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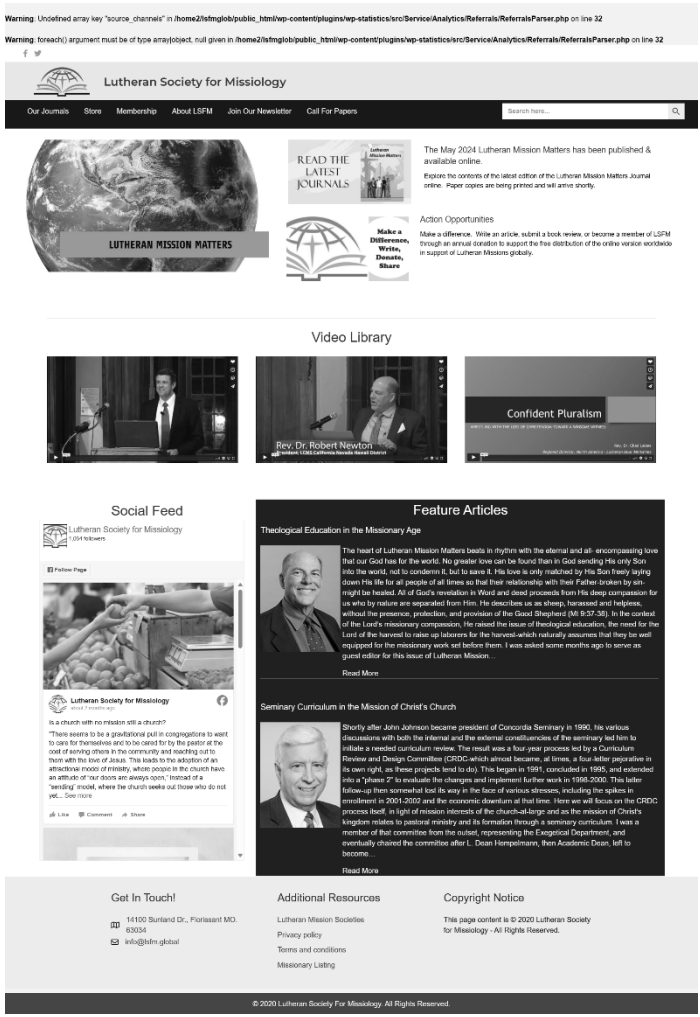

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Inside This Issue

The Theology of the Cross and Christian Mission

How do you "go tell" when your motto is "Here I stand"?

In this issue of *Lutheran Mission Matters* we focus on the link between the mission of the church and Luther's theology of the cross.

Luther nailed his 95 theses to the Castle Church door to spark a discussion. He received an opportunity to discuss his "new theology" in 1518 at Heidelberg. For this he prepared some new theses for disputation, theses that today are often called the "Heidelberg Disputation."

Theologians of glory may not intend to, but they try to justify themselves. They end up looking to works or praising strength or avoiding shame. Theologians of the cross know and believe what God has made known through the shame and foolishness of the crucified Christ.

There is much to mine in this topic, especially the power of the gospel for Christian mission.

To be frank, I was late coming to know the power of the gospel. In my second year at Concordia Seminary, "Red Fred" Danker had us translating Paul's Letter to the Romans. My translation of Romans 3:20–21went something like this, "God's way of putting people right with Himself has been revealed, and it has nothing to do with the law. The law and the prophets give their witness to it, but God puts people right through faith in Jesus Christ." For some reason, obviously by grace, I heard this not just in my head but in my soul. Why hadn't I heard this before? It was a lesson I continued to learn on vicarage, sometimes painfully.

During my 1969-70 vicarage in Monterey, CA, my supervisor gave me leeway in preaching. After a few weeks I knew everything that was wrong with the congregation, and in my first sermon let everyone know it. Shaking hands at the door, a middle-aged woman greeted me: "I get beat up enough at home. I don't need to come to church for that." How painful that learning experience was!

The law accuses, drives us to Christ, but it is the gospel that brings healing and impels Christians to love God and others. I did make some progress preaching in that loving, forgiving vicarage congregation, Bethlehem Lutheran Church. After one of my later sermons a member met me after church and said, "You'll make a good door keeper." I am still learning that lesson.

Recently, in preparation for a move, I was going through fifty-three years of paper sermons. I saw the early sermons were mostly law. But "The gospel is the power of God for salvation." (Romans 1:16). As I grew in ministry, I learned to listen to the

hearts of people and the heart of God to bring gospel to bear on the joys and pains of living. It is a lesson I need to continue learning.

We all need to continue learning how to release this incredible power of the gospel. The articles in our Fall 2024 LMM issue help us see the powerful and unique role the theology of the cross plays in Christian mission.

You will find insights of pastors, missionaries, mission executives, and others on the theology of the cross and mission. I pray their insights will help you grow in your understanding and appreciation of the power of the gospel to bring the love of Christ into every part of God's world.

In the articles submitted for this publication we see the various connections made by these authors between the theology of the cross and God's mission:

Joel Okamoto explains that the theology of the cross was a new paradigm for Christian faith and life at the time of the Reformation—and ours, and "something clearly reflected in the New Testament."

Joshua H. Jones discusses Luther's concept of "agonizing struggle," connecting it to the Heidelberg Disputation and contemporary experience.

Robert Kolb takes us deep in Luther's insights about living under the cross, pursuing God's mission to bring the saving message to others, encountering God Hidden and God Revealed.

Adam Francisco investigates Luther's response to the looming threat of Islam at his time and explores how Luther encourages Christians, following the theology of the cross, to prepare themselves to bear witness to Muslims even while living under Muslim occupation.

Kevin Robson presents the Mission Affirmations and policies of LCMS mission entities to show how the theology of the cross is clearly involved throughout.

Cari Chittick and Alfonso Espinosa show how a gospel-centered mission impels us to care for the marginalized, especially children with special needs.

Dale Meyer seeing in the Man of Sorrows, Jesus portrayed in Isaiah 53, highlights the prophetic call to address societal injustices and the need for the church to embody Christ's love.

Will Fredstrom prepares us for the Fall 2025 issue of LMM with a forward-looking discussion of the digital age, and the coming technologies that influence today's world.

MISSION OBSERVERS

Philip Brandt shares pastoral experiences and leads us in a study of Paul's pain, pleading for and receiving forgiveness in 2 Corinthians, showing the importance of not just speaking of the theology of the cross, but *doing it.*

Robert Stuenkel demonstrates the Lutheran insights empowering Christian growth during his 35 years in ministry to college students.

Jon Zehnder overviews sources expounding the theology of the cross and encourages missionaries that "the confidence you can have in proclaiming the Gospel is because the Holy Spirit will be working through that Word."

In my mind, our emphasis on theology of the cross makes Lutherans uniquely qualified for mission work. The law kills; the gospel has the power to bring people out of the world to the cross; and it has the power to impel forgiven people back into the world, bringing with them the saving love of Jesus. The theology of the cross was Luther's revelation of God's "go-power." That same power is ours today.

Rev. Dr. Robert Scudieri

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Paradigms, Mission, and the Theology of the Cross

Joel Okamoto

Abstract: Philosopher of science Thomas Kuhn identified "paradigms" as central to the growth of scientific knowledge and practice. A "paradigm" is a concrete solution to a problem that proves valuable to identify and deal with other problems. This article applies this concept to Luther's theology of the cross. It argues that the theology of the cross was a paradigm for Christian theology and practice at the time of the Reformation, and it shows that the theology of the cross still serves as a paradigm for mission and mission thinking in our time.

Introduction

In an earlier article in *Lutheran Mission Matters*, I summarized Martin Luther's theology of the cross in the Heidelberg Disputation and suggested ways it might frame discussion about mission and mission thinking.[1] I noted that Luther's distinction between the theologian of glory and the theologian of the cross reflected his judgment that theologians of glory make a "category mistake." This means more than they are wrong about some or many matters. Theologians of glory are confused in general. They mistake matters that belong to one category as though they belonged to an entirely different category.[2] A mistake of this magnitude justifies Robert Kolb's assertion that Luther's views "constituted a paradigm shift within Western Christian thought in the understanding of God's revelation of himself, God's way of dealing with evil, and what it means to be human."[3]

In this article, I will pursue the idea that Luther's theology of the cross amounts to a paradigm shift and apply this insight to thinking about mission in general and evangelism in particular.

Paradigms, paradigm shifts, and mission

The expression "paradigm shift" originated with philosopher of science Thomas Kuhn in his vastly influential book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*.[4] He used the idea of a "paradigm" to argue that scientific progress is made not only and not primarily through the gradual accumulation of facts, theories, and methods, but especially through revolutions in how scientists think about their work, their concepts and aims, and the world itself. When a paradigm shift occurs, scientists who join the shift do not simply know more or do better. They convert to a different way of participating in science.

Joel Okamoto is the Waldemar and Mary Griesbach Professor of Systematic Theology at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri, where, since 1998, he has struggled to embody and explain the theology of the cross.

The ideas, distinctions, and arguments in *Structure* have been adapted to many other areas of practice and theory. Kuhn himself did this when he responded to his critics several years after the book was first published.[5] As Kolb shows, Christian theologians have also done so. A widely known and well-regarded example in missiology is *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in the Theology of Mission* by David Bosch.[6]

What has been less widely appreciated about paradigms is that Kuhn used the term in two different senses.

> On the one hand, [paradigm] stands for the entire constellation of beliefs, values, techniques, and so on shared by the members of a given community. On the other, it denotes one sort of element in that constellation, the concrete puzzle-solutions which, employed as models or examples, can replace explicit rules as a basis for the solution of the remaining puzzles of normal science.[7]

Kuhn called paradigms in the first sense of the term "sociological." He referred to paradigms in the second sense as "shared examples" or "exemplars."

Paradigms and paradigm shifts in the sociological sense have proven helpful in understanding historical development in many communities, not only scientific ones. It is paradigm in the sociological sense that explains Kuhn's enormous influence. Kolb, for instance, meant paradigm in the sociological sense. This is evident as he explained Luther's achievement:

> His Heidelberg theses floated before his monastic brothers a new constellation of perspectives on the biblical description of God and of human reality….
>
> What he offered his fellow monks in Heidelberg was not a treatment of a specific biblical teaching or two. He presented a new conceptual framework for thinking about God and the human creature. He provided a new basis or set of presuppositions for proclaiming the biblical message. Luther stepped to the podium in Heidelberg with an approach to Christian teaching that came at the task from an angle significantly different from the theological method of his scholastic predecessors. They may have disagreed among themselves on a range of issues, but they all practiced a theology of glory, according to the Wittenberg professor. Luther called for a different way of thinking about—and practicing—the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Indeed, more than a proposal for a codification of biblical teaching, a theology of the cross, Luther called for the practice of this theology in the proclamation and life of theologians of the cross.[8]

Phrases like "a new constellation of perspectives," "a new conceptual framework," and "a different way of thinking about—and practicing the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ" clearly reflect the sociological sense of paradigm, and it suits Kolb's purpose of conveying the sweep of Luther's proposal in context of Western Christian thought.

Paradigms as exemplars, for reasons that will be made clear, can be helpful in better grasping and practicing mission itself.

But the theses of the Heidelberg Disputation themselves can also be understood as paradigms in the second sense, that is, as *exemplars*. The idea of paradigms in the sociological sense explains how radical changes can be. The idea of paradigms as exemplars explains how such changes come about in the first place. Paradigms in the sociological sense work well for a project like David Bosch's, which tried to make sense of historical developments and contemporary differences in the church's theology of mission. Paradigms as exemplars, for reasons that will be made clear, can be helpful in better grasping and practicing mission itself.

Paradigms in science and scientific revolutions

The idea that scientific progress required revolutions was not in itself new. Talk about the "Copernican Revolution" and the "Scientific Revolution" had been commonplace for a long time. Still, Kuhn's proposal was itself revolutionary.

This is because Kuhn first developed a novel picture of science. Kuhn proposed that we think of science as normally a kind of puzzle-solving. A puzzle for Kuhn is a problem assumed to have a solution. Crossword puzzles and jigsaw puzzles are examples of puzzles in this sense because they are assumed to have solutions. The problem of designing lasting peace, on the other hand, is not assumed to have a solution and therefore is not a puzzle.[9] Scientists themselves might not like to be thought of as mere puzzlers, but the concept stemmed from Kuhn's conclusion that "[p]erhaps the most striking feature" of working on normal research problems—what Kuhn would call "normal science"—"is how little they aim to produce major novelties, conceptual or phenomenal."[10]

Why so little novelty? Because normal science is "mop-up work." Normal science fills in and makes more precise what is assumed to be the case. Therefore, as Kuhn explained, "Mopping-up operations are what engage most scientists throughout their careers. They constitute what I am here calling normal science."[11]

What is normal science "mopping up"? "[O]ne or more past scientific achievements, achievements that some particular scientific community acknowledges for a time as supplying the foundation for its further practice."[12] In contemporary times, these achievements are usually stated and passed on in textbooks and through laboratory work. In the past, classics like Newton's *Principia* served "implicitly to define the legitimate problems and methods of a research field for succeeding generations of practitioners."[13]

Kuhn called such achievements "paradigms," or, as he did later, "exemplars." He did so "to suggest that some accepted examples of actual scientific practice—examples which include law, theory, application, and instrumentation together—provide models from which spring coherent traditions of scientific research."[14] Paradigms are concrete achievements that share two essential characteristics. "Their achievement was sufficiently unprecedented to attract an enduring group of adherents away from

competing modes of scientific activity. Simultaneously, it was sufficiently open-ended to leave all sorts of problems for the redefined group to resolve."[15]

As the label implies, exemplars are models for solving all sorts of problems. One of Kuhn's illustrations was Newton's Second Law of Motion, stated symbolically as $f = ma$ and rendered in plain English as "Force equal mass times acceleration." A student learns not only the symbolic generalization and its rendering, but also to recognize the forces, masses, and accelerations in various situations. But there is more, Kuhn pointed out. Students of science and scientists themselves often deal with situations in which $f = ma$ itself is not applied but is what Kuhn called the "law-sketch" or "law-schema" for a variety of situations. In the case of free fall, gravity comes into play and $f = ma$ becomes $f = mg$; in the case of a simple pendulum, it become $f = mg \sin \theta$; and so on. In this way, $f = ma$ is an exemplar.

Kuhn's central insight was that *exemplars are more basic than theories and methods*. They are, to repeat his own words, "the concrete puzzle-solutions which, employed as models or examples, can replace explicit rules as a basis for the solution of the remaining puzzles of normal science." Considering the actual history of science, Kuhn realized that he had to account for the observable fact that scientific communities often did not operate with enough explicit rules or theories to justify the unquestionable coherent and successful practices they were engaged in. But shared examples "provide[d] what the group lacked in rules."[16] Margaret Masterman, an early commentator on Kuhn's proposal, put it this way: "The paradigm is something which can function when the theory is not there."[17] These puzzle-solutions come first, and they retain their defining status; theories and other developments follow.

Kuhn's central insight was that *exemplars are more basic than theories and methods*. They are, to repeat his own words, "the concrete puzzle-solutions which, employed as models or examples, can replace explicit rules as a basis for the solution of the remaining puzzles of normal science."

At this point, it becomes clear why Kuhn was looking for a term like "paradigm" instead of "theory" or "framework." Paradigms as exemplars are recognized *before* general theories are articulated and *before* new frameworks are adopted. It always is the case that first there are specific questions, problems, and puzzles and then attempts to solve them. Theorizing only happens once the questions, problems, and puzzles are recognized as legitimate, and after some success has been found in dealing with them. Through this process, these questions, problems, and puzzles become community property. They become shared examples or exemplars that define the science, like the inclined plane, pendulum, and planetary orbits listed by Kuhn for physics.

The idea of paradigms as "accepted examples of actual scientific practice" is very important for Kuhn's argument, although he would later acknowledge that this was "the central element of what I now take to be the most novel and least understood aspect of this book."[18] Paradigms in this sense are "shared examples" or "exemplars" of how to recognize and solve puzzles. In normal science, they are "the concrete

puzzle-solutions that students encounter from the start of their scientific education… ."[19] More than anything, these exemplars set apart different scientific communities, not only broadly, like the difference between physics and biology, but also within disciplines. For example, astrophysics will have some specific exemplars that set it apart from particle physics. But all physicists "begin by learning the same exemplars: problems such as the inclined plane, the conical pendulum, and Keplerian orbits; instruments such as the vernier, the calorimeter, and the Wheatstone bridge."[20]

A paradigm shift, then, may take place when anomalies in the normal scientific research become intractable and prompt a crisis about the viability of the paradigm itself. Normal science becomes impossible, and science becomes "extraordinary" in the sense that it is no longer trying to "mop-up" but to find a new way. "The proliferation of competing articulations, the willingness to try anything, the expression of explicit discontent, the recourse to philosophy and to debate over fundamentals, all these are symptoms of a transition from normal to extraordinary research."[21] It is a search for a new paradigm. Of course, a new paradigm might not emerge and gain enough followers to sustain a new program of normal science. But when it does, a paradigm shift occurs.

Such a shift is *revolutionary*. A paradigm shift results not only in different and presumably better answers, but in different questions, problems, criteria, concepts, theories, and aspirations. A paradigm shift was nothing short of "a transformation of the world within which scientific work was done."[22] Kuhn explained how the world changes:

> Led by a new paradigm, scientists adopt new instruments and look in new places. Even more important, during revolutions, scientists see new and different things when looking with familiar instruments in places they have looked before. It is rather as if the professional community had been suddenly transported to another planet where familiar objects are seen in a different light and are joined by unfamiliar ones as well. Of course, nothing of quite that sort does occur; there is no geographical transplantation; outside the laboratory everyday affairs usually continue as before. Nevertheless, paradigm changes do cause scientists to see the world of their research-engagement differently. In so far as their only recourse to that world is through what they see and do, we may want to say that after a revolution scientists are responding to a different world.[23]

Since paradigm shifts result in transforming someone's worldview, Kuhn spoke of the paradigm shift as a "conversion." The change is so radical that "it must occur all at once (though not necessarily in an instant) or not at all."[24]

Mission as paradigm shifts

The ideas that paradigm shifts are revolutions, that they effect the transformation of one's view of the world, and that they amount to conversions apply not only to scientific progress but also to mission. The mission of Jesus Christ, and therefore the mission of the Christian Church, do not amount to giving better answers to questions that everyone has. Christ proclaimed the coming of the radically new—the Kingdom

of God—and called on all to repent. Christ's mission was revolutionary. For those who heard, repented, and believed, the message effected a transformation of their view and life in the universe. Christ converted them from their old identities and ways to a new identity and to new ways.

Put this way, it could be argued that what Kuhn did was apply religious ideas to science. In fact, this is what John Watkins did in a 1965 essay against Kuhn's idea of normal science: "My suggestion is, then, that Kuhn sees the scientific community on the analogy of the religious community and sees science as the scientist's religion."[25] Watkins saw parallels both with normal science and with paradigm shifts. For normal science, he asked readers to consider a theologian dealing with an apparent inconsistency between two Bible passages.

> Theological doctrines assure him that the Bible, properly understood, contains no inconsistencies. His task is to provide a gloss that offers a convincing reconciliation of the two passages. Such work seems essentially analogous to 'normal' scientific research as depicted by Kuhn; and there are grounds for supposing that he would not repudiate the analogy. For *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* contains many suggestions, some explicit, others implicit in the choice of language, of a significant parallelism between science, especially Normal Science [sic], and theology.[26]

For paradigm shifts, Watkins points out: "And when Kuhn discusses the personal process of repudiating an old paradigm and embracing a new one, he describes it as a 'conversion experience,' adding that 'a decision of that kind can only be made on faith.'"[27]

It does not matter for our purpose whether Kuhn intended such connections between his account of science and scientific progress. The parallels are apparent, and they are especially appropriate for describing and analyzing mission.

At this point we could go in a few different directions in drawing out implications from these parallels. I will return to the idea of paradigm as exemplar to show how the theology of the cross is a paradigm for evangelism, that is, for proclaiming the gospel to those who do not yet believe in the Lord.

Luther's theology of the cross as an exemplar for evangelism

Luther was already a controversial figure before the German Augustinians convened in Heidelberg in April 1518, so he was asked to prepare theses on sin, free will, and grace and avoid indulgences and penance. He consented. But the theses he prepared, especially the theological theses, were carefully composed and arranged. Taken together, they raised two basic problems and proposed two new solutions. In Kuhn's idiom, Luther was offering two *exemplars*. One was a new solution to the puzzle of righteousness before God. The other was a new solution to the puzzle of being a faithful theologian.

The prevailing paradigm of the medieval church held righteousness before God was attained through human works and will. Luther pointed out how this ran contrary to the Scriptures in several ways (see Theses 1–18). The law promotes sin, and righteousness before God does not come by keeping the law (Thesis 1). Human

creatures are incapable of doing the works of the law anyhow (Thesis 2) and in fact put them under a curse (Thesis 3). The human will is free only to sin, so if "it does what it is able to do" (*facit quod in se est*), as the scholastics taught, it would commit mortal sin (Thesis 13). This is one set of problems.

All of this, Luther contended, derived from another problem: Not knowing God through the crucified Christ. The underlying theology—the theology of glory—understood that God's ways could be seen by understanding how the world works (Thesis 19). In the world, the righteous ones are those whose will and works are righteous. Theologians of glory assumed that this is how it is with God. And this led to turning everything upside down. As Luther argued in the Proof to Thesis 21:

> This is clear: He who does not know Christ does not know God hidden in suffering. Therefore he prefers works to suffering, glory to the cross, strength to weakness, wisdom to folly, and in general, good to evil. These are the people whom the apostle calls "enemies of the cross of Christ" [Phil. 3:18], for they hate the cross and suffering and love works and the glory of works. Thus, they call the good of the cross evil and the evil of a deed good.[28]

On the other hand, Luther's new paradigm—his new solution—for the puzzle of righteousness before God is: "He is not righteous who does much, but he who, without works, believes much in Christ" (Thesis 25).[29] Righteousness before God is not a matter of good works or good intentions *at all*. Justification is by faith in the crucified Christ apart from works, and it comes about entirely at God's initiative and action: "The love of God does not find, but creates, that which is pleasing to it…" (Thesis 28).[30] God does not look for someone or some works that he finds pleasing. He finds persons to love and makes them good and pleasing.

At this point, Luther's new paradigm for knowing God is clear: God is known not according to the usual wisdom of the world but through the *crucified Christ* (Thesis 20). Faith in someone who is crucified is not merely unusual; it is strange and foolish. It means that God wants to be known and dealt with through a person whose words and deeds led to being rejected and put to death by crucifixion. But it is only through Christ that theologians call a thing what it actually is. Otherwise, they call evil good and good evil (Thesis 21).

Once again, Kuhn defined a paradigm as "sufficiently open-ended to leave all sorts of problems for the redefined group to resolve."[31] This applies to both of Luther's solutions in the Heidelberg Disputation. But the paradigm for knowing God is the one that applies more directly to evangelism. Knowing God *properly* is essential, as the New Testament testifies to often and in varied ways. But what is the proper way? Luther raised this as a problem. Like Paul, he stressed that God is known through a way that is weak and foolish, namely, the crucified Christ.

The theology of the cross is a paradigm for evangelism by making the problem of knowing God properly the essential question.

The theology of the cross is a paradigm for evangelism by making the problem of knowing God properly the essential question. The corresponding solution is in proclaiming Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Greeks (1 Cor 1:23).

In this case, "Christ crucified" refers not merely to the historical fact that Christ died on a cross, but to Him and His mission, which resulted in His rejection, suffering, and crucifixion. Sometimes "preaching Christ crucified" is shorthand for "Telling people Jesus died on the cross to save you from your sins." Luther has in mind something very different. To be sure, Luther does not make this point directly. But we should not expect it from him, if we think that Luther is offering a paradigm, that is, an open-ended puzzle-solution. It is our puzzle.

Luther does direct us toward the solution in the paradigm of righteousness that he advances in the Heidelberg Disputation. Righteousness before God is by faith alone. The law, works, and the will have nothing to do with righteousness before God. It is not even theoretically possible for a perfectly righteous person to merit eternal life. In the same way, Christ is not someone who makes up for sin by His own good works and good intentions and who pays a debt owed because of sin. To insist on preaching Christ crucified only in this way is to prefer works to suffering and, in general, good to evil. Luther, to be clear, did not deny how important our sins are or how necessary forgiveness of sins is for us. But this is concern about our own righteousness. Here Luther is concerned about righteousness before God, and this righteousness is entirely alien; human creatures are completely passive. Who one is and what one has done are irrelevant. It is entirely according to His favor. It is by divine grace alone, and therefore it can only be received through faith. "[W]orks contribute nothing to justification," Luther argued in the Proof of Thesis 25. "[A person's] justification by faith in Christ is sufficient to him."[32]

And how do we know justification by faith in Christ is sufficient for anyone? It is what God revealed through Christ in the first place. Naturally, this comes through clearest in the gospels because this is point of the gospels. What John wrote applies to all the canonical gospels: "These things were written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (Jn 20:31). Each gospel relates the story of Jesus Christ in its own way, but all the gospels tell of Jesus Christ come to announce, to teach, and actually to inaugurate new life in the new creation for those who believe in Him. He comes in fulfillment of promises made to Abraham and all Israel. But He confounds many in Israel. He calls sinners, not the righteous. He does not always keep the Mosaic Law. Demons are on a first-name basis with Him. He shows grace even to Samaritans and Canaanites. He calls Himself the Son of God. He is rejected and crucified. But God raised Jesus from the dead, and as the risen Lord and Son of God, Jesus sent His followers to proclaim Him. They are sent to proclaim faith in Him for life in the world to come when He comes again in glory, this time.

Proclamation along these lines is the puzzle-solution suggested by the exemplar of Luther's theology of the cross. Moreover, when we consider the theology of the cross as a paradigm, then conversion is the goal, and transformation of the view of the world is the result. And conversion and transformation follow naturally. Knowing God through the crucified Christ implies a definite and unique picture of the universe. And

knowing that Christ came and was willing even to be crucified for inviting the peoples of the world to enjoy new life in this new creation aims precisely for conversions.

All I have offered here is a puzzle-solution, not an approach or an outline. They would be part of the "mopping-up" that comprises the majority of the thinking and effort. However, someone might ask whether this kind of mopping-up is worth the effort today. Questions like this are about the actual contemporary relevance of evangelism along these lines. They are fair questions and appropriate for drawing this article to a close.

My answer is, "Yes." My reason is that knowing God through the crucified Christ, and therefore evangelism that is centered in proclaiming the crucified Christ, aims to bring an end to all other ways of identifying and justifying oneself. In the Heidelberg Disputation, it was to bring an end to justifying oneself by one's own efforts and intentions. But the crucified Christ means the end of identifying with other gods, with other philosophies, with self-made spiritualities. It also means the end to despair over meaninglessness and dismay over the confusion and violence so prevalent in contemporary life. This is because Christ came to rule over all things. He was rejected and crucified for this mission, but God raised Him from the dead. So, when He comes again, His kingdom will have no end. And for all who believe in Him, they will share in this everlasting kingdom. The Christian good news is intended to be good for any and for all.

ENDNOTES

[1] Joel Okamoto, "Mission and the Theology of the Cross," *Lutheran Mission Matters* 32 (2024): 67–74.
[2] Okamoto, "Mission and the Theology of the Cross," 69.
[3] Regin Prenter, "Luther's Theology of the Cross," *Lutheran World* 6 (1959): 222. Robert Kolb, "Luther's Theology of the Cross," *Lutheran Quarterly* 16 (2002): 443. In the introduction to the "Heidelberg Disputation" in *The Annotated Luther*, Dennis Bielfeldt concluded, "There is indeed much in the disputation that supports Kolb's assertion." Dennis Bielfeldt, *The Annotated Luther*, vol. 1, *The Roots of Reform,* ed. Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), 67.
[4] Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 50th Anniversary Edition, with an introductory essay by Ian Hacking (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2012). (Hereafter Kuhn, *Structure.*)
[5] Kuhn did this in his "Reflections on my Critics," in *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge*, ed. Imre Lakatos and Alan Musgrave, *Proceedings of the International Colloquium in the Philosophy of Science, London, 1965*, vol. 4 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 231–278.
[6] David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in the Theology of Mission*, American Society of Missiology, No. 16 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991).
[7] Kuhn, *Structure*, 174. Kuhn acknowledged that he believed this was the source of criticism and controversy over his book. See the Postscript in *Structure*, "Reflections on my Critics," and "Second Thoughts on Paradigms" in Frederick Suppe, ed., *The Structure of Scientific Theories*, 2nd ed. (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1977), all written around 1969, for Kuhn's written efforts to clarify the two senses of paradigm in *Structure*. See also the collection of Kuhn's essays in *The Road Since Structure: Philosophical Essays, 1970–*

1993, with an Autobiographical Interview, ed., James Conant and John Haugeland (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2000).
[8] Kolb, "Luther's Theology of the Cross," 443. Emphasis added.
[9] Kuhn, *Structure*, 35–37, but the entire Section IV is devoted to "Normal Science as Puzzle-solving."
[10] Kuhn, *Structure*, 35.
[11] Kuhn, *Structure*, 24.
[12] Kuhn, *Structure*, 10.
[13] Kuhn, *Structure*, 10.
[14] Kuhn, *Structure*, 11.
[15] Kuhn, *Structure*, 10.
[16] Kuhn, "Second Thoughts on Paradigms," in Frederick Suppe, 482.
[17] Margaret Masterman, "The Nature of a Paradigm," in *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge*, ed. Imre Lakatos and Alan Musgrave, *Proceedings of the International Colloquium in the Philosophy of Science, London, 1965*, vol. 4 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 66. See also Kuhn, "Reflections on My Critics," in Kuhn, *Structure*, 168, where he quotes Masterman with approval.
[18] Kuhn, *Structure*, 186. This is part of the "Postscript" written in 1969, seven years after the initial publication of *Structure*.
[19] Kuhn, *Structure*, 186.
[20] Kuhn, *Structure*, 186.
[21] Kuhn, *Structure*, 91.
[22] Kuhn, *Structure*, 6. See also Section IX on "The Nature and Necessity of Scientific Revolutions" and Section X that shows how scientific revolutions are "changes of world view."
[23] Kuhn, *Structure*, 111.
[24] Kuhn, *Structure*, 149.
[25] John Watkins, "Against 'Normal Science,'" in *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge: Proceedings of the International Colloquium in the Philosophy of Science, London, 1965*, ed. Imre Lakatos and Alan Musgrave (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 33.
[26] Watkins, "Against 'Normal Science,'" 33.
[27] Watkins, "Against 'Normal Science,'" 33. Watkins is quoting from *Structure*, 150, and *Structure*, 157.
[28] LW 31:53; WA 1.362.23–28: "*Patet, quia dum ignorat Christum, ignorat Deum absconditum in passionibus. Ideo praefert opera passionibus et gloriam cruci, potentiam infirmitati, sapientiam stulticiae, et universaliter bonum malo. Tales sunt quos* [Phil. 3, 18.] *Apostolus vocat Inimicos crucis Christi. Utique quia odiunt crucem et passiones, Amant vero opera et gloriam illorum, Ac sic bonum crucis dicunt malum et malum operis dicunt bonum*."
[29] LW 31:55; WA 1.364.2–3: "*Non ille iustus est, qui multum operatur, sed qui sine opere multum credit in Christum*."
[30] LW 31:57; WA 1.365.2: "*Amor Dei non invenit sed creat suum diligibile*…"
[31] Kuhn, *Structure*, 10.
[32] LW 31:55; WA 1.364.11–12, 14: "[*A]d iustificationem nihil faciunt opera… sua sibi sufficit iusticia ex fide Christi."*

The Relationship between *Tentatio*/*Anfechtung*, the *Vita Passiva*, and the *Missio Dei* in Luther's Theology of the Cross

Joshua H. Jones

Abstract: *Tentatio (Latin)*/*Anfechtung (German)*/ "agonizing struggle" has been identified as a major aspect of Luther's theology of the cross. Luther's views on *tentatio*/*Anfechtung*/ "agonizing struggle" stood at odds with many in his own day and stand at odds with many in Western culture. A pattern emerges in the theology of the cross that moves from agonizing struggle to the receiving of comfort in the gospel (*vita passiva*), and to sharing the comfort of the gospel (*missio Dei*). The article proposes that "agonizing struggle" is the catalyst for the *vita passiva* (the receptive life) and the *vita passiva* spurs mission. These characteristics of the theology of the cross are examined in light of Luther's own thought and the Scriptures.

In 2015, Disney Pixar released *Inside Out*. The clever, animated story personifies a handful of emotions to give audiences a glimpse of what happens inside the mind of the characters. The plot involves a dad, mom, and daughter who move from Minnesota to San Franscico, California. The daughter, a young girl named Riley, tries to adjust to her new home but struggles because nothing is quite the same as it was. Meanwhile, Joy is at the headquarters in Riley's brain steadfastly endeavoring to ensure that Riley is always happy. But Joy's efforts do not quite match reality, and they flounder. Meanwhile, Sadness keeps touching things, risking Riley's perpetual happiness. The climax of the movie hinges upon Riley deciding to run away and then with the help of Sadness returning to her parents. Through a series of wild twists and turns inside of Riley's brain, Joy has an epiphany: Sadness is the catalyst for Riley to receive comfort and, in turn, joy. It is only when Sadness takes the controls that Riley receives that comfort from her parents.

Most people try to avoid suffering. And if they do find themselves experiencing what Luther called *tentatio* or *Anfechtung*, understood as "agonizing struggle,"[1] they routinely seek to escape such things as quickly as possible. In other words, most people are a lot like Joy in *Inside Out* before her grand epiphany. Human creatures generally prefer happiness and joy to anything resembling agonizing struggle. This is why Luther's thoughts on being a theologian of the cross sound so strange. His words run contrary to the way one ordinarily thinks about an agonizing struggle. Luther argues

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in the Heidelberg Disputation, "This is clear: He who does not know Christ does not know God hidden in suffering. Therefore, he prefers works to suffering, glory to the cross, strength to weakness, wisdom to folly, and, in general, good to evil. …God can only be known in suffering and the cross"[2] That Luther speaks positively about suffering should catch one's attention. And Luther's claim that "This is clear" may not be obvious to many.

So why does Luther speak positively about agonizing struggle? For Luther *tentatio*/*Anfechtung* was not an end in and of itself. One's agonizing struggles are important because it is in the midst of such struggles that God reveals and offers comfort in His Word and promises, in Christ. This is something that Luther experienced personally in his own agonizing struggles. Robert Kolb argues that Luther's theology of the cross arose from distress that human creatures do not have and cannot do what God in His justice demands.[3] But Luther came to understand that God uses suffering to draw us to Himself, to get our attention as it were, to listen to his Word.[4] C. S. Lewis summarized this phenomenon well, "God whispers in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pain: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world."[5] This realization helps us understand why a theologian of the cross should not immediately seek to avoid or escape agonizing struggles (or, as often is the case, ignore them, or keep them to oneself) since it is in the midst of them that he *receives* God's comfort, in Jesus. Since it is in the midst of suffering, cross, weakness, folly, and evil that he receives such comfort; he is content with these things and seeks to patiently endure them. In this sense, Luther is like Joy after she had her epiphany. He perceives that *tentatio*/*Anfechtung* is the catalyst for comfort.

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Lutherans have recognized the receptive nature of faith, forgiveness, and righteousness in the life of the believer since their beginning.[6] Luther even coined a phrase for this receptive quality of the Christian life and faith: the *vita passiva* or the receptive life.[7] In the later years of the Lutheran Reformation, university students who studied theology were routinely instructed to pay close attention to their own agonizing struggles. Attention was called to these agonizing struggles not for the sake of the struggle itself, rather because of the importance of knowing how and where one received comfort in the midst of such difficulties.[8]

Luther himself describes the importance of this as he explains the third component of his formula for the making a theologian (*oratio*, *meditatio*, and *tentatio*), "Thirdly, there is *tentatio*, *Anfechtung*. This is the touchstone which teaches you not only to know and understand, but also to experience how right, how true, how sweet, how lovely, how mighty, how comforting God's Word is, wisdom beyond all wisdom."[9] The experience of these agonizing struggles and God's deliverance from them, were according to Ronald K. Rittgers, "the sine qua non of theological study"[10] and "the touchstone for authentic pastoral care."[11] Oswald Bayer agrees when he writes, "Agonizing struggle is not the touchstone that validates the authenticity of faith, as if

to demonstrate the veracity and the credibility of the believing person. Instead, agonizing struggle is the touchstone that shows the Word of God itself to be credible and mighty within such struggle and when opposing it."[12]

One important aspect of the *vita passiva* has to do with the content of the message of the gospel. It is no mistake that Luther, Rittgers, and Bayer use the word "touchstone" in conjunction with *tentatio*/*Anfechtung*. It essentially provides the test for whether or not the comfort received is trustworthy and true. This is not to say that the test is subjective based upon the individual's interpretation, instead, it reveals there is only one message that is up to the task of true comfort in the midst of *tentatio*/*Anfechtung*.

The theology of the cross is not only a revealing of God's proper work of comfort, consolation, forgiveness, and life in Christ, it is also a revealing of humanity's utter helplessness apart from Jesus.[13] If what is received in the midst of agonizing struggle requires a person to do something (works) then what is received is not the genuine comfort Luther and the Scriptures describe. Instead, what is offered as comfort is received as law, that is, "do something." Luther addressed this problem in the Heidelberg Disputation as well, "The law brings the wrath of God, kills, reviles, accuses, judges, and condemns everything that is not in Christ [Rom. 4:15],"[14] and "The law says, 'do this,' and it is never done. Grace says, 'believe in this,' and everything is done already."[15] In the midst of *tentatio*/*Anfechtung* anything less than the genuine kerygma will not do. Without the gospel, the comfort one receives is a sham. It might sound enticing and good, but such comfort misses the mark. It fails the touchstone test.

The theology of the cross is not only a revealing of God's proper work of comfort, consolation, forgiveness, and life in Christ, it is also a revealing of humanity's utter helplessness apart from Jesus.

For example, our daughter, who has profound disabilities, recently endured a very dangerous and risky 12-hour surgery. As her parents, my wife and I were experiencing some "agonizing struggles." More than one person attempted to give us the assurance of a positive outcome. We heard things like "Think positively," or "Don't worry. Everything will be okay." Such assurances were well-intentioned, and the promised conclusion was certainly desirable. But those assurances did not provide actual comfort. Why? The surgeon made it very clear that everything would probably not be okay. We had also previously experienced risky surgeries that did not turn out okay.

Assurances are only as good as their grounds. And unless the person offering this kind of assurance has special knowledge, they have no real basis for offering it. Worse, perhaps, is the secondary assumption that the giving of assurance is an end in and of itself, thinking "as long as I attempt to make a suffering person feel better, I've done my job." But what has actually been accomplished? People in our situation often feel uneasy and confused when they hear such assurances. We look for comfort but are told to *do* something like "think positively" or to *believe* "everything will be okay" even though such a belief has nothing to do with Jesus. It is as if by the sheer power

of the will we can guarantee the desired outcome. This kind of assurance fails the touchstone test because it is law, not gospel.

Importantly, the Scriptures direct us in the same way as Luther. David confesses, "Before I was afflicted, I went astray, but now I keep your word" (Ps. 119:67) and "It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I might learn your statutes" (Ps. 119:71). For David, affliction was the catalyst for directing him to God's word and promises. In a similar line of thought Paul and Barnabas strengthen and encourage the saints at Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, saying that it is "through many tribulations that we must enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22b). Paul again speaks similarly in his letter to the church at Rome, "…we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope" (Rom. 5:3–4). Here the apostle emphasizes that suffering is the catalyst for (eschatological) hope.[16] Paul's expansion of this truth in 2 Corinthians 1 is worth of quoting in full:

> Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer. Our hope for you is unshaken, for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort.
>
> For we do not want you to be unaware brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead.
> (2 Cor 1:3–9)

The affliction Paul and Timothy endured in Asia taught them that relying on their own strength was hopeless, in order that they might instead rely on God who raises the dead. Here again, affliction is the catalyst for comfort. But we also see an added dimension to the importance of both *tentatio*/*Anfechtung* and the *vita passiva* for Christians. Not only do Paul and Timothy receive comfort in their affliction and sufferings, but they also have an eye toward sharing the same comfort with others. That is to say, the theology of the cross informs the message and in turn impacts pastoral care and the *missio Dei*.

That Paul uses "comfort and salvation" as a hendiadys[17] confirms what has been argued above, namely, that comfort is nothing less than full salvation rooted in the word of the cross which Paul has been preaching to the Corinthians from the beginning to the end of the Corinthian corpus.[18] His preaching passes the touchstone test. The message of the cross then is both what is to be received as comfort and what is to be proclaimed to the lost and erring. Robert Scudieri agrees as he contends that "mission

flows from the cross, then back to the cross."[19] The *vita passiva*, the receiving of the comfort of the gospel, should then spur a desire to share the same message with others.

Luther put his theology into practice, for example, among the saints at Miltenberg in 1524. Notably Luther uses Paul's words in 2 Cor 1 as he seeks to comfort the congregation at Miltenberg after their pastor was excommunicated due to a conflict with local Roman Catholic priests.[20] Not only does Luther seek to comfort the them with the gospel in their agonizing struggles, he also reminds them that prayer and God's Word are the only means to attack false teachings and to spread the gospel.[21]

In the midst of ministry in the church, God's people are sure to experience *tentatio*/*Anfechtung*. Such experiences, as mentioned above, should be the catalyst for comfort. They should open our ears and hearts once again to the gospel and to know and believe the message is for me. Paying attention to successes and failures and discussing what contributed to them is worthwhile, beneficial, and wise. But we should not get too down on ourselves in failures, nor should we become puffed up in outward success. In successes and failures, Luther directs us once again to Christ and His cross,

> …he who has not been brought low, reduced to nothing through the cross and suffering, takes credit for works and wisdom and does not give credit to God. He thus misuses and defiles the gifts of God.
>
> He, however, who has been emptied [Cf, Phil 2:7] through suffering no longer does works but knows that God works and does all things in him. For this reason, whether man does works or not, it is all the same to him. He neither boasts if he does good works, nor is he disturbed if God does not do good works through him. He knows that it is sufficient if he suffers and is brought low by the cross in order to be annihilated all the more.[22]

Luther's words suggest strongly that in success as in failure, we would do well to be content and mindful that God is God, and we are not. Success or failure is God's prerogative. We can simply be content as Paul and Timothy were in knowing that if we fail, it is for the comfort and salvation of others; and if we succeed, it is still for the comfort of others (2 Cor. 1:6). Likewise, God's people do not make a competition out of suffering as if one who has suffered much is somehow better than someone who has suffered less. Nor should we view a growing ministry with suspicion or assume the opposite with one that lags. Presumption and despair are not the results of receiving the sweet comfort of God's word but of sin.[23]

We have come full circle from *tentatio*/*Anfechtung* to the *vita passiva* to the *missio Dei* and back again to *tentatio*. This is the pattern for a theologian of the cross. As he pays close attention to this pattern of agonizing struggle and receiving God's Word of comfort, he aims to speak the word of the cross to others that they might receive the same comfort in Christ Jesus—the only true comfort that is the power of God for salvation,[24] and the only comfort that passes the touchstone test.

ENDNOTES

[1] In this article *tentatio*, *Anfechtung*, and agonizing struggle are used interchangeably.

[2] Martin Luther. *Luther's Works: American Edition*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut Lehman (St. Louis and Philadelphia: Concordia and Fortress, 1955–1986), 31:53. Hereafter referred to as LW.
[3] Robert Kolb, "Luther on the Theology of the Cross," in *The Pastoral Luther: Essays on Martin Luther's Practical Theology,* ed. Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017), 35.
[4] Much could be said concerning Satan's role in *tentatio*/*Anfechtung* that is beyond the scope of this brief article. Briefly, I would argue that in the midst of agonizing struggle which is given only by God, that God and Satan have different aims. God desires to draw people closer to him and refine them. Satan attempts to use the same agonizing struggle to pull us farther away from our Lord to despair, presumption, or unbelief. Job is the primary Scriptural example of this phenomenon.
[5] C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 91.
[6] See, for example, AC IV.
[7] Oswald Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology*, trans. Thomas H. Trapp (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 42.
[8] Ronald K. Rittgers, *The Reformation of Suffering: Pastoral Theology and Lay Piety in Late Medieval and Late Modern Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 228. His evidence for this claim is based upon David Chytraeus' *Discourse on How to Begin the Study of Theology Correctly* (1560) which Rittgers argues was among the most widely used works for students studying theology in order to become pastors in the late Reformation.
[9] LW 34:286–287. Italics are original. Cf. Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology*, 35.
[10] Rittgers, *The Reformation of Suffering*, 228.
[11] Rittgers, *The Reformation of Suffering*, 228.
[12] Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology*, 36–37.
[13] Robert Kolb's discussion on *homo absconditus* and *homo revelatus* is especially helpful in "Luther on the Theology of the Cross," 51–56.
[14] LW 31:54.
[15] LW 31:56.
[16] Cf. 1 Pet. 1:3–9; James 1:2–4, 12.
[17] See Mark A. Seifrid, *The Second Letter to the Corinthians*, Pillar NT Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 27.
[18] See 1 Cor. 1:18, 2:2–5; 2 Cor. 12:9–10.
[19] Robert Scudieri, "A Missiology of the Cross," in *The Theology of the Cross for the 21st Century: Signposts for a Multicultural Witness*, eds. Alberto L. García and A. R. Victor Raj (St. Louis: Concordia, 2002), 65.
[20] LW 43:99–102.
[21] LW 43:103–112.
[22] LW 31:55.
[23] Luther calls this sin. "Sin carries us down to despair or up to presumption. In either case the sin is not repented of, for sin is either exaggerated or not acknowledged at all." LW 54:37 no. 273.
[24] Rom. 1:16; 1 Cor. 1:18.

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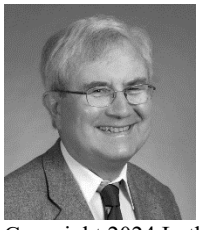
The God Behind the Cross Speaks and Sends

Robert Kolb

The 1910 World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh set the following as the immediate goal of Christian churches: "the evangelization of the world in this generation." The vision of Western Europeans and North Americans marching into the far corners of the world with the gifts of their cultures was shared in specific form by those who sang, "Onward, Christian Soldiers." The "Great War" gave pause to reconsider the optimism of the late nineteenth century, but World War II ended with opportunities for new expansion of mission that continues to transform the nature of the Holy Christian Church throughout the world.[1]

In this new millennium, talk of "the end of the post-Constantinian era" and of "post-Christendom" has changed the mood among Christians. This discourse primarily stems from two cultural shifts: the first is significant numerical losses of Christian church members and attendees in Western Europe and North America, and the second is a general acceptance of criticism and even misrepresentation of the Christian faith in the public forum. These changes in the atmosphere around us should not spread gloom among many believers who remember that the Lord of the Church told His disciples, "Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves . . . and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles" (Mt 10:16a, 18).

When considering the mission of the Church in 2024, many Christians grow despondent at seeming losses and relatively few gains, at least in their own environments. They concur with the first half of the sentiment, expressed in other words a few years ago, that "God is always late," and they tend to forget that the ditty continued, "but God is always on time." Why the Holy Spirit alters the pace and the place at which the Word of the Lord grows is hidden from the best of our minds. Therefore, to faithfully carry out Christ's mission, we the Church must first crucify our desire to exercise control over His mission. Put another way, we must set aside our impulse to fully understand and master what the Holy Spirit is doing with us whom He leads on His mission. Instead, we must concentrate on those to whom the Holy Spirit sends us rather than get distracted by His *modus operandi*.



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The Hidden God and the Church's Mission

For Martin Luther, the notion that the Holy Spirit's methods are beyond our comprehension would be no surprise. Much of his concept of "*Deus Absconditus*" (God Hidden) focuses on the evils believers suffer and their wondering "why?"[2] His discussion of the hidden God put up a "no trespassing" sign in front of the God who by very definition is beyond the complete grasp of the creatures. Luther was particularly sensitive to believers' doubts that arise when God seems to be acting like the devil. His theodicy waits patiently for "the light of glory" to reveal what the lights of nature and grace do not: why some are saved and not others. His justification for the existence of evil in a world made by the good and omnipotent God echoes Paul's in Romans 3:24–26: God justifies himself by liberating sinners through the death and resurrection of Christ Jesus won for sinners. He proves that He is righteous by bestowing new life through trust in Him as a sacrifice of atonement.

> Therefore, to faithfully carry out Christ's mission, we the Church must first crucify our desire to exercise control over His mission.

Luther did insist that the Hidden God (*Deus Absconditus*) is the Revealed God (*Deus Revelatus*).[3] His comparison and contrast of God Hidden and God Revealed in Jesus Christ address directly the concerns and anxieties over the mission of God and His Church and over their seeming—puzzling—lack of success by some standards in their own efforts. Recognizing that the Holy Spirit is the Lord of the Church's mission does not banish our questions about what is happening with His mission or our doubts about the Spirit's plan or our own. However, it does put our doubt and even despair in a different framework. This Spirit-filled framework opens up possibilities for a relaxed attitude that allows us to experiment with new ways to show His love and speak His presence into the lives of those outside the faith. For He will give us sensitivity to recognize failed experiments as well as fruit-bearing new approaches. He will discipline our waywardness when we try to follow unfruitful paths too long. He wants us to listen.

In the "Schwabach Articles," a confession of the faith that Luther composed in 1529, the reformer and his followers affirmed that "God also bestows faith through this Word, as through an instrument, with his Holy Spirit, when and where he wills. Apart from it there is no other instrument or way, passage or path, to obtain faith. Speculations [about what happens] apart from or previous to the spoken Word, as holy and good as they appear, are nevertheless useless lies and errors."[4]

In the Augsburg Confession, Melanchthon affirmed that the Holy Spirit brings people to faith "when and where he wills."[5] The Wittenberg reformers insisted that the Holy Spirit brings people to trust in the only name given among human beings by which they may be saved (Acts 5:29), Jesus Christ. He does so through His Word of Gospel in oral, written, and sacramental forms. But they also acknowledged that that

Word does not work magically. The Holy Spirit remains the Lord of the process, and His ways of letting His Word grow in the hearts of His people remain beyond human grasp, despite our sometimes-helpful attempts to analyze psychologically how people come to faith in Christ. The Holy Spirit has His own plan and His own schedule.

Luther's concept of God Hidden and God Revealed may help believers rely on God's judgment in the pursuit of bringing salvation to those outside the faith. For it frees us to actively give witness through building trust through love and then through explicit and joyful speaking about our Savior and Lord without the hindrance of the compulsion to make sure we are "doing it right." The "when and where" of the Holy Spirit's wanting to work has changed for North Americans. A century ago, "mission" involved a long plane ride or ship voyage. Today, "mission" occurs just outside the doors of our homes—if not within them. "Mission" was then something that needed our "praying" and our "paying." In His mysterious ways, the Holy Spirit has taken away the believers next door and replaced them with their children who have lost the faith or with those from foreign lands whom the Holy Spirit has drawn to us. The former can particularly distress us because it is difficult to fathom why children of believers have not found Jesus Christ necessary or meaningful for them. We must simply commend them to the Holy Spirit's mysterious plan. We may also struggle to express the faith we often take for granted to those who come from strikingly different ways of conceiving of reality. In both cases, the Holy Spirit's lordship over His mission frees us to experiment with new and old ways of telling the story of His dying and rising to restore trust in our Creator and joy in His gifts.

The Revealed God and His Mission

Although Christ's crucifixion and resurrection did not claim a major role in the Heidelberg Theses, the saving work of Jesus Christ set the tone for Luther's theses and for his preaching and teaching throughout his career. The Holy Spirit gives this message to His Church today to take to people who live with all the burdens of fear, shame, and guilt. Such are the results of lives broken by temptation and mortality, imposed upon humanity since the fall into sin. The commission which Jesus has given to His Church, according to Luke, leads us to preach repentance and forgiveness of sins throughout the world (Luke 24:46–48) or, according to John, sends us to make real the forgiveness of sins for His people (John 20:21–23).

Luther presumed that believers, as children of God, act as God acts—within the limits of their creaturely humanity. That means that they talk. These children blabber out the family secrets to anyone who will listen and to some who do not want to. Luther reminded the Wittenberg congregation in 1523, "We live on earth only so that we should be a help to other people. Otherwise, it would be best if God would strangle us and let us die as soon as we were baptized and had begun to believe. For this reason, however, he lets us live so that we may bring other people also to faith as he has done for us."[6]

Almost two decades later, in 1540, preaching on John 20, Luther paraphrases, "I send you as my father has sent me":

> This same commandment I give to you unto the end of the world, that both you and all the world shall know that such forgiveness or retaining of sin is not done by human power or might, but by the command of him who is sending you. This is not said alone to the ministers or the servants of the church but also to every Christian. Here each may serve the other in the hour of death, or wherever there is need, and give him absolution. If you now hear from me the words, "your sins are forgiven," then you hear that God wants to be gracious to you, deliver you from sin and death and make you righteous and blessed.[7]

The revealed God has chosen each one of His baptized people to speak for Him, with their conduct and with their words, with a comforting embrace or hand on the shoulder and with recollections of what Christ has been delivering in every form of our sharing the Gospel. The revealed Word made flesh continues revealing Himself through witness of every believer.

The revealed God has chosen each one of His baptized people to speak for Him, with their conduct and with their words, with a comforting embrace or hand on the shoulder and with recollections of what Christ has been delivering in every form of our sharing the Gospel.

What Luther originally called "our theology"—the "*theologia crucis*" as outlined in his Heidelberg Theses of 1518—forbade speculation about God Hidden because God has revealed His person and plans through Jesus Christ and the Scriptures, "which testify of him" (John 5:39). Luther recognized that being human is more than simply being a rational being (*animal rationalis*), that Aristotle perceived as the definition of what it means to be human. Because Aristotle was operating without a concept of a person who created, certainly without the notion of an Uncreated Creator who could speak and relate to human beings, he had to define human beings simply as rational living beings. For Aristotle and his followers, reason moved them to follow the eternal self-standing law: their performance of the law was necessary and the ultimate good for human life.

By 1518, Luther had spent five years immersed in the thinking of the psalmists and the apostle Paul. Through Scripture, where the Holy Spirit chooses to speak according to Luther,[8] God reveals himself as the Creator, who came in the second person of the Trinity, the Word made flesh, to speak as He had spoken in Genesis 1. This Word, Jesus of Nazareth, spoke from a cross and from the mouth of an empty tomb. The Heidelberg Theses emphasized that trust in Christ gives life, but they did

not discuss the cross or the empty tomb that lay on His path toward reclaiming our lives for our Creator. What Luther only hinted in the Heidelberg Theses blossomed in his preaching and lecturing into an exposition of the revealed God as the Crucified One, the risen Lord of life, Jesus the Messiah. As the reformer wrote in his Smalcald Articles,

> Here is the first and chief article [of the Christian faith]: That Jesus Christ, our God and Lord, 'was handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification' (Rom. 4[:25]); and he alone is 'the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world' (John 1[:29]); and 'the Lord has laid upon him the iniquity of us all' (Isa. 53[:6]).[9]

In twenty-first century societies in North America, Australia, and Western Europe, many people have more material blessings than any of their ancestors ever did and yet are plagued by dissatisfaction, disease, discontent, and discouragement. They feel disgruntled over irritations that their grandparents took in stride. Like Sisyphus, they strive and are frustrated when they seem to get nowhere. They sense that there is more to life but cannot let themselves hope beyond the edges of their definition of reality.

To such people, believers come with the offer of a new framework for thinking of life and a new identification of who they are and what their place is in the grand scheme of reality. Believers offer an exit from old existences and old ways of conceiving what is authentic and genuine in life through the cross. For the cross stops us from breathing the foul air of our own conceptions of how life should work. It spells death to living with false gods, relying on idols of our own fashioning. The tomb takes those who have died with Christ and buries them in His tomb. The open mouth of the tomb provides the entrance into a life lived in conversation and community with our Creator, who has come to re-create us as His trusting people. Without the cross, there is no exit that opens into real living.

Living under the Cross

In pursuing God's mission to bring the saving message to others, believers encounter God Hidden and God Revealed. God seems at times to be hindering His own mission or putting it on hold. Or we think He is indifferent about bringing salvation to certain groups or kinds of neighbors. In the face of such impressions, believers recognize the need to hear of Christ in those whom the Spirit lets them reach with their witness. With the hurts and heartaches this outreach can produce, believers turn to Jesus on the cross and coming out of the tomb, suffering for sinners. Believers do not shy away from engaging those within our reach at their malicious or hypocritical worst. For Christ's people know that His model for combatting evil and delivering the Goods comes in what seems a weak and foolish manner (1 Cor 1 and 2).

Luther understood the implications of the liberation for true human living that comes from Christ on and down from the cross, which flows into and out of the tomb. First, a sense of joy and peace arise for those who now hang out with God, listening to what He has to say in Scripture and responding to Him in prayer and praise. Second, believers realize that not only is Christ's life our life; Christ's battles are also now our battles. Satan continues his role as accuser; the devil cannot help but deceive and try to kill. But God has given us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor 15:54–57). So, when our Lord and our faith are criticized, we must remember that Jesus promised, "If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household!" (Mt 10:25) and simply continue to proclaim without malice.

Christians do not pick fights. They are winsome in their witness, and that alone can arouse opposition.

Luther believed that the true Church is recognized by the opposition it encounters in the world. Christians do not pick fights. They are winsome in their witness, and that alone can arouse opposition. Among those marks of the Church's presence, he found such opposition to the Gospel. Luther's theology of the cross informed his seventh mark of the Church. In *On the Councils and the Church* of 1539, he wrote,

> The holy Christian people are externally recognized by the holy possession of the sacred cross. They must endure every misfortune and persecution, all kinds of trials and evil from the devil, the world, and the flesh (as the Lord's Prayer indicates) by inward sadness, timidity, fear, outward poverty, contempt, illness, and weakness, in order to become like their head, Christ.[10]

In *Against Hanswurst*, two years later, in the face of open persecution and harsh criticism, Luther described the reaction of his followers: "we have not … avenged ourselves in return. … But as Christ, the apostles, and the ancient church did, we endure, admonish, and pray for others."[11]

He meant that the Church should expect to live among wolves. Times when the Church lives among friendly cocker spaniels have been rare in history. This does not mean that Christians actively seek harassment, persecution, or milder forms of dissonance with the surrounding culture. It means that those around us are made uncomfortable by the implications of Christian living, to say nothing of Christian speaking, and that they react in self-defense. That self-defense manifests as criticism of godly living and ridicule of believers' confession that Christ is the way, the truth, and the life. Believers understand that the claim that the Lord makes on the lives of those outside the faith does mean death to old ways of life, so we have sympathy for the struggle to let go of old Adam. We have been there and done that. And so Christ's people take for granted that their friends, relatives, neighbors, and coworkers who do

not trust Jesus as Savior and Lord will be defensive in order to preserve a way of life they believe is working. Therefore, believers do not complain about the opposition, understanding it arises in good—but tragically false—faith that has substituted idols for Jesus the Lord.

Thus, we deal with those who are trying to defend their idols with cheeks expecting to receive blows. Turning the other cheek confesses that those who seek to harm us do not govern our estimation of our own worth or power. We know that our Savior has given us the ultimate worth available to human beings, that of being God's child. We know that Jesus has given us the ultimate power in our scope, the power to forgive sins and offer the embrace of our Father to those who insult Him by objecting to our speaking His message and living His way of life. He has reserved "evening the score" for Himself (Dt 32:35–36, Rom 12:19). Believers do not take blows or blasphemies personally, figuring that the Creator can take care of Himself and us. Believers see such expressions of hostility as opportunities to talk about Christ on the cross, who suffered on behalf of His bitter enemies (Rom 5:6–9).

For Luther, the cross of Christ casts its shadow over the whole life of the Church. This is certainly true for mission on which God sends the Church. As it brings the liberating promise of new life in Christ, it points to the cross, which is history—the history of our Lord's dying two millennia ago, and the history of our sinful identities, which He has claimed and taken from us. Living in the cross's shadow, with the light of the Lord's resurrection illuminating the path ahead, His people are energized to deliver new life to others. His call to every believer to testify about what God has done in our lives creates opportunities for the Gospel of Jesus Christ to eliminate sinful identities and bestow life-changing membership in God's family.

ENDNOTES

[1] See, e.g. Mark A. Noll, *The New Shape of World Christianity. How American Experience Reflects Global Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009) and Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom. The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), and Jenkins, *The New Faces of Christianity. Believing the Bible in the Global South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). Jenkins's bright picture of the Christian church in the majority world is tempered in his *Fertility and Faith: The Demographic Revolution and the Transformation of World Religions* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2020).

[2] Steven D. Paulson, *Luther's Outlaw God. vol. 1: Hiddenness, Evil, and Predestination*, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2018), esp. 159–243.

[3] Martin Luther, In commenting on Genesis 26:9, *Luther's Works. vol.5*, Jaroslav Pelikan, ed. (Saint Louis/Philadelphia: Concordia/Fortress, 1958-), 45. [Hereafter LW]

[4] Robert Kolb and James A. Nestingen, eds., *Sources and Contexts of the Book of Concord* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 85–86.

[5] Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 40.

[6] Martin Luther, In his sermon on 1 Peter 2:9, LW 30: 64–65.

[7] John Nicholas Lenker, ed., *Sermons of Martin Luther* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), 392–393.
[8] Robert Kolb, *Martin Luther and the Enduring Word of God. The Wittenberg School and its Scripture-Centered Proclamation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 75–97.
[9] *Book of Concord*, 301.
[10] LW 41: 164-165.
[11] LW 41: 198.

Luther's Theology of the Cross in *A Muster Sermon against the Turks* (1529)

Adam S. Francisco

Abstract: This article explores Martin Luther's theology of the cross as articulated in his 1529 sermon, "A Muster Sermon against the Turks." Luther was deeply concerned with the challenges posed by Ottoman imperialism, including the way Christians might bear witness to the gospel to Turkish Muslims. Ultimately, Luther's theology of the cross provided a framework for understanding Christian suffering and mission in a hostile world, affirming the hope that even in the most challenging circumstances, God's work could be accomplished through His faithful followers.

Luther was not a missionary in the conventional sense of the term, but he was interested in seeing the gospel proclaimed to those who had never heard it,[1] including the oldest of Christianity's foes: the followers of Islam.[2] He wondered why no one had sent preachers to the Muslim world, and he was critical of Christians in a position to do something about it but who nevertheless failed to do so. Early on in his career, for example, he criticized the pope for neglecting to send missionaries to the Ottoman Turks and issuing a call for a crusade instead.[3] If the pope were indeed the vicar of Christ, he wrote, "he would risk life and limb to preach the gospel to the Turks."[4] Luther once expressed hope that he would get the opportunity himself,[5] but as time passed, it looked like the task would have to fall to someone else. "I sincerely hope to see the day when the gospel will come to the Turks…. It is not likely that I will see that day. But you might, and then you will have to deal with the Turks carefully…that one of them might receive [the gospel]."[6]

That day seemed to be getting closer in the late 1520s. The once-distant world of Islam had extended its reach deep into Christendom as Sultan Suleyman and the Turks laid siege to Vienna in 1529. Muslims had already begun migrating to Hungary.[7] Buda's massive Mátyás Templom had been converted into a mosque. And reports of Christian conversion to Islam were beginning to spread.[8] "The Turk and his religion," wrote Luther in a preface to a work on the rites and customs of the Ottomans, are now "at our very doorstep."[9] Even so, while the situation was dangerous and the Turks

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were notoriously violent, he began to think about the possibility of Christians living among Muslims, and in a work addressing his "dear Germans, the drunken swine," he offered advice for vulnerable Christians with the hope that with the right frame of mind they might "perhaps convert many" of the Turks.[10]

The booklet is entitled *A Muster Sermon against the Turks*. It was written shortly after the Turks abandoned their siege on Vienna in mid-October 1529 as news began to filter into Germany about the atrocities that accompanied their march into lower Austria. And it was terrifying. Whole towns had been depopulated. Men of fighting age were gathered and executed. Women were systematically raped. Young adults and children who were spared execution by impalement or being cut in two were sent back east to be sold in slave markets. Thus, Luther began the *Muster Sermon* by admonishing his readers "in these dreadful, dangerous times" to "take heart and no longer think of peace and good days."[11] The days of tribulation had arrived. The Turks sought world domination and the destruction of Christendom, for they were "the final and worst fury of the Devil against Christ."[12] In fact, "according to scripture," he wrote, the rise of the Ottoman Turks was predicted long ago in Daniel 7:2–14. They were none other than the little horn that sprouted up from the head of the fourth beast of Daniel's vision, who displaced three of the original ten. The horn's human-like eyes were symbolic of the Qur'ān, for it lacked the "divine eye. . .. for it teaches nothing different than what human wisdom and reason can accept," and its blasphemous mouth was symbolic of the false teachings of Islam.[13]

Luther's apocalyptic description of the Turks was meant to encourage and comfort his readers. That the Ottoman Empire was the little horn meant that their days were numbered, "for the Turk will not knock off more than. . .. three horns" and they had already accomplished this—in the Turkish conquest of Asia Minor, Egypt, and the Balkans.[14] Thank God for this, he wrote elsewhere,

> For this is sure: there are no more temporal events to wait for according to the Scriptures. It has all happened, all has been fulfilled—the Roman Empire is finished, the Turk has come to the peak of his power, the power of the Pope is about to crash—and the world is cracking to pieces as though it would tumble down…for if the world were to linger on, as it has been, then surely all the world would go Muhammadan or Epicurean, and there would be no more Christians left.[15]

Luther's view of the world, especially later in his life, was always apocalyptic. The expansion of Islam into Christendom played an increasingly prominent role in the drama. But it was not all doom and gloom. He thought it was part of God's plan and the arena in which God's mission would take place. According to Michal Valčo, for Luther,

> God's mission, the *missio Dei,* does not take place on neutral ground. . .. The history of the world has an apocalyptic framework; a continuous battle is being waged between God and the Devil. . .. Final victory is in God's hands because the decisive battle has been won by Christ on the cross, but while in this world,

> Christians must suffer persecution and pain and remain a minority in a hostile world. [16]

Continuing, he adds, "Luther pointed to Christ's promise in the New Testament that the gospel would be preached in all the earth before the end comes, believing that the Holy Spirit's mission, … was then, in his lifetime, shortly before the final apocalypse, centered on Germany."[17] So, despite the time, including the prospect of subjugation—a life of dhimmitude—under Islam, Luther believed that God might just be at work through Christians living amidst Muslims. He thus dedicated the last section of the *Muster Sermon* to advising Christians—whether they be prisoners of war, slaves, or servants of the Turks—for the task.

"At this point," he wrote, "I need to give an exhortation and consolation to the Germans who are already captive in Turkey or who might still be taken captive."[18] "Make no mistake, life will be hard there. You will be treated like chattel, and your faith will be challenged, for you will not hear the Gospel nor learn anything about Christ and your soul's salvation."[19]

God was nevertheless at work, but the first thing you need to do in preparation is to learn the basics of the Christian faith. Most importantly, Luther insisted,

> Learn the article [of the creed] where we say, 'And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and buried, descended into hell, on the third day rose from the dead, ascended into heaven, is seated at the right hand of God the Almighty Father from where He will come to judge the living and the dead.' For everything depends on this article…by this article our faith is distinguished from all other faiths.[20]

He even went on to suggest some devotional practices a Christian might perform that would not draw undue attention or persecution from Muslims. "In Turkey, where you can have neither a preacher nor books, recite to yourself—be it in bed or at work, be it with words or thoughts—your Lord's Prayer, the Creed, and the Ten Commandments. When you get to this article," [the article on Christ; instead of making the sign of the cross], "press your thumb against a finger or give yourself some other sign with the hand or foot to firmly fix this article in your mind and make it distinct, especially in cases where you are presented with a Turkish stumbling block or are tempted [by Islam]."[21]

The term Luther used for temptations of this sort was *Anfechtung.* What he meant by it is more than a sinful urge or tempting distraction; it was more of a spiritual assault from the outside accompanied by doubt and despair. According to Alister McGrath,

> It must be emphasized that Luther does not regard *Anfechtung* as a purely subjective state of the individual. Two aspects of the concept can be distinguished, although they are inseparable: the *objective* assault of spiritual forces upon the believer, and the *subjective* anxiety and doubt which arise within him as a consequence of these assaults.[22]

Luther was no stranger to such temptation either.

> Whoever is interested may learn a lesson from my example. A few times—when I did not bear this principal teaching [the doctrine of Christ] in mind—the Devil caught up with me and plagued me…. Then all the works and laws of man were right, and not an error was to be found in the whole papacy. In short, the only one who had ever erred was Luther. All my best works, teaching, sermons, and books had to be condemned. The abominable Muhammad almost became my prophet.[23]

Luther believed that every Christian was susceptible to *Anfechtung*. They should, in fact, expect it—whether in Christendom or, in this case, the Ottoman Empire. "Every Christian has his temptations. He who would believe, let him reconcile himself to the fact that his faith will be assaulted with temptations. The Devil will do all he can to quench the spark of faith before it comes to a flame."[24] This would be the case for Christians living in subjugation (or dhimmitude) under Islam. While there might not be state-sponsored coercion or compulsion to convert, there would certainly be social pressure.

It would also come through the doubt stirred up by certain and, in a way, impressive aspects of Islamic culture. There were many, Luther thought, including the notable piety and austerity of Muslim clerics and dervishes, the discipline and liturgical devotion of Muslims generally, the sobriety, modesty, and regimentation of Muslim society, and reports of signs and wonders at the tombs of famous Muslim saints.

The greatest, however, was the power of the Turks. They have enjoyed "so many victories, have so often defeated Christians (or so they think), and up to now have expanded so impressively, that," it seems, "can only indicate that their holiness, faith, and way of life pleases God."[25] All these things are but a "holy façade,"[26] though, he quickly added, for despite their temporal victories and earthly successes, because they deny Jesus to be the son of God, who died and rose from the dead, "they blaspheme God the Father and honor the Devil in place of God."[27]

So how should a Christian think about life among the Turks? First, Luther encouraged his readers to "be patient in their captivity and to endure and bear all their misery willingly for God's sake."[28] If you are taken captive by the Turks, it is because God has allowed it. So be of this mindset, he continued, to "accept and endure such misery and servitude sent by God patiently and willingly for God's sake and that you serve your master (to whom you are sold) with total faithfulness and diligence regardless of the fact that you are a Christian and your master is a heathen or Turk." Do not try to run away, and certainly do not commit suicide, for life under Islam is what God has planned for you. The scriptures exhort servants and slaves to be obedient "even though the masters are non-Christians or wicked."[29] Such service and subjugation, he went on, is "good and useful…as your cross in which your faith is practiced and proven."[30] In fact, there were plenty of examples of this in the history of God's people—Jacob, Joseph, the nation of Israel (under Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon), Paul, John, and many of the other apostles. The greatest example is, of course, Jesus. "Didn't Christ have to allow the Jews and the gentiles, Pilate, and Herod

to do what they wanted with Him?" So, he asked those vulnerable to subjugation, "Why would you have it any better than your Lord Christ Himself along with all His saints in the Old and New Testament?"[31]

This is the Christian life. Every Christian will bear a cross (or crosses) and should be prepared to endure it. As Luther put it in a sermon on suffering and the cross written around the same time that he wrote the *Muster Sermon,*

> Christ by his suffering not only saved us from the Devil, death, and sin, but also…his suffering is an example, which we are to follow in our suffering. Though our suffering and cross should never be so exalted that we think we can be saved by it or earn the least merit through it, nevertheless we should suffer after Christ, that we may be conformed to him. For God has appointed that we should not only believe in the crucified Christ, but also be crucified with him.[32]

Christians should therefore be prepared for a life of suffering—not over-spiritualized, self-induced suffering but "the kind of suffering that is worthy of the name and honestly grips and hurts, such as some great danger of property, honor, body, and life."[33]

> Christian persecution, temptation, and stumbling blocks are a form of suffering visited upon us by the Devil or the world. … we must suffer, in order that we may thus be conformed to Christ….
>
> When one knows this it is all the more easy and bearable, and one can comfort oneself by saying: Very well, if I want to be a Christian, I must also wear the colors of the court; the dear Christ issues no others in his court; suffering there must be."[34]

It is in and through suffering that God works. In Luther's mind, it was the *modus operandi* of his mission. As he put it in the *Muster Sermon*,

> With stubbornness and impatience, you accomplish nothing more than making your master, whose servant you are, angrier and even worse. On top of that, you also disgrace the teaching and name of Christ, as though Christians are such wicked, unfaithful, treacherous people who will not serve but will rather run away and steal themselves away as scoundrels and thieves, and in doing so they are hardened and made stubborn in their faith. On the other hand, if you were to faithfully and diligently serve, you would adorn and glorify the gospel and the name of Christ so that your master and perhaps many others, no matter how wicked, would have to say, 'Sure enough, the Christians really are a faithful, obedient, godly, humble, diligent people.' And with that, you would also put the Turkish faith to shame and perhaps convert many when they would see that Christians surpass the Turks in humility, patience, diligence, faithfulness, and similar virtues.[35]

So, Luther urged Christians to accept the otherwise undesirable circumstances of dhimmitude. One never knows how God might be working through His people—even the simplest among them whether man, woman, or child. Servitude and suffering are part of what it means to be a Christian in the world, and there is no escaping it. Why would there be? The Devil is the world's landlord. "There's nothing but the Devil on both sides and all around."[36] Therefore, Christians should expect difficulties, especially in these last days. "At the end it must happen in such a way that the Devil will attack Christianity with all his power on all sides, both physically and spiritually, and tempt it as best and as much as he can."[37] But it will end. Christians, then, should serve their neighbor, whoever it may be, and "wait to see what God will do."[38]

One never knows how God might be working through His people—even the simplest among them whether man, woman, or child.

In the years after the assault on Vienna and the publication of the *Muster Sermon,* Luther did what he could to further prepare Christians for life under Islam, as he anticipated future conquests and the subsequent subjugation of Christians under Islamic rule. In 1541, he appealed to Germans everywhere to pray against the Turks, but also to be prepared for them as well. He reiterated the advice he gave in the *Muster Sermon*. In addition to men and women, he singled out children, writing, "I strongly urge that the children be taught the catechism. Should they be taken captive in the invasion, they will at least take something of the Christian faith with them. Who knows what God might be able to accomplish through them."[39] He was especially interested in fortifying their faith so that they might defend the faith in a Muslim context. The surest defenses,

> our greatest protection and stoutest weapons are the articles about Christ, namely, that Christ is the son of God, that he died for our sins, that he was raised for our life, that by faith in him we are righteous and, with our sins are forgiven, are saved, etc. These are the thunderclaps that destroy not only Muhammad but even the gates of hell.[40]

Though the chances were slim, he hoped that Christians strengthened in the gospel and prepared to address the specifics of Islamic doctrine might be used to call Muslims "led astray" by the Qur'ān "back to God."[41]

The theology of the cross, as it has come to be defined,[42] is apparent throughout Luther's advice to Christians facing the prospect of life under Islam. The first thing he urged Christians to do as a matter of preparation is to learn the basics of the Christian faith, and he singled out, as both a soteriological and theological (perhaps even epistemological) concern, the doctrine of Christ as the central and most fundamental article of the faith. Everything else depended on it. Christ crucified for sins is why "we are called Christians and are also called and baptized into that by the gospel and thus are numbered and taken into Christianity," he wrote. "And through it, we received the Holy Spirit, the forgiveness of sins as well as the resurrection of the dead and eternal life. For this article makes us God's children and Christ's brothers so that we become coheirs and like Him eternally."[43] Nothing can change this. The cross of Christ (and all that is associated with it—from the incarnation to the resurrection and ascension) is an accomplished historical and theological fact. So regardless of the success and impressive and pious trappings of Islam, he emphasized, "know and bear in mind that they still know and believe nothing of your article nor of your Lord Jesus Christ. So, for that reason [Islam] must be false."[44]

He has permitted Christians to suffer under the Turks so that they may practice and prove their faith—not for their benefit before God but for the sake of the Muslim.

The theology of the cross also extended to his practical advice for how to live under Islam. It is tough council for sure, but since God does not promise Christians a life of ease, much less success, it was necessary. The Christian life, he taught, was a life that would be marked by suffering. One should expect to carry any number of crosses in this life. God permits it, plans it, and works through it. He has permitted Christians to suffer under the Turks so that they may practice and prove their faith—not for their benefit before God but for the sake of the Muslim.

Luther was not naïve. He knew full well, especially as he learned more about Islam in the years following, that Muslims are not so easy to convert. He described them as obstinate and almost impossible to convert at one point. Even so, he believed God might just be using their subject Christian population for their conversion. And so, coming back full circle, he insisted throughout his advice that Christians keep Christ and the cross at the center of their worldview so that when it came time to carry their own cross among the Turks they would be rooted and ready for the task. "Who knows what God might be able to accomplish through them. Joseph as a seventeen-year-old youth was sold into slavery into Egypt, but he had God's word and knew what he believed. And he converted all Egypt. The same is true of Daniel and his companions."[45] Perhaps he would also use the Germans.

As it turned out, the Turks never made their way back to the German borderlands in Luther's lifetime, and soon thereafter the expansion of the Ottoman empire waned. Even so, Luther's advice and the theology of the cross would persist and, while not in name, remain central to Luther's thinking about the essence of Christian theology and life in a world full of trials, tribulations, and temptations as well as in populations—whether weak or powerful—who need Christians to bear their cross so that the cross

of Christ might be seen and heard—so that "the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life" (John 3:14–15).

ENDNOTES

[1] See Volker Stolle's collection of Luther's missiological texts in *The Church Comes from All Nations: Luther Texts on Mission,* trans. Klaus Detlev Schulz (St. Louis: CPH, 2003).
[2] The preface of the Latin edition of the Augsburg Confession describes the Turks (and Islam) as the "most dreadful, hereditary, and ancient enemy of the Christian name and religion" *The Book of Concord, eds.*, R. Kolb and T. J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 31.
[3] On the various responses to Turkish expansion during Luther's life, see Adam S. Francisco, "Crusade, Pacifism, and Just War: Responses to Ottoman Imperialism in the early Reformation era," *Muslim World* 107:4 (October 2017): 621–631.
[4] Martin Luther, *Weimarer Ausgabe*. Edited by Karl Drescher et al. 127 vols. (Weimar: Hermann Böhlaus Nachfolger, 1883–2009). WA 8:708; cf. WA 2:224–225. Unless otherwise noted, translations by the author. Hereafter cited in the form WA volume number: page number.
[5] WA 17/1:509.
[6] WA TR 5:221.
[7] See Géza Dávid and Pál Fodor, "Hungarian Studies in Ottoman History," in *The Ottomans and the Balkans: A Discussion of Historiography,* ed. Fikret Adanir and Suraiya Faroqhi (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2002), 342–346; Gábor Ágoston, "Muslim Cultural Enclaves in Hungary Under Ottoman Rule," *Acta Orientalia Hungaricae* 45 (1991): 181–204.
[8] Antonia Zhelyazkova, "Islamization in the Balkans as a Historiographical Problem: The Southeast-European Perspective," in *The Ottomans and the Balkans,* 259.
[9] WA 30/2:207.
[10] WA 30/2:195.
[11] WA 30/2:161–162.
[12] WA 30/1:162.
[13] WA 30/2:168.
[14] Martin Luther, *Luther's Works: American Edition*. Edited by Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia; St. Louis: Muhlenberg Press; Concordia Publishing House, 1955–1986), Vol 35:300 (WA DB 11/1:12). Hereafter *American Edition* cited as AE volume number: page number.
[15] WA DB 11/2:381.
[16] Michal Valčo, "Mission and Christianization," in *The Oxford Dictionary of Martin Luther,* eds. Derek R. Nelson and Paul R. Hinlicky (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 2:556.
[17] Valčo, 256.
[18] WA 30/2:185.
[19] WA 30/2:183.
[20] WA 30/2:186.
[21] WA 30/2:186.
[22] Alister McGrath, *Luther's Theology of the Cross: Martin Luther's Theological Breakthrough* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985), 170.
[23] AE 14:37 (WA 31/1:355–356).
[24] WA 29:63–64.
[25] WA 30/2:191.
[26] WA 30/2:191
[27] WA 30/2:191.

[28] WA 30/2:192.
[29] WA 30/2:193. He cites 1 Cor 7:20–21, Eph 6:5–6, Col 3:22, and 1 Pt 2:13,18.
[30] WA 30/2:193.
[31] WA 30/2:194.
[32] AE 51:198.
[33] AE 51:198.
[34] AE 51:199 (WA 32:28–30).
[35] WA 30/2:194–195.
[36] WA 30/2:196.
[37] WA 30/2:196.
[38] WA 30/2:196.
[39] AE 43:239 (WA 51:621).
[40] AE 59:261 (WA 30/2:207–208).
[41] WA 53:278. To this end, he was instrumental in getting the Qur'ān and other literature on Islam published, including an apologetic manual entitled *A Refutation of the Qur'ān.* See Adam S. Francisco, *Martin Luther and Islam: A Study in Sixteenth-Century Polemics and Apologetics* (Leiden: Brill, 2007).
[42] See Joel Okamoto, "Mission and the Theology of the Cross," *Lutheran Mission Matters* (May 2024): 67–78.
[43] WA 30/2:186.
[44] WA 30/2:187.
[45] AE 43:239 (WA 51:621).

On the Theology of the Cross for the Mission of the LCMS as a Church Body United

Kevin D. Robson

Abstract: Is the theology of the cross understood and actualized by the LCMS? Over against a "theology of glory," the theology of the cross is exhibited by distinctively faithful Lutheran doctrine preached and taught in congregation, school, and home. This, however, leads to an additional question: Is the theology of the cross grasped and actualized also by the LCMS as a united church body in national/international *corporate* perspective—that is, as a *collective* of church worker members who have outwardly bound themselves together first by subscription to a confessional standard (which is of chief importance) and then by a voluntary, agreed-on manner of polity and governance which always serves and assists to advance the church body's confession of the faith? Our aim in this paper is briefly to recapitulate the theology of the cross and then to answer this question in the affirmative, while offering some evidentiary explanations and observations along the way.

Cross Against Glory

Within Lutheran circles, any reasonable consideration of the theology of the cross and/or a theologian of the cross finds its ground in some of the historically most significant and intensively examined theological theses of the Luther's Heidelberg Disputation (1518). There the Reformer begins with a treatment of the law of God (Thesis 1) and concludes with the love of God (Thesis 28). The directly relevant theses for the topic at hand are Theses 19–21:

> 19. That person does not deserve to be called a theologian who looks upon the invisible things of God as though they were clearly perceptible in those things which have actually happened [Rom. 1:20].

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> 20. He deserves to be called a theologian, however, who comprehends the visible and manifest things of God seen through suffering and the cross.
>
> 21. A theologian of glory calls evil good and good evil. A theologian of the cross calls the thing what it actually is.[1]

In these theses, Luther effectively issues a firm smackdown on a "theology of glory" and on "theologians of glory" who would claim to see and understand the inner workings and divine majesty of God through visible created things, observable human history, and the works of man. In fact, a theology of glory captures every theology and religion, other than the Christianity that can properly claim fidelity to the Word of God. The cross stands in opposition to all false theologies and religions.

Against theologians of glory, the Apostle Paul flatly declares, "Claiming to be wise, they became fools" (Rom 1:22). In contradistinction to a theology of glory, a theology of the cross asserts that in His infinite love and wisdom for fallen sinners, God cannot truly be directly perceived or understood directly in invisible characteristics such as virtue, godliness and so forth. Instead, God chooses to reveal Himself by taking on our human nature in weakness, foolishness, and suffering, sinlessly living among and loving the very people who mock and reject and persecute Him. He brings His Son to a bloody death in agony and torment upon a cross. In substituting Himself in the place of fallen mankind doomed in its rebelliousness against God, Jesus fulfills the Law in its entirety and placates divine wrath completely, thus destroying death and the work of Satan and imputing God's perfect righteousness to all sinners.[2] This is the hidden mystery behind our forensic justification before God, without any merit or worthiness of our own. Luther thus explained the theology of the cross in this way:

> Because men misused the knowledge of God through works, God wished again to be recognized in suffering, and to condemn wisdom concerning invisible things by means of wisdom concerning visible things, so that those who did not honor God as manifested in his works should honor him as he is hidden in his suffering. As the Apostle says in 1 Cor. 1[:21], 'For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.' Now it is not sufficient for anyone, and it does him no good to recognize God in his glory and majesty, unless he recognizes him in the humility and shame of the cross. Thus, God destroys the wisdom of the wise, as Isa. [45:15] says, 'Truly, thou art a God who hidest thyself.'[3]

The cross is the cornerstone, the foundational launchpad, of the church's mission to a broken, sin-corrupted world and to those souls who have yet not been brought to saving faith in the person and redemptive work of God's Son. To recognize and know God is to recognize and know the *crucified* Christ, who declared of Himself, "No one comes to the Father except by me" (Jn 14:6) and "I am the door" (Jn 10:9) and "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father" (Jn 14:9). He is Jesus of whom the Apostle John wrote under divine inspiration, "Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also" (1 Jn 2:23) and "Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life" (1 Jn 5:12). And so the church must constantly and as a matter of first importance be about the business of proclaiming Jesus crucified as the atonement for all sin. Luther went on to say:

The cross is the cornerstone, the foundational launchpad, of the church's mission to a broken, sin-corrupted world and to those souls who have yet not been brought to saving faith in the person and redemptive work of God's Son.

> This is clear: He who does not know Christ does not know God hidden in suffering. Therefore, he prefers works to suffering, glory to the cross, strength to weakness, wisdom to folly, and, in general, good to evil. These are the people whom the apostle calls 'enemies of the cross of Christ' [Phil. 3:18], for they hate the cross and suffering and love works and the glory of works.[4]

A theologian of glory who promotes and centralizes the mere wisdom and works of man has no legitimate place within the mission and ministry of the LCMS. The cross takes center stage among us because it is inextricably bound to the church's doctrine of justification by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, the central teaching of the Holy Scriptures by which the church stands or falls.

When it comes to the holy cross and justification, it is rightly said: you cannot have one without the other. A theology of glory is utterly incompatible with this understanding. Forde captures this sentiment when he warns that "the hallmark of a theology of glory is that it will always consider grace as something of a supplement to whatever is left of free will and power. It will always, in the end, hold out for some free will."[5] He adds that "theologians of the cross attack the way of glory, the way of law, human works, and free will, because the way of glory simply operates as a defense mechanism against the cross."[6]

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Also germane to our discussion here—quite interestingly so—are Luther's theses that bookend Theses 19–21 cited above:

> 18. It is certain that man must utterly despair of his own ability before he is prepared to receive the grace of Christ. …[7]
>
> 22. That wisdom which sees the invisible things of God in works as perceived by man is completely puffed up, blinded, and hardened.[8]

The second use of the Law demands that each of us despair over the sin-wrought limitations of our own capacities and skills and instead utterly rely on the Gospel—of which we are never ashamed, "for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes" (Rom 1:16)—and on the work of the Holy Spirit in the divinely established means of grace. Here is a note of warning—applicable to us as individuals *and* to the LCMS collectively—that as we strive to fulfill our earthly vocations, equipped with the rich blessings of First Article gifts and abilities (with joyful thanksgiving to God) that we walk humbly before our God. Mutually encouraging the saints with whom we run this earthly race, we ought never trumpet our mere stewardship of the rich resources that God has abundantly provided to accomplish the mission of the church. Neither should we ever hold forth our "leadership" or "management" as an important or powerful or satisfying thing, or—as is so often the case among theologians of glory—package our plans with a self-assured, triumphalist or paternalist mindset. No, said Luther:

> The remedy for curing desire does not lie in satisfying it, but in extinguishing it. In other words, he who wishes to become wise does not seek wisdom by progressing toward it but becomes a fool by retrogressing into seeking folly. Likewise, he who wishes to have much power, honor, pleasure, satisfaction in all things must flee rather than seek power, honor, pleasure, and satisfaction in all things. This is the wisdom which is folly to the world.[9]

Here is how Jesus perfectly summarized it: "So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty'" (Luke 17:10). This requires the kind of reflective humility that Melanchthon described in his *Loci praecipui theologici* (1559):

> While we are still in subjection to the cross and mortal death, we are being exercised in great calamities, and sins and great darkness still cling to us. We are under attack by the devil, who constantly ties us up in his evil traps. And no one is so careful, so diligent, that he does not from time-to-time wander into thoughts about these things. And we ourselves cannot govern the very difficult and perilous course of this life and our calling only by human actions and diligence, as Jeremiah says [10:23], 'I know, Lord, that the way of man is not in himself.'[10]

What does the foregoing mean for us in the LCMS national and global context, thinking and working together collectively as a unified church body, striving to plan and execute to the utmost of our God-given abilities in all activities and initiatives in the Synod's mission? Here several helpful observations may be made.

In Practice

The theology of the cross serves the foundation for the development, exposition, understanding and implementation of all LCMS mission work, as the cross is the focal point—the pivotal event in God's plan for man's salvation by redemption and justification. The cross is the crucial factor that binds us together in our life and labors as a church body. Schulz summarizes such an Augsburg Articles IV-and-V-based approach to mission quite nicely:

> [T]he doctrine of justification includes the doctrine of Christ's death and resurrection. The total accomplishment of Christ in achieving righteousness for the world compels one to confess Luther's dictum that 'the cross alone is our theology' [Heidelberg Disputation, Theses 20–21]. …Mission is the act of extending the gift of righteousness and forgiveness to the world through its preaching of the Word and administering of the Sacraments.[11]

One rightly concludes from this statement that the act of extending God's righteousness and forgiveness to individuals outside of currently existing church congregations (i.e., those who are unbelievers and disconnected from the church) necessarily carries with it a firm objective to eventually bring them into the regular fellowship of an assembly of believers gathered around altar, pulpit and font.

Over the course of its normal business at its 68th Regular Convention in the summer of 2023, at Milwaukee, WI, the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod adopted multiple resolutions pertaining to the church's mission under the convention theme, "We Preach Christ Crucified" (1 Cor 1:23a)—the theme itself aptly reflecting the church's commitment to the theology of the cross. Concordia Seminary St. Louis President Thomas Egger offered this to convention delegates from an essay written for the occasion:

> We do not test-market our message for today's culture. We do not custom design a Jesus who resonates with the spirit of our times. If we were to come up with a religion that would really "sell" today, it probably wouldn't be centered around a crucified Messiah. The Lord has not called us to invent a new message, but to proclaim the crucified Messiah of the Holy Scriptures.[12]

Among notable mission-related *Resolved*s adopted by 2023 LCMS Convention delegates were the following:

> *Resolved*, That the Synod in convention affirm *Making Disciples for Life* as its mission and ministry emphasis for the 2023–26 triennium.[13]
>
> *Resolved*, That the Synod reaffirm the Synod's current seven mission priorities as they exemplify our fervor in being faithful to the Lord and loving our neighbor, and also encourage their use to affirm our unity as Synod as lived out by congregations, national servant-leaders, district servant-leaders, and circuit servant-leaders in accord with the Synod's current mission priorities:

- plant, sustain, and revitalize Lutheran churches;
- support and expand theological education;
- perform human care in close proximity to Word and Sacrament ministries;
- collaborate with the Synod's members and partners to enhance mission effectiveness;
- promote and nurture the spiritual, emotional, financial, and physical well-being of pastors and professional church workers;
- enhance early childhood education, elementary and secondary education, and youth ministry; and
- strengthen and support the Lutheran family in living out God's design.[14]

One notes that the Synod's longstanding, overarching objectives as spelled out in Article III of the LCMS constitution[15] are well-represented among the seven mission priorities listed above. The first three of these priorities directly address the enablement and actualization of the church's mission to be about the task of preaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments. The remaining four mission priorities might be seen as indirectly—yet no less importantly—supportive of the same.

Considering herself from national/international perspectives and operating under such self-identified mission priorities, corporate LCMS prayerfully considers and then strives to create conditions wherein the preaching of the Word and the administration of the Sacraments might have their most free and unhindered course. We do so while acknowledging that it is never we alone accomplishing the end goal, but rather the work of the Holy Spirit, all under God's grace, accompanied by a multitude of participants and partners in both the US and around the globe.

Moreover, the proclamation of this saving Word—considered in an even wider sense than the public preaching that necessarily takes place through the Office of the Holy Ministry (Augsburg Confession Article V)—occurs in and through the everyday vocations of the believer. As with Philip the evangelist (Acts 8:26–40) the Holy Spirit working through the means of grace in Word and Sacrament enables every baptized Christian to bear Christ's love to neighbor—at home, at work, in social life.

Why does the LCMS conscientiously plan and then work under such mission priorities as listed above? Here is sound rationale offered by Öberg:

> From 1519 until his death, Luther emphasized the following scheme of soteriological economy: the Father, the Son, and the Spirit; the Word and Sacraments; the testimony of laypeople and the ordained ministry of the Word and Sacraments; and a created and sustained faith. Throughout his life, but especially after the dispute with the spiritualism of the enthusiasts, Luther emphasized the necessary connection between the means of grace and faith. No one can receive saving faith without the Word and Sacraments. Wherever the true Gospel is in motion, faith and the community of saints are created. The church as the institution of the means of grace and the spiritual importance of faith are connected to each other. …The Gospel of the church

> and mission is the instrument of God's salvation, something unavoidably necessary. Forgiveness of sins and eternal life are received only where the Father, the Son, and the Spirit communicate these blessings in the means of grace.[16]

Under that kind of prayerful thinking, the convention-elected members of the LCMS Board for National Mission (BNM) and Board for International Mission (BIM) are diligent in carrying out their bylaw-mandated duties to assist the Synod President in establishing specific end goals and then to exercise oversight for actions and initiatives of staff in the Offices of National Mission (ONM) and International Mission (OIM). LCMS Boards work to ensure that convention resolutions pertaining to the Synod's corporate mission and ministry efforts are effectively fulfilled.

Along the way, the Synod as a collective entity strives to maintain excellent coordination and accountability among the diverse participants in the mission of corporate LCMS. For instance, 2023 Convention Resolution 9-04 added an LCMS Bylaw requirement to strengthen BNM and BIM roles and responsibilities, calling for the respective boards' annual formal review and endorsement of the ONM and OIM standing strategic plans.[17]

Space simply does not allow for a full exposition here, but just one example of such cross-centered LCMS mission leadership on the domestic side is the BNM's prelude to its ends policies located under the first of the Synod's seven mission priorities:

> The Board for National Mission establishes policy for the Office of National Mission to assist districts and congregations through their districts in planting, sustaining, and revitalizing Lutheran congregations around Luther's seven marks of the Church: the preaching and teaching of God's entire Word, Holy Baptism, Holy Absolution, Holy Communion, called pastors, public prayer and thanksgiving, and faithful suffering *under the cross of Christ* (AE, Vol. 41; p. 148–165). Word and sacrament ministry is central to planting, sustaining, and revitalizing congregations, in order to reach the lost and bring them into the fellowship of saving faith. Where Christians faithfully and regularly receive the means of grace in the Divine Service, they are sustained in their faith and live out their faith in Christ in loving service to God and their neighbor in their respective callings [*emphasis* added].[18]

On the international side of LCMS mission, the OIM's established strategic plan currently features three "pillars" that stand completely on a proper theology of the cross: Spread the Gospel, Plant Lutheran Churches, and Show Mercy. Virtually all OIM work around the globe is done around those pillars, most often in close coordination and collaboration with Lutheran partner church bodies, LCMS recognized service organizations, other faithful Lutheran groups (including FOROs [A forum of the church to come together by LCMS missions and sister churches in Latin America and the Caribbean to further the work of the Gospel][19]), and individuals located within all four of the Synod's global regions that comprise her overseas foreign mission fields.

Some in LCMS circles complain that the Synod's mission efforts have become too pastor-centric, especially on the international side. Currently, just under one half of the Synod's missionaries (who all are called and sent by the BIM and then supported and supervised by the OIM) are ordained LCMS pastors; many of these men are serving as theological educators in international seminaries. A proper theology of the cross cannot be embodied in a churchly mission served and supported by a less-than-well-formed ministerium. The most oft-repeated direct request that the LCMS receives from her international church partners in established altar-and-pulpit fellowship: "Help us train future church workers." Such requests are not only aimed at training future ordained pastors but also Lutheran deaconesses and teachers as well. To respond to this need, the LCMS OIM, Concordia Seminary St. Louis and Concordia Theological Seminary Fort Wayne work closely with one another today on multiple foreign mission fields.[20]

With respect to the "Show Mercy" pillar, our observation applies not only to the Synod's international mission activities and initiatives, but just as reasonably fits within the U.S. domestic side. The Synod's third mission priority as set forth above states it clearly: "Perform human care in close proximity to Word and Sacrament ministries." *Without* the clear proclamation of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments—and that requires the intentional formation, presence and participation of both laity and called ministers of the Gospel, gathered or being gathered within an assembly of the saints around font, altar and pulpit—the mission of the church under a genuine theology of the cross is absent. The familiar dictum attributed (likely mistakenly so) to St. Francis of Assisi, "Preach the Gospel at all times; use words, if necessary," simply does not hold up well within the mission of the LCMS in national/international corporate perspective.

What Shall Serve the Mission?

Only through the offense of suffering and the cross are sinners enabled to see and know the God who took into Himself our human nature to save us from sin, death, and the power of the devil. The theology of the cross is central to the mission of the LCMS as a church body united. There is plenty of current evidence—in fact, far more evidence than could ever be examined within a brief overview such as this—that the Synod is determined to translate a sound theology of the cross into mission practice, even despite our often-surfacing flaws and imperfections, yet always in the weakness and humility of the crucified Christ.

A theology of glory does not serve the LCMS as a church body united because it does not serve the Gospel. Efforts to "Lutheranize" (with a theology of the cross) non-Lutheran (with a theology of glory) church authors and church mission resources represents questionable stewardship of time and efforts. My earthly boss at the LCMS International Center has lately been fond of saying something like this: "In everything we're striving to do together, let's straightforwardly be who we say we are. Let's be Book-of-Concord Lutherans." What a blessing daily to be reminded of that. I might add, "Let's steadfastly remain theologians of the cross in everything we do on the mission field, both here at home and around the world." God grant it for the sake of Christ.

ENDNOTES

[1]Luther, Martin, *Luther's Works, Vol. 31: Career of the Reformer I*, ed. J.J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald, & H. T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1957), 40. [Hereafter LW vol:page]
[2]As Detlev Schultz (*Mission from the Cross* [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2023], 119), observes: "God not only sent Christ for the sake of the world but also to placate the Father's wrath. …No other theologian has promoted this distinction as efficiently as Luther with his theology of the cross. Luther gained the deepest insights into the hidden and revealed God at the cross, into the "proper" and "alien work" of God. …[T]he cross does in fact communicate both God's alien work, that is, the exclamation and satisfaction of His wrath, as well as His proper work, that is the expression of His grace and love for the world."
[3]LW 31:52-53.
[4] LW 31: 53.
[5]Forde, Gerhard O., *On Being a Theologian of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1997), 16
[6] Forde, 12.
[7]LW 31:40.
[8]LW 31:40-41.
[9]LW 31: 53-54.
[10]Martin Luther and Philip Melanchthon, *Christian Freedom: Faith Working through Love*, trans. Christopher J. Neuendorf, J. A. O. Preus et al., eds. Edward A. Engelbrecht and Charles P. Schaum (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2011), 172.
[11]Klaus Detlev Schulz, *Mission from the Cross* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2023), 78.
[12]Egger, Thomas J., "We Preach Christ Crucified," *Proceedings of the 2023 (68th) LCMS Convention* (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 2023), 93.
[13]Resolution 4-02, "To Affirm and Continue Making Disciples for Life as Mission and Ministry Emphasis for 2023–26 Triennium," *Proceedings,* 136.
[14]Resolution 4-03, "To Affirm and Continue Mission Priorities for the 2023–26 Triennium," *Proceedings*, 137.
[15]Article III in *Handbook: Constitution, Bylaws, and Articles of Incorporation* (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 2023), 11–12, states:

> The Synod, under Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, shall—
>
> 1. Conserve and promote the unity of the true faith (Eph. 4:3–6; 1 Cor. 1:10), work through its official structure toward fellowship with other Christian church bodies, and provide a united defense against schism, sectarianism (Rom. 16:17), and heresy;
> 2. Strengthen congregations and their members in giving bold witness by word and deed to the love and work of God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and extend that Gospel witness into all the world;
> 3. Recruit and train pastors, teachers, and other professional church workers and provide opportunity for their continuing growth;
> 4. Provide opportunities through which its members may express their Christian concern, love, and compassion in meeting human needs;
> 5. Aid congregations to develop processes of thorough Christian education and nurture and to establish agencies of Christian education such as elementary and secondary schools and to support synodical colleges, universities, and seminaries;
> 6. Aid congregations by providing a variety of resources and opportunities for recognizing, promoting, expressing, conserving, and defending their confessional unity in the true faith;

7. Encourage congregations to strive for uniformity in church practice, but also to develop an appreciation of a variety of responsible practices and customs which are in harmony with our common profession of faith;
8. Provide evangelical supervision, counsel, and care for pastors, teachers, and other professional church workers of the Synod in the performance of their official duties;
9. Provide protection for congregations, pastors, teachers, and other church workers in the performance of their official duties and the maintenance of their rights;
10. Aid in providing for the welfare of pastors, teachers, and other church workers, and their families in the event of illness, disability, retirement, special need, or death.

[16]Öberg, Ingemar, *Luther and World Mission: A Historical and Systematic Study with Special Reference to Luther's Bible Exposition*, trans. Dean Apel (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2007), 83–84.
[17]Resolution 9-04, "To Establish Mission Board Responsibilities Regarding Mission Office Strategic Plan and Annual Budget Proposal," *Proceedings*, 137.
[18] For the complete content of the BNM's and BIM's current policies, see https://www.lcms.org/about/leadership/board-for-national-mission#board-policies and https://www.lcms.org/about/leadership/board-for-international-mission#board-policies, respectively.
[19]Resolution 2-07A, "To Commend Use and Attendance of FOROs," *Proceedings*, 136.
[20]Egger, in another essay delivered to the 2023 LCMS convention ("Our Residential Seminaries: Deep Pastoral Formation and Worldwide Impact," *Proceedings of the 2023 (68th) LCMS Convention* [St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 2023], 110) said: "I can tell you without exaggeration that the faculties of the seminaries of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod serve as valuable resources and encouragement to Lutheran churches throughout the entire world, who hold them in the highest regard. Our partner churches and friends are sending gifted scholars and leaders to study in Fort Wayne and in St. Louis—students from Brazil, Argentina, Canada, Japan, Taiwan, Korea, Macao, Australia, India, Ethiopia, South Africa, Tanzania, Kenya, Ghana, Rwanda, Madagascar, Sudan and South Sudan, Germany, Latvia, Norway, and more. Our faculties also accept invitations to lecture abroad, all around the world, as church bodies and pastors on every continent say, 'Come over and help us!'"

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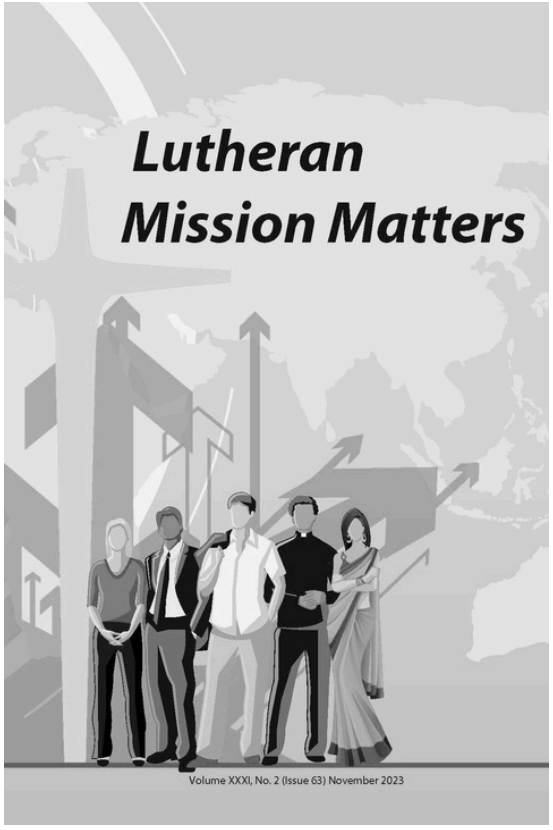

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The Theology of the Cross and Gospel Receptivity

Cari Chittick and Alfonso Espinosa

Abstract: The theology of cross provides a Christological and cruciform lens for assisting the church to identify possible receptivity in those who not only demonstrate need in various forms of poverty but also profess reverence toward God through recognized humility. Such recognitions should enable a better stewardship of the church's mission endeavor. Dr. Espinosa presents a theological foundation for these possibilities and Dr. Chittick elaborates on left-hand kingdom resources that may very well facilitate opportunities for right-hand kingdom mission, especially as these possibilities might apply to Lutheran schools. The article expresses a special interest in serving students with special needs, who too often are marginalized even by the church.

Luther's theology of the cross can be applied extensively, most assuredly to the mission of the church. Not only does the reformer's famous theological lens help us know God by seeing Him revealed in the humility, weakness, and death of Jesus, God incarnate, but it also enables one to see Jesus as He is *in the people* the church is called to serve. We may focus on "the least of these" (Matt 25:40), some still without the saving gospel in their lives. Luther expounded on how the priority of the gospel is connected to the poor:

> Next to the proclamation of the Gospel it is the task of a good pastor to be mindful of the poor. For wherever the church is, there must be poor people. Most of the time they are the only true disciples of the Gospel, as Christ says

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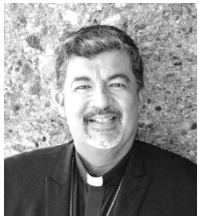

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> (Matt. 11:5): 'The poor have the Gospel preached to them.' For both human beings and the devil persecute the church and bring poverty upon many, who are then forsaken and to whom no one wants to give anything.[1]

Althaus in his analysis of Luther's *theologia crucis* in opposition to natural religion's *theologia gloriae* points out: "The theology of glory leads man to stand before God and strike a bargain based on his ethical achievement in fulfilling the law, *whereas the theology of the cross views man as one who has been called to suffer* (emphasis added)."[2] Is it true? should the church recognize higher receptivity of the saving gospel especially among those who observably suffer?

In thesis 18 of Luther's Heidelberg Disputation: "It is certain that man must utterly despair of his own ability before he is prepared to receive the grace of Christ."[3] Luther connected two ideas: despairing of one's own ability coinciding with receptivity of the gospel. In this connection, however, there seems to be a dilemma.

On the one hand, the great commission of the Lord Christ is clearly universal in scope: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (Matt 28:19a). Without question, the church maintains *gratia universalis* and the objective reality of Christ's universal atonement. Who is helpless and needy? Answer: all are. Who is suffering the impact of sin, the world, and the devil? Answer once again: all are. That is, all people are suffering the horrendous impact of sin and death whether they realize it or not.

However, any empirical observation of signs, outward behaviors, external conditions can be deceptive. In fact, the very core of the theology of cross emphasizes our need to walk by faith and not by sight. (See 2 Cor 5:7.) For example, Luther in his sermon about the Pharisee and publican (Luke 18) states, "we should open our eyes and not judge the people according to their outward appearance."[4] The reformer goes on to discuss how the works of the Pharisee were in themselves good works, so that someone with a different heart could have worked those works without the accompanying pride and self-praise. Or someone else could have emulated the words and actions of the publican, but without contrition and faith. Thus, the theology of the cross humbles us in realizing our considerable limitations to recognize the spiritual condition of anyone with our fleshly eyes.

On the other hand, while sin is a universal malady— "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23)—the Scriptures still maintain distinctions among people. That is, there are signs and indicators that should both guide perception in the church and also warn the church. Note Luther's thesis 19: "The person does not deserve to be called a theologian who looks upon the invisible things of God as though they were clearly perceptible in those things which have actually happened [Romans 1:20]."[5] We might put the situation this way: the church can see with her eyes of flesh all people who suffer, but the church cannot see with eyes of flesh those who within themselves despair and yearn for salvation.

However, the theology of the cross does not eliminate indicators for the invisible reality of what goes on in the hearts of people. Informed by the theology of the cross, the church may recognize the things contrary to the theology of glory that are consistent with the image of Christ Himself, the One who was "despised and rejected

by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief . . . we esteemed him not" (Is 53:3).

Could this be a contradiction? How can the church under the Lord Christ recognize what it cannot see? The church is helped because while the theology of the cross maintains the spiritual blindness of men, it also teaches about the condition of men who insist upon the theology of glory. The theology of the cross understands the cross itself as the lens for seeing what coincides with the things of God. Through Christ on the cross, this Christological and cruciform lens provides a means of recognizing those who might be especially receptive to the gospel.

One encounters a theological paradox in the theology of the cross. Alister E. McGrath points out, "For Luther, the sole authentic *locus* of man's knowledge of God is the cross of Christ, in which God is to be found revealed, and yet paradoxically hidden in that revelation."[6] At the same time, this is not a new *modus operandi* for God. This paradoxical revelation is entirely consistent, for example, in the Old Testament. Luther was assuredly aware of this.

In his thesis 20 at Heidelberg, Luther says, "The man who perceives the visible rearward parts of God as seen in suffering and the cross does, however, deserve to be called a theologian." That is, "Luther's reference to the *'rearward parts of God'* serves to emphasize that, like Moses, we can only see God from the rear; we are denied a direct knowledge of God, or a vision of his face (cf. Exodus 33:23...). The cross does indeed reveal God – but that revelation is of the '*rearward parts of God'.*"[7] In other words, the cross is both an indirect revelation *and* genuine revelation.[8]

All the while, the theology of the cross stands in stark contrast to the theology of glory which presumes to fully see God, but in actuality rests on the speculation and inaccurate perceptions of people even when they say they represent the authentic teachings of the church. But how does the theology of the cross move from the cross to the present?

In explaining Luther's teaching, Hermann Sasse wrote, "But although God remains hidden to our eyes, he still reveals himself by the Word. So, the revelation in the Word is the way of divine revelation to this world."[9] Furthermore, Sasse maintains that for Luther, the revelation of the Word of the cross "is one of the marks by which the true Church of Christ on earth is recognised [sic], that she must go through persecution and suffering."[10] Christians are called to share Christ's cross.

The Lord Jesus teaches, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Matt 16:24). And while Christians bear their cross to follow Christ, where does Christ lead them? This, too, the Lord teaches: "I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me" (Matt 25:35–36).

What might be some of the other indirect and yet genuine signposts for identifying those to whom the church ought to especially reach out? Who might easily despair and be eager to receive the church's gospel-harvest ministry? Especially, how might these be represented in 21st century America? And how does the theology of the cross help Christians to recognize people led by the Spirit of Christ who are ready to receive the life-giving Gospel?

Holy Scripture itself teaches that there are indeed signs the church may look for under the cross of Christ and through the lens of the Word of Christ. The apostles led by the Spirit of God made distinctions by considering the condition of persons. After the saints James, Peter and John certified the holy ministry of St. Paul and St. Barnabas, St. Paul records the reminder that came from these reputed pillars of the church: "Only, they asked us to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do" (Gal 2:10). Such apostolic direction pinpoints attention towards those who suffer in poverty.

In the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5, the Lord Christ bestows His grace upon those "poor in spirit" (verse 3). In the beatitudes, many of the descriptors of those receiving God's grace in Christ represent various forms of suffering and therefore various forms of poverty. It is not difficult to hear the echo of St. Paul's assertive revelation that describes such need: "God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong" (1 Cor 1:27b).

All the while, the church cannot rely upon natural perception apart from the theology of the cross. When David confronted Goliath, the giant conformed to the world's standards as he looked upon David: "And when the Philistine looked and saw David, he disdained him, for he was but a youth" (1 Sam 17:42a). Perception controlled by the sinful nature will disdain other people, and as a result, misread them entirely.

Even the prophet Samuel, following the Lord's direction to anoint a son of Jesse to be king of Israel, "looked on Eliab and thought, 'Surely the Lord's anointed is before him'" (1 Sam 16:6). The Lord would correct mighty Samuel: "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature. ... For the Lord sees not as man sees; man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart" (1 Sam 16:7). Even servants of Christ by nature tend to look at the outward appearance of others. The church's lesson here, however, is to learn to perceive the heart, especially that heart despairing of itself and recognizing its need for the Savior of the world.

God gives His church glimpses of the heart when the church sees through the cross those whom the Lord Himself has prepared to receive the Gospel of Christ. Nevertheless, the whole heart is only truly known to God. Because of the old Adam, people judge and make assumptions when they view others through their human lens, building barriers to sharing the gospel. Recognizing the importance of the command to love our neighbor as ourselves, we recognize that with God all things are possible (Matthew 19:26). He can break down walls and use us to reveal hope through Christ.

Throughout history people have been and continue to be marginalized. Some are ostracized because of their physical differences; some are disliked because of their ideals or political views. Others are left to be passed by because they are misunderstood or because they do not conform to the beliefs and norms of the community. One such person who was avoided is found in Luke 19. A man who used his societal position for his own gain, Zacchaeus was not a person others included at their dinner table. He was unpopular and viewed as greedy and dishonest. As Jesus was passing through Jericho, Zacchaeus was curious. Was there a gospel invitation intended for him? Who would share it with him when he was left out and not invited to social gatherings? Fortunately, Jesus called to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today" (Lk 19:5). Scripture tells us his heart was

changed, and salvation came to his house. People looking on assumed this could never happen due to his selfish ways.

Scriptures present Zacchaeus and others as being receptive towards grace and chosen by God to receive salvation. The narratives provide the following signposts of receptivity towards the grace of God: (1) An observable cause of suffering, (2) humility and reverence toward God, (3) confession of sin. These characteristics align with the theology of the cross that presents the Lord Jesus Christ in (1) suffering on the cross, (2) humility on the cross, (3) confession of the sins borne for the world "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

In the days Jesus walked the earth, those marginalized were treated as insignificant, and they included many people such as tax collectors, people with leprosy, and paralytics. The same is true today with certain groups treated differently. Because of their income, where they live, with whom they associate, or because of their differences in ability, intellect, and capabilities, they may not be invited or included even in the church.

In the New Testament and especially as noted in the great commission, Jesus models inclusivity and the universality of the gospel. Jesus tells His disciples to "make disciples of all nations" (Mt 28:19). People of all nations, cultures, abilities, backgrounds, and statuses need salvation. God calls His people into ministry to share the saving grace of God through Jesus with everyone.

Still today some people are neglected or overlooked. One subgroup sometimes marginalized are those with special needs: those who have physical differences or intellectual and developmental disabilities, and those who are neurodivergent. Scripture tells us in Psalm 139:14, "I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well." This includes all mankind, not just able-bodied and socially astute persons; all are created in the image of God (Gen 1:27).

One subgroup sometimes marginalized are those with special needs: those who have physical differences or intellectual and developmental disabilities, and those who are neurodivergent.

Through the theology of the cross, Scripture presents an identifiable pattern for recognizing receptivity for the gospel of God's grace in Christ. Thus, the all-inclusive and universal gospel is especially applicable to those within the world who are often marginalized and treated as less than others, while at the same time they show a readiness for receiving the gifts of God. Many of these who are often overlooked, are in fact yet more likely to hear the promises of hope in the gospel. What, then, can the church do to increase opportunities to reach them? In our commitment to living out the great commission we can generate connections of closer proximity between the left- and right-hand kingdoms.

One left-hand kingdom approach is to be proactive in using laws to promote direct contact for the sake of the gospel. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) originally called the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, was enacted in 1975 to establish rights and protection for all children to receive a free and appropriate public education to meet their specific learning needs.[11] Many changes

have evolved through reauthorization and amendments including adding categories such as autism and traumatic brain injury.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is also a public law designed for access. Persons with disabilities are protected in employment, transportation, and public accommodations. These laws were designed to help people with needs to increase their access and participation in society.[12] Advocating for the needs of people who are marginalized and especially receptive to the gospel includes being good stewards of our left-hand kingdom resources. The more this is done, the more we generate contact with the harvest field.

Russ Moulds explains God's two strategies to be aware of:

> Scripture informs us of two strategies God is using to free humanity from its captivity to the devil: one strategy sustains the present world, thereby providing opportunities for the Gospel, the other advances the Gospel in the world. These strategies work together and not independently since they are both God's strategies for his single purpose of our salvation.[13]

In public schools, learners receiving special education or related services make up fifteen percent of the population of students aged three to twenty-one. This includes those with specific learning disabilities, vision or hearing impairments, autism spectrum disorder, giftedness, and other health impairments to name a few.[14] Focusing on this subgroup, many of our Lutheran schools have added resource programs to support students with various learning differences, enabling them to be included in the school community. Because of this, more children have access to a Christian education which supports their academic needs and, most importantly, their opportunity to hear the gospel daily.

Consequently, Lutheran schools have provided left-hand kingdom resources which then also connect students and their families with the right-hand kingdom gospel ministry. The students have exposure to the gospel that they might not have otherwise. Chapel, religion classes, and connections with the church are mission opportunities. Therefore, advocating for children who learn differently, who are often among the marginalized, so that they are included in the Lutheran school community serves their eternal need for salvation in Christ.

Jesus was an advocate of those excluded because of their differences, and He acted by reaching out to those in need. He met the blind man and "commanded him to be brought to him" (Luke 18:40), he *entered* Jericho to encounter Zacchaeus the tax collector (Luke 19:1), and he *called him* and *went to* his house (Luke 19:5). He engaged the Samaritan woman by *going to* the well and asking for a drink (John 4). He *initiated* washing the feet of His disciples, who were confused and confounded (John 13:7).

Jesus was an advocate of those excluded because of their differences, and He acted by reaching out to those in need.

We can learn from the deliberate outreach of Jesus. He taught not by staying idle or in places of comfort, but by going out and by being relational. Jesus broke barriers

of societal norms to teach us to be proactive in making the gospel accessible to all. He did not avoid those who were ostracized; he took steps toward individuals and conversed with them.

Another example of advocacy is found in Luke 7. Once again Jesus demonstrated His movement towards those in need by responding to the request of a Roman centurion who by virtue of his role in the Roman empire was inherently associated with that culture's idolatry. Some of Jesus' disciples might have questioned the Lord serving a religious outsider, a person who would have been marginalized by their religious traditions. The Lord ventured out to him, nevertheless. The centurion was associated with great need and suffering (on the part of his servant), he expressed reverence and faith toward the Lord, and he offered humility in the way he justified his request to Christ.

As missionaries and leaders in kingdom work, we have opportunity to emulate the Lord Jesus by moving forward, moving especially towards those who are clearly in need. We move toward the marginalized who want to know God and who with a humble and reverential spirit towards God, are prepared to learn from Him. All of this is to be viewed through the Christological and cruciform lens described in this analysis which boldly seeks the marginalized. After all, this is what the Lord, who suffered on the cross, did for the needy and excluded as described in Romans 5:6–10:

> For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For … God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.

The suffering Christ on the cross, where God can be seen and known, also saw those who would receive His saving work: the weak, the ungodly, the sinners, and the enemies of God. That includes the marginalized, the poorest ones, who are only known in their misery, but who are also perfect candidates for receiving the saving Gospel. Therefore, just as they know they are included in the universal condemnation of sin, may they also come to know that anyone who calls on the name of the Lord, confessing their need for His grace, will receive His gift of salvation. This too is for us all.

ENDNOTES

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[2]Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 27.
[3]Martin Luther, "Heidelberg Disputation," in *Luther's Works* American Edition, vol. 31, eds. Helmut T. Lehmann and Harold J. Grimm (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1957), 31:52.
[4]Martin Luther, "A Picture and an Example of a True Saint," in *Sermons of Martin Luther,* vol. IV, ed. John Nicholas Lenker (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 338.

[5]Luther, "Heidelberg Disputation," 31:52.
[6]Allister E. McGrath, *Luther's Theology of the Cross* (Oxford, UK: Basil Blackwell, 1985), 149.
[7]McGrath, 149.
[8]McGrath, 149.
[9]Hermann Sasse, *The Journal Articles of Hermann Sasse,* eds. Matthew C. Harrison, Bror Erickson, and Joel A. Brondos (Irvine: New Reformation Publications, 2016), 306.
[10]Sasse, 312.
[11]National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, 2024, https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/cgg
[12]ADA, U.S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Division, 2024, https://www.ada.gov/law-and-regs/ada/

[13]Russ Moulds, "Kingdom Teaches the Other: The Two Strategies of Lutheran Education," in *Learning at the Foot of the Cross: A Lutheran Vision for Education,* edited by Joel Heck and Angus J.L. Menuge (Austin, TX: Concordia University Press, 2011), 82.

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A Man of Sorrows

Dale Meyer

Abstract: This article explores the theme of mission in the light of the Theology of the Cross, emphasizing the importance of engaging with marginalized and oppressed communities. It highlights the prophetic call to address societal injustices and the need for the church to embody Christ's love through action. It advocates a hermeneutical approach that sees the exalted Christ speaking to contemporary issues and underscores the significance of Christ's suffering and exaltation, urging congregations to adopt a missional culture that reflects the love and justice of the Man of Sorrows.

"The prophets take us to the slums."[1] Whoa! Not comfortable for us who like our cushioned pews. It is on the very first page of Abraham Heschel's classic, *The Prophets*. At least to this follower of Jesus—Heschel was not a Christian—it speaks to mission in light of the Theology of the Cross. Great Commission. Sharing Jesus' love. "All are precious in his sight." We hear those motivations and others to do mission, and they are true, for sure, but this issue's theme is mission in light of the theology of the cross. Better to say, mission into the darkness of so much in our

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communities, nation, and world. This is not about a slick evangelism brochure, not about music to bring people into church, not about the church taking to social media. "To the slums." "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?" (Mark 2:16). Because Jesus was "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, [We naturally avoid "those kind of people"] and *we* esteemed him not" (Isaiah 53:3). "Human love avoids sinners and evil persons,"[2] but Jesus identifies with the marginalized, the victim, the abused, the homeless, the hungry, the has-beens or never-will-be people. "This is the love of the cross, born of the cross, which turns in the direction where it does not find good, which it may enjoy, but where it may confer good upon the evil and needy person." (Heidelberg Disputation, thesis 28, proof).[3]

Heschel again:

> The things that horrified the prophets are even now daily occurrences all over the world. There is no society to which Amos' words would not apply.
>
> Hear this, you who trample on the needy
> and bring the poor of the land to an end,
> saying, 'When will the new moon be over, that we may sell grain?
> and the Sabbath, that we may offer wheat for sale,
> that we make the ephah small and the shekel great
> and deal deceitfully with false balances,
> that we may buy the poor for silver
> and the needy for a pair of sandals
> and sell the chaff of the wheat?' (Amos 8:4–6)[4]

My thesis: When our preaching and teaching the Old Testament, especially, but not only, the prophets, urges the concern of the exalted Christ for the body and soul well-being of all people in all historical times, then we will help foster a congregational culture wherein the theology of the cross becomes truly actionable in the missional awareness and activities of the congregation.

Nostalgia is not going to bring back churched America. While many societal changes are out of the church's control,[5] two assumptions underlying the theology of the cross can motivate and inform outreach efforts by a congregation into its increasingly secular community. The first assumption is hermeneutical, namely, that *the exalted Lord Christ is speaking to us today through the prophets*. Nowadays, Old Testament texts are often presented as nothing more than "Save the Date" for some eventual fulfillment in the future. "Today's Old Testament lesson is fulfilled in the Gospel lesson when Jesus…" Hence, a prophetic text, like Amos quoted above, is seldom the thrust of a sermon, but if it is, the interpretation is likely spiritual, not a look at predatory commercial practices.

Nostalgia is not going to bring back churched America.

This limitation of a prophetic text's meaning is a result of the Enlightenment when reason became magisterial in exegesis, not ministerial. No longer could a historical event, especially one from the distant biblical past, be assumed to be true and

applicable to later generations, which was how the ancient church fathers had read the texts, Luther and the reformers as well.[6] Biblical events, like miracles and prophecies, had to be explained by modern categories, such as the natural order of cause and effect. The Enlightenment unraveled the grand connection between disparate narratives, removed Christ from the Old Testament, and severed the unity of the two testaments. In defense of unity, "biblical theologies" emerged, scholarly attempts to abstract overarching truths from the myriad texts.[7]

One strand of biblical theologies—this is where we get the "Save the Date" reduction of meaning for Old Testament texts—is "salvation history," locating biblical stories on a timeline from creation to eschaton.[8] To be sure, a linear understanding does have ancient precedent. David Maxwell: "In the early church, the meaning of a text of Scripture is to be found in its role in the larger story of salvation."[9] "Salvation history," however, is different. It is a 30,000-foot flyover that misses the down and dirty realities of human life on the ground, and what better place to find those stories than the Old Testament? Its innumerable sins, unrestrained evils, hard to believe divine interventions or depressing lack thereof, and logical inconsistencies in describing God, all present us with troubled and perplexing life as sinners lived it long ago.[10]

Whatever God intended in His mysterious counsels hidden to us, their lives were still *coram deo*, before God in judgment and in need of mercy, just as we are in our time. "Salvation history" smooths out all the troubling stories by neatly placing texts on a *manmade* continuum from creation to the eschaton that we can understand. Sarcastically, Hans Frei wrote, "God's purpose must be identified."[11] Martin Luther: "That person does not deserve to be called a theologian who perceives the invisible things of God as understandable…" (Thesis 19).[12] But "a theologian of the cross calls a thing what it actually is" (Thesis 21).[13]

Mark Seifrid:

> The attempt to interpret Scripture as a comprehensive and unified story presupposes that the reader is in a position to discern God's work as a rational plan, from the creation to the eschaton. Such a position, set above the fray, is not ours. We are not yet beyond the battle between unbelief and faith, between the worship of the idols and the worship of the one, true God. We remain simultaneously sinners and saints, and therefore do not yet possess a whole and unified identity but await it in hope. It is the Scripture that interprets us, tells us who we are in our present state, as in the apostle's penetrating narrative of the human encounter with the Law and recognition of the Gospel in Romans 7. So long as we remain in this body and life, we find ourselves in that wretched person, who cries out for deliverance and finds it in Jesus Christ.[14]

That is how Luther interprets the Fourth Servant Song, Isaiah 52:13—53:12, especially 53:3, "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." His interpretation is far more than "Save the Date" for Lent.

> This passage forms the basis for the church's faith that Christ's kingdom is not of this world. Now follows what He would accomplish by His

> suffering…. And this is the second part of our understanding and justification, to know that Christ suffered and was cursed and killed, but FOR US. It is not enough to know the matter, the suffering, but it is necessary to know its function. . .. Unless God has instructed us, we will not understand this. Therefore, I delight in this text as if it were a text of the New Testament. This new teaching which demolishes the righteousness of the Law clearly appeared absurd to the Jews. For that reason, the apostles needed Scripture, *Surely, He has borne our griefs.* His suffering was nothing else than our sin. These words, OUR, US, FOR US, must be written in letters of gold. He who does not believe this is not a Christian. . .. Therefore, the prophet leads us so earnestly beyond all righteousness and our rational capacity and confronts us with the suffering of Christ to impress upon us that all that Christ has is mine.[15]

Luther jumps straight to Christ's suffering for us, no horizontal rational explanation of the unfolding plan of God through the centuries. "I delight in this text as if it were a text of the New Testament." Seifrid again: "God's address to us in judgment and mercy within the biblical narratives *itself has the power to bridge past, present, and future.*"[16]

Does a prophetic text which pleads the plight of the oppressed and outcast have application to the mission of the church today? Can we, *mutatis mutandis*, apply that Law to the congregations of today's institutional church? Allowing for contextual differences between ancient Israel and contemporary America, which are absolutely necessary moves when doing exegesis, do prophetic calls to work for justice in society apply to the church's mission today? Consider Isaiah 58.

> Behold, in the day of your fast you seek your own pleasure, and oppress all your workers. . .. Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh? Then shall your light break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up speedily. (Isaiah 58:3b, 6–8a)

James Voelz asks, "Does a text 'have' a meaning which reflects the intention of its author? Yes."[17] The authors of prophetic texts, Isaiah here and Amos quoted earlier, are human authors but the ultimate author is the Spirit of God and Christ. "No prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21; see also 1 Peter 1:10–12). With "salvation history," minimalization of texts being legitimately removed, texts pleading for help to the least and the lost do indeed apply to today's church.[18] The Man of Sorrows works through His church in community. "I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations. He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice" (Isaiah 42:1–3).

A second assumption underlying the theology of the cross is that *the Man of Sorrows is ascended, exalted, and now ruling all for the good of His church*. Hence the present tenses of thesis 28, "God's love does not find, but creates, that which is pleasing to it."[19] The culture of a congregation should be missional, but here too, "salvation history" can reduce the Great Commission to an unheeded sermon closing or an unlived mission statement. Without repeatedly presenting Christ as crucified *and exalted*, with us but also over us, hearers are tempted to think of New Testament accounts as sacred history, the church as a religious museum, and pastors are the docents. Who wants to go to a museum every Sunday morning?

Without repeatedly presenting Christ as crucified *and exalted*, with us but also over us, hearers are tempted to think of New Testament accounts as sacred history, the church as a religious museum, and pastors are the docents.

How do parishioners picture our Lord *right now*? He is not in a manger, not on a cross, and out of the tomb for 2000 years. And when we speak about the resurrection, we usually direct thoughts to two times, back to that Easter day or forward to the resurrection on the Last Day. The former is history and the latter, I suspect, is for most people far, far off.[20] That can leave a gap in the timeline for parishioners; what is our Lord doing *right now*? Again, lest you misread me, all these acts of God through Jesus are absolutely necessary for our salvation. They must be preached and taught constantly but, as with hermeneutics, the "salvation history" schema can effectively take Christ out of our here-and-now, as if he is in the "green room" waiting for his next appearance on stage. The Ascension and all it entails is richly present throughout the liturgy, lectionary, and hymns, and in the church's public confession. He is at God's right hand "to rule and reign forever over all creatures, so that through the Holy Spirit he may make holy, purify, strengthen, and comfort all who believe in him, also distribute to them life and various gifts and benefits, and shield and protect them against the devil and sin" (AC III, 4–5).[21]

Right now, Jesus Christ is in His State of Exaltation, seated at the right hand of God in glory, ruling over church and world, all powers subjected to Him (Col 1:15–20; Heb 1; 1 Pt 3: 22; Rev 1:12–18). Right now He is hearing our prayers (Heb 4:5; 1 Pt 3:7; 4:7) and interceding for us with His Father (Hebrews 7:25; Romans 8:34). Right now He is giving His Spirit through the means of grace. The Word is maturing us toward our glorious future (1 Pt 1:23–25; 2:3). Baptism, giving "forgiveness of sins, rescues from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation,"[22] is not transactional, we give so that we get, but is total grace that orients us to the future (Rom 6:4–5; 1 Pt 3:21). Similarly, the Lord's Supper where He is mysteriously present by faith while absent to our sight is forward looking, a "foretaste of the feast to come."

This outpouring of gifts from our Lord at the right hand of God creates the church as a unique community, loving God and one another, living as we do in an often impersonal, sometimes hostile society (1 Pt 1:8, 22–25; 4:7–11). "After you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you" (1 Pt 5:10). Rather than hearing evangelism and mission exhortations as echoes of Jesus speaking in the first century, awareness that He is now *Lord over us* means scriptural words about the least and the lost are words *He is speaking directly to us today.*

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Of His imminent appearance in glory to judge all, there are two audiences. First, the prospect humbles us. How we do mission, and to whom we take mission, falls under the Law. "[E]ach one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done" (1 Cor 3:13).

Thesis 6: "The works of God—we speak of those that are done through human beings—are thus not merits as if they were sinless."[23] In the proof, Luther compares our faithful works, and this must include our mission efforts, to rusty hatchets. "There is a comparison: If someone cuts with a rusty and rough hatchet, even though the worker is a good craftsman, the hatchet leaves bad, jagged, and ugly gashes. So it is when God works through us."[24] Secondly, for the oppressed and outcast in society, even when they know Christ, the Good News is strongly eschatological. The heart-wrenching pleas spoken by the psalms, prophets, and sufferers today will only be answered finally and fully when the Lord appears in glory.

N.T. Wright:

> The picture of Jesus as the coming judge is the central feature of another absolutely vital and nonnegotiable Christian belief: that there will indeed be a judgment in which the creator God will set the world right once and for all…. In a world of systematic injustice, bullying, violence, arrogance, and oppression, the thought that there might come a day when the wicked are firmly put in their place and the poor and weak are given their due is the best news there can be. Faced with a world in rebellion, a world full of exploitation and wickedness, a good God must be a God of judgment.[25]

In summary, the session of Christ and His imminent return, even when not explicitly stated, are a fundament of the New Testament, the predicate of much paraenesis, and formational for Christians in the first century and today, since the Spirit through inspired authors wrote not only to form Christian faith in first century Christians in the Roman Empire but also wrote for us in our impersonal, sometimes hostile, post-churched America.

Lutheran theology aims to be Christocentric. "[A]ll of theology has been embraced in Christology. Without Christ one cannot speak properly about God or

about creation, not to mention redemption and eternal glory. Everything is comprehended in him, and everything refers to him."[26] Therefore, Christian life should be wholly cruciform, and mission must be in light of the theology of the cross. "God can be found only in suffering and the cross" (Proof to thesis 21).[27] The mission of the prophets had two intimately related foci: In worship, true repentance and faith before God, and in community, striving for God's justice. Jesus identifies those two foci as the two great commandments in Matt 22:36–40 and parallels.[28] Luther related the two this way:

> Now when you have Christ as the foundation and chief blessing of your salvation, then the other part follows: that you take him as your example, giving yourself in service to your neighbor just as you see that Christ has given himself for you. See, there faith and love move forward, God's commandment is fulfilled, and a person is happy and fearless to do and to suffer all things. Therefore, make note of this, that Christ as a gift (i.e., grace) nourishes your faith and makes you a Christian. But Christ as an example exercises your works.[29]

Of the intimate connection of the two tables, Philipp Melanchthon said, "The works of the Second Table are *truly the worship of God*…that is, *when our works are guided by the fear of God and by faith*."[30] For your congregation, it may not be going to the slums. It might be partnering with an inner-city church or ethnic mission. It might be a community garden or a food bank. It might be a service to children and parents of a public school. It might be hosting a community organization. It might start with a simple block party to get acquainted with the neighbors around your church. It might start by talking with city officials about community needs.[31] The immediate goal is not to make church members but begin to meet people outside your church who need God's love and His mercies that you can deliver. "Love…does not seek its own" (1 Cor 15:5).

The immediate goal is not to make church members but begin to meet people outside your church who need God's love and His mercies that you can deliver.

Martin Chemnitz:

> God puts before us a person who in his necessity needs our help and love, and you can help him, this person is your neighbor whom you are commanded to love, nor are you to argue as to whether he is your friend, your enemy, known to you, a stranger, of a different religion or language.[32]

A biographical passage from Dietrich Bonhoeffer shows that it all comes down to the First Commandment.

> I remember a conversation that I had in America thirteen years ago with a young French pastor. We were asking ourselves quite simply what we

> wanted to do with our lives. He said he would like to become a saint (and I think it is quite likely that he did become one). At the time, I was very impressed, but I disagreed with him, and said, in effect, that I should like to learn to have faith…. I discovered later, and I'm still discovering right up to this moment, that it is only by living completely in this world that one learns to have faith. One must completely abandon any attempt to make something of oneself, whether it be a saint, or a converted sinner, or a churchman (a so-called priestly type!), a righteous man or an unrighteous one, a sick man or a healthy one. By this-worldliness I mean living unreservedly in life's duties, problems, successes and failures, experiences, and perplexities. In so doing we throw ourselves completely into the arms of God, taking seriously, not our own sufferings, but those of God in the world – watching with Christ in Gethsemane. That, I think, is faith; that is *metanoia* (repentance); and that is how one comes a man and a Christian. May God in His mercy lead us through these times; but above all, may He lead us to Himself.[33]

ENDNOTES

[1] Abraham Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York, NY: Harper Perennial Classics, 2001), 3.
[2] Martin Luther, "Heidelberg Disputation," Thesis 28 in Timothy Wengert, ed. *The Annotated Luther: The Roots of Reform* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2015), 85. Hereafter Wengert, *Roots* for quotations of Heidelberg Theses.
[3] Wengert, *Roots,* 104–5.
[4] Heschel, 3.
[5] E.g., hyper-individualism, omnipresence of media, artificial intelligence, growth of government, the omnipotent market, decline of mediating institutions, etc.
[6] Robert Preus about the Lutheran reformers, who followed the traditional hermeneutic: "To be sure, there is a vast difference between the Old and New Testament Scriptures in their presentation of doctrine; there is a definite unfolding and advance in clarity as well as phraseology and thought. The Old Testament Scriptures present the doctrine under different circumstances and different times; in the Old Testament Christ is prefigured under shadows and types as something to come. But substantially the theology of Scripture is one, even as Christ is one. *Tempora variata sunt, non fides*." Robert D. Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism,* Vol. II (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1972), 332.
[7] You can picture this genre somewhere between exegetical commentaries on one hand, and systematic, dogmatic texts on the other. James Barr: "The very idea of 'biblical theology' seems to hang uncertainly in the middle air, somewhere between actual exegesis and systematic theology" (James Barr, *The Concept of Biblical Theology* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999], 2). Foster McCurley and John Reumann, *Witness of the Word: A Biblical Theology of the Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986) introduced their work: "This book is an exercise in that elusive discipline called 'biblical theology." xv. (, xv). Barr makes a bald confession: "The theology of the Bible, as most modern biblical scholarship has envisaged it, is something that *has still to be discovered*." (ibid., 3; emphasis his).
[8] "Salvation History" was especially promoted by Lutheran professor J.C.K. von Hofmann of Erlangen. He sought a biblically and historically based alternative to historical criticism.
[9] David Maxwell, "The Exegetical Elephant in the Room," *Concordia Journal*, 49:3, (Summer, 2023), 16.

[10] E.g., Martin Luther, "Scripture approves of homicide in the case of some kings, in others it condemns it." (Martin Luther, "Jonah," in Luther's *Works,* vol.19. Tr. Charles D. Froehlich (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1974), 5. Hereafter LW.
[11] Hans Frei, *The Eclipse of the Biblical Narrative* (New Haven: Yale University Press,1974), 174.
[12] Wengert, *Roots*, 83.
[13] Wengert, *Roots*, 84.
[14] Mark Seifrid, "Story-Lines of Scripture and Footsteps in the Sea," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology,* 12:4 (Winter 2008), 94.
[15] Martin Luther, Lectures on Isaiah Chapters 40–66. tr. Herbert J.A. Bouman, LW 17: 220–221. Emphases by capitals is Luther's.
[16] Seifrid, 89–90.
[17] James Voelz, *What Does This Mean?* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1997), 215.
[18] The tide has been turning against critical exegesis. David Steinmetz wrote in 1980, "The defenders of the single meaning theory usually concede that the medieval approach to the Bible met the religious needs of the Christian community, but that it did so at the unacceptable price of doing violence to the biblical text…. I should like to suggest an alternative hypothesis. The medieval theory of levels of meaning in the biblical text, with all its undoubted defects, flourished because it is true, while the modern theory of a single meaning, with all its demonstrable virtues, is false. Until the historical-critical method becomes critical of its own theoretical foundations and develops a hermeneutical theory adequate to the nature of the text which it is interpreting, it will remain restricted—as it deserves to be—to the guild and the academy, where the question of truth can endlessly be deferred." David Steinmetz, "The Superiority of Pre-Critical Exegesis," *Theology Today,* (1980), 38.
[19] Wengert, *Roots*, 85.
[20] It is interesting to note that Jesus' visible life, suffering, and resurrection and the resurrection at the end of times are matters of sight. Of the former, "one of these men (candidates to replace Judas) must become with us a witness to his resurrection" (Acts 1:22). Of the latter, "he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him" (Rev 1:7). However, Christ's session now at the right hand of God is known only through the words of faith. Might that explain the relative lack of attention given to the Ascension and its entailments? "We walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Cor 5:7).
[21] Augsburg Confession III, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, eds R. Kolb, T.J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2000), 38. Hereafter KW.
[22] *Small Catechism,* Baptism: "What gifts or benefits does baptism grant?" KW, 359.
[23] Wengert, *Roots*, 82.
[24] Relevant to humility in our religious works are Luther's references to "the fear of God," six times in the 28 theses of his Heidelberg Disputation (7 [2x], 8, 9, 11, 12). He is contrasts human trust in works to the fear that our works may be damnable before God. The seventh thesis: "The works of the righteous would be mortal sins were they not feared as mortal sins by the righteous themselves out of pious fear of God." Old Testament texts, real stories of saints and sinners *coram deo*, can instill the fear of God, judgment for our sinfulness, but more wonderfully, the pious fear of God, marvel that He saves us sinners. Do we today talk about the "fear of God"?
[25] N.T. Wright, Surprised *by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection and the Mission of the Church* (NY: HarperOne, 2008), 117.
[26] Samuel Nafzger, ed., *Confessing the Gospel: A Lutheran Approach to Systematic Theology* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2017), 416.
[27] Wengert, Roots, 100.

[28] "Teacher, what is the great commandment in the Law?" And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it; You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets" (Mt 22: 36–40).
[29] Martin Luther, "A Brief Instruction," Tr. E. Theodore Bachmann. LW 35:120.
[30] Philipp Melanchthon, in Martin Chemnitz *Loci Theologici.* Tr. J.A.O. Preus. II, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1989), 716. The sharp distinction between forensic justification and the resultant life of sanctification (the Second Table) is present in Scripture but was not delineated sharply until Luther and the Reformation. Alister McGrath: "Justification is then interpreted as *Gerechtsprechung*, being 'pronounced righteous' or 'accepted as righteous.' A sharp distinction thus comes to be drawn between justification, as the external act in which God pronounces or declares the believer to be righteous, and regeneration, as the internal process of renewal in which the believer is regenerated through the work of the Holy Spirit." Alister McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification 4th edition* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 209. David Maxwell about Augustine: "Justification…refers to the inner transformation of the sinner into a righteous person that happens when God pours his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5). It is not a forensic declaration of innocence by the judge as it is in Lutheran theology; rather, it is a process of healing. The dogmatic term that describes this is *sanative justification* or justification by healing. That does not mean that forensic justification was something Augustine never thought of." David Maxwell, "Justification in the Early Church," *Concordia Journal,* 44:3 (Summer 2018), 29.
[31] However a congregation decides to serve the community is not merely a private church matter. City services like fire and police protection are provided to congregations even though congregations pay no taxes. The rationale for tax exemption is that the congregation provides valuable service to the community. Some religious institutions voluntarily pay a "PILOT," "payment in lieu of taxes."
[32] Chemnitz, 747.
[33] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (New York: Macmillian Publishing Company, 1971), 369–370.

Emerging Technologies and the *Missio Dei*: Inviting Constructive and Critical Engagement

William G. Fredstrom

Abstract: Digital devices and technologies, like smartphones, tablets, and laptops, have become integral to our daily lives. These contemporary technologies shape how we connect, communicate, and collaborate in our homes, workplaces, and churches. They have also granted us incredible conveniences and opportunities. Loved ones and colleagues can interact over great distances with relative ease. Information that once would have taken days to find and compile can be accessed momentarily. Increased efficiency and automation in day-to-day activities like shopping, paying bills, and investing point to the capacity of these tools to streamline and make many areas of our lives easier. These technologies have also brought several challenges and problems into our personal lives and our common life with one another. Increased screen time, the decline in in-person social interactions, the rise of social isolation and anxiety, privacy concerns, and changes to our brains are just a few examples of our digital age's "malformative" effects.

As the development and capacity of digital devices continue to advance in the years to come, emerging technologies like virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), artificial intelligence (AI), the Internet of Things (IoT), robotics and autonomous systems, biotechnology and gene editing, and brain-computer interfaces (BCI) promise to shape our future in profound ways. Emerging technologies elicit theological reflection as they invite new possibilities for the life and witness of the church today and because they raise important questions about living in the world, interacting with others, and even being human. This kind of technological situation adds urgency for Christians to deal constructively and critically with emerging technologies and their implications for life, witness, and theology today.

The Digital Revolution

The world has experienced plenty of revolutions. "For nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom," Jesus said (Mt 24:7). Political powers that once seemed destined to reign for eternity crumble and fall. However, another sort of revolution began transforming the world in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. It was not a political but a technological one: the digital revolution. The digital revolution is one of several industrial revolutions that have shaped the world. Klaus Schwab, the founder and chairman of the World Economic Forum, calls it "the fourth industrial

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revolution."[1] According to Schwab's analysis,[T]he first industrial revolution came with the rise of steam power (beginning in the 1760s), and the second came with the transition from steam power to electricity (in the decades around 1900). The third industrial revolution marks the transition from mechanical and analog electronic processes to digital computing (beginning in the 1950s), and the fourth industrial revolution represents the internet revolution and its continual unfolding with artificial intelligence (from the 1990s onward).[2]

Each of these revolutions has shaped the world, but the speed at which the internet and digital devices have been created and integrated into our lives is astonishing.[3]

The digital revolution cannot be fully understood apart from the development of digital devices, especially the iPhone.[4] Consequently, Thomas Friedman points to 2007 CE as one of the most transitionary years in human history. As he puts it, "What the H*** Happened in 2007?"[5] In 2007, the iPhone was released; Facebook (now Meta) left college campuses and entered the wider world; Twitter (now X) was spun off; Google bought YouTube and launched Android; Netflix began streaming videos; Amazon released the Kindle; and Internet users surpassed one billion worldwide.[6] 2007 was revolutionary not just because the iPhone was released but because of all its release set in motion and all that came after.

In just under twenty years after the release of the iPhone, terms like artificial intelligence (AI), transhumanism (Humanity+), posthumanism, the Internet of Things (IoT), the Metaverse, virtual reality (VR), and augmented reality (AR) have become more and more common in scholarly literature and pop culture. These technologies emerge from the digital revolution and fundamentally intensify its values and practices. In *Future Politics: Living Together in a World Transformed by Tech,* Jamie Susskind argues that three defining features will characterize our shared techno social future: 1) increasingly capable systems, 2) increasingly integrated technology, and 3) an increasingly quantified society.[7]

The development of increasingly capable systems such as AI and machine learning algorithms promises not just to perform tasks that were once believed to require the cognitive and creative processes of human persons with extraordinary speed and efficiency but also to be able to "learn" apart from the programming of their human creators.[8] These developments are predicated on advances in mathematics, philosophy, and neuroscience and the explosion in available data and computing power.[9] The optimism behind machine learning is undergirded by "Moore's Law," a theory that posits computer processing doubles roughly every two years. This theory has led futurist Ray Kurzweil to predict that by 2050, "one thousand dollars of computing will exceed the processing power of all human brains on earth."[10]

Susskind contends that emerging technologies will be "more *pervasive*, more *connective*, more *sensitive*, more *constitutive*, and more *immersive.*"[11] Let us consider the last one by looking at augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR). Through smart glasses or goggles, AR "allows the wearer to experience digital images overlaid onto the physical world. They might show directions to a park, or assembly instructions for a new wardrobe."[12] Examples of this technology are Snapchat *Lenses*, which allows selfies to be edited with animations and filters, and *Pokémon Go*, a smartphone game that overlays the real world with digital Pokémons that must be captured and trained. VR promises an even more immersive experience.

Unlike AR, which overlays digital images onto the real world, VR headsets allow users to enter into three-dimensional virtual worlds where, through the power of "haptic" technology embedded in clothing, suits, and gloves, users can feel and experience tactile feedback, often called "presence."[13] In the future, workers will attend virtual meetings, shoppers will peruse virtual shopping malls, sports fans will attend virtual stadiums, and people will even seek out virtual brothels.[14] Thus, emerging technologies promise to shape the most public and private of experiences.[15]

Finally, the use of digital devices and emerging technologies will lead to an incredible amount of data that can be sorted, stored, processed, and quantified.[16] The twenty-first century has seen an astronomical explosion in data generated and processed by persons and machines. "Today," Susskind writes, "humans generate roughly the same amount of information every couple of hours as they did from the dawn of civilization until 2003."[17] However, this data is not being forgotten or wiped away but stored and "used for commercial purposes, to train machine learning systems, and to predict and control human behaviour."[18]

In *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, Shoshana Zuboff argues that the gathering of data by big tech firms and political powers constitutes a new, unprecedented form of power, which she calls "instrumentarianism" or "instrumentarian power," consisting of the "instrumentation and instrumentalization of behavior for the purposes of modification, prediction, monetization, and control."[19] Thus, the growth and integration of these technologies into our world and lives must also be coupled with conversations regarding regulation, privacy rights, and how data is to be used, controlled, owned, shared, and sold.

Emerging Technologies and Their Impact

The creation of the printing press, television, the internet, and the iPhone didn't just reshape our physical landscape and infrastructure; they fundamentally reshaped how we imagine our world, ourselves, our values, beliefs, lifestyles, and interactions—often in ways we are not consciously aware of.[20] Emerging technologies will do the same, generating what Neil Postman calls "ecological" change,

> Technological change is neither additive nor subtractive. It is ecological. I mean "ecological" in the same sense as the word is used by environmental scientists. One significant change generates total change. If you remove caterpillars from a given habitat, you are not left with the same environment minus caterpillars: you have a new environment, and you have reconstituted the conditions of survival; the same is true if you add caterpillars to an environment that has had none. This is how the ecology of media works as well. A new technology does not add or subtract something. It changes everything. In the year 1500, fifty years after the printing press was invented, we did not have old Europe plus the printing press. We had a different Europe.[21]

One of the most striking ways emerging technologies will bring about ecological change is the gradual blurring of once central distinctions like physical reality/virtual reality, offline/online, and human/robot. Total immersion in a digital world through

VR or overlaying digital objects onto the physical world through AR will gradually dissolve the distinction between physical and virtual reality.[22] Some futurists believe that one day, we might live fully immersed in mixed reality (MR), where VR and AR are so advanced that there is functionally no longer a distinction between physical and virtual reality.[23]

Similarly, the distinction between offline/online is increasingly blurring due to the Internet of Things (IoT).[24] IoT refers to the network of physical, interconnected devices—like phones, appliances, vehicles, sensors, and thermostats, to name a few—that are embedded with technology to collect, exchange, and act on data due to their connection to the internet. This connection enables them to interact, collect data, and make decisions, often without human prompting. In this connected context, it will become increasingly challenging to notice a distinction between our offline and online lives.

One of the most striking ways emerging technologies will bring about ecological change is the gradual blurring of once central distinctions like physical reality/virtual reality, offline/online, and human/robot.

Finally, emerging technologies will reshape how humans understand themselves. It is often believed that technology will evolve, upgrade, and update, but humans will stay the same. Michael Bess, however, calls this presumption "the Jetsons fallacy" and argues that it is fundamentally mistaken.[25] Not only do technologies like digital devices shape us physically by altering our brains and, therefore, our behavior, but a growing number of futurists and technologists point to the day when integrating technologies like brain-computer interfaces (BCI) into our bodies and employing technological capacities like gene editing and biohacking will become commonplace.[26] Yuval Noah Harari describes how this might come about,

> *Homo sapiens* is likely to upgrade itself step by step, merging with robots and computers in the process, until our descendants look back and realize that they are no longer the kind of animal that wrote the Bible, built the Great Wall of China and laughed at Charlie Chaplin's antics. This will not happen in a day, or a year. Indeed, it is already happening right now, through innumerable mundane actions. Every day millions of people decide to grant their smartphone a bit more control over their lives or try a new and more effective antidepressant drug. In pursuit of health, happiness, and power, humans will gradually change first one of their features and then another, and another, until they will no longer be human.[27]

The growing plausibility and practice of integrating technological systems and capacities into human bodies will likely blur the distinction between humans and robots.

A Posture for Engagement: Cultivation and Creation

Emerging technologies elicit a wide range of reactions. Some see these technologies as ushering in a time of increased efficiency, leisure, and automation, leading to human flourishing and happiness. Others see them as the harbingers of a dystopian, tech-dominated future. The reality is that technological innovations have always created polarizing responses.[28] So, how might the church engage these technologies? Andy Crouch has proposed a constructive posture that is well-suited for the church's engagement with emerging technologies.

In his influential work, *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling*, Crouch argues that Christians must recover their identity as "creators and cultivators… artists and gardeners… creaturely creators, tending and shaping the world" God has made.[29] Made in the image of God (Gen 1:26–27; Gen 5:1-3; 9:5– 6) and renewed in that image through the work of Christ and our baptism into Him (Rom 8:29; 2 Cor 3:18; Col 3:10; Eph 4:24), God's people are called to tend and cultivate God's creation.[30]

This tending and cultivating work does not just consist of maintaining creation's natural state;[31] instead, as Anthony Hoekema writes, it means that because humans are made in God's image, they are "called by God to develop all the potentialities found in nature and in humankind as a whole. [They] must seek to develop not only agriculture, horticulture, and animal husbandry, but also science, technology, and art… to develop a God-glorifying culture."[32] The question is how to do this faithfully, because there is a difference between imaging God as His creative creatures and trying to overcome our creatureliness through our creations in the vain attempt to become like God.[33]

In keeping with the vision of humanity laid out in Genesis 1-2, Crouch argues that God's people should take up a posture of cultivation and creation as they relate to various cultural goods and artifacts.[34] Rather than being a people who are habitually reactionary and dismissive of various cultural goods and artifacts, Christians should develop a posture of cultivation. They should use, improve, and adapt them to glorify God and serve their neighbor. As Christians seek to embody a posture of cultivation, they are also freed to employ certain gestures, such as condemning, critiquing, copying, and consuming.[35] So, what might this look like more concretely? Let's take the example of VR.

Many Christians might be immediately dismissive of the use of VR. Yet, Darrell Bock and Jonathan Armstrong argue that VR can be an incredible pedagogical tool that, among other things, could display God's glory in the created universe while speaking and teaching about His presence and power.[36] They also believe VR might be an essential tool to engage Christians where meeting together in a church is illegal or where Christians are actively persecuted.[37]

These are examples of how an emerging technology like VR, when engaged in a posture of cultivation, can bring glory to God, and serve our neighbor in a way that might not have been thought of if we had a purely reactionary and critical posture. However, there are also examples where a particular gesture is needed concerning VR. An instance in which God's people should employ the gesture of condemnation is the use of VR to engage in any number of sexual scenarios with any number of virtual avatars and experience sexual sensations through haptic technology.[38]

…godly wisdom, discernment, and engagement are needed to help Christians deal constructively and critically with these emerging technologies and their implications for life, witness, and theology today.

Emerging technologies present pros and cons, strengths and weaknesses, affordances and drawbacks, possibilities, and perils for God's people today. That is why godly wisdom, discernment, and engagement are needed to help Christians deal constructively and critically with these emerging technologies and their implications for life, witness, and theology today. As a result, the November 2025 issue of *Lutheran Mission Matters* will delve deeper into the intersection of emerging technologies and Christian theology. Among other things, emerging technologies inevitably raise questions about theological concepts and frameworks.

Questions

- How do emerging technologies impact theological concepts and understandings?
- What are the implications for doctrines like creation, providence, and human agency in a world increasingly shaped by machine learning and algorithms?
- As the distinction between physical reality/virtual reality and human/robot becomes increasingly obscured, what does this mean for questions of theological anthropology and ecclesiology?

Emerging technologies also raise ethical considerations from several perspectives, from parish pastors engaged in sermon writing and by-law revisions to doctors seeking a better understanding of the relationship between therapeutic correction and technological enhancement in their medicinal practice.

Questions

- What ethical challenges arise from integrating AI and digital technologies into ministry practices, such as sermon writing?

- What are the implications of using AI to compose church documents like policies and bylaws?
- How might churches and pastors balance AI's efficiency and insights with the need for human wisdom and discernment?
- What are the ethical considerations for Christians when deciding whether to integrate emerging technologies into their bodies?
- How does the Christian understanding of human persons as finite and limited inform decisions about integrating life-extending or life-enhancing technologies?

Emerging technologies also invite the church to consider how it engages in the work of mission, witness, and faith formation.

Questions

- How can AI, VR, and other digital and emerging technologies be used to advance mission objectives?
- What are the opportunities and risks associated with using these technologies for evangelism, church planting, and global outreach, and how might they reshape traditional mission strategies and practices?
- How might AI and immersive technologies like VR and AR transform Christian education and formation?
- What might faith formation look like in a digital age?

Finally, emerging technologies and technological visions like transhumanism (Humanity+) and posthumanism invite the church to give an account of what it means to live well as finite, limited creatures who look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come, all as a result of God's gracious initiative and work.

Questions

- How should Christian theology respond to technological visions like transhumanism (Humanity+) that seek to transcend human limitations through technology?
- What are the theological and ethical implications of pursuing human enhancement in light of the Christian account of creation and new creation?

The technological landscape is rapidly changing, and it is changing us too. This reality makes many excited about the future, while others look forward with fear and trepidation. Yet God's people believe in the crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ, who rules and reigns over all things visible and invisible and will come again to judge the living and the dead and make all things new. In this hope and confidence, God's people are empowered to take up questions like these with godly creativity and wisdom.

ENDNOTES

[1] Klaus Schwab, *The Fourth Industrial Revolution* (New York: World Economic Forum, 2016).
[2] Darrell L. Bock and Jonathan J. Armstrong, *Virtual Reality Church: Pitfalls and Possibilities (Or How to Think Biblically about Church in Your Pajamas, VR Baptisms, Jesus Avatars, and Whatever Else is Coming Next)* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2021), 36.
[3] Schwab, *The Fourth Industrial Revolution*, 8, "The spindle (the hallmark of the first industrial revolution) took almost 120 years to spread outside of Europe. By contrast, the internet permeated across the globe in less than a decade."
[4] See Felicia Wu Song, *Restless Devices: Recovering Personhood, Presence, and Place in the Digital Age* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2021).
[5] Thomas Friedman, *Thank You for Being Late: An Optimist's Guide to Thriving in an Age of Accelerations* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2016), 19. Cited in James Emery White, *Hybrid Church: Rethinking the Church for a Post-Christian Digital Age* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Reflective, 2023), 39.
[6] White, *Hybrid Church*, 39.
[7]Jamie Susskind, *Future Politics: Living Together in a World Transformed by Tech* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 22.
[8] Susskind, *Future Politics*, 30–36.
[9] Susskind, *Future Politics*, 38.
[10] Ray Kurzweil, *The Singularity Is Near* (New York: Viking, 2005), 127. Cited in Susskind, *Future Politics*, 38.
[11] Susskind, *Future Politics*, 43.
[12] Susskind, *Future Politics*, 58.
[13]See Peter Rubin, *Future Presence, How Virtual Reality Is Changing Human Connection, Intimacy, and the Limits of Ordinary Life* (New York: Harper One, 2018), 165–193; See also, Jeremy Bailenson, *Experience on Demand: What Virtual Reality Is, How it Works, and What it Can Do* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2018).
[14] Susskind, *Future Politics*, 60.
[15] For a relevant discussion of the many ways VR might change our lives, see Mark Zuckerberg, "Founder's Letter, 2021" October 28, 2021, https://about.fb.com/news/2021/10/founders-letter/
[16] Susskind, *Future Politics*, 61.
[17] Susskind, *Future Politics*, 61.
[18] Susskind, *Future Politics*, 61,
[19] Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power* (New York: Public Affairs, 2019), 352.
[20] For an analysis of the transformative power of a technological medium, see Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy*: *The Making of Typographic Man* (1962; Toronto: The University of Toronto Press, 2011); Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (1964; Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994).
[21] Neil Postman, *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology* (New York: Vintage, 1992), 18.
[22] David J. Chalmers, *Reality +: Virtual Worlds and the Problem of Philosophy* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2022), xvii, argues that "virtual reality is genuine reality." He calls this "virtual realism," the "thesis that virtual reality is a genuine reality, with emphasis on the thesis that virtual objects are real and not illusory" (p. 470).
[23] For examples of what these technosocial futures might look like and how they might work, see Herman Narula, *Virtual Society: The Metaverse and the New Frontiers of Human*

Experience (Great Britain: Penguin Business, 2022); Matthew Ball, *The Metaverse and How It Will Revolutionize Everything* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2022).
[24] See Samuel Greengard, *The Internet of Things* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2015).
[25] Michael Bess, *Make Way for the Superhumans: How the Science of Bio-enhancement Is Transforming Our World, and How We Need to Deal with It* (London: Icon, 2016), 7.
[26] See Joel Oesch, *Crossing Wires: Making Sense of Technology, Transhumanism, and Christian Identity* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2020), 1–18; 51–65.
[27] Yuval Noah Harari, *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow* (2016; New York: Harper Perennial, 2018), 49.
[28] See A. Trevor Sutton, "Looking into the AI Mirror: Optimism, Pessimism, or Something Else," *Journal of Lutheran Ethics* 24, no. 4 (August/September 2024), https://learn.elca.org/jle/looking-into-the-ai-mirror-optimism-pessimism-or-something-else/
[29] Andy Crouch, *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling*, expanded ed. (2008; Downers Grove: IVP 2023), 97.
[30] On the image of God and its loss and renewal, see Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration 1, 10–14; Cited in Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 533–534.
[31] Andy Crouch, *Playing God: Redeeming the Gift of Power* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2013), 105, "When human beings do what they were created to do, the latent possibilities in creation come to fruition, a flourishing reality that would never exist without the application of human intelligence and intentionality. That is what image bearing is for." Cited in Dennis P. Hollinger, *Creation and Christian Ethics: Understanding God's Designs for Humanity and World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2023), 68.
[32] Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 14. Cited in Hollinger, *Creation and Christian Ethics*, 145; cf. 177.
[33] Hollinger, *Creation and Christian Ethics*, 222–246, argues that as Christians engage with emerging technologies and consider the potential of technological enhancements, they must do so in ways that respect rather than transgress their fundamental constitution as finite, limited, and dependent creatures. Cf. Lydia Jaeger, *Ordinary Splendor: Living in God's Creation*, trans. Jonathan Vaughan (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2023).
[34] Crouch's posture of cultivation relies on a robust doctrine of creation, vocation, and eschatology. For further discussion, see William W. Schumacher, "Theology for Culture: Confrontation, Context, and Creation," *Concordia Journal* 42, no. 3 (Summer 2016): 211–222.
[35] Crouch, *Culture Making*, 93–98, encourages readers not to let these gestures turn into their operating posture.
[36] Bock and Armstrong, *Virtual Reality Church*, 20.
[37] Bock and Armstrong, *Virtual Reality Church*, 21. The LCMS council of presidents encourages and advocates for the continued practice of in-person communion, as opposed to virtual or online communion. I, too, affirm the practice of in-person communion, as opposed to virtual or online communion. https://files.lcms.org/file/preview/6CAF272D-692A-4653-9005-A5C931CD045B cf. Resolution 5-08A, "To Affirm In-Person Communion," from the 68th Regular Convention of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. https://reporter.lcms.org/2023/convention-affirms-in-person-communion/ .
[38] See Rubin, *Future Presence*, 195–220; Oesch, *Crossing Wires*, 66–83.

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Mission Observer

Theology of the Cross and the Mission of Christ's Church

A sermon by Phillip Brandt

During the days of the shutdown occasioned by the recent pandemic, I found myself gathered with a handful of people in a local cemetery on a cold and wet day. We were properly admonished to stand appropriately distant from one another. There would be no embraces that day with anyone outside immediate family "bubbles." The gathering was small. Because of pandemic restrictions, we did not have a larger gathering at church, so this committal service would be all that the family really had as a formal moment to remember, grieve, and hear the words of our Lord, His promise of resurrection.

She had been a long-time, dare we say "long-suffering" member of this parish, almost from its inception. She had been there when its vast nave had been built and then filled, so full they needed three services to accommodate them all. In the last months of her life, she had been denied the opportunity to worship with the couple score of members who now showed up, scattered around a room which would accommodate ten times their number. Until the pandemic kept her away, she had come, faithfully and joyfully.

Christ spoke to us that day, words of eternal comfort, beauty, and truth. He is the resurrection of the dead, the eternal life which we lost in that garden long ago. Her death was a personal manifestation of sin's consequence. This gathering, however, was an occasion to speak the greater truth, to call things what they are. Christ has taken death to Himself, her death, my death, our deaths. He has paid the price of our sins, her sins, my sins, all of them. He is her and my Way, Truth, and Life. These are the things which are true. We shared a few memories, laughed at a few things she had said

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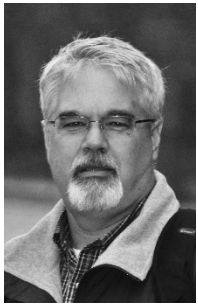


Pastor Phillip L. Brandt, PhD serves St. Michael's Lutheran Church in Portland, Oregon and is Campus Pastor to the students, faculty, and staff of the ABSN (accelerated nursing) program operated by Concordia University, St. Paul which is located in Portland. He served as the chair of the theology department of Concordia University, Portland and holds a PhD in Classics from the University of Kent, UK. He publishes weekly sermon notes on Sunday-Sermon.com a resource for preachers who are using the LSB lectionary. He is married to Stephanie and has three adult children.

and done. We stood nearby as her casket was lowered into the ground, and we wept at the bitterness of death.

I begin with the story above to focus on the question, "How does a theology of the cross shape our thinking about faithfulness in mission?" In his excellent treatment of Luther's Heidelberg Disputation of 1518, Gerhard Forde observes that a theologian of the cross does not so much talk about the theology of the cross, but he does it.[1] I will also consider how the theology of the cross changes the way we think about success. To be a true theologian of the cross, it seems that one must *do it*, engage in the very act of forgiving and being forgiven, speaking words of comfort to grieving children at their mother's grave, confronting sinners, and being confronted in one's own sin. It requires a humble vulnerability on the part of the one engaged in mission. I am another beggar like you,[2] tipping you off about where you might get a hot meal.

To be a true theologian of the cross, it seems that one must *do it*, engage in the very act of forgiving and being forgiven, speaking words of comfort to grieving children at their mother's grave, confronting sinners, and being confronted in one's own sin.

More than 30 years ago I was called into my first parish, a small place nestled in the northern suburbs of Salt Lake City. I had grown up in a town that (my siblings and I joked) contained far more Lutherans than people. The parish our father served regularly saw an attendance which exceeded the hamlet's population. Now I was serving in a community which was 92% LDS (Latter Day Saints, Mormons). It was in many respects the exact opposite of what I knew. I was now labelled a gentile, an outsider.

My time spent in that parish was my happiest service. I simply showed up. I led Bible studies, preached sermons, taught confirmation, and did not fly into rages or leave after nine months. It was a low bar for success. But we did succeed, measurably. How should we think about those days when my little parish doubled in size? We started some new ministries. Hungry people were fed, children welcomed, and we even got the aluminum cross atop our building reilluminated after many years of darkness.

Since then, I have served a larger parish and seen conflict. I have been called to a university faculty, been elevated to leadership positions, been nominated for more CUS presidencies than there are currently institutions in the system, and mercifully was chosen for none of them. My own institution has collapsed and closed around me, and now I find myself again, Sunday in and Sunday out, preaching to a group of folks the same size as that small clutch of Lutherans in that community north of Salt Lake City. How should we think about such things? I would let Scripture answer those and other questions.

We go to the words of Paul's second letter to the Corinthians. I consider the first seven chapters of that book to be thoroughgoing explication of the theology of the cross. In the first letter that he has that wonderful statement about the cross and the apostle's own devotion to its preaching and its power (1 Cor 1:18-25). But it is in the second of those letters that he *does it*.

Titus has returned with good news after much conflict and consternation (2 Cor 7:6). The Corinthian congregation, after a painful visit by Paul and a difficult letter (2 Cor 2:1–4), has heard the Law, been crushed by it, and now seeks the forgiveness which Paul can speak to them. Those first seven chapters of that wonderful letter are pure gold. For they are the wide-open heart (2 Cor 6:11–13) of the apostle as he seeks to do what they so desperately need: forgive them. He needs them to hear it, to believe, to take this to themselves and know that it is real. He has forgiven them. He begs them to believe that he is the ambassador of God, commissioned to bring this very news to them (2 Cor 5:20). He knows how hard it is for the sinner to believe that this forgiveness is *for me* after *I* have sinned. Paul himself had needed the inspired laying on of Ananias' hands to open his own eyes (Acts 9:17–19). He needed the blinding light of Christ to be brought to baptismal repentance and the fellowship of those fellow believers in Damascus and beyond (Acts 9:3-4).

Now, in 2 Corinthians he looks upon his penitent flock and he fears that their remorse shall lead to despair, to a denial of the very forgiveness which they have sought. Thus, he pleads with them for seven eloquent chapters that they would believe him and hear what he says. He begs them not receive the grace of God in vain. Now is the day of salvation and not another day, but this day, when they hear these words (2 Cor 6:1–2). He wants to open the floodgates of love which accompany such forgiveness, putting no obstacle before anyone. He suffers all so that they may hear and believe not some abstraction of forgiveness which applies to someone else, but to them, to the very people who have hurt him and now repent (2 Cor 6:3–10).

The love of Christ controls Paul now (2 Cor 5:14). (Is that "of Christ" an objective or a subjective genitive? Does it matter? I rather think it could be both.) He has concluded this one thing: Christ has died for all. That fact has changed everything. For Paul that means he no longer lives for himself but for the one who for his sake died and was raised (2 Cor 5:15). It also means that he no longer sees anyone as he did before. They are a new creation in Christ. The old has passed away. The new has come. (Note the tense!) All this is thanks to Christ, not Paul, not the Corinthians, not you, not me. It is all Christ. For God made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us (2 Cor 5:16-21). Paul is reaching the crescendo of his appeal right here. In the very next verses, he will exclaim that now is the day of salvation. He begs in the next chapter; will they please open their heart to him (2 Cor 6:12–13).

Paul is the theologian of the cross. These are words about forgiveness spoken to real sinners whose hearts are accusing them. Forgiveness is always a first- and second-person conversation, with God or with one another.

Which brings me back to that damp, cold afternoon in the cemetery. The theologian of the cross must look into the overflowing eyes of the 20-something granddaughter and speak the promise to her. He must *do it*. Yes, in that instance with words, but it is a doing all the same. It is no good to talk about resurrection in the abstract, you have to say, "She will rise again." Just as Paul wrote in this letter and did the act of forgiveness to those wretches in Corinth so long ago.

Now consider faithfulness in mission in light of this theology of the cross. How should we measure and assess such faithfulness? What does it mean to entrust ourselves to God and to trust God? The theologian of the cross cannot just write papers about the resurrection, he cannot simply teach classes about law and gospel. The true theologian of the cross must look into those grieving eyes and speak it to that human being. Written papers are at best a secondary theology, a blessing in service to that primary sort of theology which happens at gravesides, hospital rooms, fonts, and rails.

We have run afoul of Heidelberg's 21st thesis, "A theologian of glory calls evil good and good evil. A theologian of the cross calls the thing what it actually is."[3] We turned this upside down, imagining the scholar as the primary theologian and imagining that the one who discerns law and gospel in the lives of the flock of God as the secondary theologian. And this speaks also to my own experience as a young seminary graduate looking toward a higher calling as a professor of theology—perhaps viewing my parish service as a necessary step toward greater glory.

Return again to that letter of Paul, his second to the Corinthians. We have already mentioned that passage in chapter six in which Paul says that his heart is wide open to the Corinthians, begging them to return that blessing to him. Reading on, we hear what at first sounds like a strange interlude from Paul (2 Cor 6:14–16a). He suddenly urges them to reject idolatry and to refuse to be unequally yoked with unbelievers. Some have thought that this is an insertion, not original to the letter, but I disagree. I think this is the very point of Paul's letter. Believers can and should be yoked together in Christ, reunited in forgiveness. Paul's very next words, a citation from the Old Testament, is about the presence of God in our midst (2 Cor 6:16b–18).

Then in chapter seven Paul returns to the language of an open heart. Paul is walking tenderly here. He does not want to condemn them; he reminds them that he is proud of them, overflowing with comfort and joy despite all that has happened (2 Cor 7:2–4). He had gone to Macedonia, but Paul had no rest among the Philippians and Thessalonians, where he experienced "fighting without and fear within" (2 Cor 7:5). What was the source of this angst and inner conflict? It was this very conflict with the Corinthians. The resolution was the arrival of Titus with good news. Not only had Paul been comforted by his arrival, but "he told us of your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced still more" (2 Cor 7:7).

Here we really must return to the opening words of this amazing letter, as Paul is here echoing the language of his opening prayer.

> For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened

> beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. (2 Cor 1:8–9)

I know that many see this deadly peril as some spasm of persecution or the like. But I think Paul really means the deadly sorrow of his broken relationship with the Corinthians. I think this situation with the congregation in Corinth was just about killing him. The whole letter is the resolution of that deadly peril.

This brings me to the final thing to say about the theologian of the cross and the mark of such a ministry. The theologian of the cross is vulnerable, even broken, and able to love people so much that, in Paul's words, it almost does kill him when things go off the rails. The theologian of the cross is a theologian through whom God's love flows deeply into the messiness of life. He must speak those words he says at gravesides to himself. If he does not need to hear them at times for himself, he really should not be there. If he would be a theologian of the cross, he needs to look into those overflowing eyes of that granddaughter and see his own grief and his own frailty in the face of death.

The theologian of the cross is a theologian through whom God's love flows deeply into the messiness of life.

In my first parish was another woman at whose funeral I presided. As one of the only non-Mormon churches in town, we collected people from many traditions. It was an eclectic group. At its core was Kay. She was in many respects a better theologian than I was. She had developed a rock-solid faith through the much more efficient school of hard knocks. She knew what it was to be vulnerable. Her husband had left her and their three developmentally disabled children. But right around the time that I arrived, something good happened to Kay. David had come into her life. He accepted her rather odd children and loved her wholly.

Then Kay got sick, really sick. We all dreaded the next part. She had metastasized breast cancer. It had spread throughout her body. There were the agonizing next weeks, watching her catch her breath as she crested the few steps into the church, her grey pallor, the weariness. She soon died. It was an unmitigated gut punch for this preacher. I had no idea how much I relied upon her presence, her wisdom, and her grace.

I treasure this letter from Paul. He got to see the resolution of his deadly peril.

> For even if I made you grieve with my letter, I do not regret it—though I did regret it, for I see that that letter grieved you, though only for a while. As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us. For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death. (2 Cor 7:8–10)

I too shall see the resolution of my deadly grief for Kay and others. I am confident. My grief is of the godly sort, not the worldly sort which only produces death. In the meantime, I can join Paul in that prayer which begins this letter:

> Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. (2 Cor 1:3–4)

ENDNOTES

[1] Gerhard O. Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross: Reflections on Luther's Heidelberg Disputation, 1518.* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), xii.
[2] Luther's last written words were, "We are all beggars."
[3] Martin Luther, "Heidelberg Disputation" in Luther's *Works*, Vol. 31: Career of the Reformer I, eds. Jaroslav J. Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999), 40.

Growing in the Cross

Robert Stuenkel

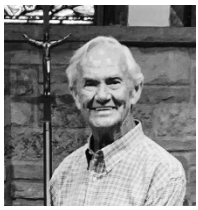
Any positive action in response to the word *cross* appears to be contradictory. A cross is the ultimate of suffering, also of least possibility for a response. The accounts of Jesus' crucifixion in the four Gospels, however, proclaim boldly that all areas of spiritual growth lead in that positive direction and culmination. This article focuses on applying the theology of the cross to the mission of campus ministry in the church.

A Particular Facet of The Theology of The Cross

Christians of all traditions recognize the cross of Christ as central to our faith. The vertical and horizontal dimensions of the structure embrace a Christian worldview. In proclaiming the preeminence of Christ, the Apostle Paul exclaims, "For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace *by the blood of his cross"* (Col 1:19-20).

That which the New Testament Scriptures reveal as universal, we believe also to be personal. We come face-to-face with Christ's cross; questions arise—especially with young adults. Questions arise about God permitting this injustice to take place—for Jesus to feel abandoned, and for the injustice of His suffering and death. "What is the meaning of this terrible happening on Golgotha?" is the way theologian Juergen Moltmann asks the question.[1] The first answer is that God surrendered Christ *for us*. He did it out of love. In the self-giving of the Son, we discern the self-giving of God.

Professor Moltmann goes on to give two comprehensive answers. "First, so that God could be *beside us* in our suffering and with us in our pain. That means: God's solidarity with us. Second, so that he could be there *for us* in our guilt, freeing us from its burden. That means: God's *atoning intervention* for us."[2]



Robert (Bob) Stuenkel, a 1964 graduate of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, served in campus ministry for 36 years: 1967-74, at Indiana State University and Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology in Terre Haute; 1974-78, in the Detroit Metropolitan Lutheran Campus Ministry; and 1978-2003, as pastor of University Lutheran Church & Campus Ministry at the University of Colorado at Boulder. Bob received the S.T.M. degree at Concordia Seminary in July 1973. Bob and Julie continue to make their home in Boulder, where Bob remains close to Lutheran campus ministry. Since retirement in 2003, Bob and Julie spend the winter months in Sarasota, FL. Bob's clergy membership is in the Florida-Georgia District, LCMS.

A phrase by Martin Luther became an emphasis in my thirty-six years of campus ministry; the "glorious and joyful exchange of Christ with us" is the realization of the gospel, and it is the source of our growth. The theology of the cross is another concept that "lifts high the cross." It is helpful to know that it was in a university community in 1518, just in the year after his posting of the Ninety-five Theses in Wittenberg, Germany, that young theologian Martin Luther discussed his theology of the cross in what is called the "Heidelberg Disputation."

It is helpful to know that it was in a university community in 1518, just in the year after his posting of the Ninety-five Theses in Wittenberg, Germany, that young theologian Martin Luther discussed his Theology of the Cross in what is called the "Heidelberg Disputation."

The fuller understanding of the theology of the cross is being described from various perspectives in this issue of *Lutheran Mission Matters.* The facet that emerges strongly from my experience in campus ministry as an outreach of the church is *growth in Jesus Christ.*

The Mission of Campus Ministry—Growth in Vocation in Christ

The mission of campus ministry in our Lutheran circles is to help people in higher education settings *to grow in their vocation* in Jesus Christ. This is a simple, powerful approach to ministry.

Closely related to growth are the words *increase* and *development*. In educational circles, the stages of development remain a measure in both natural and intentional ways. Young adulthood—at least into one's twenties—is a key time of potential growth, and higher education remains focused on those years. (Thankfully, continuing education is also increasingly recognized and productive of growth.) Biblically, we have the examples of Jesus and John the Baptist who "grew and became strong" (Luke 1:80; 2:40). The Apostle Paul speaks of the spiritual growth in Jesus significantly to the Ephesian community. By God's grace, believers are given new life in Christ,

> to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are *to grow up* in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body *grow* so that it builds itself up in love. (Eph 4:12–16)

This Biblical description of growth may begin to sound idealistic and not sufficiently realistic for young adults in their preparation for careers and for the challenges of adult life in our world. The very distinction that Martin Luther is making between a theology of the cross and a theology of glory may seem clouded. Rather, our Lutheran campus ministry commitment, in "helping people to grow in their vocation in Jesus Christ," always places the cross at the center of the story. "The truth is, *Theologia Crucis* in Luther refers to a spirit and a method, a way of conceiving of the whole content of the faith and the task of theology"[3]

Luther applies the decision of Paul to himself: "I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified." (1 Cor 2:2). To this Scripture Luther refers again and again. And Luther, however boldly he announced victory of the Crucified, never did so in such a way as to suggest that now, after Easter, the cross is no longer a part of the human situation. The theology of the cross is not good news of deliverance from the experience of darkness and pain and death as much as it is the permission and the command to enter that experience with hope. The "glory" of Jesus consists in the fact that He makes His disciples on earth willing and capable to bear the cross after Him.

Going Out. . . In The Cross

Our colleges and universities bring together cross sections of people for a period of time, and communities are formed. The church has the opportunity, both as ongoing congregations and as specialized campus ministries, to serve the students and the established faculty and staff members "to grow in their vocation in Jesus Christ." In so doing, investment is made in the developing lives of countless persons, and the Holy Spirit is building the body of Christ. For the vast majority, there is the movement after a period of a few years into the multiple crossroads of life—also internationally. Is it too narrow, too pious, to describe this commencement as "Going out. . .in the Cross"?

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod adopted "Affirmations on God's Mission" almost sixty years ago. The first of six areas of commitment, entitled "The Church Is God's Mission," written in the form of resolutions to the church convention, lifted up these statements:

> Whereas, The Son in obedience to His Father's commission laid aside His glory, became a man to serve [all people], and died on the cross to reconcile all things unto God (passages include 2 Cor 5:17–21),
>
> Resolved, That we thank the Lord of the church for the ways in which He graciously used us and our church body in His mission, blessing us and making us a blessing to others" (passages include 1 Cor 1:4–9).[4]

This action came at a time of marked growth of institutions in higher education and development of campus ministries in the mid-1960s. Most significant was the insight into the needs of the "whole [person]," the "whole society," and the "whole world." Exceptional change was being absorbed on all fronts.

Douglas John Hall says that Christian mission today means "the stewardship of life in the kingdom of death." Hall quotes Karl Barth stating, "the theology of the cross has to do with the 'freedom for all humanity' that is the core of the gospel of 'Jesus Christ and him crucified' (1 Cor 2:2)."[5] The theology of the cross at its core is about God's abiding commitment to the world. It is the world that God loves and wills to redeem. The immense challenge is to convey and relate this message meaningfully to young adults, for their perspective on all of life and its questions, especially of personal suffering and concern for suffering peoples.

Our University Lutheran campus ministry community was introduced to Dr. Douglas John Hall, professor of Christian theology at McGill University in Montreal in 1983. His presentations in various campus settings were also variations on the theme of his influential book, *Lighten Our Darkness—An Indigenous Theology of the Cross.* In his later book, *Thinking the Faith,* he reflects, "It is my view. . .that the tradition North American Christians today are most in need of contemplating and assimilating is that thin, neglected, and frequently *rejected* one to which Luther gave the nomenclature (he did not invent it) *theologica crucis."*[6] My perspective for this time also is that his view holds true.

The enduring and decisive factor in our full ministries in campus communities is to proclaim and live out the gospel of the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus. We are crucified and risen with Christ in baptism, and we keep preparing young adults for the realities of that risen life. Dr. Hall sets the pace for us:

> [T]he theology of the cross takes as its point of departure the brokenness of the human spirit and the human community. It places its hope in God's transformative solidarity with fallen creation, with the world *in* its brokenness. It wants to serve, not as a ready-made ideological panacea for every form of human and worldly suffering, but as the salvific base from which the courage may be found willingly to participate in the suffering of the earth and its creatures. Thus, the community that is moved by the gospel of the cross inevitably finds itself drawn towards earth's suffering ones, for they are those in whom the divine pathos and compassion become especially transparent.[7]

Youth grow in being able to serve and in doing so confront the hard features of life. The questions arise, and here we benefit from truthful reflection upon and confession of our real condition. Dr. Hall cautions against being an "answering religion," which too often also becomes "popular religion." Rather, he writes: "Over against this simplism, serious representatives of God's revelation in Jesus Christ must learn how to identify themselves with the *questions* of a humiliated and fearful rationality, and to ask these questions with the same earnestness as the sensitive representatives of worldly concern ask them."[8]

When we have achieved that kind of solidarity with the human questions; when we count ourselves among those who "hunger and thirst for righteousness" and for God, then we shall have the right to explore again, in new ways, the revelatory answer to the human question. Again, Dr. Hall: "Only as we participate in the suffering of the intellect and the humbling of the human enterprise shall we have any possibility of

bringing comfort from the side of the suffering God. This is what it means to apply to this aspect of Chistian theology—to the dialogue of reason and revelations—the revelation called *theologia crucis."*[9]

In summary, "By contrast, the 'theology of glory' instinctively draws away from the sufferer, except where it can play the role of benefactor and miracle worker. . . As Luther put it succinctly in his Heidelberg Disputation, thesis 21: 'A theology of glory calls evil good and good evil. A theology of the cross calls the thing what it actually is.'"[10]

Suffering in life is inevitable, and it involves a great range of experiences in which we are largely passive. The questions abound, and we accompany maturing youth in their mutual struggles. They discover in the suffering Christ the God who understands them and suffers with them. Once we sense this, we perceive that God in Christ has become the human God who cries out with us and in us. The God who has become human intervenes on our behalf and has made our lives part of His life, and our sufferings his suffering.

Another dimension of meaning for young people to carry with them throughout their lives is that of passion. Christian faith lives from the suffering of a *divine passion* and is itself the passion for life which is prepared for suffering, for discipleship and service. People discover in the suffering Christ the God who understands them and suffers with them. Active suffering on our part is the willingness to open oneself to be touched, moved, affected by something other than self.

Anyone who hears the message of the crucified Jesus hears the call to discipleship as well; and anyone who enters the discipleship of Christ must be prepared to take up the cross. That is what the Gospels tell us. Christ is not merely a person. He is the Way—a road, too. And the person who believes in Him takes the same road He took. Juergen Moltmann gives this description: "There is no Christology without Christo praxis, no knowledge of Christ without the practice of Christ. We cannot grasp Christ merely with our heads or our hearts. We come to understand him through a total, all-embracing practice of living, and that means discipleship."[11]

It all comes together in our approach to campus ministry. The commitment to the growing person is to provide the means for this "all embracing practice of living." We recognize the need for meaning in one's life. The building up of one another is our commitment, and the focused years of higher education in a concentrated setting is a compelling opportunity. Growing up and growing outward is the hoped for result. "Discipleship is the holistic knowledge of Christ, and for the people involved it has a cognitive as well as an ethical relevance; it means knowing and doing both."[12]

An outgrowth of that "knowing and doing" is the participation in Christ's own *messianic passion***.** Again, in the words of Moltmann, "The Gospels tell the story of Christ's passion as the history of an ever-deeper self-emptying on Christ's part."[13]

Following the way of Christ, according to the Gospels: "And proclaim as you go, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons." (Mt 10:7–8). Then, Christ loses everything. Paul's hymn in the Letter to the Philippians sums up this humiliation: "[Christ] emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant . . . he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." (Phil 2:7–8). Men and women who take Christ's road, who take up the cross, take up the struggle of life against death. It means engaging in

this struggle in our own time and our own place. Christ's own messianic passion inspires us to be passionate about our service and advocacy for justice. Oh, that we may be open to God's Spirit instilling such passion in us and in our communities!

The most common phrase about youth and campus ministry students is that they represent the future of the church. Yes, and so much more. Juergen Moltmann envisioned all mission as preparing for God's kingdom. He maintained that in Jesus' cross, in His death and resurrection, Jesus Christ brings God's future to us human beings, and we are invited to God's future.

> So, in the New Testament gospel and evangelization are messianic concepts. They are the word and the language through which God reveals the future and makes his new creation of all things known. So, the gospel is also the word which liberates the captives and justifies sinners, which wipes away the tears and raises up men and women who are burdened and bowed down. . .. People who believe the gospel experience the powers of the future world 'and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and of the age to come' (Hebrews 6:5). They move into the springtime of the new creation.[14]

Dr. Moltmann gives us an additional word of freedom and hope:

> Evangelization is *an invitation*, nothing more than that and nothing less. It is not instruction, and not an attempt at conversion either. It is a plea: 'Be reconciled with God!' . . . It is the authority of the pleading Christ, who carries our sins on the cross and with his outstretched arms invites us: 'Come, for all is now ready.' . . .
>
> The pleading Christ begs for his invitation to be accepted. He appeals to the people invited, but the appeal is based on their freedom. In Christ, God has reconciled the world with himself, so be reconciled with God! Reconciliation is possible. So here too we are told: God is going to create everything anew, so seize these opportunities. They are there already, in yourself and close to yourself. Peace is possible. Justice is possible. Liberation is possible. God had made the impossible possible, and we are invited to seize our possibilities for living. Participate in the renewal of society and nature.[15]

The Theology of the Cross applies equally to people of all ages and circumstances

The distinctiveness of the mission of campus ministry in the outreach of the church is in the application of growing up and growing outward in the cross as a way of life. The vocation, the calling in discipleship, however, relates to us *all***.** As I mark sixty years since graduation from seminary and my wife, Julie, and I have celebrated our sixtieth anniversary of marriage in this year, we have drawn again upon the text of my father's sermons at the time of ordination and marriage: "And he [Christ] died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them" (2 Cor 5:15).

ENDNOTES

[1] Juergen Moltmann, *Jesus Christ for Today's World* (Minneapolis*:* Fortress Press, 1995), 38.
[2] Moltmann, 41.
[3] Douglas John Hall, *Thinking the Faith - Christian Theology in a North American Context* (Minneapolis*:* Augsburg Fortress, 1989), 23.
[4] The Mission of the Christian Church in the World V, Accessed at Ctsfw.netctsfw.net/media/pdfs/CTCRTheMissionoftheChristianChurchintheWorld.pdf, 9.
[5] Hall, 25.
[6] Hall, 23.
[7] Hall, 28–29.
[8] Hall, 425.
[9] Hall, 425.
[10] Hall, 29.
[11] Moltmann, 47.
[12] Moltmann, 47.
[13] Moltmann, 38–39.
[14] Moltmann, 145–46.
[15] Moltmann, 146.

Luther's Theology of the Cross and Missions
"Confidence in the Gospel"

Jon Zehnder

Lutheran Pastor Jon Zehnder collects modern reflections on Luther's Theology of the Cross and applies them to mission.

Introduction

"For I resolved to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor 2:2). For the Apostle Paul, the significance of the cross and the redemption purchased for us there was the fulfilment of God's plan of salvation. In His grace, God would do for us what we could not do for ourselves—cover the debt of our sins. God would reconcile us to Himself by laying our sins on Jesus who knew no sin, so that Jesus might redeem us (2 Cor 5:19, 21). The theology of the cross is simply Justification by Grace through Faith in Jesus! It is the article by which the Church stands or falls (AC, Art IV). Luther's theology of the cross, reflected in Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, clearly declares a confidence in the Gospel that impacts the ministry and mission of the Church.

Background

Any examination of Luther's theology of the cross benefits from understanding the Heidelberg Disputation in its historical context and its contribution to the

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development of Reformation theology. Edward Schroeder has done an excellent job setting that context:

> Just six months before the Heidelberg meeting of the Augustinian monks, Luther's 95 theses on indulgences—back up in Wittenberg—had been a bombshell. When the German chapter of the Augustinian monks gathered for their annual meeting, they asked Luther: 'What are you doing up there at Wittenberg? What's the fuss all about? What's this business about justification by faith ALONE?' Perhaps the clearest signal of what they were doing in Wittenberg were the 97 Theses on scholastic theology that Luther had published just a few months before his 95 Theses on indulgences. They were dismantling scholastic theology, from A to Z. The indulgence theses applied that critique of scholasticism to a major piece of practical theology in everyday church life.[1]

Although the Heidelberg theses were presented originally in April of 1518, Rick Serina notes that little attention seems to have been given to them prior to the twentieth century, the renewed interest driven, he claims,

> [I]t was only with the late ELCA theologian Gerhard Forde that its popularity grew among American Lutherans. Forde, without any substantial reference to the history or interpretation of the Heidelberg Theses, laid out the theology of the cross as a method for doing theology, focusing primarily on theses 19-24, where Luther contrasts theologians of the cross with theologians of glory. For Forde, this approach became a new way of making sense of the world through the lens of the cross and suffering rather than, say, science or philosophy or our self-help culture or even dogmatic theology (think Pieper's dogmatics). He used it to show how the cross shook up all of our neat, tidy views of creation and humanity, of life and faith and doctrine.[2]

Heidelberg Theses

The 28 Heidelberg Theses can be divided into four topical groups: 1–12 Good Works; 13–18 Human Will; 19–24 Contrasting Theologies of Cross and of Glory; 25–28 God's Work in Us—the Righteousness of Faith. For this paper Theses 14–25 are key:

> **Theses 14–25** *(emphasis mine)* Free will, after the fall, has power to do good only in a passive capacity, but it can always do evil in an active capacity. . . . Nor could free will remain in a state of innocence, much less do good, in an active capacity, but only in its passive capacity. . . . *The person who believes that he can obtain grace by doing what is in him adds sin to sin so that he becomes doubly guilty.*. . . Nor does speaking in this manner give cause for despair, but for arousing the desire to humble oneself and seek the grace of Christ. . . . That person does not deserve to be called a theologian who looks upon the invisible things of God as though they were clearly perceptible in those things which have actually happened (Rom 1:20;

> cf. 1 Cor 1:21–25), *he deserves to be called a theologian, however, who comprehends the visible and manifest things of God seen through suffering and the cross.*. . . A theology of glory calls evil good and good evil. . . . A theology of the cross calls the thing what it actually is. . . . That wisdom which sees the invisible things of God in works as perceived by man is completely puffed up, blinded, and hardened. . . . The law brings the wrath of God (Rom 4:15), kills, reviles, accuses, judges, and condemns everything that is not in Christ. . . . Yet that wisdom is not of itself evil, nor is the law to be evaded; but *without the theology of the cross* man misuses the best in the worst manner. . . . *He is not righteous who does much, but he who, without work, believes much in Christ.*[3]

"Calling a thing what it actually is"

"Calling a thing what it actually is" would lead one to see that Luther here in the Heidelberg Disputation is arguing against works, human wisdom, reason, and experience in regard to our salvation. Luther's words above are clear that a person is saved by grace through faith and not by works of the Law. He states emphatically that the theology of the cross declares, "He is not righteous who does much, but he who, without work, believes much in Christ."

Serina notes that the 28 theses at Heidelberg almost exclusively have to do with the way in which the theology of the day had frequently strayed from Christ's suffering and death as a basis for our salvation.

> Luther is targeting the exact same foe he had targeted several years earlier and which would come more sharply into focus in the succeeding years: any attempt to explain our righteousness in terms of moral effort or human ability apart from Christ's suffering and death. That's your theology of glory. What Luther articulates is something quite different: the proclamation of righteousness on the basis of Christ's suffering and death, which offers us salvation from our sin. That's your theology of the cross.[4]

Theology of the Cross versus Theology of Glory

And there you have it. Herman Sasse, made this observation:

> The attempt to perceive God as He is, whether from observing the world, by mystical experience or by philosophic speculation, is the theology of glory. It is the theology of natural man, of the heathen, of the philosophers, and, most unfortunately, also of the professors of theology. Being Christians, they ought to know better. But 'we theologians,' so Luther remarks in comment on Psalm 65:17, 'use the blessed name of God by which we are baptized and at which heaven and earth tremble, in disputations, even in prayer, very irreverently. We exhibit the art of keen and loquacious disputing on divine truths - which we have learned from Aristotle - so that we talk of the blessed Trinity as the shoemaker about his leather' (WA 3, 382, 7ff). That means that God becomes an object, a thing about which one talks. But whoever talks about a thing has to stand above a thing, has to command it,

> and so, in pursuing theology, a Christian is constantly in danger of losing the right relationship towards God. In Thesis 29 of the Heidelberg Disputation Luther says: 'He who wishes to philosophize by using Aristotle without danger to his soul must first become thoroughly foolish in Christ' (LW 31:41). Otherwise, he will become a theologian of glory, and that would mean he is no theologian at all. . ..
>
> Luther does not deny that it is possible to perceive the invisible things of God from his works in creation; that is, as he himself defines in the commentary to Thesis 19, to perceive God's power, his wisdom, his righteousness, his goodness, etc. What he denies is that this perception of God is of any use. It makes men neither worthy nor wise. It does not change our relationship to God…. And so 'God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe' (I Cor. 1:21). This preaching is the message of the cross (I Cor. 1:18) . . .. The cross is the revelation, and the theology of the cross the only one which deserves the name theology.[5]

Theology of the Cross as Personal Suffering

The whole idea of our own suffering should not come as a surprise to anyone. Welcome to the post-Genesis 3 world where sin and the brokenness of sin afflict and affect everyone, as our Lord says in Matthew 5, "For he (our Father in heaven) makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the just and on the unjust."

But more than that, for those of us who are believers in, and followers of Jesus, our Lord reminds us that even as the world hated and persecuted Him, they will do the same to us. Scripture is full of those reminders: Phil 1:29; 1 Pt 4:16; Acts 5:41; 2 Tim 1:8; Rom 8:17–18; 2 Cor 1:5; Phil 3:10 etc. In fact, 1 Peter 2:21 declares, "For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps."

But an emphasis on personal suffering is not what the theology of the cross is about and may, in fact, stand in opposition to the theology of the cross. Anything, including suffering or defeat or loss, which makes us think that our pitiful condition makes us more acceptable in God's sight works against the theology of the cross, which teaches us that our salvation depends on the suffering and death of Christ alone.

But an emphasis on personal suffering is not what the theology of the cross is about and may, in fact, stand in opposition to the theology of the cross.

As Edward Schroeder concludes,

> Theology of glory is not the opposite of suffering–for Luther or for St. Paul in 1 Corinthians. Instead, it is the antithesis of Justification by Faith Alone! Luther didn't tell his Augustinian brothers: Hey, we've got a new theology of suffering up there at Wittenberg that's got everybody excited! When Luther uses the term theology of the cross, there is 'ouch' involved,

> pain and suffering. But the focus of the 'ouch,' the pain, (on GOD'S side) is the cross of Christ. Here the second person of the Trinity accepts the suffering… Only once does the word suffering occur in the 28 Heidelberg Theses. And it's Christ's suffering recommended as the lens for 'comprehending the visible and manifest things of God,' i.e., what God's up to in the world. This double crucifixion (Christ and our sinner self) is needed for Justification by Faith Alone to happen at all. Thus, the theologian of the cross 'tells it like it is' on the primal human agenda, the topic of 'us and our salvation.' The glory theologians have no understanding of this. They are on a completely different page…[6]

The Theology of the Cross—What does this mean?

Rick Serina summarizes,

> All that to say this: when we talk about the theology of the cross, and when we refer back to the Heidelberg Theses as basis for that, our knowledge of the argument and scope of the theses is limited to the 28 basic theses we have in print, and those have to do almost exclusively with the way in which the theology of the day had frequently strayed from Christ's suffering and death as a basis for our salvation. Theologians had put increasing emphasis upon the human ability to please God through works, such as obedience to the law, rather than what Christ had done. When we understand Luther's theses in their theological and historical context, it should be clear that he is not advocating a new way of doing theology. Instead, he is targeting the same exact foe he had begun targeting several years earlier and which would come more sharply into focus in the succeeding years: any attempt to explain our righteousness in terms of moral effort or human ability apart from Christ's suffering and death. That's your theology of glory.
>
> It is simply another of talking about justification—justification by grace through faith alone apart from works for Christ's sake, as Augsburg 4 says. That is what we as Lutherans are about. If we have a Lutheran theology of the cross, it isn't some clever way to sanctify someone's suffering or a different method for doing theology. Rather, it is clinging to the cross of Christ, to his suffering, death, and resurrection, as the sole basis and means for our justification. No, that isn't terribly sexy or trendy, it won't make a book cover look better, or the book sell more, and it may seem old hat to Lutherans who have heard about it their entire lives. Yet it is exactly what Lutherans have always taught and believed, what Luther's Smalcald Articles refer to as the "chief article" (*Hauptartikel*) and what Lutherans have since called the "article upon which the church stands or falls" (*Articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae*). Simply put, if the theology of the cross as expressed in the Heidelberg Theses is of any use to us, it is so simply as another way to talk about the Gospel as Lutherans understand it.[7]

Heino Kadai summarizes the issue,

> Luther's theology is—and Lutherans would do well to heed this—Christocentric. Man's relationship to God depends on the saving event of the cross of Christ. Without Incarnation and Atonement, he would be in sin and thus alienated from God. Luther's theology is also revelation oriented. God meets man in the cross of Jesus Christ. Now His gracious revelation continues in the word, the Holy Scriptures. God also offers His gracious forgiveness in the sacraments of baptism and the eucharist. Again, Luther's theology is faith centered. It does not seek support in reason, philosophy, or metaphysical speculation. One apprehends salvation, healing, and new life through faith alone.[8]

How Does the Cross Apply to Missions?

The question of mission work is simply this—how does a person come to receive Jesus Christ as their Savior? Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1:21 there is one way, "For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe." And then Paul goes on in v. 23, "but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles." In other words, it is the proclamation of the message of the crucified Savior, through which the Holy Spirit calls, gathers, and enlightens.

As Lutherans we understand the power of God's Word—written, spoken, sung, as well as when it is connected to visible elements like water and bread and wine, this is how God effects our salvation. "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ" (Rom 10:17). In a nutshell "in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them. . .. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor 5:19, 21).

In 1 Corinthians 2:4–5 Paul says, "my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God." You see, it is not about being Billy Graham or Oswald Hoffmann, having airtight arguments, or memorized outlines—the message is simple: Jesus died for you! The Holy Spirit works through that simple message to touch and turn hearts and lives. This is the only message we have been armed with, which is a "foolish" one in the world's ears. All we can say is Jesus died for you, so that no one may boast before God. (See 1 Cor 1:29.) No Christian, no missionary, no pastor, teacher, or preacher can ever say, "I am such a great evangelist, I'm so smooth, so practiced in my order of worship, so persuasive that I effect salvation." When someone is brought to faith, it is not due to our merit, all the praise goes to God! That the Holy Spirit somehow used us—what an unspeakable privilege it is to be able to share just the foolishness that Jesus died for you.

Now, Paul also reminds us in Colossians 2:5–6 to be wise in the way we act toward outsiders, making the most of every opportunity, letting our conversations always be with grace which is balanced with salt so we can make the most of every opportunity and know how to answer everyone. Paul here speaks to the reality that "style" is important because some will be turned off by the messenger and not the message. So,

Paul says, be careful, let your speech always be seasoned with grace. Our primary attitude needs to be graciousness that is balanced with seasoning, with salt (that good old Law & Gospel) to seek to win the person before trying to win the argument. Paul says we need to know how to respond to each person, our approach should be tailored to the individual, but the message is always the same—Jesus Christ died on the cross for you!

Conclusion – The Theology of The Cross: An Encouraging Word to Those in the Mission Field

The world is a mission field. Every mission plant, every congregation, has a purpose and reason for its existence: to be a life-saving station. The message of the cross IS the message, when we "preach Christ crucified" we are simply proclaiming the truth that we are justified by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone! Any attempt to claim or proclaim that we are involved by our works in our own justification and salvation denies the efficacy of Jesus' sacrifice (which is "calling evil good and good evil").

Regardless of where you have been called to serve by God, you were sent there "for such a time as this" (Esther 4:14) because God in His wisdom knew your unique personality, gifts, abilities; the unique situation, season, and circumstances of that mission or congregation and the community in which it is blessed to serve. But the confidence you can have in proclaiming the Gospel is because the Holy Spirit will be working through that Word, and it is the Holy Spirit ALONE who touches hearts and changes lives. As a 26-year-old Seminary graduate, I did not know what I did not know, but I did know that I could trust that God did.

Every "field" needs something—some need initial plowing and weeding; some need seed scattered and watered; some, the harvest is incredibly plentiful; and some where the circumstances are such that the field can no longer sustain a harvest (that may be due to the life cycle of that specific congregation and community, and yet that field still needs to be tended with care). To everything there is a season, discern that season and your calling to that particular field. Faithfully use the gifts God gave you in the place He sent you to serve. "If you cannot preach like Paul, you can tell the love of Jesus, you can say He died for all…"[9] (That is the theology of the cross).

Satan loves to twist the report of ministry going on in other places, to whisper, to discourage, and try to lead us into despair. As shepherds we all desire to hear the Great Shepherd say, "Well done good and faithful servant." But notice our Lord Jesus does not say, "Well done, good and successful servant," or "good and confessional servant," or "good and well-loved servant." So, if we are going to glory or boast, let us glory and boast in Jesus! The Church is His Bride which He loved more than anything else; the mission and ministry we are privileged to serve is one of His gifts.

ENDNOTES

[1] Ed Schroeder, "Luther's Theology of the Cross is Not a Theology of Suffering." A Singapore Congregational Presentation, The Crossings Community, October 2006, Blog. Accessed at Crossings.org/luthers-theology-of-the-cross-is-not-a-theology-of-suffering. Cf. Gerhard O.

Forde, On Being a Theologian of the Cross: Reflections on Luther's Heidelberg Disputation 1518. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1997).
[2] Rick Serina, NJ District, *Theology of the Cross.* April 14, 2020. Accessed at https://www.njdistrict.org/in-commemoration-of-the-reformation/theology-of-the-cross.
[3] Martin Luther, *Luther's Works,* Vol. 31, Harold Grimm, ed., (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957), 49–55.
[4] Rick Serina.
[5] Herman Sasse, AJ Koelpin, trans., "Luther's Theology of the Cross" Thesis 6 – "A Theologian of the Cross versus A Theologian of Glory." in Essays, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary (New Ulm, MN: Dr. Martin Luther College, 1981), 5–6. Accessed at Essays.wisluthsem.org:8080/butstream/handle/123456789/1986/SasseCross.pdf?sequence=1&is allowed=y. Luther's Theology of the Cross.pdf (wisluthsem.org)
[6] Ed Schroeder.
[7] Rick Serina.
[8]Heino O Kadai, "Luther's Theology of the Cross," *Concordia Theological Quarterly*, Vol 63:3 (1999): 34. Accessed at Ctsfw.net/media/pdfs/kadailutherstheologyofthecross.pdf
[9] David March. "Hark, the Voice of Jesus Crying," *Lutheran Service Book* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), # 826, v. 2.

Call for Papers

Witnessing cross-culturally to a Chinese and multi-Asian population

May 2025

The editorial committee of *Lutheran Mission Matters* (*LMM*), formerly *Missio Apostolica,* invites you to submit an article for the May 2025 issue on the chosen theme: Witnessing cross-culturally to a Chinese and multi-Asian population.

China is a global hegemon, and "China" literally means "middle kingdom," the center of the world. Chinese language, culture, and thought continue to thrive and in our interconnected and secular age. From dim sum to feng shui, Chinese influence and immigration are long-standing and significant aspects of everyday North American society and culture.

Papers are invited on approaches and strategies for reaching Chinese and multi-Asian populations particularly in North America, and in urban and suburban areas, as well in university contexts and campus ministries. Articles are also welcome that consider missiology in Asia and for multi-Asian populations, mission and ministry in southeast Asia, the Philippines, and the far east, and missiology and best practices for witnessing and ministering to the global Chinese, Filipino, Hmong, and greater Southeast Asian diaspora.

Witnessing cross-culturally to a Chinese population and in Chinese and multi-Asian contexts includes theological and missional reflection and praxis on the religions and cosmologies of China and East Asia: Confucianism, Buddhism, Daoism, and animist-folk religions, as well as modern secular-materialist worldviews. Comparisons and connections are welcome between Christ and Buddha, Lutheran paradoxes and traditional yin-yang dialectics, *wu-wei* and possible connections to Lutheran conceptions of active and passive righteousness, Biblical kenosis, and emptiness and fullness.

Other topics to consider include:

- Multigenerational mission, American born Chinese and China and Taiwanese born Chinese;
- Challenges of sustaining culture, and fears over losing culture in diverse North America;
- Best practices on witnessing to Chinese and multi-Asian populations in North America;

- Constructive examples of Lutheran Chinese mission especially in campus ministry;
- Interviews with first, second, and third generation Chinese Lutherans and Christians;
- Historical theological overviews of the importance of China and Chinese worldviews;
- Chinese missionaries and ministries based in China active throughout the world;
- Christian and Lutheran mission in the Philippines and to Filipinos in North America;
- Hmong mission and ministry globally and in North America;
- Christian and Lutheran mission in Korea and Koreans in North America;
- Christian and Lutheran mission in Japan and to Japanese in North America;
- Lutheran mission with Chinese characteristics.

Papers are welcome in both English and Chinese or other primary languages.

LMM articles are generally up to 3,000 words in length, although longer articles will be considered. The deadline of February 2025 is negotiable.

Send your articles, mission observers and book reviews concerning the theme 'Witnessing cross-culturally to a Chinese and multi-Asian population' to the editor of the journal, Dr. Victor Raj (rajv@csl.edu) with copies to the issue editor Dr. Joshua Hollmann (hollmann@csp.edu) and the Editorial Assistant at LSFMdesk@gmail.com .

If you wish to submit a manuscript, please consult our subscription guidelines found at the back of the journal of here https://www.lsfm.global/our-journals/

Please let us know soon of your willingness to be a part of this publishing effort.

Emerging Technologies and the *Missio Dei* Today

November 2025

The digital revolution has transformed the world at an unprecedented pace. Nearly every aspect of our lives is now shaped by digital devices and technologies such as smartphones, tablets, and laptops. Emerging technologies like virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), artificial intelligence (AI), the Internet of Things (IoT), robotics and autonomous systems, biotechnology and gene editing, and brain-computer interfaces (BCI) promise to push us even further into a digital, technosocial future. These emerging technologies elicit theological reflection as they create new opportunities for mission and witness and because they have the potential to redefine

for many what it means to live in the world, interact with others, and even what it means to be human. As the church navigates this rapidly evolving technological landscape, this special issue of *Lutheran Mission Matters* invites theologians, practitioners, ethicists, and technologists to submit papers examining the theological, ethical, and practical dimensions of these emerging technologies for the life and witness of the church today.

The following themes and topics are suggested for submission:

- **Emerging Technologies and Theological Reflection:** How do emerging technologies impact theological concepts and understandings? What are the implications for doctrines like creation, providence, and human agency in a world increasingly shaped by machine learning and algorithms? As the boundary between physical reality/virtual reality and human/robot becomes increasingly obscured, what does this mean for questions of theological anthropology and ecclesiology?
- **Emerging Technologies and Mission Strategy:** How can AI, VR, and other digital technologies be used to advance mission objectives? What are the opportunities and risks associated with using these technologies for evangelism, church planting, and global outreach, and how might they reshape traditional mission strategies?
- **Emerging Technologies and Ethical Considerations:** How can emerging technologies like AI be used well and faithfully in ministry contexts? How might churches and pastors balance AI's efficiency and insights with the need for human wisdom and discernment?
- **Emerging Technologies and Christian Education:** How might AI and immersive technologies like VR and AR influence Christian education and formation? What might faith formation look like in this context? How can emerging technologies support or hinder spiritual formation and discipleship?
- **Transhumanism (Humanity+), PostHumanism, and Christian Theology**: How should Christian theology respond to technological visions like transhumanism (Humanity+) that seek to overcome human limitations through technology?

Submission Guidelines:

1. **Manuscript Length**: Articles, including endnotes, should be between 3,000 and 5,000 words. Book reviews should be 650 words.

2. **Submission Process**: Send your articles, mission observers, and book reviews concerning the theme "Emerging Technologies and the *Missio Dei* Today" to the editor of the journal, Dr. Victor Raj (rajv@csl.edu), with copies to the issue editor, Rev. William Fredstrom (fredstromw@csl.edu), and the Editorial Assistant at LSFMdesk@gmail.com. Please send book reviews to Dr. Joel P. Okamoto (okamotoj@csl.edu).
3. **Peer Review**: All submissions will undergo a double-blind peer review process.
4. **Important Dates**: Please submit final articles and book reviews by August 1, 2025.

In Christ's mission to the world, and on behalf of the editorial committee,
Rev. Dr. Victor Raj
Editor of Lutheran Mission Matters

Submission Guidelines

We welcome your participation in writing for *Lutheran Mission Matters*. Please observe the following guidelines for submission of manuscripts.

Lutheran Mission Matters publishes studies of missiological issues under discussion in Christian circles across the world. Exegetical, biblical, theological, historical, and practical dimensions of the apostolic mission of the church are explored in these pages. (See the mission statement below.) While issues often focus on a theme, the editorial committee encourages and appreciates submissions of articles on any missiological topic.

Contributors can familiarize themselves with previous issues of *Missio Apostolica* and *Lutheran Mission Matters* at the Lutheran Society for Missiology's website (https://lsfm.global). Click on Our Journals to view PDFs of previous issues.

Book reviews: LSFM also welcomes book reviews. Submit reviews of no more than 500 words. E-mail Dr. Joel Okamoto (bookreviews@lsfm.global) if interested in writing a review.

Mission Statement

Lutheran Mission Matters serves as an international Lutheran forum for the exchange of ideas and discussion of issues related to proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ globally.

Formatting and Style

Please consult and use *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 17th edition for endnotes. See basic examples below and/or consult the "Chicago-Style Citation Quick Guide" (http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html).

[1] David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 243–255.

[2] Hans Küng, *Does God Exist? An Answer for Today*, trans. Edwin Quinn (New York: Doubleday, 1980), 184–186.

[3] Robert J. Priest, Terry Dischinger, et al., "Researching the Short-Term Mission Movement," *Missiology, An International Review* 34 (2006): 431–450.

References to Luther's works must identify the original document and the year of its publication. Please use the following model.

[4] Martin Luther, Ninety-five Theses (1517) in *Luther's Works*, ed. Harold J. Grimm (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957), 31:17–34.

Quotations of or allusions to specific texts in the Lutheran Confessional writings must be documented. The use of modern translations of the *Book of Concord* is encouraged. Please use the following model.

[5] Augsburg Confession V (Concerning the Office of Preaching) in *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran* Church, ed. R. Kolb, T. J. Wengert, C. P. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 40.

Direct quotations exceeding four manuscript lines should be set off from the text in an indented paragraph, without quotation marks. Omissions in a quotation should be noted by ellipsis, with an additional period to end a sentence, as appropriate.

Spelling should follow the latest edition of *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*. Words in languages other than English should be italicized.

Preparation and Submission

Length: Concise, clear articles are preferred. Manuscripts should not be more than 3,000–4,000 words although longer pieces may be arranged by the editor.

Content: *Lutheran Mission Matters* is committed to addressing the academic community as well as pastors and people throughout the church and involving them in

the theology and practice of mission. Use of terms or phrases in languages other than the language of the article itself is discouraged. The use of complex and long sentences is discouraged. Attention should be paid to paragraphing so that the article is easy to follow and appears inviting on the page.

Use of call-outs: *Lutheran Mission Matters* frequently uses call-outs to break up blocks of text on a page and to emphasize important points being made in the article. The author is invited to use Word's Text Highlight Color to suggest words or phrase that may be included in a call-out. The final decision will be made by the editor.

Format: Please submit articles in single spaced Times New Roman 10-point font with 0.25" paragraph indents.

Submission: Manuscripts should be submitted electronically to Professor Victor Raj, editor@lsfm.global. Submission of a manuscript assumes that all material has been carefully read and properly noted and attributed. The author thereby assumes responsibility for any necessary legal permission for materials cited in the article. Articles that are inadequately documented will be returned for complete documentation. If the article has been previously published or presented in a public forum, please inform the editor at the time the article is submitted.

Review: The editors submit every manuscript to the editorial committee for examination and critique. Decisions are reached by consensus within the committee. Authors may expect a decision normally within three months of submission. Before publication, articles are copy edited for style and clarity, as necessary. Major alterations will be made available to the author for review.

Additional Submission Information

Bio: Authors should provide, along with their submissions, an autobiographical description. Please write 2–3 sentences introducing yourself. Please include your title(s) you would like LMM to use, the form of your name you want to be known as. Tell your present position and/or your education or experience that qualifies you to write the article. If you have a head-shot photo that you would like to provide, we will try to use it. Please provide the email address at which a respondent could reach you.

Abstract: Please provide up to a one-hundred-word abstract of your article. The abstract will serve as a first paragraph to provide the reader with the basic intent and content of the article.

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Submission Checklist:

- o Article
- o Abstract
- o Bio & Photo