

# Deleted Analysis



## A Deleted Analysis of the Church in America POSTED April 12, 2004

Based on an interview, we were quoted in an article in the ELCA *The Lutheran* magazine. Then, based on the church giving research we have done through empty tomb, inc., we were invited to "host" a Web board discussion related to the article. The topic of the article was declining mission giving. The title of the article, and the Web board discussion, was "Crisis or opportunity."

In a March 8, 2004 email reminding us that we had agreed to host the Web board discussion from March 16-23, 2004, we were also invited to "Please consider logging in before your week to host to post some discussion starters for our readers under the 'Crisis or opportunity?' thread."

On March 16, 2004, the first morning of the eight-day hosting responsibilities, at 7:15 AM Central Time, we posted the paragraphs below that begin, "Living for self . . ." with the subject label, "[To Begin](#)." The "To Begin" discussion starter we posted included references to other documents on *The Lutheran* Web discussion board, and the comments also applied to a broader spectrum of the church in the United States.

After checking a few times that morning, at about 11:30 AM we again checked *The Lutheran* Web site, to see if any response comments had been posted. Instead, we found that our "To Begin" comments had disappeared.

After some brief discussion, and double-checking, we were preparing to call *The Lutheran* office to find out if there were technical difficulties. At 11:38 AM, we received a call from a staff person at *The Lutheran* to explain why she had deleted the comments. As we understand it: (1) in her opinion, the comments did not belong on the missions support Web discussion she had asked us to host, even though we felt they did; (2) she felt the beginning expressed a "hurtful" opinion, particularly in light of the fact that the national office is trying to engage the entire denomination in discussion on the topic of homosexuality; (3) the end opinion is "hurtful" in light of the fact that, in her opinion, many denominational officials do care; (4) what became clear in the phone conversation was that the unspoken agenda of the Web discussion board, which had not previously been explained to us, was to talk about what we would term fundraising techniques.

In the phone call, Sylvia Ronsvalle tried to explain that, as experts who have studied the field of giving for well over a decade, we felt that the comments we posted directly addressed the main issues affecting church giving patterns, and that no fundraising techniques were going to fix what was wrong with giving trends in the church in the U.S. *The Lutheran* official remained unconvinced, and indicated that the comments could not appear on the Web discussion board she had asked us to host. If we liked, we could post the comments to the General discussion board elsewhere on the site. But, in her opinion [which counted because she had already demonstrated her power to delete them], these comments would not appear as the opening discussion starter on the mission support Web discussion page.

We told her that although we disagreed, we would respect the fact that it was her Web discussion board. We also pointed out that it would be good to communicate any agendas when inviting future hosts, and she agreed that it definitely would. Finally, we agreed to monitor the site and respond to any postings for the eight days, as we had given our word to do. Given the general apathy on the topic, we did not expect much activity on the site, and for at least the first three days, that view has been borne out.

In our opinion, placing limits on a broad discussion of what is affecting church member giving patterns will contribute to the continued decline of denominational support.

For your own reflection, following is the analysis of the church in the U.S. that was deleted.

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empty tomb, inc.  
March 19, 2004

## To Begin

Living for self rather than for God has many facets.

For example, homosexuality is a sin of commission. The inaction which results from greed (which is idolatry-see Eph. 5:5 and Col. 3:5), is a sin of omission. As James 4:17 says, "Anyone who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins" (NIV).

The culture wars emanating from living for self are in the engaging foreground, focusing on issues of human sexuality. This high energy level is symbolically represented by the 34 (thirty-four) Lutheran Magazine WebBoard Discuss the Magazine comments on homosexuality as of March 15, 2004 at about 10 AM.

Mobilizing to live for others with our money in this Age of Affluence is in the dull background. This low energy level is symbolically represented by the 0 (zero) Lutheran Magazine WebBoard responses as of March 15, 2004, at about 10 AM, directly to the question posed by Revdo. Ronaldo M. Rentner, La Iglesia Luterana Agustina de Guatemala: "In general terms, how do we come to terms with our relative wealth over against most of the rest of the world's people? What can we do -- what do we do -- about it?"

Rev. Rentner's comment has life and death implications. Guatemala's under-5 years old child mortality rate of 49 per 1,000 live births provides a window into world need. There are 129 countries of the world with under-5 mortality rates of 20 ranging up to 284. Compare that to the North American and European rates of mostly less than 10 per 1,000 live births. Most of these child deaths would be preventable if historically Christian churches in the United States mobilized to increase church giving and then directed it for this purpose.

Question: What is the core, human, organizational reason that over 10 million children die each year, with little effective attention from historically Christian churches in the United States?

Response: Every level of the church--local membership; pastors; regional officials; national officials--are involved in greedy inaction. Top national denominational leaders in historically Christian churches in America do not care enough to mobilize their constituencies to love the little children in Jesus' name in order to impact global child deaths at a significant enough level.

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