

Gerhard Forde's
Theology is for Proclamation:
A Study Guide

by

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Preface

I appreciated the invitation from Pastor Culynn Curtis, chair of the LCMC Augustana District Board of Theology and Ministry, to write this study guide for use in advance of the LCMC Augustana District Theological Conference in February, 2019. It is a good “fit” with my mission to do research and write in support of Dr. Gerhard O. Forde’s—and Martin Luther’s—theology of the cross. Even though I retired young from the pastoral ministry in 2002, I still believed that I had a calling to serve in support of the theology of the cross.

In so doing, I was pleased to be accepted onto the LCMC retired clergy list and affiliated with the LCMC Cross Alone District where I served as the president of the district for a few years. Our primary educational focus in the Cross Alone District was sponsoring a number of “Forde Fests” along with maintaining a web site with a wealth of theological content. The web site—now Cross Alone Lutherans—is still maintained and new content is added. You can find it at www.crossalone.us.

After the Cross Alone District disbanded, I immediately sought affiliation with the LCMC Augustana District and was invited to serve on the Board of Theology and Ministry and am delighted to continue to do so. This past summer the board had a two-day retreat at my home—my “retreat center in the woods”—just north of Duluth. It was at this retreat that the theme of the 2019 theological conference was chosen: *Theology is for Proclamation*. All participants would be encouraged to read Dr. Forde’s book on the subject prior to the conference. It is the purpose of this study guide to facilitate a “deep reading” of the text rather than just skimming over it.

I thank my theological mentor and friend, The Rev. Dr. Joseph A. Burgess, for our many hours of conversation about this project and his ideas for the shape and content of this study guide along with his editorial suggestions. (Of course, any errors that may remain are my responsibility.) It should be noted that Dr. Burgess was a colleague of Dr. Forde’s on the U.S. Lutheran Catholic Dialogues and was the co-editor of a number of volumes of those dialogues.

The structure of this study guide begins with an introduction consisting of material from a lecture Gerhard Forde gave early in his career, in the early 1960s, which both functions as an important supplement to *Theology is for Proclamation*, which he had published almost thirty years later, and demonstrates the consistency of his theological perspective. In order to facilitate a study of *Theology is for Proclamation*, executive summaries are presented which highlight key sections in each chapter. Within the summaries, certain quotes are in bold for further reflection. When italics are found within quotation marks, whether or not the text is in bold font for emphasis, the italics are always in Forde’s text. Page numbers of the quotes are given in the text of the study guide.

Crux sola nostra theologia,

Brad Jenson

Advent, 2018

Duluth, Minnesota

About the author of this study guide:

Rev. Brad Jenson was a student of Dr. Forde’s in the early 1980s. He is a co-author of *The Essential Bible: A Summary of the Major Stories* and *Luther and Bach on the Magnificat: For Advent and Christmas*. In 2017, he gave a lecture at the LCMC Augustana District Theological Conference, based on Forde’s research, titled “Luther on the Jews: A Three-Phase Journey in His Thinking” which was subsequently published in the Reformation 2017 issue of *LOGIA: A Journal of Lutheran Theology*. He is currently doing research and writing on Dr. Forde’s Christology for a forthcoming article.

Brad received a B.A. in Religion from St. Olaf College (1978) and a Master of Divinity Degree from Luther Seminary (1984). After serving congregations in the American Lutheran Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America for 18 years, he accepted a position as a Financial Advisor in Duluth in 2002. In financial services, his professional designations are as follows: CERTIFIED FINANCIAL PLANNER (CFP®), Certified Investment Management Analyst (CIMA®), Accredited Investment Fiduciary (AIF®), and Chartered Advisor in Philanthropy (CAP®). Contact information: e-mail bcjenson@charter.net or by phone at his office at Lake Superior Financial Services/Raymond James in Duluth, Minnesota at 218-625-2430.

Introduction: Law and Gospel as the Methodological Principle of Theology

Early in his theological career, Gerhard Forde articulated the core perspective of *Theology is for Proclamation* in a brilliant lecture he gave in 1962. This lecture should be considered an important companion to his book *Theology is for Proclamation* published almost thirty years later. The context of Forde's aforementioned lecture is important. Prior to Forde's arrival at Luther College in Decorah, Iowa, it got quite testy in the religion department: All but one member of the religion faculty plus the campus pastor resigned and walked out. The reason for the walkout was a protest against Robert W. Jenson who, contrary to Lutheran Orthodoxy, taught in favor of the theory of evolution and against the theory of Biblical inerrancy. In the wake of this walkout and with the blessing of the Luther College President, E.D. Farwell, the religion department sponsored a series of public lectures about these and other matters of theological controversy. In Forde's lecture titled "Law and Gospel as the Methodological Principle of Theology,"¹ he spoke out *against* the theory of Biblical inerrancy and the verbal inspiration method and *for* the law-gospel method. A review of the arguments in this lecture—primarily through Forde's own words—will function as our introduction to *Gerhard Forde's Theology is for Proclamation: A Study Guide*.

Forde begins his lecture with a definition of methodology that applies to all intellectual disciplines. A method attempts to answer the "How do you know?" question. In science a particular truth claim appeals to the scientific method. A sociologist has a method which befits a gathering and interpretation of sociological data. A historian works with a method to analyze and interpret events in history. Likewise in theology, "When we make certain claims about God, man,² Christ, salvation, etc., we must be ready to give some sort of an answer to the question, 'how do you know?'" (50) Therefore this focus is on theological method and how "it is it is used in dogmatic theology, that is, the method by which the claims of faith are established." (51)

"It is the main contention of this essay that Lutheran theology does not need the verbal inspiration method because it always had, at its best, a method quite its own which is better and more in accord with the scriptures themselves." — GERHARD FORDE (52)

The Verbal Inspiration Method

For the verbal inspiration method, the "How do you know?" question is answered not via the actual the proclamation of law-gospel, but rather by a particular *theory* of the words on the printed page of the Bible. And this theory is established *a priori*. What does a priori mean vis-a-vis the Bible? "It means that it is so because it *must be so* in order for scripture to be considered the Word of God. That is, if you believe that the scripture is the Word of God, then you must believe that it cannot contain any errors before you even begin to read it, otherwise you would not read it as the Word of God. The position must be established *a priori*, before the examination of evidence, otherwise it cannot be considered a sure basis for faith." . . . (52-53) ". . . [O]ne cannot and dare not ascribe any error to the writers of Holy

¹ The lecture was published in *Theological Perspectives: A Discussion of Contemporary Issues in Theology by Members of the Religion Department at Luther College*. Decorah Iowa: Luther College Press, 1964, pp. 50-69.

² Forde's lecture was given in the early 1960's prior to the time that inclusive language was used. Forde's words will be quoted exactly as they are given in the printed form of his lecture.

Scripture, even in the least, all the way down to the nomenclature.” . . . (53) “Inspiration in this method refers to the process by which God supernaturally influenced the writing of scripture and protected the writers from error of any sort.” . . . (54) “For when all is said and done, **the *a priori* belief that this is the way it *must be* in order for the scripture to be the Word of God is nowhere established in scripture itself, and it is a human construction; it is a human idea about what the term ‘Word of God’ must mean.**” (55-56)

“Finally, what is at stake in this conflict over method? Must we make a choice between them today? . . . I think we must.” — GERHARD FORDE (67)

The Law-Gospel Method

The law-gospel method operates quite differently from the verbal inspiration method. The answer to the “How do you know?” question does not depend on a human theory about the Word of God but, rather, functions as a confession of faith in the event of hearing the actual proclamation of the Word of God—**by listening to a preacher.** “This method I have called the law-gospel method. As I said previously, I believe that this method has always been the method actually employed by Lutheran theology at its best. Every Lutheran pastor knows, or at least should know, that when it comes to preaching he does not in fact depend upon the verbal inspiration theory to convince his hearers. Every pastor has been told often enough that the only way to gain entrance to a man’s heart is to convict of sin and convince of grace. In other words, to preach the law and the gospel and to distinguish correctly between them.” (59)

In contrast to the verbal inspiration method, there are “no *a priori* ideas about what God’s Word is or what it would have to be. I cannot start with *my ideas* of what the Word of God is or what it would have to be and then try to make the scripture fit this idea. It means that at the beginning I can only hear this thing which some men call the Word of God and then experience what it does to me and says to me, and from this hearing and experiencing learn what the Word of God really is. The *Word of God* is not a thing, not a proposition; it is an event.” . . . (60) “Luther could even go so far as to say that it was a great deterioration and limitation of the Spirit that books had to be written about the gospel because it is something which by its very nature must be preached.” (63)

The Word of God “. . . attacks men in their self-sufficiency, brings them down into the hell of despair and recreates them through the gospel. God does not wait around to be discovered by men and allow himself or his Word to be judged by men. God goes on the offensive through his Word.” . . . (61) “This means, according to Luther, that when the Word of God is preached *something happens*, something is always accomplished. The Word does not return void. Some may, to be sure, be repelled by it; some may be frightened by it, or terrified; and some may by the miracle of the Spirit’s guidance hear the good news in it; but in any case something always happens. And that which happens, that which *actually occurs*, in a very concrete sense, is the action of the living Word. It is God acting through his Word. **The Word of God establishes its own authority through the preaching of it.**” . . . (61) “**Only when one realizes that there is absolutely no hope outside the gospel, and nothing but hope in the gospel, is faith created. When this Word addresses me, I can only say, ‘I repent, thou alone art Lord!’ Then faith is created and is based solely on the hearing of the gospel, and it can ask no better basis than this. The Word of God is something quite special; it establishes its own authority.**” (62) There are important issues at stake in this battle between methods.

First, with the law-gospel method, one does not need to go through intellectual contortions—as one

must with the verbal inspiration method—in order to protect the scriptures from charges of certain mistakes or errors within its pages. Forde wrote: “. . . **the verbal inspiration theory has the increasingly obvious difficulty that it is unable to deal with facts gained both by research into the Bible and the world around us.** For over two hundred years now it has demonstrated its inability to cope with truths established by scientific and historical research. **In the face of the mounting knowledge of the world, the verbal inspiration method has had no constructive counsel to give, but can only advise one to retreat from the world one finds uncomfortable.** One does not need to go outside the Bible itself to show the inability of this method to cope with the facts. Clearly the belief that there are no mistakes of any sort in scripture simply is not true.” (56)

In contrast the verbal inspiration method, **the law-gospel method “. . . is not embarrassed by human advancements in science, history, or other disciplines.** This method recognizes that the Biblical writers were men of a particular time, limited by the knowledge of their time. **It is concerned only to maintain that we share the same basic faith as those ancients did regardless of a difference in world-views and thought forms.”** (66) That being said, the fight *for* the law-gospel method and *against* the verbal inspiration method is nothing less than a fight “. . . for the restoration of the gospel. It must be made absolutely clear that it is *not* dedication to historical-critical research, it is *not* dedication to science or any other human endeavor which decides the matter. **It is purely and simply dedication to the gospel.** For the twentieth century the burning question is the question ‘how do you know?’ and one cannot compromise on this question without compromising on the gospel.” (67)

“It is not possible to hold both these methods today or to compromise between them without compromising and hence distorting the gospel.” — GERHARD FORDE (67)

“. . . [T]he question of the basis for faith is also at stake. The verbal inspiration method seems to believe that faith can be solidly based only if its assured that scripture is without error, even in its most insignificant details. But how strong is this faith really? In the face of the mounting human knowledge about the world and about scripture, this faith is only as strong as the will of the one who holds it to resist the advancement human knowledge. I have been around colleges and universities now long enough to know how strong this faith is in the majority of cases. Usually it simply withers and dies, for when a child has drummed into him over and over again that if it can be shown that there are errors in scripture then his faith is groundless, he is doomed. When we allow someone to continue in this assumption, we are in fact only pushing him out on a limb and inviting someone to saw it off. By this method we produce nervous and timid Christians who can maintain their faith only by cutting themselves off from the world. As far as I can see, it is absolutely imperative that we operate today with a method which enables us to face the world and to enter into meaningful conversation with it. In this, it seems to me, the law-gospel method offers much more fruitful possibilities without sacrificing any of the essentials of the faith.” (68)

Furthermore, “. . . the very nature of preaching is at stake. The acid test for any method is its practical consequences. Here too the law-gospel method is the best one we can adopt. Under the influence of the verbal inspiration method, where faith may be understood as a matter of believing a number of doctrines, the sermon gets to be a kind of theological lecture in which doctrines are merely recited. The gospel becomes merely another doctrine which ‘is to be believed.’ The gospel then become another law, something which you have to do, something you have to believe. The sermon then becomes a recital of truths which you ought to believe and be ‘really sincere’ about. If the parson has little imagination, the sermon is dull. If he is clever, he may spice it up with interesting stories and

inspirational anecdotes. But in either case, neither the law nor the gospel is preached in its radical sense. . . . To me the greatest argument for the law-gospel method is the fact that it attempts to restore some vitality to the preaching of the church.” . . . (68) **“The ultimate goal of the law-gospel method is the revitalizing of the preaching of the church.** This is one of the things that is at stake.” (68-69)

“In summary, the law-gospel method is an attempt to recover the fundamental genius of the Reformation. It is the assertion that the Word of God can only be brought home to men through the preaching of law and gospel. In this preaching and in the hearing of it, the whole matter is decided. The only real purpose and the ultimate goal of this is that the *via vox evangelii*, the living voice of the gospel, be restored to the church in a time when it has been confused with many other voices and virtually drowned out by them.” — GERHARD FORDE (69)

Thus from the earliest days in his professional career to the very end of his life, Gerhard Forde’s methodological claim is that *Theology is for Proclamation!*

What follows next is a section on Forde’s understanding of the relationship between systematic theology and proclamation found in the introductory section of the book *Theology is for Proclamation* and then executive summaries of each chapter.

On The Relationship Between Systematic Theology and Proclamation

Of course, “theology is for proclamation” is the title of Forde’s book. Most importantly, it is an argument about how systematic theology, when done properly, drives to the proclamation of the gospel. But systematic theology is *not* proclamation. Regrettably, systematic theology is often confused with proclamation and thus often obscures the proclamation by taking its place in the pulpit: “Proclamation gets displaced by explanation, teaching, lecturing, persuasion, ethical exhortation, or public display of emotion about Jesus.” (1)

How are proclamation and systematic theology to be properly distinguished? **Proclamation is primary discourse: “Proclamation, as we shall use the term in this study, is explicit declaration of the good news, the gospel, the kerygma.” (1) By contrast, systematic theology is secondary discourse.** As such, systematic theology “is not the Word of God, it is words about God, reflection on what has been heard. . . . It attempts to put things in order, to focus, to lend coherence, and to measure the church’s discourse on the basis of established norms, scripture, the creeds, and confessional documents.” (3) As primary discourse, proclamation is like a present tense declaration: “I love you,” whereas, as secondary discourse, systematic theology is like a book about love or the nature of loving.

If the distinction between proclamation and systematic theology is the distinction between primary and secondary discourse, how are they related? “Without systematic theology there will be no proclamation; but without proper understanding of proclamation, systematic theology will overstep its bounds and falsify itself.” (5)

One can view church history from the perspective of systematic theology overstepping its bounds and thus usurping the place of proclamation. “Almost from the beginning [of the church] the gospel proclamation tended to lose its present tense. . . . Jesus became, in today’s parlance, ‘history,’ past tense. The good news became old news. The only place where the present tense survived in some fashion was in the sacraments. . . . The direct proclamation survived at best only as part of the Sacrament of Penance where it was carefully hedged by conditions and kept in the closet of the confessional.” (6)

The Reformation was, at its best, a recovery of primary discourse: “It was an attempt to get the primary discourse out of the closet of the confessional into the common discourse of Christians and into the public pulpit. It survived by fits and starts in the churches, but increasing separation between university and church could only mean that theology would become more and more an academic rather than an ecclesiastical discipline. Secondary discourse again crowded out primary discourse.” (6)

This book seeks “. . . to recapture the present tense of the gospel. . .” (8)

Chapter 1: The Preached God

“ . . . [H]ow shall we reflect on God so as to foster proclamation? That is the fundamental question for systematic theology.” . . . (13) **“Being captivated by the proclamation, our thinking about God is radically altered. We encounter not just talk about God, but God speaking to us.”** (14)

It is precisely hearing God speaking to us in the proclamation that “makes us aware of a fundamental distinction, as Luther once put it, between God preached and God not preached.” . . . (14) “God ‘not preached’ is a God of wrath. This concept may be unpopular but it is true.” . . . (15) “God not preached is therefore a confusing, nefarious brew of presence and absence, of sheer timeless abstractions. Yet the abstractions do not reveal so much as hide God from us. They tell us more about what God is not than what God is. God is infinite (that is, not finite), immutable (that is, not changeable), not mortal, not suffering, not limited by time or space, not relative to anything. As such God amounts to a deified minus sign. So, **even though inescapably present, God is terrifyingly absent in this presence. God is, as the tradition (especially Martin Luther) put it, ‘hidden’ (*absconditus*).**” . . . (15-16) “God not preached is the absconder, the one who hides behind the naked abstractions, and there is nothing theology as such can do about that because theology is a collection of abstractions. **It is only in the concrete proclamation, the present-tense Word from God, spoken ‘to you’ the listener, that the abstraction is broken through for the moment and God no longer absconds [hides] but is revealed.** This is what theologians with too few exceptions through the ages have either failed or refused to see. When the distinctive correlation between systematic theology and proclamation is overlooked, the theological impulse will of necessity be to attempt the impossible: to go to work on the abstractions, to attempt to remove or see through them, to tear the mask from the face of the ‘hiding’ God. When proclamation is not heard, there is no other recourse. One attempts, against Luther’s frequent caveat, to ‘peer into the hidden majesty of God.’” (17)

“What are we to do about God not preached? Nothing. We are to leave the not-preached God alone and pay attention to the God clothed and displayed in the Word. But how can we do that? Only, of course, to the degree that we are grasped by the preached God. In Luther’s terms we cannot—will not—do it by ourselves, not apart from the proclamation.” (27)

“If we are to proclaim and not merely to explain God, what are we to say? In speaking of God it is important to start with the very first principle: What is to be proclaimed is what God has decided, in fact, to do. **The word for what God has decided to do is election.** The God of the Scriptures is an electing God. The God of the Scriptures is ‘the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,’ the God who chooses Israel and disposes over its entire history, the God who comes in Jesus to break down the wall of separation between Jew and Gentile so that election shall know no bounds.” . . . (30-31) “The God of the Scriptures is an electing God and, therefore, a God who speaks and enjoins those who hear, believe, and follow to speak the Word of God, to go and do the electing.” . . . (31) “One must have the nerve—or better, the Spirit—to do the unheard-of thing and say to those listening “You are the elect!’ or ‘You are the one.’” (33)

Chapter 2: Hard of Hearing

This chapter sketches a theological anthropology in the sense that it articulates presuppositions for the proclamation. In light of the proclamation of law and gospel, what should be presupposed in order to proclaim Christ? In other words, **“what is the actual predicament of those who are to hear the proclamation? Why can they not hear without a preacher (Rom. 10:14)? Would not a teacher or purveyor of wisdom do as well?** When the question of the human predicament is put in this fashion it will not only lead us to a more accurate assessment of who we are and where we stand over against the electing, preached God, but it will also play a significant role in shaping the proclamation itself.” (39-40)

The preacher is *not* to dispense religious teaching so as to make a pitch for a personal decision or a behavioral change so that the hearer, in turn, can decide this or do that. **“Bondage, not freedom, is presupposed, and such a presupposition will not only affect our view of the human predicament but will also deepen the understanding of the proclamation itself. . . .** The question is really not whether we ‘have’ free wills, but rather what we will do—what we are ‘bound to’ do—when we come up against God. Proclamation presupposes that we cannot, will not, reconcile ourselves to God. But the proclaimer hopes and thus proclaims in the expectation that through the proclamation the ‘Spirit of the Lord’ is at work to set captives free.” (43)

Is the bondage of the will the same thing as philosophical determinism? No. “The phrase ‘bondage of the will’ does not mean, first of all, that the will is forced, determined, or frustrated, perhaps by some higher power or fate or god in its attempt to do what it really wants to do. No, the bondage of the will refers to what we will not do, what we are bound not to do in a given instance. The bondage of the will means that we find ourselves in a situation where we simply cannot do what is asked of us, and we cannot do it because we will not.”. . . (44) “We are bound . . . because when we come up against God we come up against those masks, the magnificent abstractions about which we can do nothing. We come up against that which is truly above us. The trouble is simply that God is above us. God is simply God and not at our disposal. **And we will not have it; we will not, cannot let God be God.**” (46)

Regarding the primordial “fall” into sin, the word “fall” is best understood as an “upward fall”—strange as that concept is—because it is “. . . an upward rebellion, an invasion of the realm of things ‘above,’ the usurping of divine prerogative.” . . . (48) “What one loses in such a ‘fall’ is faith and trust in God. . . . Succumbing to the temptation, ‘you shall not die,’ creatures are driven by their death-denying, self-promoting (*causa sui*) projects. Death reigns in the midst of life.” (49)

Therefore, if . . . “we proceed from the premise that the proclamation exposes our upward fall and our bondage at the same time as it delivers from it, then we can perhaps begin to grasp what is intended by the doctrine of original sin. We see that we are trapped in a condition, bound in a predicament we cannot escape. . . . When the proclamation gets through to us, we come to confess our bondage [and are set free].” (50) “The proclamation is therefore shaped by the fact that the bound are to be set free.” (55)

Chapter 3: The Preacher

The focus of this chapter is both on Jesus the preacher and on preaching Jesus Christ. Thus we delve into the issue of Christology. “What happened to Jesus the preacher is the stuff of Christology.” . . . The crucial question has been: How did the Jesus who preached become the Jesus who was and is preached in the church? How is the move from Jesus the preacher to Jesus as Lord and Christ, the very Son of God, our Savior, warranted?” (57-58)

Jesus came preaching the forgiveness of sins: “. . . [H]e simply forgave sins—even the sins of really wicked people. . . . Publicans, sinners, and whores would enter the kingdom before the righteous, he claimed, because the first would be last and the last first. Madness! The outcome of such conduct is predictable. He was ruining ‘the cause.’ He could only be judged a blasphemer, an outlaw, a rebel. He was wasted—betrayed, judged, beaten, spat upon, mocked, crucified, dead and buried. But he was raised from the dead. . . .” (75) His followers, who had forsaken him and fled, now became believers and proclaimers of Jesus Christ risen from the dead—for the forgiveness of sins.

“God’s self-vindication in the cross and resurrection of Jesus . . . confronts us with a radical discontinuity. Living ‘under the law’ we simply cannot fathom, accept, or trust an act of sheer mercy. When we come up against the goodness of God in any form our bondage becomes evident. We cannot give up. It does not seem safe to us. We hang onto the law because it appears to offer us a way to control our own destiny, our future. It seems to promise the continuity we think we need. . . . But now God had shattered everything. God shut up everything, even keepers of the law, under disobedience by raising the crucified Jesus from the dead. All the old continuity was gone.” . . . (77-78) **“The discontinuity is involved in the very nature of the case. It is a new thing that God has done by raising Jesus from the dead. Indeed, God does this *to us*, putting to death the old and raising up the new.”** (80)

Christology leads to the problem of Christological theories: **“The problem with most christologies, conservative or liberal, right or left, is that they depend upon a continuity that undercuts the proclamation and substitutes a lecture about Christ for the preaching of him.** . . . One may call these ‘Christologies of continuity.’ . . . Christologies of continuity are usually constructed as a detour around the folly of the cross and the shock of the resurrection. . . . The freedom of choice is the counterpart in the theological anthropology to continuity in Christology. . . . There is neither consciousness of bondage nor release from captivity. There is only a demand for a Jesus who ‘meets our religious needs.’ **The fundamental paradigm for Christologies of continuity is free choice, not death and resurrection.**” (69)

For example: “Conservative Christology seeks to trace explicit ‘proof’ for the ‘divinity’ of Jesus directly back to the teaching of an inerrant scripture. . . . Today such a Christology can maintain itself only by ignoring the development of careful historical investigation of the Scripture and the problematics that gave rise to that historical work.” (70)

On the other hand, “. . . more liberal Christologies are also Christologies of continuity, even though they generally accept the judgments of historical criticism. . . . Here continuity with the teachings of the ‘real’ Jesus is claimed.” (70) But here is the radical *discontinuity* of the actual situation: “. . . the earthly, human Jesus who actually dies—comes to an end—under the law, and is nevertheless raised to new life by God.” Without this radical discontinuity “the law [i.e., *lex aeterna*] reigns supreme” (84) and there is no gospel.

Chapter 4: The Preached God

When systematic theology is *not* for proclamation (the antithesis of Forde's theology), Christology is for *explanation*. Such Christologies have the character of theories which then compete with each other for theological and ecclesiological acceptance. By contrast, "[t]he project of this chapter is **to work out what Christology might look like when systematic theology is for proclamation.**" (88) Therefore "Christological reflection is to guide us on our way from yesterday's to today's proclamation. As such, it is a constructive task. Those who have been grasped by the proclamation measure past reflection critically so as to propose ways present reflection might once again foster vital proclamation." (87)

Proclamation "does God" to the hearers: "Proclamation as present-tense Word of God spoken by a human being is possible only under the aegis of . . . divine self-repetition. Only so can the Word we proclaim today be the Word of God. One proclaims the only Son of the Father in the Spirit and so 'does God' to the hearers." (93)

"It is in and through [Jesus'] humanity, the suffering and the dying, that we come up against what his divinity means. **He does not come to protect us from death, he comes to do it to us. He brings home death to us. He does old beings to death.** The suffering and dying Jesus is therefore the one in whom we meet our end, the eschatological end of our existence in bondage to sin and death. He is the end of the old being who vainly constructs death-denying projects, who thinks that abstractions such as divinity and immortality can save. He puts an end to our story negatively and positively. He is the end (*finis*) of the old, and the goal (*telos*) of the new. The old is put to death so that the new can be resurrected in faith and hope to look to the last day in confidence." (102)

Regarding atonement theories about Jesus' death, "[a] common characteristic of the various atonement theories is . . . a tendency to forget that it was actually a murder and that we did it. We seem in such haste systematically to explain why it had to happen that we become exonerated from our part in it." . . . (120) "If systematic theology is to drive to viable proclamation of the cross all this must cease. . . . **Atonement thinking has to proceed from the actual story of Jesus and his way to the cross. Perhaps the fact most conspicuous in its absence from our theories of atonement is the fact that we killed him.** He was despised and rejected and we esteemed him not. Jesus came among us exercising the freedom of God, declaring the reign of God through repentance and the forgiveness of sins, and we would not have it. . . . **The problem of forgiveness is that it simply does not fit in this world. Naturally so, for it brings the kingdom of God! Forgiveness full and free is therefore the most subversive rebellion against the powers of this age there can be.** . . . It spells the end of our upward rebellion, our attempt to be gods. . . . To quote Bonhoeffer. . . 'There are only two ways of encountering Jesus: man must die or he must put Jesus to death.' So we kill him. It is a matter of self-defense. If there is to be a proclamation of atonement today which actually brings reconciliation we must drive this point home." (121)

"It is vital for a proclamation of the death and resurrection of Jesus that aims at actual atonement to grasp what it means to say that Jesus died for us and that consequently we too have died. How is this so? We breathe, we walk around, we exist, but we have made our last move. It is checkmate. We are dead as old beings, as those who seek to establish and control their own destiny." . . . (125-126) "The aim is to be made one in Christ with God. Just so is it atonement, the raising up of a new being who actually enjoys God. That is the subject of the next chapter." (133)

Chapter 5: Hearing

“The outcome of everything discussed thus far, the goal of the proclamation, is the hearing of faith.” . . . (135) **“Faith is the state of being grasped and captivated in the Spirit by the proclamation of what God has done in Jesus.”** (137) “[The proclamation] is an eschatological Word, a promise. For that reason it is a Word that can only be preached, and can only be received by hearing.” . . . (135) “For the [eschatological] Word to be spoken is unheard of in this age, startling and offensive, negating and contradicting everything the age stands for. It is all summed up in the fact that through the death and resurrection of Jesus God has done absolutely everything for the salvation of humankind. It is summed up in the fact that Jesus has died for us, and so we have all died. We are through, ‘washed up’ as old beings. It is summed up in the fact that forgiveness of sins is to be preached to all in Jesus’ name and for his sake. It is summed up in the fact that there is nothing left to do. What shall we do to be saved? Nothing! He, she, whoever has ears to hear, hear it! Just listen for once!” (135-136)

“What does this mean for our understanding of faith? Faith means to be freed, liberated by what Jesus has accomplished, to believe and rejoice in God.” (140) As such, “God does not want to be one in whom we have to believe in order to . . . get what we consider to be ‘salvation.’ As a matter of fact, to think of faith as a ‘have to’ is most likely to lose it. The persistent preaching that thunders away at the idea that we ‘have to’ believe or ‘make our decision for Jesus’ or somehow acquire ‘Jesus as our personal savior’ usually defeats the purpose of the gospel altogether. Faith is not something you ‘have to’ do. . . . God does not wish to be one in whom you have to believe but rather one in whom you would want to believe. God has acted in Jesus so as to set us free for that. God wants to be desired and enjoyed for his own sake, to be more than just needed or necessary.” (140)

Now we are in a position to say something about creation and sin in light of faith. “The faith that comes from hearing lights up creation and casts the sin that distorts it in darker relief.” . . . (141) “Putting together the pieces we have developed, a quite different picture [of creation and sin] begins to emerge. There is nothing wrong with creation but the loss of faith. Sin is not merely wrong moral choice, it is faithlessness, unbelief. Sin is simply the lack of joy in God and the creation.” . . . (142) **“Faith in God the creator and thus the receiving of creation as a sheer gift comes by dying and being raised.** It is a new creation out of nothing. Out of the fact that there is nothing to do, the whole creation is made new in the risen Christ. **But we should not mistake the fact that in this life such a view is not easily or lightly held. In actuality faith waivers and must be renewed daily.** We do not surrender or get over our idealisms readily. They haunt us till we die. Perhaps we could say that to the extent we are grasped by Christ’s deed in faith, to that extent we receive the world back as creation. It is important to say that to make it clear that the battle for creation is still being waged, and we are in the middle of it.” (145)

“Corollary to this faith in creation is the . . . ‘doctrine of the two kingdoms.’ . . . Thinking in terms of two kingdoms is a faithful way of looking at the world. Only because one is a new creature in Christ does one receive the world back again as a new creation. Only then will one turn about to carry out one’s vocation in this age and not seek to desert it prematurely.” (145)

Another corollary to this faith in creation is the truth that “[g]race is not some secret or mysterious behind-the-scenes power added to an incomplete or deficient creation. Grace is what happens through the open proclamation of the death and resurrection of Christ. **Grace is putting a stop to our whole quest to be gods, putting down the rebellion, the cracking of the bondage, the liberation of creation to be creation, the sheer gift of God.**” (144)

Chapter 6: Proclaiming

The Hermeneutics of Proclamation

When theology is for explanation, “The basic presupposition for such oral communication [i.e., preaching] tends to be the freedom of choice. The words provide information about God and Christ which one is expected to appropriate or accept by an act of the will. One may, of course, insist that such choosing is aided by grace or the workings of the Spirit and so not only a matter of human caprice. But even so, the presupposition remains the same, that of the continuously existing subject.” (147) The “self” as “continuously existing subject” is a “self” without the discontinuity of an eschatological event involving the death of the old being and rising of the new being in faith.

By contrast, when theology is for proclamation, “[t]he purpose . . . is not to present [the hearer’s free will] with one more option, but to put the old to death and to raise up the new in the Spirit. The ultimate purpose of the proclamation is to raise the dead.” (153-154)

“It is here that the hermeneutics of the matter can help us. Proclamation should issue ultimately in what might be called a *doing* of the text to the hearers, a doing of what the text authorizes the preacher to do in the living present. . . . Just as in Christology we were impelled to move from the language of being to the language of doing, so also the proclamation must move from explaining to doing the text.” . . . (155) “But exegesis is mostly presupposition for proclamation, not proclamation itself. Nor should one stop or become too preoccupied with the move from what the text meant to what it ‘means.’ . . . It is more to the point to inquire what the text did to the hearers and prepare to do that again.” . . . (156) “In moving from text to sermon, one would do well to look first for the offense, the killing letter of the text, the hard saying, the uncompromising word, and start with that rather than with some cute story. . . . [I]t must be so preached precisely as offense to kill the old so that it can be turned over as life-giving Spirit. . . . **So the hermeneutics of the Word as killing letter and life-giving Spirit impels the proclaimer to a doing of the Word to the hearer and not merely explaining of it.**” (157)

Proclaiming the Sacraments

“Sacraments, as eschatological occurrences in the midst of time, are integral to proclamation. . . . Without the sacraments, the words go inside us. They become an internal matter. As we like to say, we ‘internalize’ the words. Once inside we begin to wonder what happened to them. **We have an incurable tendency to feed on our own innards.** We begin to wonder whether we really have taken the words seriously, whether we are really sincere, or perhaps whether we really have accepted Jesus as our ‘personal savior,’ whatever that is supposed to mean. . . . **We become a prey to adverbial theology.** Do we really, sincerely, truly, personally, believe? Do we live abundantly, joyously, affirmatively? Do we think positively, praise gratefully, respond generously? . . . The self is a bottomless pit, a black hole, endlessly sucking everything within and crushing it. The internal self constantly defeats and swallows up the words.” . . . (158-159) **The sacraments “will not let the Word be swallowed up in our internality. They remain always external, from without. . . . Sacraments save because they save the Word from disappearing into the inner life.”** (160)

Baptism

Baptism is an eschatological event. “It drowns the old being together with trespasses and sins and raises up the new being in faith. How does it do that? Simply by being done to us as an external Word according to the Word and command of God. If sin is basically unfaith, baptism is the remedy for sin because it creates faith. It gives faith something to believe, to hold to, and so saves from sin. It is a Word of God addressed directly and concretely to us. It has our name on it.” . . . (166) “Baptism embedded in the proclamation . . . is simply the gospel.” (170)

The Last Supper

In contrast to the Roman Catholic Mass, the Lord’s Supper is not a sacrifice but rather is a proclaimed eschatological gift. With Luther, “[t]he mass was not to be understood as a sacrifice (*sacrificium*), but as a gift (*beneficium*). The entire direction of the ritual proceeding is to be reversed. At its very heart, the sacrament is not a sacrifice from the human side to God in any way, but rather a gift of God to us. This is, of course, quite consonant with what we have said in the section on the atonement. Christ was sacrificed for us, not for God.” . . . (173-174) That being said, there is a sense in which “in receiving this absolutely free gift we are sacrificed in such receiving. The old is put to death with Christ so that the new can be raised.” (174)

Ministry

“Ministry is first and foremost the ministry of proclamation, the concrete speaking of the Word of God, doing of the sacramental deed, in the living present. **The primary paradigm for ministry is absolution—concrete, present-tense, I-to-you declaration in Word and sacrament authorized by the triune God: ‘I declare unto you the gracious forgiveness of all your sins in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.’** That is the culmination of all we have been saying. **Ministry is the actual doing of the deed.**” (178-179)

The Church

“The church is . . . an absolutely unique body in the world. It is the place where the absolutely strange and unheard-of kind of speaking—gospel speaking—takes place. The church is where the gospel is preached and the sacraments are administered according to the gospel. This is its primary business and this is what it must see to. . . . For those who are always impetuously anxious to be about the business of helping the world it must be said that this is also the primary way in which the church can help the world. The world needs above all to know that in the gospel of the crucified and risen Lord it too comes up against its limit, end, and goal. **Only where and when the gospel is heard will people be set free to turn back to the world and genuinely care for it.** As the ‘outpost’ of the new age, the kingdom of God, the church must proclaim this gospel so that all, including the world, may be saved.” (190)

Afterword

“You understand? Hold this ground at all costs!”³

“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.” — EPHESIANS 6:12 (English Standard Version)

It was a desperate “battle within the battle” and the stakes couldn’t have been higher. It was day two at the Battle of Gettysburg and the Confederate Army had their best opportunity to turn the tide of battle. Union Army Commander, George Meade, dispatched Brig. General Gouverneur Warren to Little Round Top to check on the Union defense of this strategically vital piece of high ground. Warren was aghast that Union Third Corps Commander, Daniel Sickles, had left Little Round Top completely undefended! Were the Confederates to capture this high ground, they would have flanked and been in an excellent position to defeat the Union Army at Gettysburg. Given this dire sense of urgency Union Brigade Commander, Strong Vincent, hustled his troops up Little Round Top and put the Twentieth Maine on the farthest end of the line—on the extreme Union left. He told Col. Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain of the Twentieth Maine, “You understand? Hold this ground at all costs!” They did.

Of course our battle is not “against flesh and blood” but, rather, against “spiritual forces.” Like the Twentieth Maine, we need to hold our ground. But what ground? Should we be concerned about holding the ground of the theological center of Lutheranism, or Confessional Lutheranism in general, or Genesio-Lutheranism, or Lutheran Evangelical Catholicism, or Lutheran Orthodoxy? No. Put simply, our ground is beneath the cross of Jesus. Of course many others claim to stand there as well. Put precisely, we, in the LCMC Augustana District, stand this particular ground not as others do (i.e., on behalf of a given systematic theology of *explanation*) but, rather, as theologians of the cross *for proclamation*.

The LCMC Augustana District is the only ecclesial body in North American Lutheranism—and the only one remaining within LCMC—where Martin Luther’s theology of the cross as interpreted by Gerhard Forde and other theologians of the Luther Renaissance is upheld in the life of its congregations and featured at its annual theological conference. Of course, and thankfully, there are many others who understand and uphold the theology of the cross for proclamation beyond our small numbers. That being said, the LCMC Augustana District, as an ecclesial body, is *sui generis*—one of a kind—in North American Lutheranism in its focus on Luther’s theology of the cross for proclamation. It is why we exist and fostering proper proclamation of the gospel in light of the theology of the cross is what we do.

“You understand? Hold this ground at all costs!”

³ This quote is from Brigade Commander Col. Strong Vincent spoken to Col. Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain of the Twentieth Maine.