

EMBRACE THE  
**CROSS** ANTICIPATE THE  
**CROWN**  
SYNOD CONVENTION 2023



# ESSAY

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67<sup>TH</sup> BIENNIAL CONVENTION OF THE  
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That person does not deserve to be called a theologian who looks upon the invisible things of God as though they were clearly perceptible in those things which have actually happened. He deserves to be called a theologian, however, who comprehends the visible and manifest things of God seen through suffering and the cross. A theologian of glory calls evil good and good evil. A theologian of the cross calls the thing what it actually is. (Theses 19-21 of Martin Luther's *Heidelberg Disputation*)

### **The pervasiveness of “cross and crown” language in religion and life**

Mary Baker Eddy, of Christian Science fame, said, “If you launch your bark upon the ever-agitated but healthful waters of truth, you will encounter storms. Your good will be evil spoken of. This is the cross. Take it up and bear it, for through it you win and wear the crown.” “Cross and crown” is central to her teaching: “Whoever reaches the understanding of Christian Science in its proper signification will perform the sudden cures of which it is capable; but this can be done only by taking up the cross daily and following Christ in the daily life”.<sup>1</sup> You’ll win your crown by struggling through the storms—the cross. So says a theologian of glory.

St. Rose of Lima, who only allowed herself to sleep two hours a night at most so that she had more hours to devote to prayer, and who donned a heavy crown made of silver, with small spikes on the inside, in emulation of the crown of thorns worn by Christ, is quoted in the Roman Catholic Catechism, saying, “Apart from the cross, there is no other ladder by which we may get to heaven.”<sup>2</sup> The catechism continues: “Because in his incarnate divine person Christ has in some way united himself to every man, ‘the possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God, in the paschal mystery’ is offered to all men. He calls his disciples to ‘take up their cross and follow him,’ for ‘Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example so that we should follow him in his steps.’ ” “The willingness with which St. Rose adopted sufferings in this life, even taking them upon herself, teaches a valuable lesson to the world today. When suffering is something to be disdained at all costs—consider, for example, the widespread acceptance of and support for suffering-eliminating practices like euthanasia—St. Rose’s story concretely presents another way. Her life illuminates the Gospel’s wisdom on suffering. Keeping in mind Jesus’ admonition to the rich young man, the way to heaven is impossible without taking up the cross (see Mt 19:16-30; Mk 10:17-31; Lk 18:18-30).”<sup>3</sup> You’ll win your crown by taking on sufferings and the cross. So says another theologian of glory.

William Penn’s Pennsylvania experiment profoundly influenced the American experiment later. He says what a free-willer theologian of glory would say, what one who rejects God showing up in Word and sacrament would say: *no cross, no crown*.

Viktor Emil Frankl was a Jewish-Austrian psychiatrist and holocaust survivor who founded logotherapy, a school of psychotherapy that describes a search for a life's meaning as the central human motivational force. His 1946 book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, has sold 16 million copies and has been translated into 52 languages. He writes:

These tasks, and therefore the meaning of life, differ from man to man, and from moment to moment. Thus it is impossible to define the meaning of life in a general way. Questions about the meaning of life can never be answered by sweeping statements. “Life” does not mean something vague, but something very real and concrete, just as life’s tasks are also very real and concrete. They form man’s destiny, which is different and unique for each individual. No man and no destiny can be compared with any other man or any other destiny. No situation repeats itself, and each situation calls for a different response. Sometimes the situation in which a man finds himself may require him to shape his own fate by action. At other times it is more advantageous for him to make use of an opportunity for contemplation and to

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<sup>1</sup> Mary Baker Eddy, *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* (pp. 178,179)

<sup>2</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994), #618

<sup>3</sup> [www.simplycatholic.com/st-rose-of-lima-the-first-saint-canonized-from-the-new-world](http://www.simplycatholic.com/st-rose-of-lima-the-first-saint-canonized-from-the-new-world)

realize assets in this way. *Sometimes a man may be required to simply accept fate, to bear his cross* [italics mine]. Every situation is distinguished by its uniqueness, and there is always only one right answer to the problem.<sup>4</sup>

A Jewish psychiatrist (and theologian of glory; not all theologians realize they are) says cross bearing is required.

Church historian Eusebius famously reports that Constantine was marching with his army (most think at the Milvian Bridge in 312 AD), when he looked up to the sun and saw a cross of light above it, and with it the Greek words “(έν) τούτῳ νικά” (“In this, conquer”), a phrase often rendered into Latin as *in hoc signo vinces* (“in this sign, you will conquer”). Constantine did not know the meaning of the apparition, but on the following night, it is said that he had a dream in which Christ explained to him that he should use the sign of the cross against his enemies. *Onward, Christian soldiers*. And the symbol of the cross has been used by theologians of glory ever since.



Figure 1: [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/In\\_hoc\\_signo\\_vinces#/media/File:Stanze\\_Vaticane\\_-\\_Raffaello\\_-\\_Apparizione\\_della\\_croce\\_\(Higher\\_Quality\).jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/In_hoc_signo_vinces#/media/File:Stanze_Vaticane_-_Raffaello_-_Apparizione_della_croce_(Higher_Quality).jpg)

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<sup>4</sup> Viktor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning: An Introduction to Logotherapy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1984, first published in 1946), pp. 85,86

Do I need to say anything about the so-called “Touchdown Jesus” at Notre Dame University? The cross and the crown get mashed together so easily.



Figure 2: [www.heimsath.com/sacred-space-holy-place/50-years-of-touchdown-jesus](http://www.heimsath.com/sacred-space-holy-place/50-years-of-touchdown-jesus)

St. Paul wrote to a splintered group in Corinth, solidly in the context of the 1st-century Greco-Roman Mediterranean world, complete with its ethnic strife, social class rivalries, and competing gods, philosophies, wisdom, and truth claims. And, in the end, he equated the crucified Jesus with the LORD of the Jews, encouraging a solid basis for boasting—in the LORD, Jesus:

For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel—not with the wisdom used in speeches, so that the cross of Christ would not be emptied of its power.

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God. In fact, it is written:

I will destroy the wisdom of the wise;  
the intelligence of the intelligent I will bring to nothing.

Where is the wise man? Where is the expert in the Jewish law? Where is the probing thinker of the present age? Has God not shown that the wisdom of this world is foolish? Indeed, since the world through its wisdom did not know God, God in his wisdom decided to save those who believe, through the foolishness of the preached message. Yes, Jews ask for signs, Greeks desire wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified—which is offensive to Jews and foolishness to Greeks, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God. We preach Christ crucified, because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

For example, consider your call, brothers. Not many of you were wise from a human point of view, not many were powerful, and not many were born with high status. But God chose the foolish things of the world to put to shame those who are wise. God chose the weak things of the world to put to shame the things that are strong, and God chose the lowly things of the world and the despised things, and the things that are not, to do away with the things that are, so that no one may boast before God. But because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us the wisdom from God, namely, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption. God did this so that, just as it is written, “Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord.” (1 Corinthians 1:17-31 EHV)

The astounding central assertion of Christianity is that God put on flesh in Jesus and died as the atoning sacrifice for his creatures. Jesus had to teach the two on the way to Emmaus that he—the Christ—had to suffer and then enter his glory. And that all Scripture is truly centered in him (Luke 24:25-27). A generation later, Jesus’ apostle asserted that the *skandalon*/offense of the cross of Christ is that such a message of freedom makes all the huffing and puffing and working of the glory theologians worthy of castration (Galatians 5:11,12).

In the faithful church, we need to ground “cross” speech—with all of its notions of suffering and even dying—cleanly and clearly and faithfully. Or it will quickly go the way of curved-in-on-ourselves-theology and make the cross all about us and our suffering. And *then* we will arrive at “crown” speech—with all of its notions of ruling and reigning, especially eschatologically—faithfully and clearly and cleanly. We need to put cross and crown terminology together faithfully for the good of any who will be listening.

We’ll be well-served today if we re-clarify a couple of theses of Luther’s when he was called on to explicate his new teaching to his Augustinian brethren at a pastors’ conference in Heidelberg in 1518.

That person does not deserve to be called a theologian who looks upon the invisible things of God as though they were clearly perceptible in those things that have actually happened (or have been made, created). That person deserves to be called a theologian, however, who comprehends the visible and manifest things of God through suffering and the cross. A theologian of glory calls evil good and good evil. A theologian of the cross calls the thing what it actually is.<sup>5</sup>

Hermann Sasse writes against theologians who confuse cross and crown, who use the cross of Christ as a lucky charm for their triumphalistic schemes:

This oldest *theologia crucis* appears to be a typical example of what Luther later called *theologia gloriae*. The cross is a direct revelation of the glory of God on earth. Triumphantly it precedes the victorious armies of the Christian emperors and the valiant hosts of the Church Militant. As in the first centuries the demons fled from the sign of the cross, so now the enemies of the church flee in confusion where the banner of the cross or the relics of the cross appear. Who can resist the power of this sign? The cross is the sign by which unfailing victory is gained. In it God’s power becomes visible in the world.<sup>6</sup>

You’ve heard it—our football team won because we have so many glorious Christians on the team. Our business is booming because we virtue signal our glorious Christianity by not being open on Sunday. This is using the cross for our own ends, not God’s. This is being a theologian of glory.

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<sup>5</sup> Martin Luther, translation of theses 19-21 from *On Being a Theologian of the Cross: Reflections on Luther’s Heidelberg Disputation* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1997), pp. 72-81.

<sup>6</sup> Hermann Sasse, *Letters to Lutheran Pastors, Volume 1, 1948-1951*, “Theologia Crucis,” originally written in 1951 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House), p. 391.

**(We) embrace the cross. (We embrace and we) anticipate the crown.**

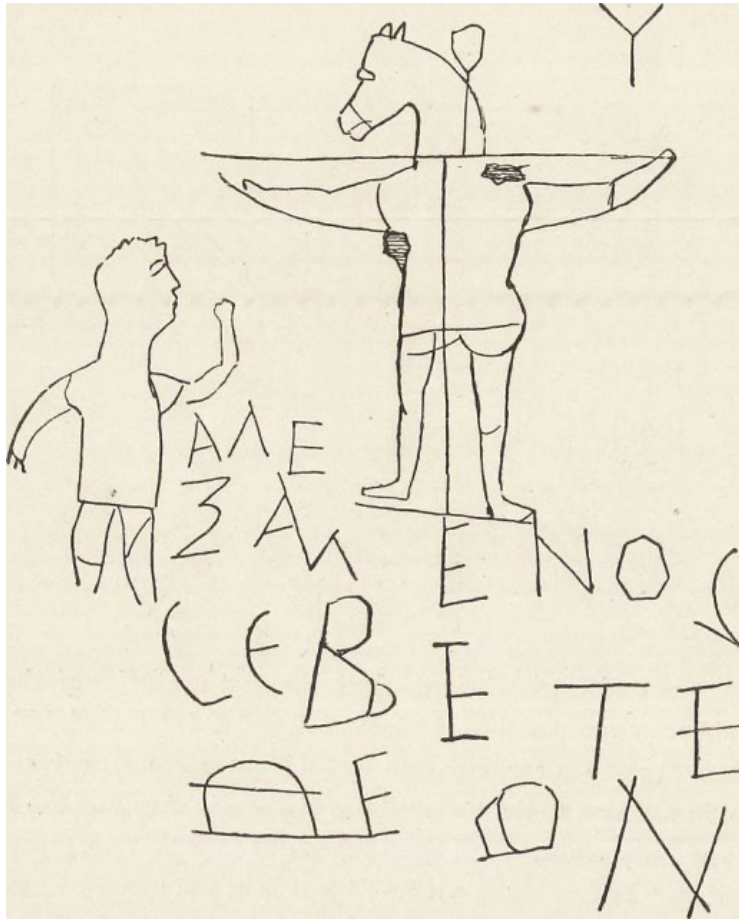


Figure 3: [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexamenos\\_graffito#/media/File:AlexGraffito.svg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexamenos_graffito#/media/File:AlexGraffito.svg)

This image from the first or second century after Christ seems to show a young man worshipping a crucified, donkey-headed figure. The Greek inscription approximately translates to “Alexamenos worships [his] god,” indicating that the graffito was apparently meant to mock a Christian named Alexamenos. Please note clearly that Alexamenos is being mocked for actually worshipping his crucified deity—he understands the theology of the cross is primarily about the assertion that it is the deity being shamed and killed up there on the torture device. This is exactly where this essay is attempting to focus our thinking and our speaking in the faithful church: On the Person crucified up there on the cross and what the promises are that we should be proclaiming in his name to each other and to those who need to hear his promises.

The 2nd-century philosopher Celsus also noticed and then reacted to faithful Christian proclamation. He used an imaginary Jew to be a literary mouthpiece in his critiques of Christian proclamation. John Granger Cook says, “Celsus’ Jew rejects the Christians’ theology of the cross: ‘Do you reproach us, you most credulous people, because we do not think this person is god and because we don’t agree with you that he endured these things to help humankind, so that we too may scorn punishments?’ ”<sup>7</sup> Later on, Cook says, “Celsus is apparently aware of Hellenistic Judaism’s belief in the Logos as son of God. What he cannot accept is a crucified Logos.”<sup>8</sup> At least Celsus clearly heard faithful Christian proclamation—

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<sup>7</sup> John Granger Cook, *The Interpretation of the New Testament in Greco-Roman Paganism* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), p. 50

<sup>8</sup> Cook, p. 54

faithful theology of the cross of the crucified Jesus of Nazareth for the sins of the world—and it literally *scandalized/offended* him.

### **The cross of Christ first and then Christian suffering and the crown faithfully proclaimed**

Today, here at the 2023 convention of WELS, when we say, “We embrace the cross,” let us say more than “we embrace suffering,” or more than “in this sign we’ll conquer.” Let us come to grips with the *hiddenness of God* and with the *unfreedom (the bound will) of the humans* also. For the faithful theology of the “cross/crown” package includes the bound will of the human, the God who reveals himself when and where he wills and the One who promises to do it via the means of grace—in the most foolish of ways.

Let us say, “We are embracing—and proclaiming—a specific cross, the cross of Jesus Christ, and all of the promises attached to him.” Hermann Sasse: “There is one thing to preach, the wisdom of the cross,” in response to Isaiah’s question: “What shall I preach?” “The cross—in this sense—is not one of many theologies (incarnation, atonement, etc.) but it claims to be in contrast to the theology of glory and claims to be the correct Scriptural theology with which the Church of Christ stands or falls.”<sup>9</sup>

Sasse continues:

The cross is *the* revelation. For it is the only place where God makes Himself visible. What do we mean by that? What does Luther mean when he says that we can find God nowhere else than in Christ crucified? How is it that God is present in a special way in the cross?

To understand that we have to ask what revelation is. Revelation occurs when something hidden comes out from its hiddenness into the open. Revelation of God is God’s coming forth from His hiddenness. For God is hidden as all objects of faith are hidden. Faith, after all, according to the definition of Heb 11:1 which Luther quotes so often, has to do with things unseen. And God remains hidden for as long as we live on earth. He dwells in the light, which no man can approach, as His word teaches us (1 Tim 6:16). He also said “that He would dwell in the thick darkness” (1 Kings 8:12). He is a “hidden God” (Is 45:15), whose face cannot be seen by any man (Exod 33:20; John 1:18; 1 Jn 4:12) until we shall see Him in the *lumen gloriae* (“the light of glory”), “as He is” (1 John 3:2), “face to face” (1 Cor 13:12; Rev 22:4). But though God remains hidden to our eyes, He still reveals Himself by His Word. So the revelation in the Word is the way of divine revelation in this world.

“At sundry times and in diverse manners” God spake to the fathers by the prophets until “in these last days” (Heb 1:2), i.e., now, at the end of the world, He spake to us through the Son, who is more than a prophet, being “the brightness of God’s glory and the express image of His person” (Heb 1:3). He is the Eternal Word which was in the beginning. This Word is the content of all written and preached words of God. About Him we are told: “And the Word was made flesh . . . and we beheld His glory” (Jn 1:14). Thus the revelation in the *Word* becomes *incarnation*. Therefore Jesus Christ as the *Logos Incarnate* is *the* revelation of God on earth. Only in Him, the Eternal Word, does God come forth out of His hiddenness. He is the content of all that is divine Word, His incarnation is the making visible of the Word. The man Jesus is the *Verbum visibile* (“the visible Word”). He who sees Him sees the Father, as far as it is possible to see Him in this aeon.

Here we understand Luther’s doctrine of the cross. If God wants to reveal Himself, to make Himself visible to man, He cannot show Himself as He is. He cannot show His glory unveiled. For no man would bear the sight of the *Deus nudus* (God in His unveiled glory). So He chooses the veil of human nature. Incarnation, therefore, is at the same time revelation of God and hiding of His glory. The *Deus absconditus* (“hidden God”), the invisible eternal God, becomes for us *Deus revelatus* (God revealed) in Jesus Christ. But the revelation, this

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<sup>9</sup> Sasse, p. 388

unveiling (which is what *revelatio* originally meant), is at the same time veiling, hiding. This explains Luther's twofold use of the expression *Deus Absconditus*. Luther can speak of the hidden God in the sense of God as He has not yet revealed Himself, and of God who has revealed Himself by Hiding Himself in the humanity of Jesus Christ. The incarnation, therefore, is at the same time both revelation of God and veiling, hiding of God, in the human nature.<sup>10</sup>

**As the LORD worked out his salvation story that began in the promise to Adam and Eve and was to culminate on Calvary's cross in the crucified Jesus of Nazareth, God hid his glory from Moses**

Your pastor learned to work in the Hebrew of the Old Testament. He experienced what all the pastors in our synod had learned—there is a very special name for God, the LORD, that Moses used—the Tetragrammaton (literally, the four-letter name). So special is this name that it has a *Kethibh* (a written presentation— $\text{יהוה}$ ) and it has a spoken one (*Qere*). Faithful Jews all over the world still today (and faithful Martin Luther College students studying to become candidates for the pastoral ministry) have to come to grips with this name and this God.

We've all heard the story. Moses hid his face (Exodus 3:6) from this God who had spoken from the bush that burned but didn't burn up. He removed his sandals, for it was holy ground—this place where God spoke and answered Moses when he asked what to say to the Israelites when asked the name of the one who sent him. "And God said to Moses, "Ehyeh-Asher-Ehyeh" (Exodus 3:14, Tanakh translation, 2004).

So mysterious and majestic is the name (and we're not even yet really talking about the hidden One that the name reveals . . .) that Prof. John Brug says, "We do not know with certainty how this name is to be pronounced." And it could be translated, "I AM," or "I will continue to be what I was," Brug says.<sup>11</sup> We can't overstate the majesty of the LORD's name—and, of course, of the LORD himself.

Moses went as the LORD had sent him and then had led the people out of Egypt. He was now on Mt. Sinai. Moses, overestimating his chumminess with the LORD, or perhaps desperate for assurance, wanted to see God.<sup>12</sup>

And the LORD said, "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live."

Then the LORD said, "There is a place near me where you may stand on a rock. When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will remove my hand and you will see my back; but my face must not be seen." (Exodus 33:21-23)

Neither Moses nor any other human could see the face of God and live. So God, in his grace, reveals to Moses what the LORD wanted him to see, his "back," his  $\text{אחור}$ , his  $\text{τὰ ὀπίσω μου}$  (LXX), *posteriora mea*

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<sup>10</sup> Sasse, pp. 396,397

<sup>11</sup> John F. Brug, *A Commentary on Psalms 1-72* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2004), pp. 297,298

<sup>12</sup>Robert Alter, *The Five Books of Moses: A Translation with Commentary*. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004) Alter's footnote on Exodus 33:18, "Show me, pray, your glory": "We are not likely to recover precisely what the key term *kavod*—glory, honor, divine presence, and very literally, 'weightiness'—conveyed to the ancient Hebrew imagination. In any case, Moses, who first fearfully encountered God in the fire in the bush, is now ready and eager to be granted a full-scale epiphany, a frontal revelation of the look and character of this divinity that had been speaking to him from within the pillar of cloud."



(Vulgate), his *hintennach* (Luther), his hinder parts.<sup>13 14</sup> Sainted Professor Arnold Koelpin, not normally known for earthy speech—unless he was talking Luther talk—said it differently.

This is far from the cuddly bear picture of God and Moses the children’s story Bibles portray. This God consumes the humans. This God has to hide himself from the humans for their own good. This God destroys both soul and body of the human sinner in hell. He speaks and it thunders. Limits have to be set up for the protection of the people, “lest the LORD break out against them” (Exodus 19). This God is to be feared.

This big God is the One who had chosen to speak it all into existence. So mysterious and so majestic. He could have done anything. And he *speaks*, “Let there be,” and *it is*. And it is good.

Remember that he had chosen to create, hands on, the crown of his creation. He walked with them in the cool of the day, talking to them, male and female, both created in the image of him. There was no need to hide from the humans for their good before their rebellion against their Creator.

But when the man and the woman chose to be god and reject their creator, this LORD God who had spoken it all into existence chose to speak powerfully again. In a promise. A promise of a seed of the woman that would strike the head of the serpent; the seed would win, the God who now hides and yet *speaks* to save the sinners *said/says*.

For so much of the subsequent history of the LORD’s dealings with his people, generation after generation, they proved they loved the other gods around. Since they couldn’t see the LORD, since all they had was his afterglow/his hinder parts/his promises, it seems they cared more about the gods they could see and sense and perceive and perform for or manipulate down to size.

**As the LORD worked out his salvation story that was to culminate on Calvary’s cross in the crucified Jesus of Nazareth, God always, without interruption, absolutely keeps himself hidden in Isaiah’s day**

We jump ahead to the mid-8th century B.C., to Isaiah 45. In the context of speaking of the LORD’s use of Cyrus, the Persian, as a christ (an anointed one), and in the context of the God of Israel sounding like the one who dressed down Job and told him to brace himself like a man so that he would listen, Isaiah writes:

אַלֹּהֵי אֱתָהּ אֵל מְסֻתָּתָר יְיָ אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מוֹשִׁיעַ:

“Truly you are a God *who hides Himself*, O God of Israel and Savior!” (Isaiah 45:15, August Pieper).

August Pieper, who served in our seminary a century ago, writes in his classic commentary on Isaiah about verse 15:

The predicate of the sentence lies in *mistatter*—you are a God who keeps Himself hidden. The translation should express the characteristic of the Hithpael participle, the uninterrupted

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<sup>13</sup> Alter’s note on Exodus 33:23, “you will see My back, but My face will not be seen”: “Volumes of theology have been spun out of these enigmatic words. Imagining the deity in frankly physical terms was entirely natural for the ancient monotheists: this God had, or at least could assume, a concrete manifestation which had front and rear, face and back, and that face man was forbidden to see. But such concreteness does not imply conceptual naivete. Through it the Hebrew writer suggests an idea that makes good sense from later theological perspectives: that God’s intrinsic nature is inaccessible, and perhaps also intolerable, to the finite mind of man, but that something of His attributes—His ‘goodness,’ the directional pitch of His ethical intentions, the afterglow of the effulgence of His presence—can be glimpsed by humankind.”

<sup>14</sup> *Lutheran Study Bible* note on Exodus 33:22,23: “God would conceal most of His presence from Moses for Moses’ own good; Moses does not see God’s ‘face’—the full expression of His glory, but he does see a glimpse of the divine presence (cf. 34:6-7).”

continuation of the action. . . . Not only now and then does God hide Himself; but always, without interruption, absolutely, does He keep Himself hidden from the reason and senses of natural man, both as to His being and as to His sovereignty. Though not even we preachers are always fully aware of this characteristic of God's being, yet it is clearly set forth in Scripture: Exodus 33:18ff; John 1:18; 1 Timothy 6:16; 1 John 4:12; Isaiah 40:12ff; Romans 11:33ff; Job 38ff; 1 Corinthians 2, etc. etc. No perception by the senses or the intellect, no conclusions based on axioms of human reasoning, no scientific experiment and discovery, no natural philosophy or metaphysical reasoning will ever discover God. He has hidden Himself absolutely from the wise men of the world.<sup>15</sup>

*God always, without interruption, absolutely hides himself.* Even when he reveals himself—this is the point of the incarnation later in history—he hides himself. This is oh! so important to remember as men under God and, especially, as preachers (according to Professor Pieper!), under God and in Christ.

But we get ahead of ourselves.

**As the LORD worked out his salvation story that was to culminate on Calvary's cross in the crucified Jesus of Nazareth, we hear that the children of Israel wouldn't speak the Tetragrammaton in Jesus' day, so hidden was God and so holy was its use**

There is one more important point to highlight before we get to the incarnation, the in-flesh-ness of the Word of God. All the commentators note that so high and so holy is not only the LORD, but also his name, that the Tetragrammaton wasn't spoken for centuries, perhaps beginning with the destruction of the temple by the Babylonians. The special name of the LORD, that mysterious and majestic name that reveals the mysterious and majestic and merciful God, was spoken only once a year by the high priest on the Great Day of Atonement. The God who hides himself, the God of majesty and mystery and mercy, seems to have become even more hidden for years.

**As the LORD worked out his salvation story that was to culminate on Calvary's cross in the crucified Jesus of Nazareth, God's people experience another twist in the hiddenness of God. The God who speaks to his people does so in another language that will be used in the New Testament texts**

Let's jump ahead another seven centuries after Isaiah to the 1st-century Greco-Roman Mediterranean world. Please think about your life as a son of Abraham, a Hebrew, in that first century. You are literate; many aren't. You are literate because your people think very highly of words, for the Hebrew words of God read aloud in both temple and now, synagogue, are recognized as holy. You are also seen as strange because nowhere is there an image of your god—the god of the Hebrews. Your God hides.

But now there are more of your people living in Alexandria than in Jerusalem, which means that there are many Jews who speak and write Greek—enough that a translation into the Greek language needed to be made for God's covenant people. You had heard the story of the exodus, year after year, at the Passover festival. And, if you heard the story in Greek-speaking Alexandria, you heard this:

καὶ εἶπεν Μωϋσῆς πρὸς τὸν θεόν Ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ ἐλεύσομαι πρὸς τοὺς υἱοὺς Ἰσραὴλ καὶ ἐρῶ πρὸς αὐτούς Ὁ θεὸς τῶν πατέρων ὑμῶν ἀπέσταλκέν με πρὸς ὑμᾶς, ἐρωτήσουσίν με τί ὄνομα αὐτῷ; τί ἐρῶ πρὸς αὐτούς;

καὶ εἶπεν ὁ θεὸς πρὸς Μωϋσῆν Ἐγὼ εἰμι ὁ ὢν καὶ εἶπεν Οὕτως ἐρεῖς τοῖς υἱοῖς Ἰσραὴλ Ὁ ὢν ἀπέσταλκέν με πρὸς ὑμᾶς.

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<sup>15</sup> August Pieper, *Isaiah II: An Exposition of Isaiah 40-66* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1979), pp. 280,281

καὶ εἶπεν ὁ θεὸς πάλιν πρὸς Μωυσῆν Οὕτως ἐρεῖς τοῖς υἱοῖς Ἰσραὴλ Κύριος ὁ θεὸς τῶν πατέρων ὑμῶν, θεὸς Ἀβραὰμ καὶ θεὸς Ἰσαὰκ καὶ θεὸς Ἰακώβ, ἀπέσταλκέν με πρὸς ὑμᾶς· τοῦτό μου ἔστιν ὄνομα αἰώνιον καὶ μνημόσυνον γενεῶν γενεαῖς. (Exodus 3:13-15, LXX)

But Moses said to God, “If I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what should I say to them?”

So God replied to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” He also said, “You will say this to the Israelites: I AM has sent me to you.”

God also told Moses, “Say this to the Israelites: ‘The LORD, the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you. This is my name forever, and this is how I am to be remembered from generation to generation.’ ”

Let’s note a couple things: 1) How the Septuagint attempted to translate 3:14—’Εγὼ εἰμι ὁ ὢν (I AM WHO I AM); and 2) How the Tetragrammaton was translated into the *lingua franca*, Greek—Κύριος (*kurios*/Lord).

Compared to most humans on the planet, you 21st-century Christians and your pastors care a lot about words. Your pastors and you are aware of some of the difficult issues in translating text to another language. Please think for a while about the massive issues involved in translating a name, *The Name* that shall not be named—the Tetragrammaton. How would it feel for your Hebrew-speaking grandpa who had been raised with not saying *The Name*, and now you, a Greek-speaking, (or, at least a Greek-reading) son of Abraham, come to the story—the great salvation story of the Exodus—and there actually a name—*The Name*—is used, er, kind of. It was hard enough to be a son of Abraham without having to come to grips with such a thorny issue. You were raised to memorize and say the great *Shema*: שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל : יהוה יהוה אחד. (Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God. The LORD is One.) You were marked as different because you were not only monotheistic but there were no statues and no images of your deity to be seen anywhere. All you had was a word, words from your deity who hid himself. All you had were the temple practices in far-off Jerusalem, if you were able to get there, to see no image, but to see and hear and smell and taste foretastes of the promise of the God who hides himself.

**As the LORD worked out his salvation story that was to culminate on Calvary’s cross in the crucified Jesus of Nazareth, the Word was made flesh and tabernacled among us**

And then along comes an image (cf. Colossians 1:15), of flesh and blood, just like we are, except there was something different.

The real light that shines on everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not recognize him. He came to what was his own, yet his own people did not accept him. But to all who did receive him, to those who believe in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. They were born, not of blood, or of the desire of the flesh, or of a husband’s will, but born of God.

The Word became flesh and dwelled [*tabernacled*] among us. We have seen his glory, the glory he has as the only-begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

John testified about him. He cried out, “This was the one I spoke about when I said, ‘The one coming after me outranks me because he existed before me.’ ” For out of his fullness we have all received grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. The only-begotten Son, [some texts say *only-begotten God*] who is close to the Father’s side, has made him known. (John 1:9-18)

You, dear son of Abraham living in the Mediterranean basin in the 1st century, would have had to think long and hard about the assertions that are being cast about regarding this Jesus. Plenty of your running mates would have rejected him; your natural inclination would be to fight against him at the core of his claims. The world was made through him, John said, but the cosmos did not know him (hidden as he

was). But to those who believed in his name (!), he gave the right to be the children of God—no less. And that birthright was a matter of new birth, not of anything else; certainly not the will, free or otherwise, of man. This Jesus tented among us, just like the LORD had tented among his people before there was a temple building. No one had ever seen God or has seen God who hides himself always, without interruption, absolutely. But something has happened, John wrote. *Someone who always, without interruption, and absolutely hides came out of hiding* to be seen and heard, kind of—and for a purpose—that by believing, you may have life in his name.

Eight chapters on in John's Gospel, Professor Joel Gerlach comments,

When Jesus declared, "Before Abraham was . . . I am" (8:58), he intended to identify himself with the God who had revealed himself with the special, unique name (Yahweh/the Tetragrammaton) to Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3:14). The people reacted to Jesus' claim by picking up "stones to stone him" for blasphemy. But Jesus was then and is now the eternal "I AM." He is God. He is personal (not just a vague impersonal force in the universe). He is real.<sup>16</sup>

At the end of his Gospel, John told us the purpose for it—"that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name"—immediately after he had just written the story of Thomas rejecting the news from the others about Jesus—"We have seen the Lord/τὸν κύριον." A week later, Jesus again appears behind locked doors, speaks peace that the world cannot understand into the room and into the hearts/lives of those there and then addressed the skeptic: "Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here and look at my hands. Take your hand and put it into my side. Do not continue to doubt, but believe.' Thomas answered him, 'My Lord and my God!' (ὁ κύριός μου καὶ ὁ θεός μου.)

John records that Thomas used the Greek word (κύριός) that was used to translate the Tetragrammaton. Dear 1st-century son of Abraham, living in the Mediterranean basin, you have just had God come out of hiding in your presence. Jesus was just declared to be κύριός/ ἰησοῦς/Lord. The God who damns both soul and body in hell has just been revealed to you as the One—the One who *saves*. Where is that revelation? In the *person* of Jesus, the *crucified* and now risen One, the only name under heaven given among mankind whereby we must be saved.

So, it's one thing to point out the uniqueness of "the name" in world history and remark about its mystery and majesty. It's another to make the central claim of Christianity that Jesus is the culmination of Judaism, and, in fact, to claim that Jesus actually equates himself to the LORD God whose name was not even to be named, much less was it heard (except for once a year) in his day; and going far past even simply vocalizing the name, Jesus claimed to *be That One and accepted worship. God hidden and revealed in Jesus Christ.*

Do we think that most of our people are actually meditating on this every time they hear "Lord," the translation of κύριός, in the New Testament? Does the God who is too awesome to allow Moses to see him come to mind? To make the claim that Jesus is *kurios*/Lord meant that you needed to be excluded from the Jewish synagogue and the Roman imperial cults for both the God of the Hebrews and the Roman emperor, before Jesus, claimed to be κύριός. It was no small thing for Jesus to be called "Lord/*kurios*." It was much more than calling him the equivalent of what a Mexican means when he says, "*Señor*," or when a German says, "*Herr*," or when an American says, "Sir." Do the Bible hearers in the worship context and the Bible readers in our congregations and that we seek to serve in outreach/evangelism have a clue regarding what is underneath "Lord" in the New Testament? Does it matter if they don't have a clue?

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<sup>16</sup> Joel Gerlach, *God's Master Plan: New Testament: An Introduction and Survey* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1993), p. 43

**As we embrace the cross of Christ crucified, we assert that proclamation, not mood management or closing the deal, is the thing (Or, how this could affect preaching; how it certainly affects proclamation that is willing to be labeled Lutheran—that is, authentically catholic and evangelical)**

Richard Muller explains:

*“Deus absconditus/Deus revelatus: the hidden God/the revealed God; the paradox of God’s unknowability and self-manifestation as stated by Luther. The issue is not that God has been hidden and has now revealed himself, but rather that the revelation that has been given to man defies the wisdom of the world because it is the revelation of the hidden God. God is revealed in hiddenness and hidden in his revelation. He reveals himself paradoxically to thwart the proud, *sub contrario*, under the opposite, omnipotence manifest on the cross.”<sup>17</sup>*

I’m not convinced that Muller understands Luther, but the point here is that Muller says it is, notably, a faithful Luther(an) thing to think about God hidden/revealed. Remember that Luther at Augsburg, along with his colleagues there, said it is sinful to go inventing churches like we Americans are so prone to do. The Augsburg Confession goes out of its way to prove its catholicity; its teaching was/is in continuity with that of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church. And Luther never gave up on that; his reformation was about teaching—that the authentic catholic and the authentic evangelical voice of the church actually be heard. But Muller’s point is helpful; it’s that the Lutherans uniquely end up thinking about this and talking about it as they seek to be faithfully catholic and evangelical. *If this hidden/revealed God at the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth thing is so faithfully catholic and evangelical, one would think Lutheran preaching, therefore, would be distinct. And “cross and crown” talk out of Lutheran mouths would also be distinct.*

**One more thing about proper “cross/crown” speech as we clarify “God hidden” at the cross of the crucified Jesus of Nazareth—what some think is pessimistic anthropology—human bound will**

Here’s the section Muller was thinking of when he mentions *sub contrario*/under the opposite above. Luther is responding in his *Bondage of the Will* to Erasmus’ statement in *Freedom of the Will* that some difficult things shouldn’t be spoken out loud for the laypeople to hear:

Still, out of our abundance we will do a work of supererogation and mention two considerations which demand that such things should be preached. The first is the humbling of our pride, and the knowledge of the grace of God; and the second is the nature of Christian faith itself.

First, God has assuredly promised his grace to the humble [1 Peter 5:5], that is, to those who lament and despair of themselves. But no man can be thoroughly humbled until he knows that his salvation is utterly beyond his own powers, devices, endeavors, will, and works, and depends entirely on the choice, will, and work of another, namely, of God alone. For as long as he is persuaded that he himself can do even the least thing toward his salvation, he retains some self-confidence and does not altogether despair of himself, and therefore he is not humbled before God, but presumes that there is—or at least hopes or desires that there may be—some place, time, and work for him, by which he may at length attain to salvation. But when a man has no doubt that everything depends on the will of God, then he completely despairs of himself and chooses nothing for himself, but waits for God to work; then he has come close to grace, and can be saved.

It is thus for the sake of the elect that these things are published, in order that being humbled and brought back to nothingness by this means they may be saved. The rest resist this humiliation, indeed they condemn this teaching of self-despair, wishing for something,

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<sup>17</sup> Richard Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), p. 90

however little, to be left for them to do themselves; so they remain secretly proud and enemies of the grace of God. This, I say, is one reason, namely, that the godly, being humbled, may recognize, call upon, and receive the grace of God.

The second reason is that faith has to do with things not seen [Hebrews 11:1]. Hence in order that there may be room for faith, it is necessary that everything which is believed should be hidden. It cannot, however, be more deeply hidden than under an object, perception, or experience which is contrary to it. Thus when God makes alive he does it by killing, when he justifies he does it by making men guilty, when he exalts to heaven he does it by bringing down to hell, as Scripture says: "The Lord kills and brings to life; he brings down to Sheol and raises up" (1 Samuel 2:6). This is not the place to speak at length on this subject, but those who have read my books have had it quite plainly set forth for them.

Thus God hides his eternal goodness and mercy under eternal wrath, his righteousness under iniquity. This is the highest degree of faith, to believe him merciful when he saves so few and damns so many, and to believe him righteous when by his own will he makes us necessarily damnable, so that he seems, according to Erasmus, to delight in the torments of the wretched and to be worthy of hatred rather than of love. If, then, I could by any means comprehend how this God can be merciful and just who displays so much wrath and iniquity, there would be no need of faith. As it is, since that cannot be comprehended, there is room for the exercise of faith when such things are preached and published, just as when God kills, the faith of life is exercised in death. That is now enough by way of preface.<sup>18</sup>

"Utterly beyond his own powers." "Completely despairs of himself." "They remain secretly proud and enemies of the grace of God." "That there be room for faith." "If I could by any means comprehend how this God can be merciful and just who displays so much wrath and iniquity, there would be no need of faith." Erasmus thought that the matter of humans' ability to choose God (or not, as Luther wrote) was too hard for human ears to hear. Luther faithfully has to disagree. If the human can choose his god, then the god that is getting chosen is small and has been made in the image of the man who chose him. Man, Luther points out, does NOT have the capacity to approach the holy God. Not at all. These truths need to be proclaimed, Luther is saying.

**Since God hides and yet is revealed at the cross of the crucified Jesus of Nazareth, and since humans have a will bound to invent its own gods, humans only find the devil (!) in their search for deity**

To think about faithful proclamation of the God who hides himself always, without interruption and absolutely, means it is helpful to recognize that those who are fallen creatures of God will, with darkened reason and sight, try to and *actually find* a god somewhere. Luther is commenting on the sailors who called on their gods while Jonah slept below:

Here you find St. Paul's statement in Rom. 1:19 concerning the universal knowledge of God among all the heathen, that is, that the whole world talks about the Godhead and natural reason is aware that this Godhead is something superior to all other things. This is here shown by the fact that the people in our text called upon a god, heathen though they were. For if they had been ignorant of the existence of God or of a godhead, how could they have called upon him and cried to him? Although they do not have true faith in God, they at least hold that God is a being able to help on the sea and in every need. Such a light and such a perception is innate in the hearts of all men; and this light cannot be subdued or extinguished. There are, to be sure, some people, for instance, the Epicureans, Pliny, and the

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<sup>18</sup> Martin Luther. *Luther's Works, Vol. 33: Career of the Reformer III* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.) (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972, 1999), pp. 61-64

like, who deny this with their lips. But they do it by force and want to quench this light in their hearts. They are like people who purposely stop their ears or pinch their eyes shut to close out sound and sight. However, they do not succeed in this; their conscience tells them otherwise. For Paul is not lying when he asserts that they know something about God, “because God has shown it to them” (Rom. 1:19).

Let us here also learn from nature and from reason what can be known of God. These people regard God as a being who is able to deliver from every evil. It follows from this that natural reason must concede that all that is good comes from God; for He who can save from every need and misfortune is also able to grant all that is good and that makes for happiness. That is as far as the natural light of reason sheds its rays—it regards God as kind, gracious, merciful, and benevolent. And that is indeed a bright light. However, it manifests two big defects: first, reason does admittedly believe that God is able and competent to help and to bestow; but reason does not know whether He is willing to do this also for us. That renders the position of reason unstable. Reason believes in God’s might and is aware of it, but it is uncertain whether God is willing to employ this in our behalf, because in adversity it so often experiences the opposite to be true. That is very obvious here. These people indeed call upon God and thereby acknowledge that He can help if He is thus inclined; they even believe that He may help others. But that is as far as they can go; they cannot transcend that. They exhaust every means at their command; they try their utmost. Free will cannot go beyond that. But they do not believe that God is disposed to help them. For if they did, they would not “throw the wares that were in the ship into the sea,” nor would they turn to Jonah and urge him to call upon his God. No, they would calmly await the help of God. Moreover, the sea would also have become tranquil as a result of their faith. But this situation calls for a faith that does not doubt but is convinced that God wants to be gracious not only to others but also to me. That is a genuine and a live faith; it is a great and rich and rare gift of the Holy Spirit, and so we shall see it in Jonah.

The second defect is this: Reason is unable to identify God properly; it cannot ascribe the Godhead to the One who is entitled to it exclusively. It knows that there is a God, but it does not know who or which is the true God. It shares the experience of the Jews during Christ’s sojourn on earth. When John the Baptist bore witness of His presence in their midst, they were aware that Christ was among them and that He was moving about among them; but they did not know which person it was. It was incredible to them that Jesus of Nazareth was the Christ. Thus reason also plays blindman’s buff with God; it consistently gropes in the dark and misses the mark. It calls that God which is not God and fails to call Him God who really is God. Reason would do neither the one nor the other if it were not conscious of the existence of God or if it really knew who and what God is. Therefore it rushes in clumsily and assigns the name God and ascribes divine honor to its own idea of God. Thus reason never finds the true God, but it finds the devil or its own concept of God, ruled by the devil. So there is a vast difference between knowing that there is a God and knowing who or what God is. Nature knows the former—it is inscribed in everybody’s heart; the latter is taught only by the Holy Spirit.

We shall illustrate this with a few examples. Let us first consider the papists and the religious. These are laboring under the delusion that God is a being who is moved and satisfied by good works. That explains their many vocations, sects, and modes of life, in all of which they presume to serve and please God. Now tell me, what are these people worshiping as God if there is no God whose mind and will conforms to theirs? Is it not true that they are honoring their own delusion and their own fancy as God? For in truth there is no God who is of one mind with them. Therefore they go awry with their illusion. They miss the true God, and nothing remains but their own false notion. That is their god. To him they assign the name and honor of God. Of course, no one but the devil can be behind this

delusion, for he inspires and governs these thoughts. Thus their delusion is their idol; it is the image of the devil they hold in their hearts. For the real and the true God is He who is properly served not with works but with the true faith and with sincerity of heart, who gives and bestows mercy and benefactions entirely *gratis* and without our works and merits. That they do not believe, and therefore they do not know God but are bound to blunder and to miss the mark.

Here you see where all idolatry comes from and why it is rightly called idol (*Abgott*) and superstition (*Abglaube*) and idolatry (*Abgötterei*); undoubtedly because such delusion draws us away from God (*Ab-Gott*) and alienates us from the true worship of God. Indeed, this is an idol and a superstition that directs us away from God and directs us to the devil in hell. For since everybody proposes to do something which he regards and believes to be pleasing to God and imagines that God is minded as he supposes He is—but in reality God is not pleased by this, and in reality God is not minded as each one supposes—it follows that as many idolatries must arise as there are illusions of that kind. Every idea of pleasing God comes into being except that of faith; this the Holy Ghost must inspire. Thus the idol Baal came to the mind of King Ahab. Since he knew that there was a God, he imagined that it was God who was pleased with his type of worship. Thus he called God Baal, and Baal God, as is evident from Hos. 2:16.

Furthermore, King Jeroboam supposed that it was God who was pleased with the worship of the golden calves. And therefore calves had to be called the God of Israel, and, again, God had to be called a calf (1 Kings 12:28). That is like calling Christ our Lord a lover of cows or of tonsures today because people assume that He is a God who is in love with cows and tonsures and is well pleased with such service. I am sure that monks and priests have that conception of Him in their hearts and also call Him that. But this is an idol and superstition and delusion which falls wide of the mark; it is genuine archidolatry. There are innumerable types of idolatry; in fact, there are as many varieties as there are illusions and self-chosen concepts of pleasing God. All but faith in Christ come into this category. And since there is nowhere a God who is pleased with this service, it follows that they are all serving the devil and not God.

Thus you also note that the people in the ship all know of God, but they have no definite God. For Jonah relates that each one calls on his own god, that is, his concept of God, whatever he conceives of God in his mind. And in that way they all fail to encounter the one true God and have nothing but idols whom they call God and honor as God. Therefore their faith, too, was false; it was superstition and idolatry and of no avail. For their god lets them down in the hour of need; he lets them call in vain, so that they despair and find themselves at a loss to know where to find a god who might help them. They run down to Jonah, arouse him, and command him to call on his God. They are curious to see whether there might be another god beside their own to aid them. There you can see that a false faith will not stand the test of adversity, but that both god and faith, idol and superstition, become engulfed and vanish, and that nothing but despair remains. Therefore only the one living God is entitled to the name and reputation of being a helper in every trouble, Ps. 9:10; Ps. 46:1; for He can rescue from death, Ps. 68:20.<sup>19</sup>

“Where do we find God?” is the question. And the humans who seek god or God or themselves as god are only finding the devil, Luther says. Of course, he’s right. Because God hides. He will only be found where he wills to be found, where he promises to be found. Of course, the humans will only find the devil because that’s what the humans are bound to do; they can do no other since the Fall and before Christ

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<sup>19</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works, Vol. 19: Minor Prophets II: Jonah and Habakkuk* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.) (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1974, 1999)



comes again. That means, in the real world (not the next one), there is no one who does good. No one who seeks God. None. All will find always, without interruption, absolutely the devil.

But there are so many who are huffing and puffing and faithing and hoping and striving and bearing their crosses without knowing the cross of Christ—all for “God,” they think. That has to be the case if the people understand themselves to be those who have the power of free choice. They have to make the right choice(s). They have to do. They have to perform. Huff, puff.

**God who hides and is ultimately revealed only in the cross of the crucified Jesus of Nazareth is seen in God *preached*—Christ crucified for us in Word and sacrament**

The illusion of humans’ so-called “free choice” regarding the God who hides himself is only frustrating and, ultimately, damning. A freely choosing human goes together with a god who is small and who can be chosen or invented. But a God who hides himself in order to reveal himself in the way that an omnipotent creating, redeeming, predestinating God does—at the torture device of the Romans with a Jew hanging on it!—goes together with a human who only has needs *coram Deo*/before the face of God.

But it pleases me to take from this passage the opportunity to discuss doubt, God, and the will of God; for I hear that here and there among the nobles and persons of importance vicious statements are being spread abroad concerning predestination or God’s foreknowledge. For this is what they say: “If I am predestined, I shall be saved, whether I do good or evil. If I am not predestined, I shall be condemned regardless of my works.” I would be glad to debate in detail against these wicked statements if the uncertain state of my health made it possible for me to do so. For if the statements are true, as they, of course, think, then the incarnation of the Son of God, His suffering and resurrection, and all that He did for the salvation of the world are done away with completely. What will the prophets and all Holy Scripture help? What will the sacraments help? Therefore let us reject all this and tread it underfoot.

These are devilish and poisoned darts and original sin itself, with which the devil led our first parents astray when he said (Gen. 3:5): “You will be like God.” They were not satisfied with the divinity that had been revealed and in the knowledge of which they were blessed, but they wanted to penetrate to the depth of the divinity. For they inferred that there was some secret reason why God had forbidden them to eat of the fruit of the tree which was in the middle of Paradise, and they wanted to know what this reason was, just as these people of our time say: “What God has determined beforehand must happen. Consequently, every concern about religion and about the salvation of souls is uncertain and useless.” Yet it has not been given to you to render a verdict that is inscrutable. Why do you doubt or thrust aside the faith that God has enjoined on you? For what end did it serve to send His Son to suffer and to be crucified for us? Of what use was it to institute the sacraments if they are uncertain or completely useless for our salvation? For otherwise, if someone had been predestined, he would have been saved without the Son and without the sacraments or Holy Scripture. Consequently, God, according to the blasphemy of these people, was horribly foolish when He sent His Son, promulgated the Law and the Gospel, and sent the apostles if the only thing He wanted was that we should be uncertain and in doubt whether we are to be saved or really to be damned.

But these are delusions of the devil with which he tries to cause us to doubt and disbelieve, although Christ came into this world to make us completely certain. For eventually either despair must follow or contempt for God, for the Holy Bible, for Baptism, and for all the blessings of God through which He wanted us to be strengthened over against uncertainty and doubt. For they will say with the Epicureans: “Let us live, eat, and drink; tomorrow we shall die” (cf. 1 Cor. 15:32). After the manner of the Turks they will rush rashly into the sword and fire, since the hour in which you either die or escape has been predetermined.

But to these thoughts one must oppose the true and firm knowledge of Christ, just as I often remind you that it is profitable and necessary above all that the knowledge of God be completely certain in us and that we cling to it with firm assent of the heart. Otherwise our faith is useless. For if God does not stand by His promises, then our salvation is lost, while, on the other hand, this is our comfort, that, although we change, we nevertheless flee for refuge to Him who is unchangeable. For in Mal. 3:6 He makes this assertion about Himself: "I the Lord do not change." And Rom. 11:29 states: "The gifts and the call of God are irrevocable." Accordingly, this is how I have taught in my book *On the Bondage of the Will* and elsewhere, namely, that a distinction must be made when one deals with the knowledge, or rather with the subject, of the divinity. For one must debate either about the hidden God or about the revealed God. With regard to God, insofar as He has not been revealed, there is no faith, no knowledge, and no understanding. And here one must hold to the statement that what is above us is none of our concern. For thoughts of this kind, which investigate something more sublime above or outside the revelation of God, are altogether devilish. With them nothing more is achieved than that we plunge ourselves into destruction; for they present an object that is inscrutable, namely, the unrevealed God. Why not rather let God keep His decisions and mysteries in secret? We have no reason to exert ourselves so much that these decisions and mysteries be revealed to us.

Moses, too, asked God to show him His face; but the Lord replies: "You shall see My back, but you will not be able to see My face" (cf. Ex. 33:23). For this inquisitiveness is original sin itself, by which we are impelled to strive for a way to God through natural speculation. But this is a great sin and a useless and futile attempt; for this is what Christ says in John 6:65 (cf. John 14:6): "No one comes to the Father but by Me." Therefore when we approach the unrevealed God, then there is no faith, no Word, and no knowledge; for He is an invisible God, and you will not make Him visible.

Furthermore, God has most sternly forbidden this investigation of the divinity. Thus when the apostles ask in Acts 1:6, "Has it not been predestined that at this time the kingdom should be restored?" Christ says to them: "It is not for you to know the times" (Acts 1:7). "Let Me be hidden where I have not revealed Myself to you," says God, "or you will be the cause of your own destruction, just as Adam fell in a horrible manner; for he who investigates My majesty will be overwhelmed by My glory."

And it is true that God wanted to counteract this curiosity at the very beginning; for this is how He set forth His will and counsel: "I will reveal My foreknowledge and predestination to you in an extraordinary manner, but not by this way of reason and carnal wisdom, as you imagine. This is how I will do so: From an unrevealed God I will become a revealed God. Nevertheless, I will remain the same God. I will be made flesh, or send My Son. He shall die for your sins and shall rise again from the dead. And in this way I will fulfill your desire, in order that you may be able to know whether you are predestined or not. Behold, this is My Son; listen to Him (cf. Matt. 17:5). Look at Him as He lies in the manger and on the lap of His mother, as He hangs on the cross. Observe what He does and what He says. There you will surely take hold of Me." For "He who sees Me," says Christ, "also sees the Father Himself" (cf. John 14:9). If you listen to Him, are baptized in His name, and love His Word, then you are surely predestined and are certain of your salvation. But if you revile or despise the Word, then you are damned; for he who does not believe is condemned (Mark 16:16).

You must kill the other thoughts and the ways of reason or of the flesh, for God detests them. The only thing you have to do is to receive the Son, so that Christ is welcome in your heart in His birth, miracles, and cross. For here is the book of life in which you have been written. And this is the only and the most efficacious remedy for that horrible disease because of which human beings in their investigation of God want to proceed in a speculative manner and eventually rush into despair or contempt. If you want to escape despair, hatred, and

blasphemy of God, give up your speculation about the hidden God, and cease to strive in vain to see the face of God. Otherwise you will have to remain perpetually in unbelief and damnation, and you will have to perish; for he who doubts does not believe, and he who does not believe is condemned (Mark 16:16).

Therefore we should detest and shun these vicious words which the Epicureans bandy about: "If this is how it must happen, let it happen." For God did not come down from heaven to make you uncertain about predestination, to teach you to despise the sacraments, absolution, and the rest of the divine ordinances. Indeed, He instituted them to make you completely certain and to remove the disease of doubt from your heart, in order that you might not only believe with the heart but also see with your physical eyes and touch with your hands. Why, then, do you reject these and complain that you do not know whether you have been predestined? You have the Gospel; you have been baptized; you have absolution; you are a Christian. Nevertheless, you doubt and say that you do not know whether you believe or not, whether you regard as true what is preached about Christ in the Word and the sacraments.

But you will say: "I cannot believe." Thus many are troubled by this trial, and I recall that at Torgau a little woman came to me and complained with tears in her eyes that she could not believe. Then, when I recited the articles of the Creed in order and asked about each one whether she was convinced that these things were true and had happened in this manner or not, she answered: "I certainly think that they are true, but I cannot believe." This was a satanic illusion. Consequently, I kept saying: "If you think that all these things are true, there is no reason why you should complain about your unbelief; for if you do not doubt that the Son of God died for you, you surely believe, because to believe is nothing else than to regard these facts as the sure and unquestionable truth."

God says to you: "Behold, you have My Son. Listen to Him, and receive Him. If you do this, you are already sure about your faith and salvation." "But I do not know," you will say, "whether I am remaining in faith." At all events, accept the present promise and the predestination, and do not inquire too curiously about the secret counsels of God. If you believe in the revealed God and accept His Word, He will gradually also reveal the hidden God; for "He who sees Me also sees the Father," as John 14:9 says. He who rejects the Son also loses the unrevealed God along with the revealed God. But if you cling to the revealed God with a firm faith, so that your heart is so minded that you will not lose Christ even if you are deprived of everything, then you are most assuredly predestined, and you will understand the hidden God. Indeed, you understand Him even now if you acknowledge the Son and His will, namely, that He wants to reveal Himself to you, that He wants to be your Lord and your Savior. Therefore you are sure that God is also your Lord and Father.

Observe how pleasantly and kindly God delivers you from this horrible trial with which Satan besets people today in strange ways in order to make them doubtful and uncertain, and eventually even to alienate them from the Word. "For why should you hear the Gospel," they say, "since everything depends on predestination?" In this way he robs us of the predestination guaranteed through the Son of God and the sacraments. He makes us uncertain where we are completely certain. And if he attacks timid consciences with this trial, they die in despair, as would almost have happened to me if Staupitz had not delivered me from the same trial when I was troubled. But if they are despisers, they become the worst Epicureans. Therefore we should rather impress these statements on our hearts, such as John 6:44: "No one can come to Me unless the Father draws him." Through whom? Through Me. "He who sees Me also sees the Father" (cf. John 14:9). And God says to Moses: "You cannot see My face, for man shall not see Me and live" (Ex. 33:20). And we read (Acts 1:7): "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed by His own authority. But go, and carry out what I command." Likewise (Ecclesiasticus 3:22): "Seek not

the things that are too high for you, and search not into things above your ability; but the things that God has commanded you, think on them always, and in many of His works be not curious." Listen to the incarnate Son, and predestination will present itself of its own accord.

Staupitz used to comfort me with these words: "Why do you torture yourself with these speculations? Look at the wounds of Christ and at the blood that was shed for you. From these predestination will shine. Consequently, one must listen to the Son of God, who was sent into the flesh and appeared to destroy the work of the devil (1 John 3:8) and to make you sure about predestination. And for this reason He says to you: 'You are My sheep because you hear My voice' (cf. John 10:27). 'No one shall snatch you out of My hands' " (cf. v. 28).

Many who did not resist this trial in such a manner were hurled headlong into destruction. Consequently, the hearts of the godly should be kept carefully fortified. Thus a certain hermit in *The Lives of the Fathers* advises his hearers against speculations of this kind. He says: "If you see that someone has put his foot in heaven, pull him back. For this is how saintly neophytes are wont to think about God apart from Christ. They are the ones who try to ascend into heaven and to place both feet there. But suddenly they are plunged into hell." Therefore the godly should beware and be intent only on learning to cling to the Child and Son Jesus, who is your God and was made flesh for your sake. Acknowledge and hear Him; take pleasure in Him, and give thanks. If you have Him, then you also have the hidden God together with Him who has been revealed. And that is the only way, the truth, and the life (cf. John 14:6). Apart from it you will find nothing but destruction and death.

But He manifested himself in the flesh to snatch us from death, from the power of the devil. From this knowledge must come great joy and delight that God is unchangeable, that He works in accordance with unchangeable necessity, and that He cannot deny Himself (2 Tim. 2:13) but keeps His promises. Accordingly, one is not free to have such thoughts or doubts about predestination; but they are ungodly, vicious, and devilish. Therefore when the devil assails you with them, you should only say: "I believe in our Lord Jesus Christ, about whom I have no doubt that He was made flesh, suffered, and died for me. Into His death I have been baptized." This answer will make the trial disappear, and Satan will turn his back.

Thus on other occasions I have often mentioned the noteworthy example of a nun who underwent the same trial. For under the papacy there were also many godly persons who experienced these spiritual trials, which are truly hellish and thoughts of the damned. For there is no difference at all between one who doubts and one who is damned. Therefore whenever the nun felt that she was being assailed with the fiery darts of Satan (cf. Eph. 6:16), she would say nothing else than this: "I am a Christian."

We must do the same thing. One must refrain from debates and say: "I am a Christian; that is, the Son of God was made flesh and was born; He has redeemed me and is sitting at the right hand of the Father, and He is my Savior." Thus you must drive Satan away from you with as few words as possible and say: "Begone, Satan! (Matt. 4:10.) Do not put doubt in me. The Son of God came into this world to destroy your work (1 John 3:8) and to destroy doubt." Then the trial ceases, and the heart returns to peace, quiet, and the love of God.

Otherwise doubt about some person's intention is no sin. Thus Isaac doubts that he will live or have a pious host. About a man I *can* be in doubt. Indeed, I *should* be in doubt. For he is not my Savior, and it is written (Ps. 146:3): "Put not your trust in princes." For man is a liar (Ps. 116:11) and deceitful. But one cannot deal doubtfully with God. For He neither wants nor is able to be changeable or a liar. But the highest form of worship He requires is your conviction that He is truthful. For this is why He has given you the strongest proofs of His trustworthiness and truth. He has given His Son into the flesh and into death, and He has instituted the sacraments, in order that you may know that He does not want to be deceitful,

but that He wants to be truthful. Nor does He confirm this with spiritual proofs; He confirms it with tangible proofs. For I see the water, I see the bread and the wine, and I see the minister. All this is physical, and in these material forms He reveals Himself. If you must deal with men, you may be in doubt as to the extent to which you may believe a person and as to how others may be disposed toward you; but concerning God you must maintain with assurance and without any doubt that He is well disposed toward you on account of Christ and that you have been redeemed and sanctified through the precious blood of the Son of God. And in this way you will be sure of your predestination, since all the prying and dangerous questions about GOD'S secret counsels have been removed—the questions to which Satan tries to drive us, just as he drove our first parents.

But how great would our first parent's happiness have been if he had kept the Word of God carefully in sight and had eaten of all the other trees except the one from which he had been forbidden to eat! But he wanted to search out why God had forbidden him to enjoy the fruits from that one tree. In addition, there was Satan, the malicious teacher who increased and abetted this curiosity. Thus he was hurled headlong into sin and death.

Thus God reveals His will to us through Christ and the Gospel. But we loathe it and, in accordance with Adam's example, take delight in the forbidden tree above all the others. This fault has been implanted in us by nature. When Paradise and heaven have been closed and the angel has been placed on guard there (cf. Gen. 3:24), we try in vain to enter. For Christ has truthfully said: "No one has ever seen God" (John 1:18). Nevertheless, God, in His boundless goodness, has revealed Himself to us in order to satisfy our desire. He has shown us a visible image. "Behold, you have My Son; he who hears Him and is baptized is written in the book of life. This I reveal through My Son, whom you can touch with your hands and look at with your eyes."

I have wanted to teach and transmit this in such a painstaking and accurate way because after my death many will publish my books and will prove from them errors of every kind and their own delusions. Among other things, however, I have written that everything is absolute and unavoidable; but at the same time I have added that one must look at the revealed God, as we sing in the hymn: *Er heist Jesu Christ, der HERR Zebaoth, und ist kein ander Gott*, "Jesus Christ is the LORD of hosts, and there is no other God"—and also in very many other places. But they will pass over all these places and take only those that deal with the hidden God. Accordingly, you who are listening to me now should remember that I have taught that one should not inquire into the predestination of the hidden God but should be satisfied with what is revealed through the calling and through the ministry of the Word. For then you can be sure about your faith and salvation and say: "I believe in the Son of God, who said (John 3:36): 'He who believes in the Son has eternal life.'" Hence no condemnation or wrath rests on him, but he enjoys the good pleasure of God the Father. But I have publicly stated these same things elsewhere in my books, and now I am also teaching them by word of mouth. Therefore I am excused.<sup>20</sup>

Where do we find the omnipotent I AM God who always, without interruption, and absolutely hides himself? In the face of the crucified Jesus of Nazareth. But where do I find this Christ? In the Scriptures. Or, even more precisely, in the crucified Christ *proclaimed* on the basis of the Scriptures. Luther:

So that our readers may the better perceive our teaching I shall clearly and broadly describe it. We treat of the forgiveness of sins in two ways. First, how it is achieved and won. Second,

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<sup>20</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 5: Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 26-30* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.) (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1968, 1999)

how it is distributed and given to us. Christ has achieved it on the cross, it is true. But he has not distributed or given it on the cross. He has not won it in the supper or sacrament. There he has distributed and given it through the Word, as also in the gospel, where it is preached. He has won it once for all on the cross. But the distribution takes place continuously, before and after, from the beginning to the end of the world. For inasmuch as he had determined once to achieve it, it made no difference to him whether he distributed it before or after, through his Word, as can easily be proved from Scripture. But now there is neither need nor time to do so.

If now I seek the forgiveness of sins, I do not run to the cross, for I will not find it given there. Nor must I hold to the suffering of Christ, as Dr. Karlstadt trifles, in knowledge or remembrance, for I will not find it there either. But I will find in the sacrament or gospel the word which distributes, presents, offers, and gives to me that forgiveness which was won on the cross. Therefore, Luther has rightly taught that whoever has a bad conscience from his sins should go to the sacrament and obtain comfort, not because of the bread and wine, not because of the body and blood of Christ, but because of the word which in the sacrament offers, presents, and gives the body and blood of Christ, given and shed for me. Is that not clear enough?<sup>21</sup>

### **Let our proclamation be *Christ crucified for us*, not merely *about Christ crucified***

Proclamation—actual delivery of the goods—in the name of God is a far different thing than information. If God promises to arrive—and actually deliver the goods of forgiveness, life, and salvation—in a promise, the faithful church gets to promise in the name of God.

Gerhard Forde writes:

To delineate precisely what is meant by proclamation, it is necessary and helpful, at the outset, to distinguish between two different types of discourse employed in the church. We have already been doing that roughly by articulating the difference between explaining and proclaiming. This difference can be maintained as a difference between primary and secondary discourse. Explaining, talking, and writing about God and things theological is secondary discourse. It is the language of theology in general, the language of teaching, and, particularly for our purposes here, of scholarship or systematic theology. Secondary discourse is generally third-person, past-tense discourse. Proclamation, on the other hand, belongs to the primary discourse of the church. Proclamation in its paradigmatic or ideal form is first-to-second-person, present-tense, unconditional address. The most obvious example (paradigmatic form) of such address is in the absolution: I declare unto you the gracious forgiveness of all your sins, in the name of the triune God. (When it comes right down to it, that is about all we have to say in a nutshell.) It is first-to-second-person: I declare to you. It is present tense: here and now I do it. Not tomorrow, not next week, not on judgment day, but here and now in the living present. The deed is done. I give it to you. It is unconditional: I do not say: “God will forgive you if certain conditions are fulfilled, if you properly repent.” Nor do I say that we will pray and hope that God will forgive you. I do not say, “May the Lord have mercy on you.” No, I say it flat out: “I declare unto you the forgiveness of all your sins.” It is proclamation. As such, it belongs to the primary discourse of the church, the chief way the church and the Christian address the world.

It is perhaps obvious from this that there are other kinds of communication that also belong to this primary discourse. The liturgy, for instance, belongs to such primary discourse, as well as the sacraments. Moreover, the response to the proclamation, the language of

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<sup>21</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 40: Church and Ministry II*, (ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann)(Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999), “Against the Heavenly Prophets,” pp. 213,214.

repentance, confession, prayer, and praise also belongs to the primary discourse. Primary discourse as direct, present-tense, first-to-second-person address demands the same kind of language in response. If I proclaim: I declare unto you the gracious forgiveness of all your sins, the corresponding response is likewise first-person, present-tense: I repent, I confess, I believe, I praise and thank you, O Lord, or perhaps even, I do not, I will not, I cannot. In any case it is primary. When the proclamation comes, "I declare to you the forgiveness of your sins," the appropriate response is not, "Well, that's your opinion!" It is not my opinion. If I were to give my opinion of you, it could be something quite different! The proclamation is instead the divine address, speaking not my words but the word God has commissioned me to say. The only possible response has to be primary discourse, discourse that is ultimately self-disclosure, revealing who you are. You can only say, I repent, I believe, or I do not.<sup>22</sup>

### **Certainty in the cross of Christ still means it's faithful to say, "I don't know," sometimes**

If God is hidden/revealed in the cross, so also is the church hidden under the cross. How does this show itself in Lutheran *habitus*? One of the ways is in pastoral counseling. Knowledge of the God who hides himself makes the authentic catholic and evangelical (Lutheran) pastor to be rock solid certain in some of his "counsel," that is, in proclamation, but also makes the pastor completely willing to say, "I don't know" when he doesn't know why a particular series of events have occurred that cause the child of God to want to peer into the counsel of God. And, much of the time, he doesn't. He knows the One who does and can proclaim some of that One's will, yes. But we must resist the temptation to be smarter than we are. Practice saying it: "I don't know."

I have no doubt that the sin of Lucifer was something like this, that he wanted to find out and know more about the unknown God than became his station, that is, about the God who has not been revealed and disclosed through the Word. What He is, what He does, and what His will is does not concern me. But this does concern me, that I know what He has commanded, what He has promised, and what He has threatened. When you reflect on these things carefully, you find God, yes, He Himself takes you on His lap. If you fall out of it, that is, if you presume to know anything beyond what has been revealed in the Word, you plunge into the depths of hell.

Therefore the well-known hermit was right when he gave the advice: If you see a young monk ascending to heaven and so to speak, putting one foot in heaven, pull him back at once; for if he puts both feet there, he will see that he is not in heaven but in hell.

This saying gives no other advice than that we should restrain our curiosity and remain within the definite bounds that are placed before us by God. He wanted us to walk on the earth, not on the clouds. He wanted us to learn the revealed Word painstakingly, not to give thought to those things that are too high for us. He wanted us to follow His Word and command, not to inquire with inordinate diligence into the reasons for His commands. When Adam and Eve do this, they perish; for they put themselves in the place of God the Creator and forget that they are creatures.

It is just as Satan says: "Then you will be like gods." You will no longer be creatures who will be concerned about carrying out the commands of God; you yourselves will be gods, you will judge God, and you will do other things—things that are proper for God alone.

Oh, the wretched divinity with which Satan surrounded us through sin when he had this one design, that we should disregard the commands and promises of God. Therefore it is original

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<sup>22</sup> Gerhard Forde, *The Preached God: Proclamation in Word and Sacrament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), pp. 45,46

sin to become a god. Against this disease we must fight throughout our entire life, and we must say with Paul (1 Cor. 2:2): "I know nothing except Jesus Christ and Him crucified."<sup>23</sup>

Here is the faithful "cross" speech, not glory church-speak. Here is the faithful proclamation of the church—set over against the bound human will—spoken by the strangest of proclaimers—flesh-and-blood clay pots—to those with ears to hear and revealing the God who hides in the way God chooses to reveal himself—at the cross of the crucified Jesus of Nazareth.

**Solidly on the rock that is the crucified Christ and proclamation of him in Word and sacrament, let us now speak of the Christian life, of trials, suffering, and, yes, crosses**

Here is where we can and should rightly talk about the Christian life now in faith and living until the then of eternity. It's a life of struggle and suffering down here in the sinful world and a life of repentance, for, after all, I am *totaliter*/totally sinful, we confess of ourselves, and, yet, in Christ, we get to hear the other proclaim Christ to me that declares me *totaliter*/totally righteous and a saint. We get to daily deny ourselves and die to ourselves as god and thank our Lord God for all of daily bread life as he chooses to give it to us—crosses and trials included.

For where God's Word is preached, accepted, or believed, and bears fruit, there the holy and precious cross will also not be far behind. And let no one think that we will have peace; rather, we must sacrifice all we have on earth—possessions, honor, house and farm, spouse and children, body and life. Now, this grieves our flesh and the old creature, for it means that we must ever remain steadfast, suffer patiently whatever befalls us, and let go whatever is taken from us."<sup>24</sup>

Life for the humans after the Fall and until Jesus comes again is all under God. We are no longer in Eden. In the liturgy we regularly confess what our sinful flesh deserves—punishment both now and forever. Yet, for the child of God, troubles and struggles serve God's purpose for us. He guides it all. The Christian life is one that experiences plenty of imperfection and troubles. In repentance, we die daily to all that is not God as he has revealed himself in Christ crucified and risen declared to us in Word and sacrament.

As a rule, these troubles are punishments for sin. Nevertheless, in the godly they serve another purpose. For they are inflicted to put present sin to death, because in the saints they extinguish and mortify concupiscence. For death remains in the saints in order to abolish this impure nature. Accordingly Paul says (Ro 8:10), "The body is dead because of sin," that is, is put to death because sin still remains present in the flesh. The cross, therefore, is not a punishment but an exercise and preparation for renewal. For when present sin is put to death and when in the midst of temptations we learn to seek the aid of God and experience God's presence, we acknowledge more and more the lack of trust in our own hearts and we encourage ourselves by faith."<sup>25</sup>

Christian life—because we are still this side of the River Jordan—is hard work. Flesh militates against the Spirit of God.

With regard to the mortification of the flesh and discipline of the flesh, we teach—just as the Confession states—that a genuine rather than a counterfeit death takes place through the cross and afflictions by which God exercises us. In these it is necessary to submit to the will of God, as Paul says (Ro 12:1), "Present your bodies as sacrifices . . ." These are the spiritual

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<sup>23</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 3: Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 15-20* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.) (Genesis 17:12) (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1961, 1999)

<sup>24</sup> Large Catechism, 65-66, Lord's Prayer, Ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000) pp. 448,449

<sup>25</sup> "Apology of the Augsburg Confession," Art. XII, par. 151, p. 214, *The Book of Concord* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000) Kolb & Wengert



exercises of fear and faith. Alongside this true putting to death, which takes place through the cross, a voluntary and necessary kind of exercise also exists, about which Christ says, (Lk 21:34), “Be on your guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation,” and Paul (1 Co 9:27) says, “But I punish my body and enslave it . . .” We should undertake these exercises not because they are devotional exercises that justify but as restraints on our flesh, lest satiety overcome us and render us complacent and lazy.”<sup>26</sup>

Grounded firmly in the crucified Christ, God hidden and now revealed, now we understand rightly phrases like *no crucianos, no christianos*. Our crosses don’t earn a thing for us. Our struggles in the Christian life are not ever to be the locus of our trust. In Christ alone do I know who I am and where my eternal destiny is. All else that seeks to be my god must be vigorously rebuffed. Even killed. “In regard to the reluctant, recalcitrant flesh, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 9:27, ‘I punish my body and enslave it,’ and in Galatians 5:24 and Romans 8:13, ‘Those who belong to Christ have crucified,’ indeed killed, their ‘flesh with its passions and desires’ and activities.”<sup>27</sup>

The comfort we learned before on account of the big God who predestines and who makes our predestination known and certain in the crucified Jesus of Nazareth matters in life this side of the River Jordan.

This doctrine (of election) also gives us wonderful comfort in crosses and trials, that in his counsel before time began God determined and decreed that he would stand by us in every trouble, grant us patience, give us comfort, create hope and provide a way out of all things so that we may be saved (cf. 1 Co 10:13). Likewise, Paul treats this matter in such a comforting way in Romans 8:28-39, pointing out that in his intention before time began God preordained what sort of crosses and sufferings he would use to conform each one of his elect to “the image of his Son,” and that the cross of each should and must “work together for the good” of that person, because they are “called according to his purpose.” On this basis Paul concluded with certainty and without doubt that neither “hardship nor distress . . . neither death nor life . . . will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord.”<sup>28</sup>

We die to ourselves, over and again, in our Baptism and are renewed by the God who comes to us time and again in proclamation and in Supper.

God is hidden in Christ crucified. The church is hidden under the cross also. We believe, teach, and confess that we know she exists by faith and not by sight; we must resist the temptations to be the Church triumphant before our risen and ascended and exalted Lord, Jesus, comes again. We know where she exists—where the gospel is purely proclaimed and the sacraments are rightly administered. But it’s important to say that we know where the church exists and declaring that as an article of faith is a far cry from seeing the church with our eyes and judging her strength by any metric other than the gospel in Word and sacrament.

But why belabor the obvious? If the church, which is truly the kingdom of Christ, is distinguished from the kingdom of the devil, it necessarily follows that the ungodly, since they are in the kingdom of the devil, are not the church—although in this life, because the kingdom of Christ has not yet been revealed, they intermingle with the church and hold offices in the church. Just because the revelation has not yet taken place does not make the ungodly the church. For the kingdom of Christ is always that which he makes alive by his

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<sup>26</sup> Apology, Art XVI, par. 45-47, pp. 229,230, Kolb & Wengert

<sup>27</sup> Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Art IV, par. 19, p. 577, Kolb & Wengert

<sup>28</sup> Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Art XI, par. 48,49, pp. 648,649, Kolb & Wengert

Spirit, whether it has been revealed or is hidden under the cross, just as Christ is the same, whether now glorified or previously afflicted.<sup>29</sup>

### **Now, let's rightly see our eternal crown—then, in sight**

The crown is not the *quid pro quo* reward for our good works or for our well-intentioned promises or for our extra hard, extra special acts of penance designed to impress both God and man. But his promise of the crown certainly has to do with our eternity in the presence of the living God.

And such a promise certainly affects our life in the here and now as we live the rest of our lives in faith in the promises of God while we struggle, while we suffer, while we experience the cross, trial, and pain, and especially as we cross the River Jordan in death. "*Wir sind bettler; hoc est verum, (we are beggars; this is true),*" we say, along with Martin Luther. Beggars, yes. But such a grand and glorious and gracious Lord we have who has revealed himself in the bloodied, humiliated face of the crucified Jesus of Nazareth. "All this He did that I should be His own, and live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness, just as He has risen from death and lives and rules eternally. This is most certainly true."

We will live in his kingdom eternally. Then, in sight. We trust we will live forever in heaven with Him.

And we also now live in his kingdom. Now, by faith. Now, "when our Heavenly Father gives His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His holy Word and lead a godly life now on earth."

For faith-alone-in-the-crucified-Christ-alone theology sets itself up against sight. We live by faith and not by sight. And, yet, in faith, we cross the eschatological divide; we now experience what God promises. St. Paul repeatedly asserts that the faithful in Christ are now seated in the heavenly realms (Ephesians 1:3; 2:6)—so sure and certain are we that his promises are good.

When we say, "We embrace the crown," we say we win *by faith* in Jesus Christ crucified, the Lamb of God who was slain. Our devotions at this convention will show us our crucified, risen, and exalted Savior from some of the pictures in the Revelation of *Jesus Christ*. Troubles, yes! Hardships also for the people of faith in Jesus Christ, yes! But please draw out in your mind's eye the pictures the Spirit uses St. John to paint for us and note how often at the center is our crucified, risen, ascended, and exalted Lord/LORD, Jesus, reigning victoriously.

Yes, the theologian of the cross sees things the way they are—the humans captive to their own gods and their own ways to please those gods—and yet, in the Christ who is really present in proclamation and in sacrament, we win with our Lord, the victorious crucified Jesus.

When we say, "We anticipate the crown," we are speaking eschatologically. So, yes, we will reign in the kingdom of priests forever with our Lord. We say with St. Paul to his younger co-worker in 2 Timothy 4:8: "There is in store for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord will award me on the last day." Trusting in our living Lord, Jesus, we are certain of our crown of life (Revelation 2:10).

### **Now, let's rightly see our eternal crown—now, in faith**

Martin Luther, from *The Freedom of a Christian*:

All of us who believe in Christ are priests and kings in Christ, as 1 Pet 2:9 says, "You are a chosen race, God's own people, a royal priesthood, a priestly kingdom, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."

The nature of this priesthood and kingship is something like this: First, with respect to kingship, every Christian is by faith so exalted above all things that, by virtue of a spiritual power, he is lord of all things without exception, so that nothing can do him any harm. As a

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<sup>29</sup> Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Art. VII & VIII, par. 17,18, p. 176, Kolb & Wengert

matter of fact, all things are made subject to him and are compelled to serve him in obtaining salvation. Accordingly Paul says in Rom 8:28, “All things work together for good for the elect,” and in 1 Co 3:21-23, “All things are yours whether . . . life or death or the present or the future, all are yours; and you are Christ’s . . .” This is not to say that every Christian is placed over all things to have and control them by physical power—a madness with which some churchmen are afflicted—for such power belongs to kings, princes, and other men on earth. Our ordinary experience in life shows us that we are subjected to all, suffer many things, and even die. As a matter of fact, the more Christian a man is, the more evils, sufferings, and deaths he must endure, as we see in Christ the first-born prince himself, and in all his brethren, the saints. The power of which we speak is spiritual. It rules in the midst of enemies and is powerful in the midst of oppression. This means nothing else than that “power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Co 12:9) and that in all things I can find profit toward salvation (Ro 8:28), so that the cross and death itself are compelled to serve me and to work together with me for my salvation. This is a splendid privilege and hard to attain, a truly omnipotent power, a spiritual dominion in which there is nothing so good and nothing so evil but that it shall work together for good to me, if only I believe. Yes, since faith alone suffices for salvation, I need nothing but faith exercising the power and dominion of its own liberty. Lo, this is the inestimable power and liberty of Christians.

He, however, who does not believe is not served by anything. On the contrary, nothing works for his good, but he himself is a servant of all, and all things turn out badly for him because he wickedly uses them to his own advantage and not to the glory of God.<sup>30</sup>

“The kingdom of heaven has neared,” Jesus told his disciples to announce repeatedly in the Gospels. The announcement of the arrival of the messianic King was happening as God was coming out of hiding in the incarnate Word, Jesus of Nazareth, son of Mary.

Indeed, the kingdom has neared in the incarnate Christ. And it continues to near when our heavenly Father gives his Holy Spirit, so that by grace we believe his holy Word and lead a godly life now on earth and forever in heaven.

### **The crown is ours—then, eternally; now, in faith vs. triumphalism that wants the crown now in sight**

Mixing up “cross and crown” talk and not keeping the truths properly distinguished leads quickly to all kinds of silliness. It certainly can lead to the worst kind of confusion regarding the two kingdoms or two realms in which the Lord actually reigns as king. Far, far too many have been tempted to think we know the way things really are by judging which political party is in charge or which legislation is passing in Congress and which laws are seen as constitutional in our nation/state or which football team is winning.

Let the faithful church turn from what is natural to our flesh—being theologians of glory—that is, theologians of a law that others should be doing, including even the law of God. If the faithful church isn’t taking seriously the glorious task of forgiving the sins of the sinners—gospel ministry, which, of course, means telling the humans how badly in bondage they are to the wrong gods—then who is actually doing gospel ministry? We’re all simply arguing about what or who is right or what or who is legal.

Let’s point out the sinfulness of the humans proven by their sinful actions. But let’s not act like the huffers and puffers out there who sing the song of “more” and “harder.” Let’s proclaim the Christ who is both revealed on the cross and who is hidden on the cross; no human would ever invent such foolishness as Christ crucified as the proclamation that actually gives new life, hope, and salvation. But

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<sup>30</sup> Martin Luther, *Three Treatises*, “Freedom of a Christian,” from *Vol. 44 of Luther’s Works* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1957) pp. 289-291

that's what our God has done. And that's what he continues to do through the faithful ministry of the church.

### **Conclusion: On metrics vs. triumphalist notions of church**

We preach Christ crucified. We deliver the goods—via Word and sacrament. Let the gospel be the offensive thing in our assemblies—not somebody watching his favorite cable channel and aping the party line of this side or that.

Let's stand on the rock of the *theologia crucis* and reject any and all of the other competing stories—all other theologies of glory—some of which are claiming to be scriptural, using all the right words—faith, grace, forgiveness, cross, crown, Jesus—but mashing them together in ways that obscure the clarity and foolishness of the message of Christ crucified for us.

Let's live by faith and not by sight—faith in the crucified and living and reigning Christ—who promises that we rule with him, even now in faith (all things serve us for our good) and eternally (we'll sit on thrones with him).

Let's push off the temptation to turn "cross" terminology into typical curved-in-on-ourselves glory stories; you know—the Christian life is a tough one, so go ahead and make yourself as obnoxious as you possibly can to others so others dislike you; especially to those in the world who don't yet know the name of Jesus rightly and view them as enemies, because you're somehow afraid of them rather than being afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell and the One who gave himself up for us all.

Let's live in the certainty of the shocking promises of the God who hides, even when he reveals himself—that means we live by faith in the promises of God in Christ, not by sight of any kind—not even ecclesiastical metrics. Our God is hidden. So is the church.

Let's live proclaiming that One who comes out of hiding in our faithful proclamation, who promises life eternal, who promises it's all good, who promises a crown. But not a one of us sees the crown. And plenty of us suffer, yes, even bear crosses while traveling to the River Jordan. Let's resist the temptations to be the church triumphant in anything other than Christ crucified—not even in our great mission programs, our great ministerial education system, our great Lutheran teachers, or our great pastors, or our great leadership. All of it—in the final analysis—is down here and therefore is not Christ crucified proclamation or sacrament administration. There alone does our God promise to be our gracious God. Not in a mystical meditation up in the hills. Or in our triumphant stadium-filling events. But in the humble words of your humble preacher, who is clay pot so that the all-surpassing power be of God and not of us (2 Corinthians 4:7).

Let's die to all of it—to anyone and anything other than Christ crucified. There he saves. There he promises us a crown.

This is most certainly true.

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