

“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

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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

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- II. An Oxymoron? A Christ Confessing Chaplain
- III. The challenge of working in interfaith settings.
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- VI. The Critical Issue – Again!
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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.

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

Lutheran Chaplain Henry Gerecke was chaplain at the Nuremberg 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.”²

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.³

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.”⁴ 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;

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

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.”⁵ 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

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.”

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.⁶

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.⁷ 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.”⁸

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.⁹ Code switching is described as the chaplain’s ability to adapt to the patient/patient’s

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.

family's religious tradition by using language, scripture, rites, and symbols from that tradition.¹⁰

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."¹¹ 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.¹² 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.¹³ 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

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.

spiritual and pastoral care, advocacy, and the opportunities for service.”¹⁴ 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?¹⁵

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

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

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.¹⁶

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.”¹⁷

¹⁶ Blog: www.crossings.org Thursday Theology #763 January 24, 2013 Topic: Talking with the “Nones”

¹⁷ Ibid.

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

¹⁸ Genesis 4:13

¹⁹ Exodus 3:7

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?"²⁰

²⁰ Matthew 10:33

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 God²¹, 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

²¹ Kushner, Why Bad Things Happen to Good People

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.²² 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.²³

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,

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

“Vocation of the Lutheran College and Religious Diversity.”²⁴ 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.”²⁵ 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.²⁶

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.”²⁷

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 chaplain²⁸ 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

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.

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.”²⁹ 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.”³⁰ 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 ...”³¹

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

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

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 counsees. 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.³²

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

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

distinctively Christian care.³³ 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.³⁴

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?³⁵ 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.³⁶

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 goals³⁷ 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

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.

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
- 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.