

# Two Recent Samples of Easter Confession, Thomas-style

Colleagues,

The Second Sunday of Easter brought us the great account of Jesus drawing Thomas into lucid, explicit confession: “My Lord and my God.” No one else in St. John’s Gospel comes close to this clarity and confidence about Jesus’ identity. To this day Thomas’s words are the essential standard by which any faith that merits the adjective “Christian” has got to be measured.

More’s the pity, of course, that Thomas has gotten such lousy treatment from his co-confessors in subsequent centuries. “Doubting Thomas.” That’s a false label, the consequence of careless reading. When day dawns on the Sunday after Easter Thomas is the very thing that doubters are not. He’s of firm mind, as certain as certain can be that his fellow disciples are babbling nonsense when they say they’ve seen Jesus. “Unless I see and inspect him myself, there’s no way I’m buying that.” The Greek word for his stance at this point—thus Jesus, when he calls him on it—is *apistos*, “not-faithing,” which suggests much more than the semi-faithing that “doubt” encompasses; and the turn he makes when Jesus appears is a full 180 degrees, not 70 or 110 or even 150. In the end he shows us all what it looks and sounds like to be *pistos*, i.e. faith-full, no ifs, ands or buts when it comes to who Jesus is. “My Lord. My God.” Note the second statement in particular. As John tells the story, Thomas is the first person ever to take Jesus’ most outrageous assertions as serious and accurate statements of a hitherto unimagined reality. “The Father and I are one” (10:30). “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (14:9), which, were Jesus using blunt, colloquial English when he says this to Philip, might

come out like this: “Guess what, pal: you’re *looking* at God!” What precipitates that comment? Jesus’ prior response to—yes—Thomas: “I AM (*ego eimi*) the Way, the Truth, the Life” (14:6).

“Amen,” says Thomas at last, on the second Sunday of Easter. This is more than his fellows have managed to come out with so far. He says it, as Jesus points out, in testimony to us, so that we will say it too (20:29). Why anyone has ever thought to look down their noses at him is altogether beyond me. We ought to honor him instead. Better still, we’ll keep thanking God for him.

One way of thanking God and grinding the pro-Thomas axe a little more is by bringing you a couple of recent examples of Thomas-like confessing. Each rests, of course, on the great history of Easter confession that Thomas inaugurated. Each also builds on that history by couching the confession in language that serves the missional purpose that Easter both presupposes and authorizes (“As the Father has sent me, so I send you,” Jn. 20:21). The aim, in other words, is to draw a fresh set of people into the joy of echoing Thomas’s use of that first person possessive pronoun: “My Lord, my God.” Do the examples here achieve that? I join others in thinking they do; but read on, and see what you think. You’ll find them below, with commentary by the undersigned,

Peace and Joy,  
Jerry Burce, for the editorial team

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I. **An English-language creedal hymn, unknown to Americans—1**

We trust in God our only king,  
Whose mighty hand makes everything,  
The Father who has called the light

From chaos deep, more dark than night.

2a

We trust in Jesus Christ his Son,  
Light born of Light and yet true man,  
Who took our darkness, all our pain,  
And shared our guilty death and shame.

2b

He conquered hell and rose to reign  
With God in glory once again,  
Until he sets the whole world right  
By bringing guilt and grace to light.

3a

We trust the Spirit, holy dove,  
Who gives us faith and teaches love;  
He leads us where he'd have us go,  
And lifts us up, when we are low.

3b

By joining us with Jesus he  
Creates a growing unity,  
Until at last, from sin set free,  
We see God's face eternally.

*Comment:*

I ran across this last year when I spent some time with fellow Lutherans of South Africa's Cape Church—the Evangelical Lutheran Church of South Africa (Cape), to be precise. They use hymnals from the Lutheran Church of Australia (LCA) for their English services. That's where this comes from. The LCA's [John W. Kleinig](#) translated it from a German original, said original intended, apparently, as a paraphrase of the Nicene Creed after the fashion of Luther's *Wir Glauben All' An Einen Gott*. Be

that as it may, Kleinig gets the credit for the limpid, fetching, and thoroughly down-to-earth English that you've just read. If you breezed through too quickly the first time, go back and read again, this time with an eye for the abundance of strong, one-syllable words. It's even better sung, of course, which we did at the services I attended in Cape Town and Port Elizabeth. I liked it so well that I ordered books when I got home, and we used it this past Lent in the congregation I serve.

What jumps out especially here is Kleinig's superb and quintessentially Lutheran rendering of the Latin "credemus," or the German "wir glauben," I suppose. Not "we believe," but rather, "we trust." Isn't that precisely what Jesus is after when he urges Thomas to be *pistos* instead of *apistos*? "Trust me," he says. "Trust God in and through me, and in the power of the Spirit I'm breathing into you." And so we do. For American Christians this language will carry a special punch, speaking directly, as it does, to the question prompted by the ubiquitous phrase on our U.S. one-dollar bills. In which God do we trust? Answer: in *thisone*, on whom we count for *these* things. *Our* Lord. *Our* God. "Yours too if you'll let him," as we well might add in a conversation with our neighbors. Talk about a missional resource!

II. **The Masai Creed**We believe in the one High God, who out of love created the beautiful world and everything good in it. He created Man and wanted Man to be happy in the world. God loves the world and every nation and tribe on the Earth. We have known this High God in darkness, and now we know Him in the light. God promised in the book of His word, the Bible, that He would save the world and all the nations and tribes.

We believe that God made good His promise by sending His Son, Jesus Christ, a man in the flesh, a Jew by tribe, born poor in a little village, who left His home and was always on safari doing good, curing people by the power of God, teaching about God and man, showing the meaning of religion is love. He was rejected by his people, tortured and nailed hands and feet to a cross, and died. He lay buried in the grave, but the hyenas did not touch him, and on the third day, He rose from the grave. He ascended to the skies. He is the Lord.

We believe that all our sins are forgiven through Him. All who have faith in Him must be sorry for their sins, be baptised in the Holy Spirit of God, live the rules of love and share the bread together in love, to announce the Good News to others until Jesus comes again. We are waiting for Him. He is alive. He lives. This we believe. Amen

*Comment:*

I learned about this some days ago in a note from Ed Schroeder, who sent it with a link to a brief [Wikipedia article](#) about it. The article cites the late, great Jaroslav Pelikan as someone who admired this as an example of what creeds are meant to accomplish. Digging through attendant links, I ran across a lecture in which Pelikan does exactly this. Delivered in 2003, the lecture is entitled "[The Will to Believe and the Need for Creed.](#)" Take the time (and it will take time) to click, read and learn, bearing in mind that this link alone makes the present post worth sending, and then some.

As for the creed, pay attention again to the clarity of language and the pulsating confidence that it conveys, especially through the brief, punchy sentences at the end. Why such confidence? Because "God has made good his

promise” in Jesus Christ whom “the hyenas did not touch”—what a phrase! So it is that good news gets driven home to another particular set of human beings for whom Christ died, and whom he now invites to stand shoulder to shoulder with Thomas in joyful, determined trust. One more time: *My Lord. My God.*

Amen and Amen. —JB

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# The Agony of the Empty Preacher

Colleagues,

“One forges one’s style on the terrible anvil of daily deadlines.” Thus Emile Zola, as I learned last week from an old friend who found the line deliciously apt as a summation of my own *modus operandi*. I should have answered with the observation that Zola presumably met his deadlines. Herewith a Holy Week musing that I’ve taken too long to cobble together. For Christ-followers such as you, may there be a speck of comfort in recalling that “patience” and “passion” derive from the same word.

Peace and joy,  
Jerry Burce, for the editorial team

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Returning to the above: my friend got the Zola quote from A.Word.A.Day, the daily email for linguaphiles that you can

subscribe to at [wordsmith.org](http://wordsmith.org). The person behind this internet gem is one Anu Garg, a man whose adoration of the English language is only slightly more intense than his abhorrence of religion. It would surely gall him to learn that the material he dispatches day after day has the effect, more often than not, of striking sparks of theological rumination in the mind of at least one of his steady followers. Garg's everyday fare includes a word decked out with pronunciation, definition, etymology, and examples of usage. He follows it up with an unrelated "Thought for Today," a quotation culled from a wondrously broad range of writers, Zola being but one of thousands. (Does the fellow crib from Bartlett? I don't suppose so, but still, he's got to be getting some help from somewhere.)

Here's a recent "Thought for Today" from Maya Angelou: "There is no agony like bearing an untold story inside of you." I read that and jumped instantly to St. Paul: "Necessity is laid upon me; woe to me if I do not proclaim the gospel!" (1 Cor. 9:16, KJV/NRSV). Then I wished that every person tasked with preaching Christ's death and resurrection next week was starting even now to writhe with Angelou's agony. And why shouldn't we? Since when has any preacher, even the most gifted and prolific—the Pauls, the Luthers—come close to exhausting the springs of fresh, enlivening news that burble away at the heart of the "old, old story," as the hymn sees strangely fit to call it?

Still, for the sake of argument let's imagine the preacher who, a mere week from Good Friday, is staring glumly at the text of John 18-19 with nary a clue as to what he or she will do with it this time around. Suppose further that this preacher operates, with some sense of loyalty, in one of those pockets of the North American church where it's lately fashionable to deplore the stories preachers used to tell on Good Friday as a matter of course. Those older stories, we hear, are too crude and bloody, too unworthy of the kind of god that contemporary sensibilities

are willing to embrace. At best they make divinity look mean. At worst they implicate it in child abuse of the most horrific kind. And so forth. Lurking somewhere in the depths of all this is the curious notion that righteousness and wrath are incompatible, an idea that pulls the plug on most anything the apostolic witnesses had to say about the cross of Christ and its accomplishments: atonement, reconciliation, redemption, the precious blood of Jesus (cf. 1 John 1:7); forgiveness so costly that it entails mortal wounds in the one body that belongs to God and humankind alike. These and others are off the table as topics for useful discussion in 2014, or so our colleague feels pressed to believe. No wonder he's drawing a blank with St. John's Passion.

Of course the longer he sits there blankly, the more he'll start to writhe with an alternative agony—not Angelou's, of the story untold, but the kind you succumb to when there's no story to tell, yet you're expected to stand up at some point and say something anyway. Too soon the moment arrives. It has to. You can't avoid it. Out pours the inevitable stream of vague banalities, devoid of promise and of no particular use to anyone; and since the preacher, an honest and decent person, is the first to recognize this, he finds no relief for the misery that's been building inside the whole week long. Instead it's compounded by his ensuing embarrassment—hardly the outcome, I should think, of the agony Angelou speaks of.

So it turns out that Angelou is wrong. There is an agony worse than hers. The pity is that any person honored with the breathtaking privilege of preaching a Good Friday sermon should suffer from it, and for so silly a reason. Someone somewhere decides that “the wrath of God” is an indefensible construct. It can't be squared, that someone opines, with “the righteousness of God.” The idea takes wing. It shows up quickly in popular dress as an argument that divine goodness and divine anger are

mutually exclusive, especially when the anger leads to retributive action. "I can't believe in a God who would..."—and here, you can fill in the blank with most anything that the likes of Isaiah or Jeremiah might say about Yahweh's response to the perfidy of his people. So too with Jesus: "Unless you repent you will all likewise perish," an assertion that, from this point of view, is also to be dismissed out of hand, or at least defanged by chalking it up to a rabbinical infatuation with hyperbole. But as a serious suggestion that a good and righteous God might cause someone to perish? To quote Rumpole of the Bailey, "Heaven forfend!"

I've called this silly. It would take a few essays to spell out the silliness in detail. Earlier I called it curious. The curiosity lies in noticing how deniers of righteous wrath are often adept practitioners of the very thing they deny. One of the angriest people I know comes across as fiercely certain that his/her anger is correct—and few things make this person madder than people like me who suggest that God might now and then be angry too, and for good cause; unless, of course, that anger is directed at Republicans, angry ones in particular. Come to think of it, perhaps that caviling about the wrath of God is more nuanced than I've so far made it out to be. Could be that it becomes insupportable as an idea only when I hear of it as directed at me, and at people that I take pride in feeling good about. But if the Almighty's sights are set on the likes of Rush Limbaugh and the Koch brothers, then let him have at it with a vengeance, and woe to him if he fails to follow through.

Of course I may be wrong about this, and in my error I might well be breaking the eighth commandment as I ruminate out loud about my neighbor. This too is a reason why the Son of God lost his life.

This brings me to a set of final observations. I'll try to make

it quick.

1. Sinners compound their sin when they deny God's right to take umbrage at their sinning. Who are we to tell God how to be?
2. Yet being sinners we do this as a matter of course. And God should not be all the more upset with us? Please!
3. To minimize God's wrath is also to minimize God's goodness. In plainer terms, imagine a god who isn't good enough to expect high goodness out of me and to back that up with some expressions of serious disappointment when the goodness isn't forthcoming. Is such a god worth a scintilla of your faith and your worship? I don't think so.
4. To deny that God's wrath is one of the core issues that swirls in the darkness over Golgotha is to insult the Christ who hung there to deal with exactly so huge and deadly an issue.
5. It likewise insults the astonishing compassion of the good and righteous God who dispatched his Son and Christ to Golgotha for precisely that reason—to establish a righteous alternative to the righteous wrath we sinners deserve, all the more when we howl our protests against it.
6. To remove divine wrath as Golgotha's core issue is finally to downgrade Easter to something less than God's earth-rending announcement of Christ's impossible accomplishment: Righteousness Version II—righteousness *en Christo*, received *sola gratia, sola fide*—entailing life for us and, for God, a way of being good and righteous even though he gives life to sinners. (For these and other breathtaking specs, take another close look at [Romans 3:21-5:21](#).)
7. With all this at stake, can we expect God to take it

lightly when his preachers take Christ crucified too lightly and refuse to tout the full magnificence of his benefits? Whoever would imagine that?

8. So is it a stretch to suppose that God's wrath is somehow at work in the agony- worse-than-Angelou's that our putative preacher is succumbing to as he stares with growing desperation at John's great passion text?
9. That said, the God who gets fed up with feckless servants (cf. Mark 9:19) is the same God who exults in turning those servants around and putting them back to useful work (cf. Jonah 3:1-2, Mark 8:33, Matt. 28:19, John 21:15-19).
10. And if God should do that with our colleague—with me, for that matter; if, that is, God should open our eyes to his wrath at work in our lives and keep us from the trendy folly of dismissing this out of hand; and if, by God's grace, we should find ourselves newly inclined to be as serious about God as God is about us: then consider the possibility. Suddenly that hitherto barren text of John begins to plant and shape an untold story in our own bellies.
11. So it dawns on us, perhaps, that Jesus' thirst in his death throes somehow comprehends and echoes our own unrelenting thirst for something to say that will bless the people we say it to.
12. Perhaps then we catch the import, for us, of "It is finished," where "it" is both the thirst itself and God's rage at finding us so inexcusably thirsty. "Done with!" Jesus says, as he gasps his dying breath into a dead and empty world to bring it back to life, with dead and empty preachers among the countless ones who benefit from that.
13. Might that be a story of Christ-for-us that now begins to grow inside? In its particularity it's a new story, as yet untold. The more it takes shape, the more we'll ache to spit it out, and in the agony of that ache we'll know at

last what Angelou was talking about—and Paul..

14. Is this an unlikely, improbable outcome? Well, sure. And with God all things are possible, as Jesus himself underscored (Matt. 19:26).
15. Though come to think of it, it's also Jesus who puts his finger on the one thing that for God is not possible, i.e. that he should dodge the drinking of the cup. See Matt. 26:42, wherein lies the seed of another incredible story that, in its growing, will ache to be told.
16. Summa: May God for God's sake, and ours, call forth the telling this week and render it holy.

Jerome Burce  
Holy Week, 2014

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## The Holy Thing of Holy Week

This week we bring you a short piece by the Rev. Dr. Steven Kuhl, longtime president of the Crossings Community board of directors and current rector at St. Mark's Episcopal Church in South Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Steve wrote this piece for his parish newsletter. As he explained to us by e-mail, he intends it to serve not as a deeply sophisticated theological meditation on Holy Week, but rather as an exhortation to his parishioners to "keep Holy Week holy, to sanctify it in their hearts, to hear and experience anew the great drama of redemption accomplished by Christ's death and resurrection that is presented to us every week through the One Word and its Sacraments." I think you'll see that he succeeds in that goal.

Peace and Joy,

Carol Braun, for the editorial team

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Palm Sunday through Holy Saturday marks that period of time in the Church year known as Holy Week. What makes this week holy is not primarily what we do as Christians, but what God did for the world in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

True, we as Christians certainly do lots of things in Holy Week. We do whimsical things like Easter egg hunts; we do serious things like fasting; and we certainly do worship—lots of worship! And we do these things precisely to keep the week holy, as the third commandment bids us to do when it says “remember the Sabbath Day and keep it holy.”

The word ‘holy’ literally means “to be set apart.” Setting apart is what we do when we regard something as special or unique or worth keeping. For example, if we set aside some money for a long desired vacation, we set it apart from our other money so that we can use it for the special purposes for which it has been “hallowed” or “sanctified.”

But the holy thing about holy week is not primarily what we do but what God has done for us. First and foremost, God set apart his Son; he sanctified Jesus Christ to be our savior. What’s more, in sanctifying his Son he sanctified us; he set us apart to become children of God, by adoption, as Paul says, and heirs of eternal life through faith in Christ. In other words, we set apart Holy Week to remember anew how God set apart his Son to redeem us from the power of sin, death, and the Evil One.

Perhaps the word ‘redemption’ sounds foreign to our modern ears. Perhaps we do not even know what the word means. In New Testament times, ‘redemption’ referred to that process by which a slave could become free from his or her master (Cf. 1 Cor

6:20, 7:23). Though it may sound trivial, when we speak of “redeeming” our coupons at the local store we are using the term in a way that echoes this New Testament usage. The item to be redeemed is “enslaved,” so to speak, until it can be released through the exchange of a coupon.

We Americans tend not to think of ourselves as enslaved. After all, we live in a free country, or so we say. But the kind of political freedom we enjoy is only a shadow of true freedom. A slave is someone who lives and acts in accordance with the will of another, that “other” being the slave’s “lord.” And that kind of slavery is all around us. For example, acting according to peer pressure or being ruled by the materialism of our culture is that kind of slavery. The very fact that we do things that we know are wrong, but we do them anyway, indicates that we are not living freely, but according to the will of another—the Evil One, or the power of sin, as Paul calls it (Rom 7:12-23).

As C. S. Lewis points out in his book *The Screwtape Letters*, the fact that we cannot see this other who enslaves us does not mean that the slavery and the enslaver do not exist. Rather, casting doubt about the fact of our enslavement is a major part of the strategy this “lord” uses to maintain power over us. For the most part, then, the work of the Evil One is generally not like that depicted in those scary movies like *The Exorcist*. The Evil One is more patient and more subtle than that. His work can be seen in the everyday, almost taken-for-granted ways that life is diminished all around us. He works by holding death in our face just enough so as to lead us into believing that by following his ways we can preserve our life. But what’s even worse is the fact that the Evil One turns us into God’s enemies. After all, being the slave of God’s enemy is really no different from being God’s enemy.

What a deceiver this Evil One is! By enslaving us, he pushes us

onto the front lines of his battle against God—exploiting our selfishness, making us subject to the judgment of God's law, and abandoning us to the law's sentence of death. Enslavement to the Evil One is the human predicament that all humanity is born into. It is another way of speaking about Original Sin.

Holy Week is all about how Jesus Christ came to free us from the power of the Evil One and the mess he has gotten us into with God. Jesus' relationship with us is the very opposite of that of the Evil One's. For Christ chose to side with us sinners while we were still enemies of God (Rom. 5:6-11). He took upon himself the judgment of God and the sentence of death that belongs to us all. By placing himself in the battlefield between unholy sinners and holy God, he conquers sin, death, and the Evil One. He establishes peace with God and gives to us his righteousness, his resurrected life, and, indeed, his very self as our Lord, our savior, our brother. In a real sense, Jesus gave his life on the cross as the price (the coupon) of our redemption. In the cross he exhausted the heavy arsenal which the Evil One uses against us, and in his resurrection he makes possible true peace between sinners and God. What a holy, special, unique thing! We call it Easter!

We at St. Mark's Episcopal Church will be sanctifying (keeping holy) Holy Week by participating in Jesus' sacramental care of us on Maundy Thursday, by adoring the depths of his sacrificial love for us on Good Friday, and by celebrating him as our new Lord and savior now and forevermore on Easter Sunday. Sanctify Holy Week in your hearts! Set apart time to let your faith erupt into worship!

Your servant in Christ,  
Fr. Steve

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# A Grass-roots Theologian on the Faith-Works Connection

Colleagues,

I won't tell you his name because I don't have his permission to do that. If I asked him for it he'd likely demur. He'd wonder why the likes of you would be at all interested in what he had to say. I suspect he'd object vigorously to being styled as a theologian. I'll do that anyway. I think it fits. I trust you'll agree.

For the sake of convenience, nothing more, I'll call him John.

John is sliding into his late 30's. He's a husband, a father, and a life-long Lutheran who doesn't skip church or let his children do that. For him this is a familial piety that stretches back for at least five generations that I'm aware of, and probably more. I catch myself praying that his children will succumb to the infection and keep it alive for their kids too.

This is not to suggest that John has this Christian thing down pat. Please, who of us ever did, or does? In nearly twenty years of serving as his pastor I've watched him struggle with issues that I had to fight through myself before Christ first smacked of joy. I recall that as the moment when a theologian was born. So if I now call John a theologian, it's because I've seen him taste the joy too. Only then does serious Christian thinking begin, of the kind that Luther lauds in [Theses 20 of his Heidelberg Disputation](#).

John's breakthrough happened about three or four years ago when

he witnessed someone else's real-life descent into Step Three of the Crossings matrix where death terrifies and all one sees of divinity is its dark, foreboding underbelly. As he watched, waited, remembered, and thought, the light somehow flipped on, or so he told me later. Suddenly all that pro forma Jesus stuff he'd been hearing his whole life long flowered into glorious good news, above all as it kicked open a future with God for the dear person he was sitting with; and if good news for that person, then good news for him and for his children, and his children's children too. His focus ever since has been on puzzling through the magnificent difference that Christ-for-us makes in our perception of the world around us and, even more, in our response to it.

What we send you this week (with John's permission) is a little sample of John's current thinking. I wish we could somehow infuse it into the water they make coffee from in the cafeterias of all the Church's seminaries.

The item is a note John sent me after a recent session of a weekly study group we attend. It's a small group, restricted to men in their twenties and thirties. We've seen some new attendees trickle in this year. Our latest guest was a drifting Roman Catholic who is still entangled enough in the faith that he wanted to spend an evening finding out what Lutherans might have to say. I've known him for a while. Again for convenience, nothing more, I'll call him Pete. We gathered quickly that Pete is wrestling hard right now with the kind of questions that are bound to surface when you spend your days wading in the muck of human despair, moral indifference, and downright bad behavior that officers of the court—he's one of them—are expected somehow to control.

The springboard for conversation on this particular night was the second half of Matthew 5. We'd been exposed to that on a

recent Epiphany Sunday. It's tough stuff, as you'll recall. Turn the other cheek, walk the extra mile, love the enemy, and all this arising from what sounds like a terrible and foreboding premise. "Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and the Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven" (Mt. 5:20). We spent some time discussing where righteousness like that might come from. The point that emerged: either Christ gives it or it's nowhere to be had.

Next question: if such is the righteousness Christ gives, what do we as recipients do with it? With that the conversation took off, our new friend Pete playing the role (not intentionally, I think) of devil's advocate. The next day came, and with it the note from John.

I've already mentioned the Crossings matrix. (See any one of the hundreds of text studies on the [Crossings website](#).) John nails cold the connection between Steps 5 and 6—i.e., between faith in the God of the Gospel and action in the world that Christ died for and owns. Have I ever seen this spelled out more plainly or clearly? If so, I can't recall it. But read for yourself. I leave things as John sent them, in the rough, unpolished style of the fast email.

Peace and Joy,  
Jerry Burce, for the editorial team

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*Grass-roots theology: A note from John—*

Enjoyed last night. Especially liked Pete's question in response to Matthew 5, "What good does living like **that** do me right here and now in today's world?" Spent the better part of last night thinking about it, because in most cases, he's right. We'd be pariahs.

Supposed that God would have two answers:

- 1) You're right. Doesn't make sense. Not what the world expects.
- 2) Just trust me.

It's the most fundamental thing I want of you in the first place—trust. Trust the ripple effects the uncommon approach may have on those around you.

A pariah? Maybe so. See earlier in Matthew (5:10) though. Blessed are they...kingdom of heaven belongs to them! Just trust me.

What's more? Embrace those difficulties. As hard as it may be to do so, just trust me. Romans 5:3 urges us to rejoice in suffering, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame.

You're concerned about right now? All things are yours (1 Cor. 3:22)! As distant as it may seem, trust it!

Sounds tough. Sounds nonsensical. But trust me. Don't fear what you are about to suffer...be faithful to death and I will give you the crown of life (Rev. 2:10). And then...no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined what I have prepared for those who love me (1 Cor. 2:9).

Jesus handled everything for you. Here is your opportunity to seriously trust that, take up your cross, and confidently follow the new system.

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# A Lenten Labyrinth

This week we're pleased to bring you another sermon from Marcus Felde, pastor of Bethlehem Lutheran Church in Indianapolis and frequent Crossings writer. (We last featured one of his sermons in Thursday Theology #808.) Marcus preached this sermon on Ash Wednesday of this year, on the Old Testament reading of Joel 2:1-2, 12-17.

With his usual eloquence, Marcus vividly illustrates Joel's message in terms of the six-step Crossings matrix, here framed as a journey into and out of the center of a Lenten labyrinth with God as our ultimate guide.

Peace and Joy,  
Carol Braun, for the editorial team

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**“Fast, Weep, Mourn; or, A Lenten Labyrinth,” A Sermon for Ash Wednesday, March 5, 2014. Bethlehem.**

INI

Let me walk you through a labyrinth.

A labyrinth is not a maze. Mazes are intended to befuddle or confound. You must solve a maze, or you will get lost.

A labyrinth, on the other hand, is intended to lead you somewhere, the way a pilgrimage takes you somewhere. The physical journey coordinates with a spiritual journey. Spiritual labyrinths are intended to lead us to God.

This evening, I want to take you somewhere, with the help of the prophet Joel. But this labyrinth is not one you will walk.

Instead, the Word of God will lead you in, and the Word of God will lead you back out. Pilgrimages or labyrinths might usually be thought of as means by which you find your way to God, but I am not talking that way. I want to adapt the practice so that the labyrinth represents the way *God* leads lost people back to God.

Joel—his name means “the Lord is God”—invites us on this journey. He will lead us into the labyrinth. At the center of the labyrinth we will “cross” a bridge. Then the Word of God will take us back out into the “real world” we left behind a few minutes earlier, changed.

*Remember*, the Word of God will do the work in this labyrinth. Our task is simply to hear God, so that God can work in us to make us new. David prays in Psalm 51, “Create in me a clean heart, O God.” The labyrinth we will go through is simply a way of representing how God does that in people like us.

We begin outside the maze, in the “real world.” The prophet Joel tells us that the Lord is angry. He wants people’s attention:

*Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy mountain!  
Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the  
Lord is coming.*

Joel expresses the danger of the present situation; and he suggests that the way out is for the people to listen to God.

*Even now, says the Lord, return to me with all your heart, with  
fasting, with weeping, and with mourning.*

There may be hope, but people must listen to what God says. And the first three words of God are: Fast. Weep. Mourn. Each command represents a stage of the labyrinth through which God

will take us.

## I

The first stage of this labyrinth is “fasting.”

Why would God tell people: “Stop eating”? Don’t we have to eat in order to stay alive? Food is good, and eating is natural!

The reason God tells people to stop eating is that they are eating “obliviously,” and that is a sin. This is not *only* true of eating. It applies to satisfying any of our other needs or appetites. But it is *even* true of eating, that to enjoy the good things of this world, without a concern for whether others are able to enjoy them, is sin.

The specific commandment which covers this sort of sin is “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

Do you remember the story about the rich man and Lazarus? The rich man ate sumptuously *without concern* for the needs of Lazarus, so he was condemned.

God says to all of us: “Stop eating.” Until you are ready to see what others need, you yourself don’t deserve to eat. The reason for giving *anything* up for Lent, is not to make you more virtuous. Or help you lose weight. It is, by making you more conscious of your own need, to make you more aware of the needs of others.

(Let me make the distinction again here, which applies throughout this labyrinth. You do not get through the labyrinth by following orders. “Fast” is not the first thing on a checklist of what you must do to get to God. It is the first thing you have to *hear* from God, for God to get you through.)

## 2

The second stage of our labyrinth is labeled “Weep!”

But why cry?

We ought to cry because of what we learned about ourselves in stage one of the labyrinth. The fact that we are able to eat “obliviously” means something is wrong with us. Luther says in the Small Catechism that we “should fear and love God so that we neither endanger nor harm the lives of our neighbors, **but instead help and support them in all of life’s needs.**” Which means, if we do not “help and support our neighbors in all of life’s needs,” we do not fear and love God as we ought. And if we do not fear and love God as we ought, well, we should weep.

3

Stage three of the labyrinth: “Mourn.” We are now about as far from “the real world” and as close to the center of the labyrinth as we can get.

What does it mean to mourn? The prophet Joel is telling us how serious our problem is. He is telling us we are done for. “Like blackness spread upon the mountains—(the way the shadow of a great cloud sweeps inexorably across the side of a mountain)—a great and powerful army comes.” The army of God coming to destroy those who do not love their neighbor as they ought. God is angry with us for being oblivious to others.

Living for ourselves always seems like a good idea at the time. “Every man for himself (every woman for herself).” But such living is the curse of the world. It is like living without God. It is like...not living.

+

We have reached the center of the labyrinth. We have been brought as low as God can bring us. Things are as dark as they can be. We are truly sorry. And we are a long ways from the security of our former existence.

Joel is not able to lead us out of this labyrinth he got us into! All he can do is offer hints. But here in the middle of the labyrinth you and I find a man on a cross, Jesus of Nazareth, with an offer: Jesus wants to take us out of the labyrinth, back to the real world, changed. He is acquainted with our sin and guilt. But he is a physician. We are who he came to serve. He lives to make us better. To flip us. Turn us inside out. Make us people who *do* fear and love God as we ought.

4

So, stage four of the labyrinth begins. Jesus says, as he once told Mary and Martha's brother Lazarus, "Come on out of that grave!" When we emerge from the dark side of the labyrinth into the clearing in the middle, we are in for a surprise: good news about our prospects. "You shall not die but live," the Gospel says to us. God has redeemed us!

I would call this fourth stage of the labyrinth "Rejoice!" Here is our God we were looking for! Just as Joel hinted he might, he has in fact relented from punishing. Christ on the cross is the sign of a God who is "gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love." God has sent his Son to save us who were enslaved to our own needs so that we can live for God. We are as glad as glad can be, to hear what God has done for us by his Son.

5

Stage five is where, by the work of the Holy Spirit, the laughing starts, as our hearts catch (by faith) the ball that is tossed to us by grace. We laugh to see that, like a Samaritan leaning over a man in a certain ditch, God has come to save us. Warmed by his love for us, we are drawn to love the God whom we cannot see. We are well on our way out of the labyrinth when we believe that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting...*not counting* our trespasses. Not counting how many

times we ate obliviously, but drawing us to see himself and others with love.

6

Stage six takes us back out into the world, for a feast. (The opposite of fast.) Joel said that the Lord might leave a blessing behind him, a grain offering and a drink offering for the Lord, our God—and lo, there it is! The feast of victory for our God, and the feast of love between God’s children. This, too, is the work of the Word of God, that we now look to the needs of others, in love.

“Fast, weep, mourn”; “rejoice, laugh, feast!”

A Lenten labyrinth. Amazing grace, by which the word of God teaches our hearts to fear, then relieves our fears. Teaches us the truth that takes us down, then gives us the truth which lifts us up.

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## **What the Bishop Said about “Repent,” and other Post- Conference Notes.**

Colleagues,

*We got a note from one of you last week reminding us that this is supposed to be a weekly blog. It has not been that in 2014 so far. Whether we’ll get back to that pace remains to be seen. For your generous patience as we work in that direction, our thanks. Meanwhile, and at last—*

What the bishop said, is "Give up!" And in saying that, she—the Rev. Elizabeth Eaton, as of late last August the Presiding Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church—urged all who were being privileged to hear her preach on Tuesday evening, January 28, to do nothing less. Isn't that, she said, what Jesus is asking of us when, according to St Matthew, he launches his ministry with the word "Repent" (Matt. 4:17)?

You can't do it. You look downright silly pretending to do it, where "it" means churning out the top-notch righteousness God seeks in all his human creatures. So give up. Quit trying. Instead trust Christ to have done it for you as he hung there dying. And in the strength of that trust, push into the adventure of living with others in mind, no longer chained to the nonsense of puffing yourself up.

Well OK, there's maybe more Burce than bishop in these last couple of sentences, but isn't that what listeners do as preachers try to push their words through filters long since in place? Still, "Repent!" "Give up." That's for sure what the bishop said; and it's equally as certain that there was joy in the room as ears and hearts grabbed hold of an invitation that led them directly into the embracing arms of Christ their Lord when the Eucharist ensued. I'd be very surprised if the chatter that broke out later over end-of-the-day refreshments wasn't pulsating with thanks to God the Holy Spirit for having raised up the leader that the ELCA is blessed with these days.

+ + +

For my money, the presence and preaching of Bishop Eaton was the highlight of January's Fifth International Crossings Conference in Belleville, Illinois, fifteen minutes from downtown St. Louis, on the other side of the great river. It was, even so, but one of many reasons for rejoicing in what happened there. Herewith a few recollections, liberally mixed with some post-

conference ruminations of my own.

1. You'll recall from the pre-conference build-up that the general topic was pluralism, with a focus on the challenge of confessing Christ in a world that takes the central pluralistic tenet more or less for granted. As one hears it too often said, with a blitheness that wearies: "The paths to God are many. No one path can be privileged over another. To suggest otherwise is rude and presumptuous, all the more when the person making the suggestion is somebody with Christ in mind." Etc.
2. Seven presenters tackled this chestnut from a variety of angles—systematic, to be sure (Steven Kuhl, Jukka Kaariainen), but also exegetical (Ralph Klein, S. John Roth), missiological (William Burrows), historical (Martin Lohrmann), and pastoral (Philip Kuehnert). If I tried to summarize what they treated us to I would carry on far too long, and make a hash of it anyway. Better that we make a point of directing you to the papers as they become available on the Crossings website, as I hope most of them will, and fairly soon. We'll let you know when and as they appear, making sure to underscore what I emphasize already now, that you'll find them both meaty and of great help in responding to the pluralistic assumption, no matter where you encounter it. Encounter it you do, and will. It's everywhere, from ivy-towered academia to the neighborhood bar. It's in the pews we share or preach to every Sunday. I'll lay a hefty bet that it continues to have hooks of sorts in most of our own hearts. Old Eve and Adam are far from dead, however deeply we may dunk them in the daily contrition and repentance that Luther recommends (*Small Catechism*, Baptism, Part IV), and there's nothing those two like better than telling God how to go about God's godly business. No one said this bluntly at the

conference, so I say it here: telling God how to *be* God is, at base, what the pluralistic impulse is about.

3. From the pluralist's point of view, of course, the issue is one of basic respect. That's "respect" as in "re-spect," the double-take one gets when somebody deems one worthy of a second look, and after that a third, a fourth. If there's one thing Eve and Adam (old-style) insist on, it's that God should respect them. The more thoughtful they are, the more likely they'll be to try showing God what to do through the respect they grant each other. But like most things sinners try, respecting the other is a trickier business than we imagine it to be. That's so especially when it comes to the matter of religious difference, a point that our conference presenters were manifestly clear about.
4. More than one of these presenters got me thinking about the favor pluralists do for Christians when they bridle at the wretched lack of respect that our crowd commonly shows to other religious systems and the few billion people who adhere to them. Dismissiveness is a folly that ill becomes us. We won't find warrant for it in the likes of St. Paul, for example. Quite the contrary. Just this week I sat with a Bible class as it read through his effort to insert good news of Christ into the abundance of god-talk swirling around the Areopagus, Acts 17. I was struck all over again by the pains he takes to stake out some common ground with the folks he's addressing. How does he begin? By respecting the altar they've set up for "an unknown god" (v. 23), and after that by respecting the insight of their better thinkers into the relationship between deity and humankind (v. 28).
5. Paul's immediate aim, of course, is to elicit some respect for the singular tale he tells of God's doing in Christ. That much he gets, at least from some: "We will hear you

again about this" (v. 32). Others dismiss him outright, objecting to his babble, as they perceive it, about resurrection (again, v.32). Paul can hardly be surprised by this, having just endured worse in Philippi and Thessalonica. It certainly doesn't stop him from sticking with his mission to push the promise that Jesus, and not another, is the one appointed to judge the world "in righteousness" (v. 31). Therein lies the singularity. A most promising singularity, come to think of it. Who better to judge the world than one so committed to the world that he died for it, and "while we still were sinners," no less, as Paul will point out later to the Romans (5:8, NRSV). Parenthetically, I've long thought that the Church's theology and proclamation pays too little attention to Jesus the Judge as a key feature of the Gospel, but that's a topic for another time. The point for now is to note how it sets Paul's message apart from everything else that's been said in that Areopagite plurality of religious proposals. At day's end the Final Say is Christ's, and if Christ's, then it can't be someone else's. Or to put that another way, there's no dodging Jesus to get to God—which, Paul would add, is a gift both good and salutary. Pity the sod of a sinner who runs into God Unmitigated.

6. But enough with my meandering. Back we go to the conference, where the speakers uniformly underscored this singularity of Christian promise and the impossibility of reducing it, as the pluralist seeks to do, to one of many religious alternatives, each as efficacious as the other in solving the conundrums of alienation, death, and judgment. Came the helpful observation: the effort to engineer such a reduction is itself fundamentally disrespectful, and not only toward the Christian, but also toward the Muslim, the Buddhist, the Hindu, the animist

(whether traditional or New Age), and whoever else is able to recognize that the faith he or she professes is not merely distinct, but so distinct that it can't be reconciled with other faith proposals, including Christianity. Nor can it be proffered as a mere alternative to those other proposals, each serving in its distinct way to bring its adherents to the same end in God. Indeed, a respectful treatment of the major religious proposals will notice that they don't envision the same end. It has ever been thus. As noted already, Paul ran into this in Athens when he started touting bodily resurrection (Acts 17:32), an outcome that would surely have struck some of his Greek hearers as more hellish than heavenly.

7. Jukka Kaariainen, Skyping in from his study somewhere in Taiwan, told us that [S. Mark Heim](#) of Andover Newton Theological School is the scholar who has grappled most openly and creatively with this plurality of ends that religions seek. For a quick sample of Heim's thinking, take a glance at "[The Pluralism of Religious Ends Dreams Fulfilled](#)" (*The Christian Century*, 1921). What impressed me immediately as I read was the breadth and depth of his respect for all serious religious traditions, not least his own. You will not find him shuttling Christ to the edges as an inconvenient obstacle to inter-religious amity, nor does he mute the hope that Christians find in Christ. But neither does he scoff at the hopes of the pious Buddhist. Jukka, respecting this, was nonetheless inclined to think that Heim's effort—to balance a full commitment to Christ with a full appreciation for the efficacy of other religions in achieving the ends they propose—is contradictory, and can't be sustained. For his ever so careful reasoning on this point, and the better proposal he'd make to Heim from the strength of Law-and-

Gospel thinking, you'll have to wait for Jukka's paper. Do so eagerly.

8. Jukka also drew our attention to the work of the late Jesuit scholar, Jacques Dupuis, than whom, he said, no Catholic theologian has grappled more deeply or effectively with the challenges that religious plurality presents to the integrity of Christian confession, where the God confessed is the One who, in Christ, loves and cherishes the entire world, and not only the professing Christian world. Bill Burrows, both editor and good friend to Dupuis, was quick to second that estimation when it was his turn to speak, the point being that if you want to dig deeply into this topic, Dupuis will be at the top of your reading list. In a post-conference note, Bill recommends [Christianity and the Religions: From Confrontation to Dialogue](#) (Orbis, 2002) as the book to read first. For a fast summary of the work and a quick introduction to Dupuis's thought, see the [review and appraisal](#) by his fellow Jesuit, Gerald O'Collins (*Theological Studies* 64, 2003). After that you'll want to check out Jukka's paper, as soon as it's available, for a succinct Law/Gospel analysis of Dupuis's key insights. And while you're at it, buy the book Bill published a year and a half ago about some trouble Dupuis ran into with the Vatican's doctrinal watchdogs. It comprises Dupuis's responses to his official critics buttressed by introductory and background material written by Bill. The intriguing title: [Jacques Dupuis Faces the Inquisition](#).
9. With that I quit—2000 words is enough for one session—recognizing as I do how scandalous it is to have said so little—indeed, so next to nothing—about what Jukka, Bill, keynoter Steve Kuhl, and all the other presenters brought to the table. More to come in future posts, I trust. How about some help with that? Were you

there in January? Did a light or two pop on at points as you listened? Were you hit somewhere along the way with a significant "Aha"? Send us a short note about that, and we'll pass it along. My own terse summation of the proceedings as a whole: respect the promise that can't be found except in Christ, and keep pushing it as God's gift for all. But do so without dismissing the religious other out of hand, or worse, clamping limits on the scope of the reconciliation that God is able to effect through the death and resurrection of his Son and the faith-inducing power of the Holy Spirit. "With God all things are possible." So said Jesus when small-minded disciples wondered if anybody could be saved at all (Matt. 19:25f.).

10. Postscripts: a) Did I mention how good it was to see more younger faces at the event than we've been used to? More laity too, including several folks who serve as authorized lay ministers under the aegis one of the ELCA's many synods. b) What a treat the devotions were, with thought-and-faith-inducing reflections from a variety of presenters. c) For once we missed the treat of meeting and hearing from somebody who holds a passport from beyond North America. Chinese New Year kept friends from Singapore at home. That connection stayed alive even so through Jill Kuehnert, who lives in Singapore as an American expat. d) Jill was there to keep her parents company, father Philip doing us the honor of a presentation on the final morning. Midway through it his pacemaker went off, startling him in earnest and the rest of us by extension. He finished his presentation anyway, then went to the hospital. He let us know a day or two later that the Lord was seeing fit to keep him with us for a while. For that and so much else in those recent conference days, thanks be to God!

Peace and Joy,

Jerry Burce, for the editorial team

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# **“The Christian Chaplain in a Pluralistic Society”**

To be presented at the Fifth International Crossings Conference

**The One for All  
Proclaiming “Christ Alone” in the Age of Pluralism**

Our Lady of the Snow Conference Center, Belleville, IL

January 26 – 29, 2014

Rev Dr. Phil Kuehnert; [pastorkuehnert@gmail.com](mailto:pastorkuehnert@gmail.com)

Reflecting and writing about Christian Chaplains in the age of Pluralism is one thing, Reflecting and writing about *Lutheran* Chaplains in the age of Pluralism is another, Reflecting and writing about *Lutheran* Chaplains in the age of Pluralism for a presentation at a *Crossings Conference* is another.

Let me tell you where I am going. The “Crossings Matrix” can be a helpful tool for the Lutheran Chaplain who seeks to be a “Christ Confessor.” And the following outline will show the way I arrive at that conclusion:

First, some introductory comments that places this presentation in the context of my life and in the world of chaplaincy in general.

Second, I will address directly my topic of the Christian

Chaplains in the context of the theme of this conference: "Proclaiming 'Christ Alone' in an Age of Pluralism." I will specifically be addressing the question, What serves as a normative pattern for being a "Christ Confessor?"

Third, expanding the scope to include Pastoral Counseling and other forms of specialized pastoral care, I will explore the critical question, "Can specialized forms of pastoral care (including chaplaincy, CPE, and pastoral counseling) be expected to operate with this distinctively Christian norm? That is, can they be expected to be a part of the Church's evangelization. (There is a wide gulf between pastoral care that is done within the context of a worshipping congregation and pastoral care that is done in the "world/market place.")

Fourth, I will explore the unique challenges and opportunities of Lutheran Chaplaincy in campus and military settings.

Finally, I make a proposal on how Pastoral Care specialists, who seek to be Christ Confessors working in interfaith settings, might use the "Crossings Matrix" to focus their confessing Christ Alone.

## **Outline**

Introduction

I. The Ubiquity of Chaplaincy

II. An Oxymoron? A Christ Confessing Chaplain

III. The challenge of working in interfaith settings.

IV. The Critical Issue

V. Denominational Endorsement and Credentialing as a professional chaplain/pastoral counselor.

VI. The Critical Issue – Again!

VII. The Spectrum of "Christ Confessing" – Cry and Response

VIII. From Matrix to Covenant: A "covenantal" metaphor to frame Cry and Response

IX. Campus and Military Chaplaincy

X. Eunbee Ham, Christ Confessor?

XI. A Proposal

Conclusion

Appendix: Theses for Debate,

## INTRODUCTION

On Friday morning, December 6th, Judy and I were at the breakfast table discussing the rest of the day. We were in the middle of preparations for Christmas; gifts to be sent, the annual letter to be mailed with the now expected picture, and all pushed forward because we would be leaving for our trip to South Africa in less than two weeks – and of course the “big project” of getting my presentation for the Crossings Conference finished before we left. I used the word “ubiquitous” in referring to place of chaplaincy in today’s world. “Oh really?” she replied. And so I started reeling off the various kinds of chaplaincies I was familiar with: prison chaplaincy, police chaplaincy, fire chaplaincy, entertainment chaplaincy, industrial chaplaincy, corporate chaplaincy, etc. That conversation having run its course and with Judy being finished eating, she picked up *Portals of Prayer* – the LCMS daily devotional still published by Concordia Publishing House – and she read:

*The Lord in our Shoes. Hebrews 4:14 – 5:10*

She handed me the Bible and I dutifully read the scripture. She then read Hebrews 4:15 “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize” and she continued: *As a fire department chaplain, I helped men....*” She got that far and I stopped her saying, “You’re kidding aren’t you?” She looked at me puzzled and I said, “That’s not what it says, does it? You’re making that up.” “No.” she replied, that is what it says and continued

reading. "I helped men who had seen horrible things talk through them together. They were great counselors for one another because they had been at the scene together. Whether it is cancer, addiction, depression, or post-traumatic stress, the best counselors are often those who have gone through the same struggle. They can provide empathy, insight, direction like no other. They have truly been in those shoes."1

And there it was...the author, Pastor Jonathan Vollrath from Dover, MN claimed his identity as a fire department chaplain. It was the first time that I can remember chaplaincy being mentioned in Portals of Prayer.

## **THE UBIQUITY OF CHAPLAINCY**

And yes, chaplaincy is everywhere, and has been in many places through the centuries. More often than not chaplains have done their work out of the limelight. Now, however, especially in the late 20th century moving into the 21st, Chaplaincy continues to grow as each area of life, from the state houses of our states to college campuses to race tracks to the industrial plant to service organizations and the corporate headquarters seem to be demanding their own formal religious presence in a person designated as the "Chaplain." And in this age where we increasingly get the impression that formal and professional religious folk are no longer welcome, it seems that there is an opening to "chaplaincy," that somewhere in the national psyche there is a place that says: "yes, we need to honor the place of the spiritual in our lives and chaplaincy seems to be pretty benign, so what can it hurt?"

In fact, I get the impression that in some instances, chaplains may be more of a mascot than an integral part of the organization: Someone who becomes a spiritual talisman or who hangs out with the crew until.... , well, until the unimaginable,

inevitable happens: a mass shooting, a 9-11 catastrophe, or a member of the force commits suicide. If the chaplain feels like a mascot, it may reflect not only on the immaturity of the chaplain, but also the inability of the chaplain to seize the opportunities for ministry in ready made, although initially superficial, relationships.

The legacy and the lore of chaplaincy are contained in countless stories. Chaplains have literally "been in the trenches" and have provided care to the most desperate of men and women in the most extreme circumstances.

Lutheran Chaplain Henry Gerecke was chaplain at the Nuremburg prison in Germany following WW II. He provided care for the first Nazis (Hermann Goering, Albert Speer, Wilhelm Keitel, Joachim von Ribbentrop) to be tried as war criminals and was with them till their execution in October of 1946. They were so appreciative of his ministry that they wrote a letter, hand written and signed by 21 of the most notorious of the prisoners, to Mrs. Gerecke asking her to allow her husband to stay with them for the duration of their trials.

*"We now have heard, dear Mrs. Gerecke, that you wish to see him back home after his absence of several years...Nevertheless we are asking that you put off your wish to gather your family around you at home for little time. Please consider that we cannot miss your husband now. During the past month he has shown us uncompromising friendliness of such a kind, that he has become indispensable for us in an otherwise prejudiced environment which is filled with cold disdain or hatred...We have simply come to love him. In this stage of the trial, it is impossible for any other man than him to breakthrough the walls that have been built up around us, in a spiritual sense even stronger than a material one."*<sup>2</sup>

An interesting side note – During the baseball World Series this past year, Dan Barry in a New York Times piece told most of this story in the context of the 1946 World Series, using a \$10 bet that the two chaplains, Chaplain Gerecke and the Roman Catholic Chaplain Sixtus O'Connor, made on the series, a series that would be decided on the night that 11 war criminals were hung at Nuremberg.<sup>3</sup>

Much better known is the story of Father Mychal Judge, a NY City Fire Department Chaplain who is the first recorded victim of the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center. Immortalized in the photo in which he is shown being carried out of the rubble. Father Judge died giving last rites to a fire fighter.

## **This paper in the context of this Conference**

I have the distinction, if it is a distinction, of being the last presentation at this conference that has raised the important question of how can Christ Alone be confessed in an age of religious pluralism. In the promotional materials for this conference “Pluralism” has been defined as “a recent, distinct and flexible theological outlook that seeks to interpret and manage the plurality of religious traditions by way of a reductionism that homogenizes their distinctive messages of salvation, minimizes their substantial differences with regard to the relationship of God to the world, and relativizes their shared concern for deep truth.”<sup>4</sup> Three of the previous presentations I hope will have spoken to the theological and practical issues surrounding proclaiming Christ alone: In the Missions Field – Dr Kaariainen; Living out the Great Commission – Missiologist William Burroughs; and Pastor Martin Lohrmann’s presentation how the Reformation Tradition has

responded to Religious Diversity. My assignment is a welcomed surprise, for often the role and unique contribution of specialized pastoral care is marginalized if not ignored. I feel not a little responsibility to those who worked with me, and who continue to work in chaplaincy and pastoral counseling to speak for them and with them. I hope that what I am presenting will not become a footnote or an afterthought. My hope is that our conversation at the end of my presentation might provide an opportunity to integrate and summarize what this conference has been about and that will include the contribution of The Christian Chaplain.

## **THE CHALLENGE OF WORKING IN INTERFAITH SETTINGS IN THE AGE OF PLURALISM**

My hunch is that most Lutheran Chaplains, if not most Christian Chaplains will shrug their shoulders at the sounding call of the challenge of this definition of pluralism and somewhat disinterestedly say something like: "Oh, OK, we can handle that. Next?" The reason is that many chaplains, and most if not all Lutheran chaplains have lived in this house from the beginning of their training. Of necessity, the Lutheran seminary student, or recent graduate, or practicing pastor, on entering the basic unit of CPE, leaves behind the comfortable, parochial culture of seminary or parish and enters, many for the first time, "the real world."<sup>5</sup> Depending on how well lived she/he is, this will be more or less of a shock. As training continues, and certainly as experience will demand, the never ending tension will be between meeting people where they are and the highly sophisticated confessional/dogmatic presuppositions that undergird one's theology. Within the seminary and parish cultures, there is much that can be taken for granted, e.g., a

more or less consistent weltanschauung, uniform hermeneutical principles, and a base line of theological education. Once the world of chaplaincy is entered, all of that is gone. The very "stuff" that makes a student, graduate, pastor successful in the world of seminary and parish, needs to be reframed, and at times radically, for that "stuff" to be an asset in the ministry of chaplaincy. It makes little difference if the client/patient is Jewish, Muslim, New Age, or "Plural," each is the focus of a chaplain's ministry. What makes the difference is that all of them have a different weltanschauung, different ways of interpreting their world, and a different dogmatic base for their beliefs. In this way specialized pastoral care is much like a box of chocolates – you never know what you are going to get. That is why I think chaplains and pastoral counselors are the free range ministers of Christianity.

The reality is that the Christian chaplain is increasingly working in a world and with a population where denominational identity is on the decline, but where interest in "spirituality" is increasing. In addition, the Christian chaplain will most likely be working with chaplains who are not only from other Christian denominations but from other faith systems as well. My hunch about all this – that chaplains live with this reality quite easily (or they find something else to do) and that they have been doing this for some time – was clarified and corrected by a major piece of research done at a large academic medical center.<sup>6</sup>

The authors, Wendy Cage and Emily Sigalow address the specific issue of how chaplains "negotiate" religious differences in interfaith (pluralistic) healthcare settings. The current demand is that most chaplains work as interfaith chaplains with a wide variety of religious and spiritual backgrounds and commitments, or lack of commitment. The "Common Standards for Professional Chaplaincy" adopted in 2004 by the main professional

organizations for chaplains in health, state that chaplains are to provide pastoral care for all people, regardless of their commitments or orientation.<sup>7</sup> The authors found that, while many chaplains are quite comfortable in working with people who are different, they detected some tension in chaplains who in the scope of their responsibility have to care for those who are from different faith traditions. Specifically, their research raised the question “how chaplains who must be endorsed in one faith tradition to be ‘board certified’ work with patients and families from other spiritual and religious backgrounds.”<sup>8</sup>

Cage and Sigalow found that chaplains deal with this in various ways, including ways they call “neutralizing” and “code switching.” Their research showed that most chaplains neutralize religious differences by focusing on what the chaplain has in common with the patient, or patient’s family. In this modality, the chaplain makes it clear that she or he is not representing a specific religious orientation, but rather seeks to support the patient in her/his religious/spiritual orientation.<sup>9</sup> Code switching is described as the chaplain’s ability to adapt to the patient/patient’s family’s religious tradition by using language, scripture, rites, and symbols from that tradition.<sup>10</sup>

## **THE CRITICAL ISSUE**

The question then needs to be raised, if Christian chaplains use in either neutralizing or code switching approaches in their work, does that then compromise their ability to confess Christ? It would seem so. It would be interesting to consider St. Paul’s commitment to be all things for all people, and his tour de force on Mars Hill as having components of both neutralizing and code switching. With St. Paul, his stated goal was to “save some.”<sup>11</sup> All of his tactics were for the purpose of confessing Christ.

When it comes to confessing “Christ Alone,” Christian chaplains and, in particular, Lutheran chaplains and pastoral counselors, depending on the depth of their training, may have reached a comfortable spot in living with the expectation that they not confess Christ. That certainly reflected my practice as a pastoral counselor until my wake up call in my own personal experience.<sup>12</sup> In a recent conversation, a Lutheran Chaplain who works in a large medical center shared with me, regretfully, that he had grown quite comfortable with not confessing Christ in his work.<sup>13</sup> I wonder if this is generally the case.

## **DENOMINATIONAL ENDORSEMENT AND PROFESSIONAL CREDENTIALS**

It is interesting to note that all the professional chaplaincy organizations that I consulted, from Fire to Corrections to Campus, require denominational/religious organization endorsement. The implicit value is that it is necessary that a woman or man who seeks to be a chaplain under that particular banner needs the endorsement of a formal religious organization. It is assumed that a chaplain will have a specific commitment to particular belief system. It is also assumed that the ecclesiastical authority will have taken responsibility to vet the candidate. That is certainly the case with both the LCMS and the ELCA who now have similar, but separate endorsing processes.

In the respective manuals that LCMS and ELCA provide to candidates seeking endorsement for Specialized Ministries, identical wording is used in which the expectation those serving in these ministries give explicit witness to Jesus: “...seek to extend the love of God in Jesus Christ to persons – any and all persons... Those involved in these ministries declare and demonstrate Christ’s love by providing spiritual and pastoral care, advocacy, and the opportunities for service.”<sup>14</sup> It is

certainly the expectation of the respective church bodies that those who serve in these ministries give witness to the love of Christ. Neither one suggests how this might be done. Neither asks explicitly that “Christ Alone” be proclaimed.

This conference asks us to consider the elephant in the room. It is the elephant that rises from the eerie mists of the past when each Sunday we confess either “from thence He will come to judge the living and the dead” or “And he will come again with Glory to judge both the living and the dead.” My father, a LCMS pastor of the radically conservative bent, believed that it was his calling to first of all determine whether or not each person he met was saved and ready to meet The Judge. If the person could not articulate faith in Jesus to my father’s satisfaction, he would give explicit witness to Jesus. As a child I lived with the ongoing anxiety and embarrassment of my father confronting strangers with either the question, “If you were to die tonight, are you sure you would be in heaven?” or “If I would fall down right now and be dying, could you tell me the way to get to heaven?” Even later in life accompanying my octogenarian dad to the drug store or any public place, he, my pleas with him notwithstanding, would continue his witnessing. I’m not sure how effective that approach was, but two things I am sure of: First, I hated it and second, he got people’s attention.

## **THE CRITICAL ISSUE, AGAIN!**

And that I believe is the question; what approach, what strategies can be used to proclaim “Christ alone” that are appropriate and effective, to the point that Christ would judge us as not denying him before men?<sup>15</sup>

Few chaplains carry the expectation of their employers that they confess “Christ alone.” For the chaplains who serve in “Lutheran Institutions,” even in those situations, it is probably not the

expectation of the Boards of those institutions that their chaplains proselytize Christians into Lutheranism or people of other faiths to Christianity. However, it would certainly be the expectation that pastoral care be carried out within the norms of generic Lutheranism, e.g. Word and Sacrament Ministry, pastoral care with scripture and prayer, etc.

But there are differences of opinion in how “the Christian art of Evangelism” is carried out. Giving witness to Christ alone, is different than engaging in apologetics with the winning position being that Christ is “The One For All.” Giving witness is different from intrusive and offensive confrontational evangelism.

## **THE CROSSINGS MATRIX AND CHAPLAINCY**

It is in the area of an approach to evangelism that the Crossing matrix may carry with it the most promise for proclaiming “Christ alone.” It has always been in the DNA of the Lutheran distinction between Law and Gospel, but it may be the unique contribution of the Crossing matrix, that, paradoxically, the radical explication of the Law (God’s criminate activity in the world and in people’s lives, either active or passive) provide the horrific and terrifying situation that there is only “one option” for solving the “problem.” What needs to be demonstrated is whether or not the “crossing matrix” is an acceptable tool for those in specialized ministries.

It is my hope that previous presentations in this conference have made this clear: namely, that, if the diagnosis/analysis of a situation is done in such a way that the wrath of God becomes the ultimate, universal problem, then, the only solution is Jesus Christ, “the One for all.” That diagnosis alone necessitates the proclamation of Christ alone.

A clear example of how that can be done is interestingly demonstrated in Ed Schroeder's response to the movie, *Carnage*, at last year's Crossings conference. This is the way that Jerry Burce described how this happened.

*Marcus Felde had brought the movie along as an example of how issues addressed in a Biblical text surface in secular contexts. We watched it on Monday afternoon. Later that evening Marcus "crossed" both the context and the underlying issues with a superb homily and some follow-up reflections. Meanwhile Ed, who had gone home early, got to thinking what he'd say as a Christ-confessor to the folks in the movie, none of whom exhibit the slightest inclination toward matters overtly religious. Here's what he came up with. Notice, when he talks about Christ he does so only in preliminary kind of way. Mostly he shows them how Christian usages of the words "God" and "law" intersect intimately with their own heated conversations, and he winds up tempting them to hear more about a genuine alternative in the Jesus story. It seemed to lots of us who listened yesterday that he did so convincingly. "Spot on," as my Australian friends might say.<sup>16</sup>*

To do what Ed does takes an extraordinary amount of skill. The last words spoken in the movie is the cry: "This is the worst day of my life." That evening Ed went home and wrote a response which began:

"The worst day of my life is what the Bible calls Judgment Day. Don't have to wait till the end of the world for that. Though that is the FINAL judgment, but Judgment day is every day. You don't even have to believe in God—and still it happens. You've just done it here. Judging each other left and right so that your own FINAL JUDGEMENT, final verdict is: This is the worst day of my life. And after all the judging, what's left? Carnage."<sup>17</sup>

Ed continues aligning the story of the movie with the great Shakespearean tragedies of Hamlet and Macbeth, “bodies all over the place.” Speaking directly to the two couples involved, Ed suggests an alternative story that reframes their story in the biblical language of judgment. He suggests they need to switch gods and offers to share with them “the success and promise angles of the Jesus story.”

## **“CRY” AND “RESPONSE”**

The “cry” is the place to where the diagnosis within the matrix leads. It is THE CRY of dereliction which is finally the God on God problem we see in cross. There we have Father vs Son with no pretention of parity and Son vs Father in a show down that ends in death...and resurrection. The challenge is getting to the crossing so that the horror can be “sweet swapped” for joy, so that the worst day of one’s life can become the best day of one’s life.

That “cry of dereliction” is the reason we have chaplains. Chaplains exist to serve those who are displaced from their “place of comfort” and who are struggling with all manner of unfairness or tragedy. You fill in the blank. It runs the gamut from fraud to murder to domestic violence to child abuse to apartheid and infidelity. Moreover, chaplains exist to deal with everyone – from perpetrator to victim, from patient to care provider, from first responder to soldier to marine to policeman to the dangerous and wayward muckers they confront.

Christian Chaplains and Jewish Chaplains claim a God that hears that cry. For Christians, the ear of God becomes flesh in the ear of Jesus who then transplants his ear into those upon whose brow carry, of all things, the Cross! Again and again, Scripture tells us of a God who hears and responds to the cry of dereliction: from the God who heard Cain’s cry (“This is more

than I can bear"18) to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob who sees, hears and "knows" the cry of the children of Israel in Egypt.19 God responds to the cry of dereliction. That response usually takes place through the mouth piece of a priest or judge or prophet. "Thus says/saith the Lord..." is the common intro. Jesus used "He who has ears, let him hear..." Cry...Response! With the invitation to hear comes the invitation to join in a covenantal relationship.

## **FROM MATRIX TO COVENANT**

The vagaries of response are limited and defined in the covenantal response. The craziness of not knowing where parties are in relationship to each other is modulated by the incremental formation of a covenant. In its most basic form, the covenant is the agreement of two people to join in conversation. For the Christian Chaplain/Pastoral Counselor, the conversation begins with the assumption that the patient/client is already wrapped in the covenant of "Divine Commitment." The Chaplain/Counselor assumes that the patient/client is a sinner, assumes that his/her cry is an echo of THE CRY of dereliction. But the Chaplain also believes that God is a God who hears those cries and proceeds to minister from that foundation. The listening, accepting presence of the Chaplain/Counselor is a reflection of God's grace. The creativity of the Holy Spirit in shaping the conversation to reflect both the cry and the response in words – and finally in The Word – will surprise, delight, and at times frustrate. From the "Confessing Christ" perspective, if that is to be the goal, it seems that the Christian Chaplain not only needs to be clear about the tools and methods needed, but proficient in the use of those tools. For the Christian Chaplain, unlike the Pastoral Counselor who may build a response over the course of weeks or month, she/he may have only one conversation with a patient. Most often there

will be severe limits on time. But if the cry is acute, e.g., "What must I do to be saved?" – a simple response to "trust the Promise" may be all that is required. And as always, the Stephen Ministry mantra needs to be repeated; "I am the care giver, God is the cure giver."

Most people who want to speak with a pastoral counselor or a chaplain at some level want to wrestle with God. Most of those same people have a feral understanding of the covenant that they are bound in with God. The very fact that a person seeks a pastoral counselor or a chaplain, or in the case of chaplain, are willing to engage in conversation, is indication enough that the God question, and in terms of the matrix, the God problem, is fair game as a target of the conversation. At this point the work of the chaplain/pastoral counselor becomes challenging, even daunting, but always interesting.

The challenge and promise of Christian chaplaincy, for all those who wish to claim the calling and responsibility to be a "Christ-confessor" is to reframe the cry of dereliction. The challenge for the chaplain (who, at least, in many hospital settings, will have maybe only one or two opportunities to engage in conversation) is how to overcome the absence of a common language to describe not only the cry, but God's response to the cry. This challenge is even more daunting when the patient/patient's family comes from a different faith tradition or even a different Christian denomination. However, it may be easier to create a common language of the cry and response for "the Pluralist" than for those who are embedded in their own faith/denominational traditions. The reason is that the "pluralist" mind may be more flexible and willing to partner in the creative process of forming a common language.

Chaplains who serve in clinics for those with chronic conditions, cancer treatment centers, dialysis units,

rehabilitation centers, long terms care units, prisons, or those who serve primarily those who protect and serve (i.e., police, first responders, firemen/firewomen) have the opportunity to build relationships over time. Is the Christian chaplain compelled to “confess Christ”? And if the chaplain chooses for some reason not to “confess Christ,” at what time does she or he come under judgment for “denying Christ before others?”<sup>20</sup>

Could it be that the unique tool that the Christian chaplain has in her/his tool box is the understanding that God has a problem. The New Testament, aka New Covenant, identifies the stake holders in the God problem. And God’s problem is directly related to the unplanned pregnancy, the cancer diagnoses, the drive by shooting that leaves a nine year old girl dead in her mother’s arms, the pile up on an interstate that takes the life of spouse and three of four children, the veteran who struggles with flashbacks so terrifying that his wife and children have left him, the rape victim, the unsuccessful suicide, the former Lutheran pastor inmate serving time for child pornography, the octogenarian who has alienated his family/been abandoned by his family, the family in shock struggling with a successful suicide, or is it? Are these situations, that are the bread and butter issues the Chaplain faces regular, related to God’s problem or not?

If God is a God who sees, hears, and “knows” the dark labyrinth which give rise to the cry, would not God’s response find its roots in that dark labyrinth? If “the worst day of my life” is a cry that finds its origin in the crushing pain of being judged and found wanting/inadequate/impotent/evil/stupid/terminal/unfaithful/guilty, is it theologically valid to say that the judgment is ultimately God’s criminate activity in the world and in people’s lives. Can God be held accountable? The covenant would suggest God has no choice.

The task of theodicy is to hold God accountable. And for Christians, in contrast to Rabbi Kushner in his classic study of Job who cops out by emasculating God<sup>21</sup>, who claim the “omnis” without reservation, especially for Christian chaplains, the challenge is to take seriously the cry. Those that chaplains minister to are those who are more likely to be without the language, culture, and community of a faith community than those that the pastor, or imam, or rabbi who responds to the cry of their parish, congregation, synagogue. Or in the language of this conference, the clientele of the chaplain most likely will reflect a pluralist mentality.

## **CHAPLAINCY ON THE COLLEGE CAMPUS**

What about Christian chaplains who serve on university and college campuses? I have spent some focused time on the University/College chaplain. This past May, my son-in-law, an ELCA pastor of some 12 years, graduate of Southern (Columbia SC), after a nine year stint as pastor of a relatively large and growing parish in Virginia Beach, accepted the position of Dean of the Chapel and Chaplain at Roanoke College, in Salem, VA. Roanoke College, a four year liberal arts school that relishes its 175 year history as a distinctively Lutheran, but not sectarian institution of higher learning. That was made crystal clear in the homily at my son-in-law’s installation, a homily that was shared by the college President Maxey and the bishop of the Virginia Synod, James Mauney. I was so impressed by the way they articulated the place of the academy in the church and the church in the academy that I asked for their manuscripts. What initially impressed me was that these two men had taken the time to talk about and write out their understanding of how the role of the chaplain bridged those two worlds in more than a symbolic way. What especially impressed me was the way President (Mike) Maxey, a cradle Baptist, was able to articulate four foundations

of Lutheran higher education.<sup>22</sup> Bishop (Jim) Mauney responded by stating clearly the church's witness to the academy.

*Jim: (Bishop James Mauney, Virginia Synod, ELCA)*

*We believe it so important to have a pastor on campus, full-time. We remember our Lord JC, who in humble Love laid down his life, in compassion for those like sheep without a shepherd, was available for seeing and hearing the hurts, the needs, the concerns, the joys, the hopes, and being among them, leading by word and example, ready to teach our father who art in heaven for young disciples asking suddenly how to pray.*

*Mike: (Michael C. Maxey, President, Roanoke College, Salem, VA)*

*And we want a dean of the chapel here. The picture on the altar in Wittenberg, Germany is Christ crucified between Luther in the pulpit and the listeners. Christ comes through the preaching and sacraments. Really, truly comes. So we truly want a chaplain to do that very thing, to bring the Christ to this campus here in word in bread and wine.*

*Jim: And we brought a parish pastor, one who has worked with families, with parents and their children, knowing their hopes and fears. We called a pastor with a family himself, three lovely children and a most capable wife and public school teacher herself.<sup>23</sup>*

In my interview several weeks ago with my son-in-law, he shared with me the unique challenges of being a Lutheran chaplain on a campus that is neither sectarian nor secular. He shared with me a very insightful article written by Darrell Jodock, "Vocation of the Lutheran College and Religious Diversity."<sup>24</sup> Jodock, Professor of Religion at Gustavus Adolphus College makes a case for a "third path" in distinction from "two well known default positions" for private colleges in the United States, i.e. sectarian institutions and secular institutions. Sectarian

institutions would certainly include those colleges and universities in the Concordia University System of the LCMS. While it is deeply rooted in the LCMS, it is not inclusive. Since the convention last summer, the President of the LCMS has the final say so in who is hired as faculty. The second default position is what Jodock calls “non-sectarian”, “religiously inclusive, it is a microcosm of the surrounding society.”<sup>25</sup> The third path that Jodock claims for Lutheran colleges is not dissimilar from that described by Bishop Mauney and President Maxey. Jodock identifies six features of the Lutheran tradition that influences how a college thinks about interreligious dialogue and civil discourse.<sup>26</sup>

## **THE MILITARY CHAPLAINCY**

The military chaplaincy presents a unique challenge and opportunity for the Christian Chaplain. Robert Crick, A Church of God military chaplain, in his book Outside the Gates, The Need for; Theology, History and Practice of Chaplaincy Ministries draws from his experience as a chaplain in a variety of settings. He addresses the issue of a chaplain working in a pluralistic setting.

“In the pastoral care setting, a successful chaplain must validate their unique faith history through balancing three difficult areas: authenticating one’s pastoral identity as a chaplain, giving the Holy Spirit a vital, yet appropriate place in ministry; and developing a more integrated view of healing.”<sup>27</sup>

Lutherans in the military chaplaincy have a long and distinguished history. For 16 years I was the pastor of Zion Lutheran in Fairbanks. The building that housed the congregation was a scant four miles from the front gates of Ft Wainwright, home of the “Arctic Warriors” and during my time, it was the

staging area for three deployments to Iraq. Over those years three Lutheran chaplains brought their families to worship at Zion. As a pastor in the community who was supportive of the base chaplains' daunting responsibilities, I had the opportunity to work closely with them in several projects.

In a recent extended conversation with a protestant chaplain<sup>28</sup> with 22 years of service, I was reminded again of the unique challenges military chaplains face and the rich resources at their disposal. I was overwhelmed by this man's passionate and, at times, disturbingly dispassionate review of his career. As a new chaplain he faced a crushing counseling load with nothing but a couple of "counseling courses back in seminary." So he found a fellow chaplain who was credentialed AAMFT and, amazingly, for the next three years had weekly individual supervision for his counseling work. He told me about his year of CPE training at a major medical center, his six months stint on an ICU and his six month immersion in a burn unit that, he said, took him a year to recover. He spent 15 months in Iraq, during which time he was responsible for a host duties from writing the "personal paragraph" for the General's letter to the families of soldiers killed in action to conducting memorial services for fallen soldier in combat zones to being assigned to a unit that had suffered 70% casualties. All of this led him to believe "the good die young." He heard again and again that the pious and respectful soldier is that one who died.

This extraordinary man was circumspect when he talked about the religious diversity among the chaplaincy corps. His experience was that chaplains were respectful both of fellow chaplains' denominational limitations and theological commitments. His primary personal support was the AAMFT supervisor who remained a personal friend until he passed away and a Roman Catholic chaplain who was such an example of faith and commitment that for a time, this chaplain considered becoming a Roman Catholic.

This chaplain affirmed the policy that military chaplains are not compelled to participate in practices that 1) violate their consciences or 2) conflict with their endorsing denomination's policy. This was also confirmed from conversations I had with Rear Admiral Jim Doebler, Civil Engineer Corps, United States Navy (Retired), who is presently the chair of the Ministry to the Armed Forces Committee (LCMS) which is made up of the chairman and three retired chaplains. The Admiral provided me with copies of communications to LCMS chaplains that related to their role as it might be affected "with the repeal of DADT (Don't Ask, Don't Tell) and the recent Supreme Court decision striking down section three of DOMA."<sup>29</sup> The memo stated that the Department of Defense is moving "full speed ahead on full implementation of benefits for SSDP (Same Sex Domestic Couples) couples."<sup>30</sup> This document clarifies for LCMS military chaplains what they must do under the rubrics "**The Gospel**" and "**Congress.**" Under the rubric "Gospel," they "will continue to counsel and minister to all servicemen and servicewomen regardless of sexual orientation..." Under the rubric "Congress" it states that congress "has already passed reinforcing language protecting the right of chaplains to preach, teach, and counsel in harmony with their conscience and their endorsing agency. Commanding officers are not permitted to force, nor can they command or coerce, a chaplain to marry SSDPs ..." <sup>31</sup>

## **EUNBEE HAM, CHRIST CONFESSOR?**

Before making some concluding remarks, I would like to share parts of a recent evaluation of training offered by a 2nd year Pastoral Counseling student Eunbee Ham at Care and Counseling, Atlanta GA. The following is her response to the following rubric: *"Articulates beginning level pastoral and theological interpretation of the praxis of psychotherapy and the life experience of the counselee. Can offer a succinct and clear*

*definition of pastoral counseling that differentiates it from other therapeutic modalities."*

*The more I delve into this work, I have realized what unique contribution I make through my pastoral theological interpretation in the life experience of counselees. I believe that pastoral counseling is unique from other therapeutic modalities in that pastoral counselors bring a perspective about personhood as inextricable from meanings derived from faith, mystery, and the Divine. For me, this means using my Judeo-Christian faith to pray, imagine, and be open to the Holy Spirit to partner in God's healing and reconciling work in the world through pastoral counseling. More specifically, my sources guiding my therapeutic interpretation include not only psychotherapy but also Scripture, theological interpretation and prayer. In our globalized, consumerist, technology-oriented society, people are feeling more lost, isolated, and fragmented by the psychosocial stressors that characterize our times. I believe that pastoral counseling is one of the methods that God uses to focus the lives of individuals and communities for God's redemptive purposes. Pastoral counseling cultivates an environment where everyone is invited to speak, to hear, and to witness God, who is at work to free the oppressed, to forgive sin, reconcile brokenness, and establish love, peace, and justice in the world. It offers a space for God's people to learn how to discern God's direction and activities in them and for the communities in which they find themselves.<sup>32</sup>*

With this excellent and thoughtful reflection on the work and impact of pastoral counseling, which I believe is also to be found in much CPE work, what more would Eunbee Ham need to say for "Christ to be confessed?" Or is this far enough to escape the judgment that Christ has been denied? Does Ms. Ham allow for Christ when she writes "the methods that God uses to focus the lives of individuals and communities for God's redemptive

purposes?”

## CONCLUSION

Concluding observations. One of the hallmarks of Stephen Ministry is “distinctively Christian care” directed by the four quadrants of the “caregiver’s compass”: Skilled, Compassionate, Full of Faith, Trustworthy. In the middle of the compass is a chi-rho. The cornerstone of Stephen Ministry is the twice a month peer supervision that Stephen Ministers commit to when they begin their active ministry. Now as a small group facilitator for one of my congregation’s Stephen Ministry’s small groups, I am continually impressed how well these paraprofessional Stephen Ministers provide distinctively Christian care.<sup>33</sup> For most “in depth” reports, the Stephen Minister is asked, how her or his care giving is distinctively Christian. I am convinced that would not happen consistently except for supervision.

The case for supervision! By the time I “went up” for Fellow in the American Association of Pastoral Counselors, I had in excess of 1600 hours of supervision from more than a dozen supervisors. There was nothing more important in my training than supervision. Course work was important. Didactics were necessary, but it was in supervision that I became confident enough to enjoy my work. It was only in my doctoral dissertation that I was forced to take seriously my theological roots as I struggled with God to provide an answer to theodicy’s dilemma.<sup>34</sup>

The excitement of that project quickly died and may, only now be rekindled. Can the Law-Gospel distinction, as uniquely captured in the “crossings matrix,” become a functional catalyst for Christ to be confessed as the “One for All” in Specialized Ministries?<sup>35</sup> I see that happening only if there is a commitment by clinical folk to do what the Crossings Community has done

publically for the past 15 years with its weekly “text study/analysis.” In the same way that a pericope is “crossed,” so a case study would be “crossed” with “the matrix.” My fascination with this proposal comes from two sources. First, I am committed to the diagnosis/prognoses dialectic as a way to pay proper attention to the law as God’s criminate action in evoking/provoking the “cry.” Second, I am as committed to the power of the foolishness of the message of the Cross of Christ in framing a “response” to the cry.<sup>36</sup>

Will it work? Is it practical? There is only one way to find out. Find chaplains and pastoral counselors who are willing to do case conferences with “proclaiming Christ alone” as being the end goal, understanding that there would be developmental stages along the way. Once learned, working the “crossings matrix” would be of little challenge for chaplains. Their clinical training and the demands of 3rd party pay has already made clinicians excellent diagnosticians. They are accustomed to mining family of origin and contextual issues for the diagnostic purposes (DSM stuff) and well equipped at creating behavioral goals<sup>37</sup> for treatment. The structure is there, only the substance would be different.

Because of the unique challenges that Christian Chaplains and Pastoral Counselors face working outside the protection of the church, on college campuses, in the military, in the counseling office, and in hospital and institutional settings, the Crossings Matrix – and its use in supervisory, peer supervision and consultation settings – may be the preferred way to ensure that the Holy Spirit has the opportunity to create faith through the proclamation of Christ Alone/The One for All!

## ***Appendix***

## Theses for Debate:

1. Christian Chaplains, by right of baptism and the imperative of ordination, are compelled to be Christ Confessors.
2. Christian Chaplains and Pastoral Counselors, by tending to the cry in its primal form with compassion and skill, fulfill their calling by "planting and watering" allowing the Holy Spirit to provide others to bring the harvest.
3. Christian Chaplains who are faithful to their calling to be Christ Confessors, may not be able to work in settings where they are required to be interfaith chaplains.
4. A Christian Chaplain working with patients/clients who are of different faith traditions has a unique opportunity to be a Christ confessor.
5. Christian Chaplains lack the tools and training to be Christ Confessors in pluralistic settings.
6. A Christ Confessing Chaplain working in an interfaith setting may not use code switching or neutralizing. (see Cage and Sigalow)

## For Discussion:

### A Chaplain is not:

- A Pastor, although she/her may provide pastoral care.
- An Evangelist, although she/he may give profound witness to the Gospel.
- Paid by the church, nor works for the church, but is held accountable by her/his endorsing religious judicatory.

### A Chaplain is

- The acknowledged spiritual representative in pluralistic settings o Expected to be true to her/his religious tradition

- Highly trained
- A representative of as well as the heart, the eyes, the ears and the voice of Christ
- Endorsed by her/his denomination
- Has unique opportunities to confess Christ, in deed and in word.

**References:**

1 Portals of Prayer, Concordia Publishing House, October – December, 2013.

2 Handwritten German letter sent to Mrs, Alma Gerecke. Concordia Historical Institute, St. Louis. This story was first shared with me by Chaplain Mark Luecke of Canton, OH at the ZION XV Conference in October of 2013.

3 Barry, Dan. “A Word Away, the Seventh Game; Close at Hand, Condemned Nazis.” *New York Time*, October 26, 2013.

4 Anonymous Paper – p. 1

5 Both ELCA and LCMS in their endorsement manuals for candidates who seek to enter specialized ministries have identical (!) wording in describing that real world: Ministries in chaplaincy, pastoral counseling, and clinical education – ELCA, Those who serve in Specialized Pastoral Ministry (LCMS), “reach directly into the primary social structures and institutions of our world. As they encounter people in the midst of these everyday settings, those who serve in chaplaincy, pastoral counseling, and clinical education seek to extend the love of God in Jesus Christ to persons – any and all persons – at the point of their deepest need.” As the introductory paragraphs in these two manuals continue, each claim the ministry is rooted in the Gospel, and although the wording is quite different, both again

in identical words: “These ministries are missional in nature and are part of the church’s outreach ministry to the ill, the imprisoned, the elderly, the troubled, the conflicted, and the afflicted.” Under the next topic “Diverse, Scattered, and Specialized” the two paragraphs are again identical, and for the sake of the conference topic these words are important: “...Those involved in these ministries declare and demonstrate Christ’s love by providing spiritual and pastoral care, advocacy, and the opportunities for service, often to many not recognizing the God-given dignity of each person.”

6 Cadge, Wendy and Emily Sigalow. 2013. Negotiating Religious Differences: The Strategies of Interfaith Chaplains in Healthcare. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 52(1):146-158. The identity of the medical center was not revealed.

7 These standards are available at <http://www.spiritualcarecollaborative.org/docs/common-standards-professional-chaplaincy.pdf>.

8 Cadge. P 147.

9 Cadge. P 151-153.

10 Cadge. P. 153 – 155. 11 I Cor 9:19-23

12 My wake up call came when Dr Ed Schroeder, who was a guest speaker at the Alaska Circuit Pastors Conference, confronted me in front of my peers about the lack of “Christ” in a case presentation of family therapy that I had made.

13 Conversation with a Lutheran Chaplain on October 25, 2013.

14 “Ministries in Chaplaincy, Pastoral Counseling, and Clinical Education, Endorsement Standards and Procedures” ELCA p. 3, 4. “Specialized Pastoral Ministry Ecclesiastical Endorsement

Manual," LCMSp. 1

15 Matthew 10:32-33

16 Blog: <https://crossings.org> Thursday Theology #763 January 24, 2013 Topic: Talking with the "Nones"

17 Ibid.

18 Genesis 4:13

19 Exodus 3:7

20 Matthew 10:33

21 Kushner, Why Bad Things Happen to Good People

22 Maxey, Michael, Unpublished notes. *There are 4 Lutheran legs that define our educational identity at Roanoke College. They inspire my own actions as president here and they influence our ideals as a college.*

*God's grace, given freely for us is a fundamental and important part of our base. As Luther put it "This grace of God is a very great, strong, mighty and active thing. It does not lie asleep in the soul. Grace hears, leads, drives, draws, changes, works all in [humanity], and lets itself be distinctly felt and experienced. It is hidden, but its works are evident." I believe God's grace is one of most important ideas we have to share at Roanoke College. It was certainly the most important attraction to me when I joined College Lutheran Church. For a college, for Roanoke College God's grace is a blanket that comforts us in the maelstrom of life.*

*The second leg on our base is the Lutheran respect for, and love of, learning, especially learning that liberates us from oppression and liberates us for service in the world. Marilyn Harran described Luther's idea that "all learning glorifies God." What a perfect match and blessing for our College.*

*The third leg of our base is welcoming all while proclaiming our Lutheran center. Many in the world would have it one way or the other. You are either wholly and exclusively Lutheran or you are wholly and exclusively secular. It is quite Lutheran to live with the tension of paradox and that paradox is no better expressed than with our value to be Lutheran at our core and inclusive in our community life together. I adore that welcoming quality of Lutheran higher education and at Roanoke College.*

*The last leg of our Lutheran base is Luther's concept of calling or vocation. This leg is most important, in my estimation, for me and for our College.*

23 Unpublished Homily, Bishop James Mauney, VA Synod, ELCA. September 28, 2013

24 Jodock, Darrell. "Vocation of the Lutheran College and Religious Diversity." *Intersections*, Spring 2011

25 *Ibid.*, p. 5

26 *Ibid.*, pp. 7 – 11. The six features are 1. Giftedness, 2. The Whole World Gifted by an Engaged God, 3. Wisdom, 4. Caution regarding Claims to Know, 5. A High Value on Community, and 6. An Emphasis on Service and Community Leadership.

27 Crick, Robert D. *Outside the Gates, The Need for, Theology, History and Practice of Chaplaincy Ministry*, Higher Life, Oviedo, FL. p.

28 His name, denomination and MOS is omitted at his request.

29 Communication from Mark J Shrieber, CAPT, CHC, USN (Ret.) Endorsing Agent, LCMS, August 27, 2013

30 *Ibid.*

31 *Ibid.*

32 By permission of Eunbee Ham. Pastoral Counselor in Training; Care and Counseling of Georgia. [permission has been requested as of 12 14 13]

33 In the spring of 2010 I made the decision to retire from 30 + years of active clinical work in chaplaincy and pastoral counseling. Shortly after that my wife and I attended a week long Stephen Ministry Leader training. We have been actively involved in Stephen Ministry since.

34 Kuehnert, Philip R. In Defense of the Indefensible: Theodicy in Pastoral Counseling. THD Dissertation, Emory University, 1987.

35 I include Chaplains and Pastoral Counselors and CPE practitioners in this designation.

36 I Cor 1:17- 33.

37 Caemmerer's old "Goal, Malady, Means" for sermon preparation comes to mind.

[TheChristianChaplaininAPISoc \(PDF\)](#)

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# Preaching Christ Alone in an Age of Pluralism: Insights

# from the Wittenberg Tradition

By Martin Lohrmann

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## Introduction

I am thankful to the Crossings conference planners for this invitation to speak with you. This topic of preaching Christ alone is crucial for considering how we might live into God's mission for us today. My goal in this paper will be to gather insights about "Preaching Christ Alone in an Age of Pluralism" from the witness of the Lutheran reformers.

I start with that terrible thing that historians always say: we cannot impose our present-day situation onto the past. The Lutheran reformers did not live in an "age of pluralism," so it would be anachronistic to simply import their words into our time. For that reason, I will compare today's pluralism with the historical situation of the Lutheran reformers. In their efforts to balance faithfulness to the gospel with practical secular reforms, the reformers employed a lively dialectic, a set of principles that can be applied to different situations, including our own. After explaining this dialectic as a variation on Luther's "two kinds of righteousness," I will conclude by applying the Crossings method to the issue of religious diversity. Throughout, I will give examples of how Martin Luther and colleagues like Philip Melancthon and Johannes Bugenhagen expressed faith in Christ alone in concrete ways that can inform ministry today.

# 1. Pluralism in the United States

In this paper, I am speaking of pluralism in a political sense as the legal non-establishment of religion in a country. In the United States, the non-establishment of a single state church is set forth in the first amendment to the U.S. Constitution: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." This clause was a key political decision, because this was a religiously diverse place already in colonial times.<sup>1</sup> The colonies in the south were mostly Anglican, the mid-Atlantic colonies were governed by influential minorities like Catholics in Maryland and Quakers in Pennsylvania, and much of New England was led by Puritan Congregationalists, with the notable exception of Baptists in Rhode Island. Which tradition ought to have become the established one? The framers of the constitution chose to establish no single church, with the Enlightenment rationale that tolerance was better than coercion.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to its pragmatism, there is a Christian spiritual value in American pluralism worth embracing, namely, the application of Matthew 7:12: "do unto others as you would have them do unto you." This word of Jesus reminds me that I am Lutheran, I am happy that I am free to be Lutheran, and I would not want to be forced into another tradition. Since I prefer freedom of religion for myself, I gladly share this freedom with my neighbors of other faiths or no faith, so that the various houses of worship in my corner of Philadelphia remind me to give thanks that I am – as Zechariah sang in Luke 1 – "free to worship God without fear." In the case of the United States, pluralism can be understood as a theologically-neutral political context. Christians can also view it positively as providing a structure for living out values like civil rights, domestic tranquility, and treating others as we would like to be treated.

## 2. The Medieval Context: Western Christendom

Our pluralistic context is very different from the political and religious setting of the Lutheran reformers. Martin Luther was born in 1483 into the world of Western Christendom in which the many thrones, dominions, rulers and powers of Western Europe shared one religious foundation, the Roman Catholic Church, whose ecclesiastical laws were legally and spiritually binding within individual lands and across national and ethnic borders.<sup>3</sup> One exception to this broad religious unity was the Jewish people, who sometimes had fragile rights in places like the Holy Roman Empire but who could also be routinely harassed, ruthlessly persecuted or even exiled entirely, as happened in thirteenth century England, fourteenth century France, fifteenth century Spain and sporadically throughout Germany.<sup>4</sup>

The spread of the Turkish Ottoman Empire across North Africa and Eastern Europe posed another political and religious challenge to Western Christendom.<sup>5</sup> By the 1520s, the Turks had conquered Budapest and were at the gates of Vienna. In fact, the Turkish threat was a major reason why Holy Roman Emperor Charles V had to work *with* German Protestants in the 1520s and '30s instead of crushing the Reformation immediately.<sup>6</sup> In God's mysterious providence, we might say that Lutherans might not exist if not for Islam! Although it seems that Luther never said he "would rather be ruled by a wise Turk than a foolish Christian," he did write, "It is said that there is no better temporal rule anywhere than among the Turks, who have neither spiritual nor temporal law, but only their Koran."<sup>7</sup> While Luther often viewed the Turks and Islam very negatively, they did sometimes provide an interesting foil against which the reformers could consider their relationship to the rest of Christian Europe.

A third exception to the medieval church's dominance came in the form of homegrown reformers and dissidents.<sup>8</sup> Some, like the Franciscans, were incorporated into the big tent of Christendom. Others, like Waldensians in France, Lollards in England and Hussites in Bohemia, were condemned as heretical and had to go underground, though by Luther's time the Hussite movement was so popular that it had achieved local mainstream status. Nevertheless, these exceptions prove the rule that the Roman Catholic Church defined the religious life of the period leading up to the Reformation, able to survive even such potentially destructive eras as the investiture controversy and the Avignon papacy.

### **3. The Reformation as an Age of Confessionalization**

Although Luther was famously not interested in departing from this Christendom model, by the time of his death in 1546 the external unity of Western Christendom was shattered. But we cannot jump from Luther to an "age of pluralism" yet. Instead, historians have come to describe the period that followed Luther's break with Rome as a time of "confessionalization." This was the gradual process of lands establishing local church polities and institutions.<sup>9</sup> The hard-won 1555 Peace of Augsburg allowed territories in the Holy Roman Empire to follow either the church of Rome or to worship and teach according to the faith of the Augsburg Confession. It set the provision of *cuius regio, eius religio*, which meant that rulers of a territory were free to decide which confession their land would embrace. Though the nobility or city councils did the deciding from the top down, they often made decisions in light of popular opinion in order to avoid civil unrest.<sup>10</sup> Confessionalization describes this process of how leaders of church and state worked to shape

new institutions in evangelical Lutheran lands.

What did this process involve? Before the Reformation, public institutions like hospitals, schools and poor relief were funded through monastic orders, religious foundations or local parishes. These systems were built theologically upon what can be called "an economy of salvation."<sup>11</sup> The upper classes donated money to charitable causes to receive spiritual benefits for themselves or their loved ones. Working people could contribute to their salvation as they were able by participating in the penitential system, performing works of merit like fasts or pilgrimages, purchasing indulgences or viewing relics. They were also taxed through a system of tithes and rents that went to local parishes and religious houses, whether or not there was a priest residing in that parish to serve the community. The poor were blessed in spirit, making poverty itself a source of merit and a situation that the upper classes need not alleviate.

After the Reformation had begun, however, a salvation-based economy of social welfare no longer existed in Protestant lands. There was no time in purgatory to reduce through donations or good works. There were no more guarantees that forgiveness would come through buying religious products like private masses or indulgences. Poverty came to be seen as a social problem rather than a spiritual blessing. Though the new theology of justification by faith alone had a strong scriptural foundation and sincere goals for social reform, a critical question remained: would reforming lands be able to support the structures that had previously been funded through the economy of salvation?<sup>12</sup> Would preaching justification through Christ alone build up the common good or destroy it?

Lutherans answered these questions through the gradual legal establishment of evangelical faith, practices and institutions. This process of confessionalization began as soon as lands like

Electoral Saxony or the free city of Nuremberg made reforms of church and society in defiance of the papal bull of excommunication and the imperial edict of Worms, which together spiritually and legally cast Luther and his followers out of Christendom in 1521. Because they went ahead with reforms outside of Christendom, these lands were truly doing something new.<sup>13</sup>

As modern as that may sound, a significant factor separates Luther's time from ours: in the age of confessionalization, church orders and confessions of faith were also the law of the land. That is, in conversation with political leaders like nobility, lawyers and city councils, reformers were not only promoting the saving faith of the heart but institutionalizing a new social order. Reformers participated in such secular rules and processes early on, for instance, in the Leisnig Church Order of 1523 which established a "common chest" for poor relief.<sup>14</sup> Written by a local congregation and its reforming pastors, Luther endorsed this church order and had it published along with a preface he wrote for it. Liturgical reforms of the following years can also be viewed as attempts to provide a basic order for worship that might serve faith without supposing that following such a liturgy would itself deliver salvation *ex opera operato*, by the mere performance of the rite.<sup>15</sup>

The 1528 Instructions for the Visitors of Parish Pastors in Electoral Saxony<sup>16</sup> and the Augsburg Confession of 1530 fit this model of a principled yet flexible foundation for reform of church and society, as do the many church orders written by Johannes Bugenhagen, Justus Jonas and others in those decades. In the case of the Instructions and the church orders, reformers began with a summary of the faith, then outlined an evangelical liturgy, described the work of ministers and church leaders, and finally provided practical guidelines for establishing schools, poor relief and other public institutions.<sup>17</sup> The shape of these

orders show how the reformers' theology moved from inner faith to outward service in daily life. Our contemporary model constitutions similarly begin with statements of faith and then move to an orderly establishment of structures that serve the ministry of the gospel.

But again: unlike our model constitutions today, those church orders and confessions were also the law of the land. Preachers could be arrested, disciplined or exiled for teaching against the local church order or a confession of faith like the Augsburg Confession or the Formula of Concord.<sup>18</sup> Lay people could also be brought before the local parish consistory for offenses against morality or the local religious orders.<sup>19</sup> Such cases of church consistories overseeing the private lives of citizens are why some view the age of confessionalization as a time when the powers-that-be increased their social control through religious means, so that evangelical faith became a tool to gain and consolidate social power from the top down.<sup>20</sup> More generally, however, I view this process as the natural result of religious and political leaders attempting to foster internal faith and promote the common good by adapting institutions they already had. As Luther preached against too great an emphasis on rule-making: "I can drive no man to heaven or beat him into it with a club."<sup>21</sup> Still, if the Lutheran reformers knew that faith cannot be legislated or coerced, why did they get involved in this process of confessionalization?

## **4. The Three Estates**

Even though faith is a matter of the heart, the Lutheran reformers did not shy away from organizing church and society. This theological concern for earthly welfare can be found in their view of the three estates that God created to serve human life: "the household, the state, and the church."<sup>22</sup> God created

the household to provide personal stability and care of the body through family life, home economies, socially beneficial trades and labor, and the mutual efforts of masters and servants. Family members take care of each other, while people managing or employed in household economies contribute to the shared prosperity of the entire group.

The second institution created by God to serve human well-being is the state, the body politic, whose main task is to serve and protect through structures that support education, employment, care for the poor and sick, just laws and fair law enforcement. Like the family, God established the state for the sake of human welfare and earthly justice;<sup>23</sup> in the Small Catechism, the petition for “daily bread” includes our praying for “upright and faithful rulers, good government” and peace.<sup>24</sup> The reformers also knew that the form of a government can be flexible, since the Bible itself shows God at work in many different forms of government from the times of the patriarchs, the judges and the kingdom of Israel to the exilic period and the Jewish diaspora. Though never means of salvation in themselves, households and governments can serve souls by setting good physical conditions for faith to grow and by providing good access to gospel preaching and the means of grace.<sup>25</sup>

The third estate, the church on earth, was instituted by God for a different purpose: to give souls the good news of Jesus Christ through word and sacrament. Though this a spiritual task concerned purely with what is of God, good preaching and ministry also serve secular society by teaching people how to live out Christ’s love in their daily callings as family members, workers and citizens. In the age of confessionalization, it was deemed good and right for civil society to support gospel preaching and teaching, because the gospel teaches a love, service and harmony that benefits secular life. At the same time, it was good for the church to support

the common good so that the gospel itself could be preached, heard and experienced in healthy settings. The reformers knew that it is hard for people to hear the gospel when they are afraid for their lives or struggling to meet basic physical needs.<sup>26</sup>

Against the critique that the reformers merely blessed the status quo and preached blind obedience to earthly authority, we have the clear word of article 16 of the Augsburg Confession, which invokes Acts 5:29 as a conscience clause: “if a command of the political authority cannot be followed without sin, one must obey God rather than any human beings (Acts 5:[29]).”<sup>27</sup> Luther’s explanation to the fourth commandment in the Large Catechism also includes an echo of Acts 5 as he says that parents and others in authority “should keep in mind that they owe obedience to God, and that, above all, they should earnestly and faithfully discharge the duties of their office, not only to provide for the material support of their children, servants, subjects, etc., but especially to bring them up to the praise and honor of God.”<sup>28</sup> Finally, when confronted with the notion that Lutherans teach political quietism, I like to remember that Luther himself is one of the most famous scofflaws in world history. Even so, the letter that Luther wrote to Pope Leo which introduces *The Freedom of a Christian* gives a great example of how Luther could at once risk everything to resist the papacy while also being genuinely willing to pray for and support the pope as a fellow Christian and human being.<sup>29</sup>

## **5. The Two Kinds of Righteousness, Squared**

Given the reformers’ concern for the three estates and the common good, how can we describe their systematic efforts to reform church and society? Since the nineteenth century, the

reformers' political theology has often been called the "doctrine of the two kingdoms." Because that label was not used during the Reformation and comes with significant baggage in modern history, I will not be speaking of a "two kingdoms" theory in Luther, even though it can certainly be done.<sup>30</sup> Instead, I prefer to see the reformers' attempts to balance earthly and divine matters as a dialectic, a principled pattern of thinking that can be applied in a variety of settings. In conflicts with the papacy, for instance, Lutherans used this dialectic to affirm the freedom of a Christian. In conflicts with radical reformers, Lutherans affirmed the goodness of this world and its institutions to say that people could indeed serve God by serving society.

Based on a source I found in my research on Luther's colleague Johannes Bugenhagen, I would like to describe this dialectic as "the two kinds of righteousness, squared." This idea comes from Bugenhagen's 1550 Jonah Commentary, which contains an extended defense of justification by faith alone. To advance his argument there, Bugenhagen included the story Luther used to tell him about how he first learned the gospel of Christ's righteousness. Speaking in Luther's own words, the text says,

I [Luther] did not know that through the preaching and the Holy Scripture of Christ's church there was a twofold judgment of God, one of the law and another of the gospel, and likewise a twofold righteousness of God, one of the law and another of the gospel. In the world the judgment and righteousness of the law is known, but it is not performed; but – as the prophets announced – David's son, our Lord Jesus Christ, would bring about the judgment and righteousness of God through the gospel when he was upon the earth, as in Jeremiah 23[:5]: "He will make judgment and righteousness on the earth, etc."<sup>31</sup>

Concepts like law and gospel, God's judgment and God's

righteousness are perhaps already familiar to us. Luther described the distinction between law and gospel in many places, including a Table Talk in which he said, “In theology there are law and gospel, and it must be one or the other.”<sup>32</sup> In the Apology to the Augsburg Confession, Melanchthon described the twofold effect of law and gospel as “putting to death and making alive.”<sup>33</sup> The “two kinds of righteousness” can be seen in Luther’s 1520 sermon by that name<sup>34</sup> and in his introduction to the 1535 Galatians lectures.<sup>35</sup> By combining these ideas, however, Bugenhagen’s reformulation invites us to see how God is beneficially active in all aspects of life. To help explain this dialectic, I have made a chart for the “two kinds of righteousness, squared” below.

**Chart 1: The Two Kinds of Righteousness, Squared**

	Active Righteousness	Passive Righteousness
Righteousness of God	<p>Righteousness of the Law (civil righteousness, 3<sup>rd</sup> use of the law)</p>	<p>Righteousness of the Gospel (righteousness of faith, imputed righteousness, etc.)</p>
Judgment of God	<p>Judgment of the Law (1<sup>st</sup> use of the law)</p>	<p>Judgment of the Gospel (2<sup>nd</sup> use of the law)</p>
	Known in the world	Known through Christ, church, etc.

As in the two kingdoms doctrine or the two kinds of righteousness, this description differentiates between an earthly or civil righteousness and a spiritual righteousness that comes through the gospel of Jesus Christ. At the same time, the addition of the law and gospel dynamic shows God at work not only in righteousness but also in judgment. For the reformers, this judgment can serve not only negative but positive and beneficial purposes.

## 5a. The Righteousness of the Law

Starting in the upper-left section, we see Bugenhagen describing the righteousness of the law. God wants goodness in our personal, social and religious lives. As Paul wrote in Romans 1 and 2, all people have known some form of moral, natural and even inspired religious law. Even at our best, however, this righteousness only comes through God's grace; Luther wrote in his Galatians commentary, "by the righteousness of the Law we do nothing even when we do much; we do not fulfill the Law even when we fulfill it."<sup>36</sup> Because original sin includes an inborn lack of trust in God,<sup>37</sup> the Wittenbergers cut off any chance that the righteousness of the law might be achieved and become truly righteous in either the civil or heavenly sense. As Melanchthon wrote in the Apology, "Paul teaches that we are acceptable on account of Christ and not on account of the observance of the law, because our observance of the law is imperfect."<sup>38</sup>

As an aside, it seems that the "righteousness of the law" is a good place to understand the so-called "third use of the law," as described in Formula of Concord VI: "Believers... do without coercion, with a willing spirit, insofar as they are born anew, what no threat of the law could ever force from them."<sup>39</sup> While some theologians have disputed this use of the law, Bugenhagen's lifelong interest in the proper relationship between faith and good works makes this a fairly simple point.<sup>40</sup> When Christians do God's will, then that is good and holy, even though such works never justify and are never done apart from the Holy Spirit and faith. As Augsburg Confession VI states, "faith should yield good fruit and good works."<sup>41</sup> As we attempt to preach Christ alone in an age of pluralism it is good for us to keep in mind that God delights in works of love and concern for the good of all our neighbors. That is, good works of love and righteousness in this earthly life are blessed godly effects

(but never causes) of justification.<sup>42</sup>

## **5b. The Judgment of the Law**

Of course, it is vain to imagine that we spend our lives enjoying the righteousness of the law. As Bugenhagen cited from Luther, “In the world the judgment and righteousness of the law is known, but it is not performed.” Instead, we live most of our lives under the condemnation of the law, in which people and institutions do not willingly serve the common good, act according to God’s commandments or love others as Christ loved us; this includes Christians. Commenting on the fourth commandment, Luther asked, “Why do you think the world is now so full of unfaithfulness, shame, misery, and murder? It is because all want to be their own lords, to be free of all authority, to care nothing for anyone, and to do whatever they please. So God punishes one scoundrel by means of another, so that when you defraud or despise your lord, another person comes along and treats you likewise.”<sup>43</sup> By wanting to be our “own lords” we have not only broken the fourth commandment but the first, so that our lives are marked by vicious cycles of one scoundrel being punished by another.<sup>44</sup>

Even though punishment for civil unrighteousness does not belong to God’s saving righteousness, it is nevertheless also righteous, since God is just in condemning sin. This is where the life-preserving first use of the law is at work. The world is a better place when people drive on the proper side of the road, do not kill, commit adultery, steal, bear false witness, and so on. Stated positively, the “judgment of the law” is where so much important work takes place on earth. We need good laws, good education, good science, good health care, and good law enforcement, imperfect though these things will be on this side of heaven. Here Paul’s exhortation in Romans 13 to obey authorities and pay taxes finds its proper place, since “rulers

are not a threat to good conduct, but to bad.” While such judgment is rightly called God’s alien work, the judgment of the law is nevertheless holy and blessed because here too God is working to promote life and goodness in creation.

This is where I would put most efforts to reform church and society, including the confessionalizing church orders of the Reformation and our own efforts to live out the ELCA slogan “God’s work, our hands” today. Because of original sin, it is not a question of *if* we need rules for daily life but rather how beneficial and effective our structures and actions will be. We need government, education and strong public institutions like we need daily bread. Though our efforts never result in our achieving even a true active or civil righteousness, they can still beneficially curb sin and assist neighbors in need. Further, in the theology of the cross, the “judgment of the law,” the thankless and – in this life – endless work of serving the neighbor, becomes a holy expression of faith active in love.

## **5c. The Judgment of the Gospel**

The judgment of the gospel begins where people have no interest in or strength for serving our neighbors, for this judgment announces that we suffer not simply from practical problems but from a fundamentally spiritual affliction which cannot be solved by better adherence to civil, moral or religious law. This was Luther’s great insight: his attempt to live according to the righteousness of the law kept getting undone by the judgment of the gospel, so that the words “In your righteousness, deliver me, O Lord” sounded like a threat. In God’s righteousness, God punishes sin, which makes seeking the ever-elusive active righteousness of the law a fool’s errand and a torturous task. Instead of seeking righteousness through an active or cooperating love, Luther started to find comfort in the purely external word of God, which comes first as judgment and then as

promise. According to historian Berndt Hamm,

God's speech – the biblical word about Christ – encounters sinners as a word of judgment and promise, *iudicium* and *promissio*. People respond to both sides of this divine speech in faith. The judgmental word exposes and condemns them in their profound evil. At that point, faith means admitting the truth of this judgment, recognizing the desperate condition before God, and prayerfully confessing sins to God by personally applying that divine judgment that accuses, judges, and condemns... they apply the truth of the judgmental word of God to themselves, realizing that, as sinful creatures, they truly are nothing before God...<sup>45</sup>

Civil, moral or religious laws cannot give us any solution to our chronic spiritual problem. We learn this only through the revelation of God's righteous judgment against our fundamental lack of faith and goodness. As revelation, the judgment of the gospel is a heavenly message. But because this revelation begins with condemnation, in a fascinating phrase the writers of the Formula of Concord described such gospel judgment as "an alien work of Christ."<sup>46</sup>

As a divine word, the proclamation of God's law is a proper work of the church.<sup>47</sup> Through such preaching, faith first assents to God's true judgments against sin and then passively experiences its justification as pure gift. As Formula of Concord II says,

Through these means (the preaching and hearing of his Word), God goes about his work and breaks our hearts and draws people, so that they recognize their sins and God's wrath through the preaching of the law and feel real terror, regret, and sorrow in their hearts. Through the preaching of the holy gospel of the gracious forgiveness of sins in Christ and through meditating upon it, a spark of faith is ignited in

them, and they accept the forgiveness of sins for Christ's sake and receive the comfort of the promise of the gospel. In this way the Holy Spirit, who effects all of this, is sent into their hearts.<sup>48</sup>

In the world we know the righteousness of the law, even though we do not achieve anything that comes close to the love, harmony and service that the law requires. But God has sent us a remedy: the preaching of a message that first condemns our unrighteousness and lack of faith in order to deliver a saving righteousness and liberation that comes from the Lord alone.

## **5d. The Righteousness of the Gospel**

The gift that the Christian Church offers the world is a righteousness that occurs beyond merit, morality or law. Instead of leaving us on our own to achieve unattainable ideals, Christ frees us from the demands and vicious cycles of the law. By trusting the promise that God forgives sin and makes all things new, this righteousness is ours. While the family and the state might have a role in supporting this good news, it is the church on earth that God graciously created to be the steward of this message of salvation.

In this light, we see how "although later numbered as a separate article," Augsburg Confession V simply continues the Holy Spirit's justifying work of article IV.<sup>49</sup> Article V states, "to obtain such [saving and justifying] faith God instituted the office of preaching, giving the gospel and the sacraments. Through these, as through means, he gives the Holy Spirit who produces faith, where and when he wills, in those who hear the gospel."<sup>50</sup> The church is the delivery system for the gospel.<sup>51</sup> What happens when the gospel is received? The answer to that question comes in article VI, which says that this faith yields good works like a good tree bears good fruit. Taken together,

articles four, five and six present a Spirit-based progression from the faith that justifies, to the church as the means of receiving this justification, on to the good effect of that free justification: a new obedience to God's will and true service to the neighbor.

Sharing this saving message and blessed effect is why the church exists in every age. In a world of impossible law, the gospel of Jesus Christ remains fresh and life-giving, today as much as ever. As the reformers clearly and repeatedly said, the gospel does not remove believers from this fallen world. For since the way of Jesus Christ is the way of the cross, Christians follow their Lord not by escaping the world but by serving it. As Gerhard Forde asked, "What are you going to do, now that you don't have to do anything?"<sup>52</sup> What we are going to do is get back to the holy orders and spiritual vocations that God gave us in the first place: to be loving sons, daughters, sisters, brothers, parents and teachers, masterful servants and servant leaders, people who freely embrace the toil God has given us to toil with. Within the single holy order of baptism, some of us will be preachers, teachers, musicians, bishops and other leaders in the church. Such "church vocations" are not calls out of the world or higher callings than anyone else's but are calls to be stewards of the gospel, just as other callings involve stewardship of households, land, possessions and communities. To emphasize the practicality of this Lutheran dialectic, I have revised my chart to show God's good effects in each part of life.

***Chart 2: The Benefits of the Two Kinds of Righteousness, Squared***

	Earthly	Heavenly
Righteousness of God	Thanksgiving for earthly blessings	Thanksgiving for Gospel freedom
Judgment of God	Call to serve in daily life	Call to repent and believe <i>(Oct. 31, 1517: Thesis #1)</i>

In light of God's unmerited grace in supporting daily life, the benefits of earthly righteousness begin with simply knowing where our blessings come from. Since our life on earth remains marked by sin, the benefit of God's judgment is that we know and practice Christ-like service to the world. The benefit of heavenly righteousness is our free and totally unmerited justification received through faith. And 494 years later, the first of Luther's 95 Theses continues to call to us with a word that condemns sin and daily drives us back to Christ: "When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, 'Repent,' he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance."<sup>53</sup>

By giving us this dialectic that I have called "the two kinds of righteousness, squared," the Wittenberg tradition handed down not a set distinction between church and state but a lively way of thinking about how the gospel brings light to all aspects of life. In such a dialectic, we can say: yes, the church is holy and of God even as it is a human institution and not identical with the kingdom of heaven; and yes, while we know that earthly order and institutions are not the same as the righteousness of Christ, such mundane things are in fact holy and beneficial because they are God's creations and our incarnate means of serving one another.

## 6. Crossing Religious Diversity in the Wittenberg Tradition

As a final step towards offering some insights for preaching Christ alone in an age of pluralism, I will end this paper by applying the six-step analysis of the Crossings Community – itself a law and gospel dialectic – to this conversation. Crossing religious diversity in the Wittenberg tradition means that we first look for a presenting symptom.<sup>54</sup> One surface problem of religious diversity is that our secular and religious lives are marked by difference rather than unity and cooperation. Why can't we all just get along? This relatively shallow external problem of difference exposes a deeper internal sin. We want to control the spiritual, moral and physical lives of others. Let's confess it: we want Christendom! But that's precisely the desire for secular and spiritual control that Luther condemned in both the papacy and the radical reformers. It is also the wrongheaded desire that Christ challenged when he said, "You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to be become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:42-45). Religious diversity forces us to see that we are not in control of others and have not been willing servants (let alone slaves) of all.

Christ's word also points to the eternal problem that confronts us in religious diversity: no one but Christ has been given as a ransom for others. We are not God and we do not give, create or sustain life for ourselves or for anyone else. Christ alone has brought us to life by giving his life as a ransom. Our attempts

at religious coercion, spiritual discipline and social control of others are signs that we have idolatrously set ourselves up in the place of God. Religious diversity confronts us with the eternal challenge that the Lord alone is creator, judge and savior of the nations. In this case, Christ's word to us may be, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 7:21-23). This word of gospel judgment identifies the hell that comes from our zeal to lord it over others.

As the reformers wrote in tall letters for fast-moving people like us to see clearly all these centuries later, the ransom of Jesus Christ becomes ours through faith. Instead of our need to be lords, God can be God and we can be ourselves, free of the need to lord it over others. See how our Christian freedom means freedom for others! I mean this not only in a political sense, as when we tolerate others because the first amendment tells us to, but also in a spiritual sense. Having been set free by Christ without respect to merit, we are free to love and serve others without respect to their merit. Neighbors do not need to be the right kind of neighbor for us to serve them. A final gospel change then occurs not in the blessing of the status quo but in the total transformation of society. In Christ, we no longer live in a world of competing ideologies, moralities or even salvations. In Christ, we are free to love this world as Christ loves it: selflessly and totally. The government does not have to be the right kind of government for us to work for the common good. The economy does not need to be made righteous before we do the right things within it. We are free to love and serve God without fear even when – and especially when – our neighbors do not look like us or worship like us. For us in the Wittenberg tradition, this message and ministry is what it means to preach Christ alone in an age of pluralism.

Thank you for your attention.

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23 LW 7:312.

24 BC 357.14.

25 BC 400.103-410.178 and 449.71-452.84 (Luther's explanations to the fourth commandment and "daily bread," respectively).

26 LW 51:70-100 (The Invocavit Sermons).

27 BC 50.7. This conscience clause also appears in article 28 of the Augsburg Confession, in the Apology, and in the Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope (BC 102-3.75, 292.21, 294.25, and 336.38, respectively).

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32 LW 54:42-43, number 312.

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34 LW 31:293-306.

35 LW 26:4-12.

36 LW 26:8. Note the same use of "the righteousness of the law" described by Bugenhagen.

37 BC 36.1-38.3.

38 BC 155.231.

39 BC 503.7.

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41 BC 40.1-3.

42 See also BC 56.35-39 (AC XX).

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44 See also the reformers' use of 1 Peter 4:17 ("the time has come for judgment to begin with the household of God"), as in BC 214.151.

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54 For examples of the Crossings method, visit [www.crossings.org](http://www.crossings.org).

[PreachingChristAloneinanAgeofPluralism \(PDF\)](#)

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# Preaching Christ Alone in an Age of Pluralism: Insights from the Wittenberg Tradition

By Martin Lohrmann  
International Crossings Conference – January 2014  
Belleville, IL

## *Outline of the Work*

Introduction and Overview

1. Pluralism in the United States
2. The Medieval Context: Western Christendom
3. The Reformation as an Age of Confessionalization
4. The Three Estates:
  - Household
  - State
  - Church
5. The Two Kinds of Righteousness, Squared (See charts 1 & 2 on the back of this page)

*“I [Luther] did not know that through the preaching and the Holy Scripture of Christ’s church there was a twofold judgment of God, one of the law and another of the gospel, and likewise a twofold righteousness of God, one of the law and another of*

*the gospel. In the world the judgment and righteousness of the law is known, but it is not performed; but – as the prophets announced – David’s son, our Lord Jesus Christ, would bring about the judgment and righteousness of God through the gospel when he was upon the earth, as in Jeremiah 23[:5]: “He will make judgment and righteousness on the earth, etc.”<sup>1</sup>*

5a. The Righteousness of the Law 5b. The Judgment of the Law

5c. The Judgment of the Gospel

5d. The Righteousness of the Gospel

6. Crossing Religious Diversity in the Wittenberg Tradition

1. External difference

2. The desire to control

3. The desire to be lords

4. The freedom to be the Lord’s

5. The freedom to let others be the Lord’s

6. The freedom to serve unconditionally

1 Cited in Martin Lohrmann, *Bugenhagen’s Jonah* (Minneapolis: University Lutheran Press, 2012), 125.

***Chart 1: The Two Kinds of Righteousness, Squared***

	Active Righteousness	Passive Righteousness
Righteousness of God	Righteousness of the Law <i>(civil righteousness, 3<sup>rd</sup> use of the law)</i>	Righteousness of the Gospel <i>(righteousness of faith, imputed righteousness, etc.)</i>
Judgment of God	Judgment of the Law <i>(1<sup>st</sup> use of the law)</i>	Judgment of the Gospel <i>(2<sup>nd</sup> use of the law)</i>
	Known in the world	Known through Christ, church, etc.

**Chart 2: The Benefits of the Two Kinds of Righteousness, Squared**

	Earthly	Heavenly
Righteousness of God	Thanksgiving for earthly blessings	Thanksgiving for gospel freedom & free justification
Judgment of God	Call to serve in daily life	Call to repent and believe <i>(Oct. 31, 1517: Thesis #1)</i>

[PreachingChristAlone-handout \(PDF\)](#)

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# Responding to Various Proposals Regarding Religious

# Pluralism

Crossings Conference, Belleville IL,

Tues, 1/28/2014

Rev. Dr. Jukka Kääriäinen

## INTRODUCTION

My assigned topic is “Responding to the Various Proposals Regarding Religious Pluralism.” Let’s clarify the parameters of my task, what I will be engaged in and what, while fascinating and worthwhile, I simply do not have time for. To that end, two important, preliminary distinctions need to be made. First, let’s distinguish between responding to *religious pluralism*, which all people do either reflectively or unreflectively, and responding to various *proposals regarding* religious pluralism (the realm of theologians/ scholars). While overlapping, these should not be confused. Responding to religious pluralism begins by acknowledging our religiously pluralistic world, then elaborates various practices, attitudes, and strategies one should adopt, such as humility, empathy, understanding, hospitality, compassion, interreligious dialogue, witness, evangelism, commitment both to one’s tradition and to the common good, etc. (Catherine Cornille, Brian McLaren). While noble, these are not technically the same thing as responding to various *proposals regarding* religious pluralism. For our purposes, it may be helpful to think of the proposals regarding pluralism as theological frameworks within and from which the practical strategies, responses, and practices unfold. The proposals themselves are sophisticated scaffoldings outlining a mansion; the lived practices are concrete responses, specific rooms within that mansion.

Secondly, what are the various, possible responses to pluralism?

Let's map the proverbial forest within which I will focus on two specific trees. In response to the question, "Is there any basis for hope that those who do not hear of Christ in this life will be saved?"<sup>i</sup> Christopher Morgan offers a ninefold typology (printed in your outline), expanding the traditional threefold typology of exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism. Given time constraints, I cannot possibly address, let alone do justice to the complex nuances of, all nine positions. Nor am I competent to do so. Instead, I will limit myself to addressing proposal #6, "**world religions inclusivism.**" Within this view of the world religions as legitimate pathways to God's inclusive, saving grace in Christ, I will grapple with two positions in particular: 1) the inclusive pluralism of the late Jacques Dupuis, and 2) S. Mark Heim's "acceptance model" which proposes many different salvations and radical difference as the basis for real, robust dialogue.

In analyzing and responding to Dupuis and Heim, what theological assumptions/ convictions am I working from? My Lutheran tools/ resources fall into three main categories: 1) the gospel as God's surprising, powerful promise, 2) the law/ gospel distinction, and 3) the distinction between the hidden and revealed God. As Ed Schroeder notes, "When it comes to promises, different world religions offer different promises, each calling for the hearer to have faith in that promise. The data of comparative religion is comparative promises and the comparative faiths that these promises call for." Oswald Bayer captures these classic Lutheran resources:

There are three, irreducibly different ways in which God encounters us... a. in the conflict with the law that judges me, that convicts me with regard to my sins, that accuses me, and that delivers me over to the final judgment of death; b. in the promise of the gospel, in which God himself speaks by means of Jesus Christ on my behalf, indeed takes my place; and

c. in the assault of the hiddenness of God, which cannot be understood merely as the effect of the law and which so radically contradicts the gospel in an... incomprehensible way.<sup>ii</sup>

Furthermore, Orthodox theologian Michael Oleksa offers a challenging claim we do well to always keep in mind—"The Christian, while knowing where Christ is, can never be certain where he is not."<sup>iii</sup> (repeat) For Lutheran theology, the Gospel as promise, safeguarded by the law/Gospel distinction, seeks to offer a robust account of where Christ can be known and embraced: in the Gospel promise of forgiveness and mercy, and its attendant invitation to trust that promise in faith. While hopeful concerning and open to being surprised by Christ's presence in unexpected places, it nonetheless cautions theologies based on the "nature/grace" paradigm, such as Dupuis' and Heim's, as insufficiently attending to the deep reality of sin and brokenness in their articulation of Christ and the Spirit's work among the religions.

## **INCLUSIVE PLURALISM: GRACE AS NATURE FULFILLED (Jacques Dupuis)**

In my judgment, Jacques Dupuis' position of inclusive pluralism offers the most nuanced, robust, and cutting-edge example of a Roman Catholic response to religious pluralism, based on a transcendental theology of grace fulfilling nature. In his own words:

While gratefully acknowledging my dependence on Karl Rahner, I also claim to go beyond his open inclusivism. Rahner affirms a "transitory" saving efficacy of the religious traditions in individual cases of persons who have not yet been confronted with the mystery of Christ and received the grace of faith in him. I put no such restrictions in time or extension to the

efficacy of the traditions in the order of salvation for their followers... (My perspective) is no longer limited to the problem of 'salvation'... or even to the role of those traditions in the salvation of their members. It searches more deeply... for the meaning of God's design for humankind of the plurality of living faiths with which we are surrounded... The convergence between the religious traditions will reach its goal in the eschaton with the 'recapitulation' (Eph. 1:10) of all things in Christ... [This] is the common, final fulfillment of Christianity and the religions.iv

Dupuis' position, "while holding fast to faith in Jesus Christ as traditionally understood... integrate(s), in their differences, the religious experiences of the living religious traditions and assign(s) to those traditions a positive role and significance in [God's overall] plan for humanity, as it unfolds through salvation history."v He prefers naming the universal uniqueness of Jesus Christ as "constitutive" and "relational," rather than "absolute" or "exclusive." Dupuis insists on holding together the universal presence of Christ (via Spirit and Logos Christology) with the particularity of salvation through Christ (via Trinitarian Christology).vi This salvific significance of Christ, far from being exclusive, must be understood in radically inclusive terms on the basis of the cumulative effect of these five principles.

1) First, as the incarnate Son and Logos, Jesus Christ does not exhaust the mystery of God. In terms of the immanent Trinity, God has more revelation to reveal than God can and has revealed in the historical Christ event.vii 2) Second, not only was the pre-incarnate Logos (Logos asarkos) active throughout the world and in the history of religions, but it continues, post-incarnation, its universal ministry in the world and among the religions. 3) Third, While Jesus alone is the Christ and Son of God, "other 'saving figures' may be . . . 'enlightened' by the

Word or 'inspired' by the Spirit to become pointers to salvation for their followers, in accordance with God's overall design for humankind."viii The role of these other saving figures, however, is inclusive in relation to Christ: ". . . their role does not consist in saving; it is limited to pointing to paths where salvation through the mystery of Christ may be encountered."ix

4) Fourth, the concrete mediation of divine grace happens through the other religious traditions in their historical, social forms.x

5) Fifth, the Spirit *may* be doing something truly different from what one finds in Jesus Christ as the incarnate Word of God, precisely in and through other religions as social structures, yet never contradictory to the revelation of Christ. "God may have- and indeed seems to have- more to say to humanity than what God has said in Jesus."xi

While that may be true, Jesus still serves as a safeguard on what the Spirit may say or do: "Christ, not the Spirit, is at the center as the way to God."xii

In other words: whatever God has to say, through the Spirit, in other religions, must be understood and interpreted "in light of" Christ. Dupuis summarizes how various elements coalesce to build his theology of revelation and appreciation of the distinctive "truth and grace" other religions offer:

The Trinitarian Christological model, the universal enlightenment of the Word of God, and the enlivening by his Spirit make it possible to discover, in other saving figures and traditions, truth and grace not brought out with the same vigor and clarity in God's revelation and manifestation in Jesus Christ. Truth and grace found elsewhere must not be reduced to 'seeds' or 'stepping stones' simply to be nurtured or used and then superseded in Christian revelation. They represent additional and autonomous benefits. More divine truth and grace are found operative in the entire history of God's dealings with humankind than are available simply in the Christian tradition. As the 'human face' or 'icon' of God,

Jesus Christ gives to Christianity its specific and singular character. But, while he is constitutive of salvation for all, he neither excludes nor includes other saving figures or traditions. If he brings salvation history to a climax, it is by way not of substitution or supersession but of confirmation and accomplishment.<sup>xiii</sup>

Religious pluralism is not simply to be endured as a *de facto* reality, but rather should be celebrated and embraced in principle (*de jure*) as a divine gift. Why? If the Spirit is able to grant revelation which truly, substantially differs from that received in and through Jesus, then the other religions must have a “lasting role” and “specific meaning,” both for Christians and for adherents of those religions, because they demonstrate “truth and grace not made explicit with the same force and clarity in the revelation and manifestation of God in Jesus Christ.”<sup>xiv</sup> This means that other faiths cannot be mere stepping stones, leading inevitably to Christianity (traditional inclusivism). “Jesus Christ is indeed the constitutive Savior of humankind, and the Christ event is the cause of the salvation of all human beings; but this does not prevent the other traditions from serving as ‘mediations’ of the mystery of salvation in Jesus Christ for their followers within God’s design for humankind.”<sup>xv</sup> Dupuis’ Trinitarian framework seeks to overcome the pitfalls of both exclusivist and inclusivist paradigms without falling into the pluralist paradigm, seeking to combine a robust, Christological inclusivism with an affirmation of religious pluralism in principle.

Building on all this, the pinnacle of Dupuis’ argument is a distinctive view of the Reign of God as a reality that all the religions, as co-heirs, are already participating in and together working to build. As Dupuis puts it:

The presence of the church-as-sign of the Reign of God in the

world bears witness, therefore, that God has established in this world his Reign in Jesus Christ. Furthermore, as efficacious sign, the church contains and effects the reality which it signifies, giving access to the Reign of God through word and sacrament. However, the necessity of the church is not of such a nature that access to the Reign of God would be possible only through being members of it; the 'others' *can be part of the Reign of God and of Christ without being members of the church. The presence of the Reign of God in the church is, nevertheless, a privileged one, for it has received from Christ 'the fullness of the benefits and means of salvation' (Redemptoris Missio 18).*<sup>xvi</sup>

In conclusion: Dupuis' inclusive pluralism, building on Rahner's transcendental theology, seeks to present the eschatological vision of all things being reunited under Christ by synthesizing a Trinitarian, constitutive Christology with a robust pneumatology. Thus far Dupuis. I now turn to explain Mark Heim's position.

## **SALVATIONS: THE GOSPEL AND MULTIPLE RELIGIOUS ENDS (S. Mark Heim)**

S. Mark Heim proposes a complex, challenging approach to religious pluralism which, following Paul Knitter, I'll call the "acceptance model." What does Heim propose or insist we "accept"? Radical, deep differences between the religions. Various religions, rather than being merely different means to the same religious goal, different paths up the same mountain, in fact aim at and offer different religious ends. There is no single fate/ destiny for all humanity. Heim answers the crucial question exclusivists and inclusivists struggle with, "How can non-Christians who have never heard of the one Savior find salvation?" by dissolving the question: just add an "s" to

salvation, making it plural! His book title, "Salvations: Truth and Difference in Religion," makes this abundantly clear: the religions, rather than pursuing one destiny or salvation, offer different truths and paths to achieve different salvations or religious goals. Buddhists arrive at enlightenment, Hindus arrive at nirvana, Christians arrive at union with the triune God, and all are happy or fulfilled in their own right. "There is no way to live the Jewish life except the Jewish way; there is no way to the Buddhist end but the Buddhist way." In other words: different truths, different paths, different goals, multiple religious ends.

How is such radical diversity possible? Because the Trinity is unity in diversity. According to Heim, real religious differences are grounded in differences in God, or Ultimate Reality. Following Nicholas Rescher's orientational pluralism, Heim lays out three logical possibilities in approaching Ultimate Reality: 1) There is only one Ultimate, which either excludes or includes all other religious ultimates (exclusivist or inclusivist position). 2) There is only one Ultimate, equally present and revealed in the different religions (pluralist position). 3) There is a "multiplicity of Ultimates," multiple absolutes, which forms the philosophical basis for Heim's "acceptance" approach. This complex philosophical claim admittedly stretches the bounds of logic. As a Christian theologian, Heim seeks to ground the unity of religious diversity within the framework of the Trinity. "Just as none of the three divine persons are 'better' or 'fuller' or 'more absolute' than any other, so none of the diverse religions can be said to be 'more absolute' than any other... Can't [we] say the same of the religions?"xvii

Paul Knitter summarizes Heim's approach succinctly: "What is true of God is true of the world God created: to affirm the being of God as Trinitarian—a community of differences in

relationship—is to also affirm that all beings must draw their [life] from differences that give rise to relationship... Just as there is a variety of relations within God, so there is ‘the possibility of a variety of distinct relations with God.’ We can expect... that there will be multiple, really different (just as the divine persons of the Trinity are really different) ways in which creatures will relate to, and find their fulfillment in, God... and we can expect those different ways of relating are going to take concrete, living form in the religions of the world.”<sup>xviii</sup> As Heim puts it, “The Trinity is a map that finds room for, indeed requires, concrete truth in other religions.”<sup>xix</sup> While the “permanently co-existing truths” of different religious ways form parallel paths toward different fulfillments or multiple absolutes, nonetheless Heim also speaks of a gradation or “hierarchy” of such religious ends. From a Christian perspective, “Communion with the triune God is thought to encompass dimensions of other fulfillments, to be better because more consistent with the nature of the ultimate and so more inclusive.” In other words, while “there is a ‘hierarchy’ between full communion with the triune God and lesser, restricted participations,” nevertheless “there is no loss. There is no evil in such plenitude.” Rather than a strict dichotomy of heaven and hell, the overflowing plenitude and depths of the Triune God’s loving purposes is analogous to Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, resulting in circles of paradise or layers of heaven. While other religious ways may find their fulfillment in different corners of Christian heaven, and while “this may seem inferior to what Christians have in their experience of God as personal and triune, but that is not at all the way... it is felt by-others.”<sup>xx</sup>

I conclude my brief summary of Heim’s “acceptance” model by letting Heim speak for himself. First, “this approach shifts the focus away from flat claims of truth and falsehood and toward

concrete religious alternatives. We ask not, 'Which religion alone is true?' but 'What end is most ultimate, even if many ends are real?'... in approaching religious differences, emphasis falls on the contrast of their *positive* ends. The Christian gospel is not just preached against false religions, but it is witnessed as an alternative among other true religions."xxi In conclusion, "The decisive and universal significance of Christ is for Christians *both* the necessary ground for particularistic witness *and* the basis for recognizing in other religious traditions their own particularistic integrity. We are only beginning to appreciate the ways in which this conviction must be embodied in our theology and practice. But the way forward lies *through* this conviction, not around it. Therefore, the way forward lies equally *through* the distinctive convictions of my neighbors, not around them."xxii

## **RESPONDING TO AND EVALUATING DUPUIS' AND HEIM'S PROPOSALS**

In evaluating Dupuis' inclusive pluralist proposal and Heim's acceptance proposal, I believe it's important to engage them on their own terms rather than criticize them for not being Lutherans and therefore not using beloved Lutheran categories such as law and gospel, grace and promise. Before engaging in constructive critique from Lutheran convictions, it's crucial for us to affirm what we can learn from these two thinkers, what insights we can appreciate, what gifts they offer that we can receive. I believe they deserve and we owe them that much. To that end, I see both Dupuis and Heim offering us six strong insights.

First, both proposals are creative, robust attempts to flesh out postmodern Christian responses to pluralism embodying both a robust commitment to Jesus and a bold openness toward other

religions. Both Dupuis and Heim seek to *take both poles of the universality-particularity paradox* (how God's universal will to save the world should be balanced with the particularity of salvation through Christ) *seriously*, without compromise. Secondly, both thinkers are rigorously *Christocentric* in the sense that they insist Jesus Christ is the constitutive cause and source of salvation. Third, both proposals demonstrate a vibrant, creative *recovery of the Trinity* as crucial for a Christian theology of religions. Fourthly, both proposals underscore the truth that, while our approaches to religious pluralism may differ, we are all inevitably *inclusivists*. From the position of our "confessional ultimate reality" (Catherine Cornille), we inevitably "judge the truth of the other... on the basis of our own particular worldview and norms. This "becomes a matter of hermeneutical necessity rather than theological triumph."xxiii As Paul Knitter notes, "We are always-incorrigibly and incurably-going to view, hear, and understand the [religious other] from our own religious perspective. That's simply how things work."xxiv To claim otherwise is misleading and dishonest. Fifthly, both Dupuis and Heim affirm the abiding *value of enduring religious differences*. Religions truly, deeply, and forevermore are different, period. These differences are not just to be tolerated, or exploited as bridges for contextualizing the Gospel, but rather affirmed and celebrated as inherently valuable, as "more life-giving and more God-revealing than similarities."xxv We should resist our natural urge to harmonize differences. Finally, sixthly, both proposals stress the *inherent value of dialogue*. We ought to inductively engage in interreligious dialogue and comparative theology, rather than merely deductively formulate a theology of religions without lived knowledge or experience of other religions. Efforts to build a theology of religions must begin with dialogue. The danger in theologizing before dialoguing, theorizing before engaging, or mapping the territory before

exploring it is that we inoculate ourselves against “the power and novelty of other religious traditions.”<sup>xxvi</sup> From this perspective, dialogue doesn’t merely have instrumental, practical value as a means to the greater end of Gospel proclamation; dialogue is inherently valuable.

Having affirmed these contributions, I now move to a constructive critique and engagement with both proposals. While Dupuis’ and Heim’s proposals are distinct, I believe enough overlap exists between them at certain key points to warrant evaluating their commonalities together. I will constructively critique/ evaluate both proposals in terms of a cluster of related concerns centering on 1) theological method/ framework, 2) Christology, 3) how to relate inductive and deductive approaches, especially in how one practically relates dialogue and Gospel proclamation, and 4) how language functions in the cultural-linguistic approach, whether it’s a connecting bridge toward other religions (my approach) or a prison isolating the various religions into linguistic ghettos (Heim).

1) We begin with *theological method and overall framework*. I’ll first direct a distinctive critique toward Heim’s foundational argument (philosophical method), that there are multiple religious ends and salvations. This method entails some significant, unresolved tensions. All religions, Heim claims, are to be recognized as being completely right in their own terms, and these claims are epistemically justified, even if they may be mistaken. But how can this be? Can all be right?<sup>xxvii</sup> *On the one hand*, many salvations would seem to imply many absolutes. But talk of “many absolutes” is a logical contradiction. As Knitter notes, “to suggest that there are many absolute expressions of truth is to imply that there are no absolute expressions of truth.”<sup>xxviii</sup> *On the other hand*, “one of these absolute truths—Christian revelation—will, in the end, prove more absolute than all the others, for it will be only on

the Christian mountain that we can understand the Trinitarian nature of God and see how all the other religions can be understood and ranked.”<sup>xxix</sup> This tension remains unresolved in Heim’s thought, for *full commitment to Christ seems to preclude full openness to other ways*.

Furthermore, both Dupuis’ and Heim’s theological methods exemplify *revelationism*, a particular way of relating the categories of revelation and salvation based on the Rahnerian, “nature/grace” paradigm. Such an approach marginalizes the revelation of sin and law, rejects the nuanced distinction between revelation and salvation, and insists that “revelation is universal, even as is the offer of salvation.”<sup>xxx</sup> Their choice of a Trinitarian framework is understandable, since it provides both Dupuis and Heim a broad enough, umbrella category which unifies the diversity of other religious ways. While they employ different pathways for advancing communion of religious others with the Trinity (Dupuis emphasizing the reign of God, Heim emphasizing diversity within the Trinity), both employ the Trinity as a foundation for grounding the paradoxes of universality and particularity, unity in diversity. This is understandable.

In contrast, a Lutheran theology of religions, like Lutheran theology in general, rightly is concerned to identify and utilize the Gospel as the promise of grace/ mercy in Christ, if not as the starting point, at the very least as a guiding principle in engaging religious pluralism. The nature of the Gospel and grace, and the proper recognition of their counterparts, law and sin, would seem to be essential for a Lutheran response to pluralism. As I’ve argued in my doctoral dissertation/ book, if the Gospel is essentially a promise of God, and if the nature of the Gospel ought to shape and direct the nature of mission, then the Church’s mission should also be grounded in and an extension of God’s gracious promise in

Christ. Therefore, to the extent that Dupuis and Heim make the eschatological recapitulation of all in Christ (Dupuis) and the Trinity (Heim) their overarching framework, and to the extent that they apply a theology of grace based on Rahner's transcendental theology, to that extent it is not surprising that their theology of grace, from a Lutheran perspective, is insufficiently nuanced.<sup>xxx</sup> In their articulation of how God's loving grace is mediated through the diverse religions, Dupuis and Heim not only pay insufficient attention to the reality and relevance of sin, but also fail to account for the accusatory function of the law (*lex semper accusat*). Gerhard Forde's reminder, "Love is not served by attempting to erase wrath from the system,"<sup>xxxi</sup> cautions these proposals not to completely forego grappling with sin, the law, and divine wrath, lest in their eagerness to affirm grace and spiritual fulfillment in the religions they end up with a God other than the Biblical "God of grace and truth."

2) My second cluster of concerns centers around *Christology*. Do Dupuis' and Heim's understandings of how Christ is Savior, how He relates to the Spirit and the Church, *undermine* the need for Gospel witness or the necessity of Christian conversion? If not, how so? Their Christologies seem to me to have this, perhaps unintentional, consequence. As a missiologist living in a predominantly Buddhist context, this is an urgently practical question for me. In their elaborations of Christ as "constitutive" and "unique," but not "absolute" or "exclusive" Savior, I sense some unresolved ambiguity.

Let's begin with Heim. In claiming, "The Trinity teaches us that Jesus Christ cannot be... the exhaustive or exclusive act of God to save us," Heim boldly moves beyond George Lindbeck and others who stress that all salvation is "only through Christ." In affirming *both* Jesus as the "constitutive cause" of salvation for Christians *and* the possibility of other, different mediators

or saving figures for the different salvations in other religions, does Heim not compromise the normativity and universality of Jesus as Savior? It sure seems that way to me. If other mediators or saving figures are possible, and Jesus is merely the cause of salvation for Christians, why would anyone ever convert to and embrace the Christian gospel? Heim claims: "The fact that this unity [of God's plan] has been manifested to us in Christ... means that Christians will look for a convergence [of all religions in communion with the triune God], but this in no way requires [such convergence]."xxxiii Again, a seeming tension exists between the Heim's Christian desire for convergence and his stated conviction of multiple religious ends.

Let's now consider Dupuis' Christology: How can Jesus Christ be both "constitutive" for salvation and "relative" at the same time? How does Jesus' fullness as "qualitative, not quantitative," and the affirmation of other saving figures, square with his affirmation of Jesus as unique, universal Savior? Does Dupuis' understanding of the relationship between the reign of God and the Church undermine the Church's role of Gospel proclamation? If other religions and their adherents are already co-heirs of the reign of God, is explicit conversion to Christianity still a valid goal and activity of the Church's mission? If so, why, and on what grounds? In articulating the relationship between reign of God and Church, Dupuis seemingly downplays the role of the Church. As Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen notes, "Dupuis [seems to believe] that linking salvation and the role of Christ too closely to the church would make the church take the place of Christ. This is an unnecessary and theologically less than convincing fear... If the church is made the instrument of salvation only for Christians, then the biblically based view of the church as the sign of the unity of humankind and the coming of the new creation (Rev 21) is

compromised.”xxxiv

Furthermore, for both Dupuis and Heim, does the Gospel and Christian faith need to be supplemented/ complemented by other religions in order to be complete? Heim claims, “The testimony of the religions is essential for internal Christian life.”xxxv In what way, on what grounds? Does such testimony simply enhance our understanding and empathy toward the religious other, deepen our witness, or is Heim talking about something more substantial and internal to Christian life? How does such testimony help us live as disciples of Christ?

3)My third set of concerns revolves around balancing *deductive vs. inductive approaches* to religious pluralism, especially in how one relates *dialogue and proclamation*. While Heim seeks to prioritize lived dialogue and the inductive practice of comparative theology before a deductive theology of religions, Knitter notes an unavoidable tension here and asks whether comparative theology can ever be “theology-free”: “Aren’t there also certain dangers in trying to engage in a dialogue with religions *before* we think about our theology of religions? Don’t we always bring certain attitudes, perspectives, and convictions to any conversation with [another]? And don’t these general predispositions influence the way we carry on the conversation?”xxxvi Yes, they are! Therefore a balance between deductive and inductive approaches is inevitable and necessary. Dupuis agrees: “I try to combine an inductive and a deductive method... This means that a treatment of the theology of religions cannot proceed simply *a priori* in a deductive way, but must first be based on contact with the concrete reality of religious plurality through interreligious dialogue. . . . [However], my way of proceeding remains largely *a priori*. . .”xxxvii

Moving now to dialogue and proclamation, while Heim eagerly advocates for dialogue, he says surprisingly little about

actual, concrete Christian proclamation and witness. I would appreciate hearing more from him about his understanding of the nature, content, form, and motivation for Christian witness. For example, in a chapter entitled "Wisdom and Witness," Heim states: "There is ample room to commend Christ [when] rightly expressed in relation to the neighbors' actual religious aim."<sup>xxxviii</sup> What does commending or necessitating Christ (Reformation dipstick) actually entail for Heim? Is Christian witness limited to a positive affirmation of the "true and good" in other religions, or is there room in Christian witness for commending what is "new" and "necessary" in Christ because it is deficient or lacking in the other?

Turning to Dupuis, as one of the chief architects behind the Vatican document *Dialogue and Proclamation*, he advocates for an "orientation" of dialogue toward proclamation, analogous to the mutual, yet asymmetrical complementarity between the religions and Christianity. While both are legitimate, necessary, and difficult tasks, nevertheless "[dialogue] cannot simply replace proclamation, but remains oriented towards proclamation, in so far as... the Church's evangelizing mission reaches in [proclamation] its climax and fullness."<sup>xxxix</sup> "The 'orientation' of dialogue toward proclamation in fact corresponds to the 'orientation' of the members of other religious traditions toward the church."<sup>xl</sup> Explained in terms of the reign of God: while the "not yet" aspect of God's reign necessitates ongoing dialogue, its "already" aspect in Jesus Christ equally necessitates Gospel proclamation.<sup>xli</sup> Dupuis explains further: "Whereas the other religious traditions... are destined to find in the Christ event their fullness of meaning—without being absorbed or dispossessed—the reverse is not true: God's self-giving in Jesus Christ is not in need of a true completion by other traditions."<sup>xlii</sup>

In my judgment, the ambiguous tension between how dialogue and

proclamation can both be “absolutely necessary” while dialogue is also “oriented” toward proclamation remains unresolved for Dupuis. To put it bluntly: “If one is really subsidiary to the other, can they both be absolutely necessary? If both are really taken to be absolutely necessary, can one of them be considered to be subsidiary to the other?”<sup>xliiii</sup> I submit that the hiddenness of God is a more fruitful category for relating dialogue and proclamation, but I’ll elaborate on that momentarily.

4) Fourthly, my final set of concerns revolves around issues of how George Lindbeck’s *cultural-linguistic model*, which both Heim and myself advocate for, uses *language*. While the cultural-linguistic insights that language profoundly shapes reality, that religions are self-contained “language games” with their own rules, is invaluablely fruitful, Lindbeck himself realizes the potential danger of language becoming a confining prison, turning “religions... into self-enclosed and incommensurable intellectual ghettos.”<sup>xliv</sup> A real danger of Heim’s proposal is this: in his zeal to affirm enduring religious differences, does the distance between religions preclude any common meeting place, platform, or language for dialogue? How can incommensurably different, diverse religions find a unified meeting place? Or are they doomed to remain isolated ghettos? To quote Knitter: Is language a prism [that] influences and colors all that we see and know, or is it a confining *prison*, a restrictively unchangeable perspective we are stuck with, preventing us from truly encountering others?

## **HIDDENNESS OF GOD- DIALOGICAL POINT OF CONTACT**

I believe that a common platform and meeting place for meaningful interreligious dialogue exists. I submit that a broad range of common, overlapping human experiences can be

intelligibly described and compared under Luther's notion of divine hiddenness. The category of "the hidden God" (*deus absconditus*) serves as a bridge between a Lutheran theology of grace and the broader context of religious pluralism. As a theology centered on promise, my Lutheran approach is best able to establish a dialogical point of contact with others when it engages them through the category of God's hiddenness, xlv a fruitful category in at least three ways: 1) When grounded in a theology of the cross, it facilitates an ecumenical approach toward religious pluralism; 2) It connects "Lutheran talk" with the wider, philosophical discourse, with thinkers like Dupuis, Heim, and Knitter. 3) It offers, in the Gospel, a hopeful word in the midst of ongoing distress.

While all religions have hopeful words to say, they also wrestle with whether such words of "grace" will indeed be the final word. I wish to contend that the most important similarities and overlaps concerning human religious experience are best described, not by categories of being or existence (ontology or anthropology), but rather in nuanced, cultural-linguistic terms as the paradoxical relationship between divine wrath and promise, sin and grace, law and Gospel, human brokenness and divine healing. Because human religious experience is ambiguous, left to our own devices, we don't really quite know how to "read" or interpret nature. The "hidden God" whom nature ambiguously reveals requires unveiling, in and through the revelation in Christ, if humanity is to have a gracious relationship of trust with this God.

God's "alien work" of judging human sin in the cross (the Law) serves God's "proper work" of justifying and reconciling sinners (the Gospel). Brian Gerrish describes the paradoxical nature of divine hiddenness in the cross: "In Christ, [God's] wisdom is hidden under folly, his strength under abject weakness. He gives life through death, righteousness to the unrighteous; he saves

by judging and damning. The Hidden God is God incarnate, crucified, hidden in suffering.”

While much remains hidden about God despite the revelation of the cross, and while adherents of other religions may be reluctant to consider a Christian theology of the cross as having any relevance to their experiences, a Christian stance toward dialogue on the topic of divine hiddenness and experiences of suffering seemingly cannot help but commend divine hiddenness as an illuminating resource for such dialogue. Luther’s emphatic claim, “The cross alone is our theology,”<sup>xlvi</sup> directs us to focus our attention on God’s paradoxical absence and presence, hiddenness and revelation, wrath and loving mercy, as those realities are conveyed in and through a theology of the cross.<sup>xlvii</sup> A theology of the cross helps us Lutheran Christians interpret, apply, and commend the Gospel as promise to our non-Christian dialogue partners in their grappling with divine hiddenness and human suffering. A Lutheran approach affirms, as Luther notes, that while all people may worship the one true God, albeit anonymously, their worship, apart from Christ, lacks many benefits, such as confidence in God’s benevolent attitude toward them and practical comfort arising from trusting the promise of divine, loving mercy in the cross. Faith in the Gospel promise offers these benefits, even as we and our non-Christian friends grapple with God’s often perplexing, disconcertingly hidden ways in our struggles and sorrows.

## **CASE STUDY AND CONCLUDING REMARKS**

I wish to conclude this talk with a case study of responding to religious pluralism in Taiwan, how we relate dialogue and proclamation. From 2000-2003, my institution, China Lutheran Seminary, engaged in a series of rounds of interreligious dialogue with the modern Zen [Buddhist] society of Taiwan. These events included witness of life and doctrine in a cordial,

respectful atmosphere. Seminary president Dr Thomas Yu noted that what fascinated the Buddhists, what they found most intriguing, was the distinctiveness of the message of the cross. Two practical results arose. First, the dialogues were published as a book by CLS. Secondly, an unexpected friendship developed between Dr. Yu and Master Li Yuansong (Believer in the Buddha), the society's senior leader. As a token of his appreciation and sign of their friendship, Master Li sent Dr. Yu a plaque engraved with this inscription: "*'Justification by grace' are words from heaven that touch me deeply and move me to tears.*" What an incredible, astounding confession by a Zen Buddhist master! Was Master Li an "anonymous Christian," as Rahner puts it? Only God knows.

Shortly after these dialogues, the modern Zen society changed their affiliation to become a Pureland Buddhist society. Pureland Buddhism, with its doctrine of enlightenment as trusting in Amida Buddha's merits on one's behalf, bears remarkable affinities to justification by grace through faith. While this "Protestant branch" of Buddhism lacks concepts of holiness/ wrath in relation to their Ultimate Savior Being, its concept of mercy is tantalizingly close to our Lutheran view of divine mercy. Should we can expect a mass conversion of Zen Buddhists to Christianity in Taiwan in the near future? I doubt it. What this attests to, I believe, is the deeply emotive, intellectual, and spiritual power of the Gospel promise. "I am not ashamed of the Gospel," St Paul asserts, "for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes (Rom. 1:16)." Powerful? Yes! Promising? Yes! Perturbing, unsettling? Yes.

On Dec 8th, 2013 a memorial gathering was held to commemorate the 10th anniversary of Master Li's untimely death at age 46. President Yu was invited to attend and pay tribute to his friend, and I was able to tag along. The society's current

leader opened his remarks with a Buddhist meditation on Matthew ch 25, how we might see our master in others. Nelson Mandela's death three days earlier caused the Buddhist speaker before Dr Yu to ponder whether forgiveness is possible. Astonished, I could hardly believe what I was hearing! Having earned the right to speak truth in love through his patient listening and friendship with the society, President Yu seized this opportunity, proclaiming the promise of the forgiveness of sins in Christ which Mandela's forgiving spirit attested to. That's how China Lutheran Seminary does dialogue and proclamation in this Buddhist, Chinese context.

Where does all this leave us? "The Christian, while knowing where Christ is, can never be certain where he is not."xlvi Catholic missiologists Karl J. Becker and Ilaria Morali remind us, "Jesus says both, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life' (John 14:6a) and 'As I have loved you, so you must love one another' (John 13:34b). Both these words of Christ must guide us..."xlix As the "one for all others," we can trust in Jesus Christ and His promises never to turn away anyone who comes to Him, to go with us as we bear witness to His loving mercy in word and deed, and to make all things new. While Dupuis' and Heim's complex proposals elaborate how we might expect a convergence of "all in one" (the triune God), a Lutheran exhortation might urge us to follow our Good Shepherd into the religious marketplace, respectfully pointing others to Jesus as the "one for all," "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Thank you very much!

### **References:**

i Christopher W. Morgan, "Inclusivisms and Exclusivisms," in *Faith Comes by Hearing: a Response to Inclusivism*, ed. Christopher Morgan and Robert Peterson, 25-36 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2008). Morgan's nine positions are as follows:

1) Church exclusivism- No, outside the church there is no salvation (*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*); 2) gospel exclusivism- No, they must hear the gospel and trust Christ to be saved; 3) special revelation exclusivism- No, they must hear the gospel and trust Christ to be saved, unless God chooses to send them special revelation in an extraordinary way—via dreams, visions, miracles, or angelic messages; 4) agnosticism- we simply cannot know; 5) general revelation inclusivism- yes, they can respond to God in saving faith through seeing him in general revelation; 6) world religions inclusivism- yes, they can respond to God through general revelation or their religion; 7) postmortem evangelism- yes, they will have an opportunity to trust Christ after death; 8) universalism- yes, everyone will ultimately be saved; 9) pluralism- yes, many will experience “salvation” as they understand it because they embrace their version of the Real, though the question is erroneous because it assumes that Christianity is ultimate

ii Oswald Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology: a Contemporary Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 42.

iii Michael Oleksa, “Orthodox Missiological Education,” 86.

iv Jukka Kääriäinen, *Mission Shaped by Promise* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2012), 151, 154, 153

v Jacques Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2001), 1.

vi Jacques Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2002), 89-95.

vii For a fuller discussion of this point, see Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 235- 253, and Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 138-162.

- viii Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 298.
- ix Dupuis, "'Christianity and the Religions' Revisited," 374.
- x Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 218.
- xi Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 388.
- xii Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 197.
- xiii Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 388.
- xiv Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 211.
- xv Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 253.
- xvi Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 214-215.
- xvii Paul Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religion* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2008), 234.
- xviii Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religion*, 195.
- xix S. Mark Heim, *The Depth of the Riches: a Trinitarian Theology of Religious Ends* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 167.
- xx Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, 196-197.
- xxi Heim, "No Other Name: the Gospel and True Religions" in *Can Only One Religion Be True: Paul Knitter and Harold Netland in Dialogue*, ed. Robert B. Stewart, et. al (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013).

xxii S. Mark Heim, *Salvations: Truth and Difference in Religion* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1995), 229.

xxiii Catherine Cornille, *The Impossibility of Interreligious Dialogue* (New York: Crossroad, 2008), 79.

xxiv Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religion*, 217.

xxv Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religion*, 220.

xxvi James Fredericks, *Faith among Faiths: Christian Theology and Non-Christian Religions* (New York: Paulist Press, 1999), 167.

xxvii Alister McGrath, *Christian Theology: an Introduction*, 4th ed. (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2006), 463.

xxviii Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religion*, 234.

xxix Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religion*, 233.

xxx Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 115.

xxxi Implied in this critique is an implicit critique of Dupuis' theology of sin. Whereas I found only four explicit references to sin in Dupuis' work, his treatment and theology of grace, as well as his explicit admission that he is indebted to Rahner's theology while aiming to extend its missional implications (see chapter four, opening paragraph), lead me to conclude that his doctrine of sin is similar to Rahner's. To the extent that is the case, my critique of Rahner's theology of sin also applies to Dupuis.

xxxii Gerhard Forde, *Law-Gospel Debate* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 197.

xxxiii Heim, *The Depth of Riches*, 269.

xxxiv Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Trinity and Religious Pluralism: the Doctrine of the Trinity in Christian Theology of Religions* (London: Ashgate, 2004), 65.

xxxv Heim, *The Depths of the Riches*, 291.

xxxvi Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religion*, 235.

xxxvii Dupuis, "'Christianity and the Religions' Revisited." *Louvain Studies* 28/4 (Winter 2004), 364-365.

xxxviii Heim, *Salvations*, 229.

xxxix Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, "Dialogue and Proclamation," (1991), in *Redemption and Dialogue*, ed. William R. Burrows (Maryknoll, Orbis, 1993), 116.

xl Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 221.

xli "Dialogue and Proclamation" 117-118.

xlii Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 257.

xliii Jacques Dupuis, "A Theological Commentary: Dialogue and Proclamation," in *Redemption and Dialogue*, ed. William R. Burrows (Maryknoll, Orbis, 1993), 154.

xliv George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984), 128.

xlv Given that divine hiddenness is most readily understood in monotheistic traditions such as Judaism and Islam, my project is most directly applicable to dialogue with these fellow "religions of the book." However, while non-theistic religions like Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism do not recognize a personal God whose hiddenness can be intelligibly discussed, I contend that this category may potentially be translated into

the framework of these religions in a meaningful, intelligible manner. The theoretical and theological justification for such a claim, however, remains beyond the scope of this study.

xlvi Luther, *Luther's Works*, 25: 287.

xlvii I am acutely aware of the immensely complex nature of issues related to the hiddenness and unknowability of God, apophatic and negative theologies, theology of the cross, and theodicy. While the limits of this study do not allow for more in-depth treatment of divine hiddenness and unknowability as they have been classically articulated by early Christian theologians as Gregory of Nyssa, Maximus the Confessor, Pseudo-Dionysius, and Meister Eckhardt, nor theologies of the cross of contemporary theologians such as Jürgen Moltmann, Eberhard Jüngel, John Stuart Hall, and others, my aim is very modest: simply to suggest how the hiddenness of God, interpreted within the framework of a theology of the cross, can serve as a missiologically fruitful topic for interreligious dialogue. Such a focus on the missiological implications of a theology of the cross in no way minimizes or negates an emphasis on a theology of the resurrection.

xlviii Michael Oleksa, "Orthodox Missiological Education," 86.

xlix Karl J. Becker and Ilari Molaria, *Catholic Engagement with World Religions: a Comprehensive Study* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2010), 511.

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