cor. 4:6; cf., Mueller, vol. 2, pp. 23-27). In addition, the insistence on rigorously including various elements in the “dialogue” seriously departs from the biblical recommendation of a spontaneous witness, as expressed in the words of Peter: “Be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have” (1 Pet. 3:15, NIV).

As to lay participation in evangelism, it is helpful, as well, to remember at this point that the great biblical emphasis is the challenge and the motivation to testify spontaneously about the faith in the context of fulfilling one’s vocation. This was one of the fundamental rediscoveries of the Reformation which we once again need to highlight.

#### 4. The major problem: The Doctrine of the Church

Among the various problems already pointed out, one appears to us to have the most serious consequences. This does not imply that the other problems are less significant, only that their consequences do not manifest themselves so immediately. But this one, when consistently taught, will have catastrophic results in a congregation. We mean the concept of “Church” as articulated in LEME. Let us examine it piece by piece.

The concept of the Church already appears in the first chapter of the “text book.” It so happens that this chapter is a kind of summary for the whole manual. Therefore, as it concludes, it summarizes this topic. Speaking of the need to nurture the results of evangelism, the author affirms, “The greater the quality of the church the better the new converts will be received. The quality is a function of the degree to which the Christians respond to the means of grace” (p. 17-18). Following this, the characteristics of such a church “with high quality” are enumerated, seven in all: “A church of high quality is characterized (1) by a leadership which is committed body and soul to the growth of the Church; (2) it is a church where the majority of the members use their gifts for the edification of others, because the faith of the absolute majority is alive and practiced with contagious enthusiasm; (3) it is a church where the structures are continually being tested and renewed according to a single criterion: what is good for the development of the church; (4) the participation in the services is the most memorable experience for the majority of members; (5) in this church there are friendship groups in which one experiences the power of love and healing in the Christian community; (6) in this church each member tries to reach their friends, neighbors, and colleagues for Christ; (7) it is a church where practically every activity makes the love of Jesus manifest. A church like this can only grow. The point is: invest in the quality, for God grants the quantity. We have no doubt in affirming that God very much desires to pour out rich blessings. The question is whether the church is ready to take these blessings. Thus, we re-emphasize that the greater the quality of a church the more it retains the blessings of God in its midst” (p. 18).

Clearly the author is speaking of local churches, i.e., local Christian congregations. And, to explain his understanding, he makes distinctions between churches. There are churches of “high quality” and, consequently, churches of “low quality.” In truth, training and equipping pastors and leaders through “LEME” should only take place in a local church which has sufficient “pre-requisites” of

quality for such work, and then she will be able to offer conferences/clinics for the equipping of evangelists.

But the concept of “Church” is more fully developed in chapter 7 (pp. 101-107). Although the author says, “When we are talking about quality, we are not talking about perfection. Perfection is only in heaven” (p. 102), he also says, “In order for the results of evangelism to be able to be channeled into the Church, it is necessary for a change in the quality of her life to take place” (p. 102). Thus, it presumes the principle that the typical church is not “of high quality.” That is why it needs “a change in the quality of her life to take place.” As this change takes place, the church will manifest certain “marks.” First of all, the following will be affirmed: “The mark of the church is forgiving and reconciling love.” Or, “the mark of the church is not perfection, but the forgiving and reconciling love of Christ Jesus, who is alive through the people of God” (p. 102). From this point on, the term “marks” is employed as a reference to “marks of a church of high quality.” In this context, five activities of the Church are mentioned (teaching, communion, adoration, witness, and service) and the “marks of a church of high quality” are defined by adjectives or adjectival expressions as follows:

| <b>Area of work</b> | <b>Element of quality</b>              |
|---------------------|--|
| Christian life      | Contagious                             |
| Leadership          | Equips others                          |
| Activities          | Take place according to personal gifts |
| Structures          | Effective; promote edification         |
| Worship services    | Inspiring                              |
| Groups              | With a friendship atmosphere           |
| Evangelism          | Through personal contacts              |
| Relationships       | Marked by love (p. 102)                |

Thereafter, each of these marks is more extensively developed (pp. 103-105). At the same time, the “marks” of a church of “low quality” are not neglected in the presentation: “A church with low quality still has Christian life, or else it would not be a church. However, The faith of the members could be so weak that the posture they take would not attract anyone to Christian practice. In this church, some activities take place, but generally it is the pastor who is doing them, always helped by a same little group. This church also has structures like times of service, procedures for electing leaders, and things in general. The important thing in this church is not evaluating whether these structures are granting opportunities to edify the members, but keeping them as they always were, because it was always done that way. There are worship services, since it is a church, but there is a striking sense of obligation in the running of the services. The only groups with a friendly atmosphere are those little cliques of members who meet only after the service or in the little league games. As far as evangelism, ‘Oh, the pastor said that it was enough that the families baptize their children, confirm them, get them married, and bury them.’ And the relationships occur more through common interests, conditional love, give-and-take. One question: Is this church ready to

effectively welcome and guide new members? Will it retain the blessings of God in its midst?"

It is impossible to avoid the conclusion that, according to "LEME," the quality of the church is basically the result of human effort. This is apparent in many places, but we will consider only this conclusion: "Let us compare the results to the fish and the church to the nets of the miraculous catch. Jesus indicated the exact place and permitted Peter, James, and John a catch of 153 fish. The 'fish' were granted by God. He directs, he bestows his blessings to his Church. Now, imagine how many fish those disciples would have had if their nets had been weak, without quality? They would not have been able to retain that blessing from Jesus. In the same way, is the church ready, with quality, to retain the blessings of God? The greater the quality the more she retains what God grants her" (p. 101). As one can see, "God grants the "fish," but the retention depends on the work of the church and her quality. One wonders whether this is a correct interpretation of this Bible passage. It is evident that a sound hermeneutic would not permit such an interpretation.

Now, how can one learn the level of a church's quality? This can take place, according to "LEME," by means of help from an external "consultant." Furthermore, this already took place twice, in the space of two years, in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd in the Lapa neighborhood of São Paulo. Such a "consultation" has the aim of "determining the 'point value' of each mark of quality, so as to establish an action plan for working on all of them together and, at the same time, to evaluate the development of the work invested in the quality of the church." At the end of this work done in conjunction with the consultation, the Church in Lapa was judged to have "developed these marks of quality" (p. 105).

Now, the following questions should be raised: "Is the concept of the Church, briefly detailed above, biblical and confessional? Could the IELB use this concept in her work in local churches? When we read the description of a "high quality church," we begin to ask ourselves whether the New Testament Churches qualified as "high quality," and we conclude that they certainly would not be considered such. For example, one sees the primitive Church described in the Acts of the Apostles. While, on one hand, it says that those who were members "persevered in the teaching of the Apostles and in fellowship, in the breaking of bread and in prayer" (Acts 2:42), on the other hand, Ananias and Sapphira could be found in their midst (Acts 5) and "there were complaints from the Hellenists against the Hebrews, because their widows were being forgotten in the daily distribution" (Acts 6:1). Or we think about the church of Rome, of Corinth, of Ephesus, etc. The letters of Paul leave a clear impression that none of these churches could be considered a church of "high quality" according to "LEME." Nevertheless, these very churches were the bastions of evangelism, an impossibility according to "LEME."

Let us also look at a few phrases of our dogmaticians, which, we presume, all our pastors have learned in their theological education. To begin, "The Church is the totality of people who have faith in their heart and are guided by the Spirit of God" (Koehler, *Summary*, p. 225). Or, as Mueller says: "The Christian Church, consequently, consists . . . of those who believe in Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29)" (vol. 2, p. 220). This Church has a set

of attributes. To summarize, they are as follows: it is invisible, only one, holy, universal or catholic, apostolic, inviolable, and apart from it there is no salvation (cf., Mueller, vol. 2, pp. 226-228; Koehler, p. 226-229). As for local churches, Mueller says: "Local churches are gatherings of believers or Christians united together in one place to preach the Gospel and administer the sacraments, in short, to exercise the office of the keys (Acts 20:28; 14:23-27; 1 Tim 3:5; Matt. 18:17; 1 Cor 14:23)" (p. 232). And he continues: "Local churches are, therefore, true believers, or true members of the universal Church, united in a visible communion with the intention of exercising the office of the keys or the peculiar ecclesiastical power which Christ gave to his Church on earth" (p. 233). Finally, he concludes with their obligations: "instruction and mutual admonition (Col. 3:16-17); ecclesiastical discipline (Matt. 18:15-18; 1 Cor 5:1-13); the preservation of true doctrine and supervision of teachers (Rom. 16:17; Col. 4:17); the preaching of the Gospel (1 Pet. 2:9); Christian conduct in the fear of God (1Pet 3:8-17), etc.... It is, then, with good reason that we define the local churches as assemblies of true believers who are gathered in a specific place with the aim to preach the Gospel and administer the sacraments" (p. 233).

Keeping the "LEME" concept of "Church" in mind, it is important to emphasize, first and foremost, the attribute of holiness. Mueller says: "According to imputed righteousness (justification), believers are perfect before God; according to his *iustitia vitae*, they continue to be imperfect (*iustitia inchoata, imperfecta*) for their whole lives (Phil. 3:12-16)" (Vol. 2, p. 227). Or, as Koehler says: "Through the justifying power of faith, all believers have complete forgiveness and perfect righteousness before God. . . . By means of the sanctifying power of faith, all true believers earnestly exert themselves to live a holy life, attaining to a kind of righteousness of life which is yet imperfect. . . . On account of the old man, the members of the Church yet commit sins, sometimes grave sins, which deserve condemnation. But when Christians repent of their sins and trust in the merits of Christ, they have the forgiveness of God and are not condemned (John 5:24)" (p. 227). In other words, what the Bible, the Confessions, and our dogmatic literature emphasize is that the Church is, on one hand, righteous, perfect, and pure, having received the righteousness of God and, on the other hand, the Church is unrighteous, imperfect, and impure (*simul justus et peccator*). The pronouncements made by the author of "LEME" about the concept of the "Church" are driven by his own the lack of clarity on the matter.

In the second place, one should emphasize, as Koehler says, that "the edification and preservation of the Church are exclusively the work of God. – Since it is the Holy Spirit who works and preserves faith through the Gospel, by which men become and remain members of the Church, just as he is the one who gathers 'all Christians on earth and preserves them in Jesus Christ in the one true faith'" (*Summary*, p. 229). For this reason, the true "marks" of the Church, according to the Bible and the Confessions, are not adjectives or adjectival expressions which describe human virtues, but are "the pure teaching of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments," as Koehler says, citing the Augsburg Confession, article VII: "But 'the pure doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments in accordance with the Gospel of Christ' are

'external marks' through which we can know that the Church must be there" (*Summary*, p. 230).

Truly, if we are looking for "marks" of the Church, apart from the teaching of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments, we are in opposition to all that the Bible and the Confessions teach. A Church defined by adjectives and adjectival expressions makes itself hypocritical. The book of Amos offers a great illustration of this. While, according to the established rites, the people of Israel where the most zealous, the prophet had to tell them that they were far from the Lord (Amos 4 and 5). The scribes and Pharisees had a similar reputation at the time of Jesus and, nevertheless, were condemned by him (Matt. 23:23; Luke 11:42). Although the author of "LEME" attempts to base his affirmations on the primitive Church and the seven churches of Revelation, the concept of the Church put forth cannot be drawn on these texts.

Now we must ask: What could we expect with the systematic teaching of this concept? Only one thing: discord, fighting, and division. We already mentioned that this would be the expected result of what is taught with respect to discipleship (see above). With the concept of the "Church" as such, this result is even more certain. One cannot but remember the Church of Corinth, which was destroying itself with its partisanship, also because the human element was exalted above the true marks of the Church (1 Cor 1). Let us imagine, for example, that an "external consultation" is requested to evaluate the quality of the Church. From this evaluation, let us say that it is found that a certain percentage "x" of the members already possess the characteristics of a "high quality" church, but the percentage "y" do not yet have them, which would make the church yet inadequate for the activity of evangelism. What would be the expected result? Without a doubt, it could only provoke vanity in those who, according to the evaluation, already possess such characteristics, and, consequently, their disdain toward those "weak" and "inferior" ones. Would there be peace and fellowship in such a Church?

## 5. Recommendations

5.1 The CTRE, after the above analysis, concludes that "LEME—Bringing the Message of Hope" is a heterodox manual, which is based on Biblical interpretations in opposition to a sound hermeneutic and on an evangelism manual (Evangelism Explosion) which fully conflicts with the body of Lutheran doctrine. Therefore, seeing that it contains false and distorted doctrinal instruction, it ought not be used in the congregations of the IELB. In spite of the practical recommendations for evangelism found in "LEME" (which are already taught and used in the manuals officially adopted by the IELB), the "LEME" project in whole is not fit to be adapted to Lutheran doctrine.

5.2 The CTRE finds that, in spite of the fact that Rev. Renato Hoerrle was charged to "prepare fitting material for training in personal evangelism" "with the assistance and support" of the theological faculty of EST/ICSP (cf., "Theological Meeting for the Analysis of Evangelism Explosion"), Rev. Renato Hoerrle manifested difficulties in articulating the theological foundation necessary for this task. In truth, such a finding had already been reached by the theological faculty of EST/ICSP and it should have already been followed, when it was determined. The CTRE understands, therefore, that the National Officers, in an extreme gesture of

tolerance, did not make the previous finding official, redirecting the matter to the CTRE. Now, however, the CTRE recommends that the task of preparing material for training in personal evangelism remain with the competent institutions of the IELB.

5.3 The CTRE recommends that the pastors who are using this material or similar material not cease from doing, encouraging, and motivating the work of evangelism in the congregation in which they serve, for it is an essential task of their call. However, they should review their practice on the basis of this finding, using manuals and methods which are in accord with biblical and confessional principles, so that their “retention” in the ministry (Bylaws of the IELB, art. 79) may not be compromised and that “the confessional unity of the IELB” (idem, art. 31) may be preserved.

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