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REDISCOVERING A CRITICAL THEOLOGY OF RELIGION: RELIGIOUS PLURALISM AND THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS

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Rediscovering a Critical Theology of Religion: 
Religious Pluralism and Theology of the Cross
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"Pluralism" is a widely diverse and stimulating approach to religious multiplicity and diversity that identifies all self-declared religion as being at least potentially salvific i.e. virtually all ‘religion’ is interpreted as positive. While clearly part of Christian diversity, the religious expression loosely known as the “Christian Religious Right,” a phenomena that relies upon its relationship with the dominant power politics of some specific cultural milieu—a kind of ‘caesaro-pietism’—is seldom considered in pluralist formulations. Seemingly incompatible, both approaches articulate a view that salvation is a human work. Both possess an orientation that I describe in this thesis as a ‘theotropical doctrine of syneresis.’ Similarly, both approaches fail to acknowledge the religious nature of ideological, political and economic structures that do not call themselves “religion,” but which possess religious attributes that are toxic to individuals, social structures and creation, even to the point of human sacrifice.

While pluralism possesses an enormously compelling moral imperative in terms of an “ethical soteriocentricity” (Knitter), the influence of the Christian religious right has continued to grow in the North American context. Essentially, pluralism in its many forms possesses no epistemological basis that concerns the Christian religious right.

There is an urgent need for a theology of religion that is clearly Christian in identity, which resists absorption into political and ideological agenda, and which is as broadly coherent as possible within the church. At the same time, such a theology must be inherently self-critical in order to avoid religious superiority, triumphalism, and complicity with oppressive practices, while also encouraging open and appreciative attitudes toward people of non-Christian religions. Such a need can be better met by a clearly Christian theologia crucis than by the commendable approach of pluralism.

It is my thesis that the terms of reference for such a theology have already been explicated by Martin Luther in terms of his theologia crucis, and may be summarized in eight terms of reference that maintain:

i) God’s initiative in all matters of salvation;
ii) God’s self-revelation in suffering;
iii) a denial of human claims to personal power and authority;
iv) opposition to power over others;
v) a rejection of ‘religion’ as a priori positive;
vi) a history in continuity with the faith of Israel;
vii) “universal intent”;
viii) the knowledge that ‘religion’ is not restricted to that which declares itself.

This thesis describes the biblical, historical, and contemporary manifestations of what is now known as theologia crucis, and how it may serve as the basis of a critical theology of religion in our context of religious plurality.
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BIBLIOGRAPHY
Abbreviations

CD  *Church Dogmatics* (4 volumes, 13 parts), translated by G.W. Bromily, et al. (Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1956-75).


WA  *Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesatausgabe* (Schriften), (Weimar: Herman Böhlaus Nachfolgen, 1883).

All biblical citations are from the New Revised Standard Version, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Bible Publishers, 1990), except when quoted within citations from other sources.
(1) **STATEMENT OF INTENT**

a) **Thesis Topic and Focus**

This thesis proceeds from a primary assertion of classical Christian Protestant theology: that all theological investigation is dependent upon that which God reveals in the cross of the risen Jesus Christ.

This assertion is no less valid in the discernment of the Christian's ecumenical and interfaith relationships. The starting point for a Christian understanding of religion, and the relationship of Christians with persons of differing belief systems, is a theology of the cross.

In this thesis, I will endeavour to establish the legitimacy of this claim, and the application of a *theologia crucis* to questions of relationship across ecumenical and interfaith boundaries. To do so, I will demonstrate how one example of *theologia crucis*, that of Martin Luther, provides the basis for a contemporary theology of religion.

It is my thesis that a theology of the cross provides the essential starting point for a Christian theology of religion. I shall argue that a *theologia crucis*, as an approach with biblical, traditional and noetic coherence, provides the essential criteria and starting point for a Christian theology of religion. Accordingly, I shall offer criticism of pluralistic theologies of religion and inter-religious relations as theologies of glory. Beginning with scripture and continuing with Luther's theology of the cross, it will be possible to develop theological terms of reference that can be applied to emerging statements and policies related to religious plurality from selected examples of the Christian religious right, church denominations (The United Church of Canada in particular), individuals claiming to speak with a Christian voice, and especially to the pluralist theological approach to religious diversity. These terms of reference are explicitly Christian, and will provide guidance for people of faith seeking a distinctly Christian way of engaging in the encounter between the Christian and the non-Christian world.
b) **A Working Definition of Theologia Crucis**

The theology of the cross that I shall propose as the basis for a critical theology of religion is based entirely in scripture. It is fundamentally found in the affirmation that salvation is solely the work of God’s grace in the suffering of Jesus Christ, which is God’s own suffering for us. This divine initiative, I shall argue, is the presupposition of any critical Christian theology of religion.

Martin Luther is perhaps our most important guide and interpreter of this scriptural message. His theology of the cross was articulated explicitly as a doctrine in 1518 for a disputation at the Augustinian monastery in Heidelberg, and is described in Chapter II of this thesis. That development, however, was not carried out as an interior journey, nor was it an invention of his considerable intellect. He ‘discovered’ the *theologia crucis* on his journey into scripture. We find, therefore, a material reliance upon scripture that gained power as Luther himself developed from a fearful monk into the strong, confident leader he eventually became. His theology of the cross leaned most heavily and most explicitly upon Paul’s letters to the Corinthians, particularly I Corinthians, chapter I. Here Paul describes God’s revelation in Jesus Christ as the altogether unexpected act of self-disclosure, a “stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Greeks.”¹ While this epistle principally guided Luther’s formulations, it was by no means the only scriptural source of his *theologia crucis*. That which corresponds to a theology of the cross is found throughout the New Testament in practically every reference to the relationship between Jesus Christ and those who would define him as something other than the saviour, whether friend, foe, brother, pretender to the throne, or mere prophet. While I Cor. 1:23 served as a guiding light on his journey, other texts provide compelling substantiation. In the fourth Gospel and in the various passion narratives, for instance, both disciples and adversaries who try to define Jesus for their own purposes as a kinsman, a miracle worker, or a king are

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met with silence or active rejection. Any theology of the cross must correspond to the biblical witness, which attests that God wills to be known in the incarnation of Jesus Christ as the one who is weak, foolish, and ultimately suffering.\(^2\) It opposes speculation about God’s incorporeal being and concentrates upon that which is visible in God within creation. In this way, a theology of the cross speaks of that which can be known of God in this specific person, Jesus Christ, and no other. Grace made manifest in Jesus Christ is always and only the initiative of God and can be neither bought nor earned, nor understood as a reward for “good works.” Made manifest in weakness, foolishness and suffering, the theology of the cross is founded precisely upon that which cannot be earned and should not be sought. It is the basis for justification by grace alone, through faith alone. Jesus Christ thus constitutes all that can be known of God, and the center of that noetic reality is the foolishness and scandal of the cross.

The incarnation of God in Christ is thus the starting point for theology, focusing on God who is ‘hidden’ in the apparent opposite of what we expect from the all-powerful and ever present God. It is, therefore, never an excuse for the acquisition of power over others, but is the exhortation to live God’s power in service to others. Any theologia crucis must perceive salvation to be ‘this-worldly,’ not as an escape from this world, but as constituted in God coming ‘down-to-earth’ for us.\(^3\) As Jensen put it, “true treasures, then, are not self-earned or human merits stored up in heaven, but the merits of the Incarnate Christ who fully participates in this world.”\(^4\)

Finally, a theology of the cross is honest and critical for our sake. “A theologian of glory calls evil good and good evil. A theologian of the cross calls the thing what it actually is,” said Luther in the *Heidelberg Disputations* (thesis 21). Anything encountered is dealt with as it actually is as revealed in the cross of Christ. Hubris, sloth, personal achievement, and even soul-withering despair are revealed for that which they are: sin. And we, who strive in futility to


\(^3\) Ibid., 198.

\(^4\) Ibid.
achieve this grace, are denied it as a reward. We are simply given it as a gift to be lived. In this way, all humanity is condemned together by the constant search for security in this world and the world to come: “Wir sind Bettler, das ist wahr”, said Luther in his last written words.\(^5\) We are beggars accepted by God’s graceful act in Christ alone, *simul iustus et peccator*!

The notion that we are beggars received by the grace of God in Christ is true of our religious activity as well as all others. Luther applied his conviction against any and all who sought security and authority on earth or in heaven. His articulation was not always charitable, nor did he succeed in applying it with an even hand, but his discovery served as the basis for every pronouncement, even against the excesses and failures of his own life and actions.

Nor did his great discovery ossify with his death. Numerous authors have developed upon it, most particularly with reference to human religious efforts and not always in complete agreement with Martin Luther. Two such developments, those of Karl Barth and Jürgen Moltmann, are described in chapter IV. Barth, as we shall see, employed his *theologia crucis* for the sake of the church’s faithfulness and authenticity in its witness to the incarnation and atonement in Jesus Christ. Moltmann, while sharing this conviction, places particular emphasis upon the divine solidarity with human suffering, and upon an active concern for the relationship of the church to the world and people of other religious traditions.

This thesis, then, will explore the *theologia crucis* as the basis of a critical theology of religion that is first and foremost self-critical. But before embarking upon a description of *theologia crucis*, it is necessary to first posit a working definition of religion.

c) **Toward a Working Definition of ‘Religion’**

Wilfred Cantwell Smith, for one, has noted that the concept of ‘religion’ is “notoriously difficult to define.” He points out that Augustine used the term in *De Vera Religione* to describe the warm and sustaining affirmative relationship with God, a relationship for which the Church

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exists to make possible. For the Swiss Reformer, Ulrich Zwingli, religion concerns human trust in God. His 1525 publication, *De Vera et Falso Religione Commentarius*, differentiates between the true and false religion of Christians, and not between Christian and non-Christian religion. A little over a decade later, Calvin published his *Christianae Religionis Institutio*, a title which Smith claims is seriously misrepresented in translation as *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, but which Smith claims should be read as something like, “Instructions on Christian Piety”. Smith himself suggested that the term ‘religion’ is confusing, unnecessary and distorting, and that its use for technical purposes (in all but the most personal sense) be discontinued.⁶ Smith preferred, instead, to differentiate between modes of religious orientation, which he bifurcated into the categories of ‘faith’ as the essential common human experience of the divine, and ‘belief’ as the secondary, subordinate practice of formal ritual and credal intellectualism.⁷

In this way, definitions of religion often seem to depend as much on what it ‘is not’ as what it ‘is.’ The bifurcation of religion into “true” and “false,” as was implied within the work of Augustine and Zwingli among many others, is coherent within the prophetic traditions of scripture.

There is, however, another trend in the definition of ‘religion’ that fails to be as broadly encompassing as is necessary for a comprehensive theology of religion. This trend tends to bifurcate between that which might be legitimately called “religion,” and that which has certain markings of religion in terms of discipline and adherence, but which is not ‘really’ religious at all.

One example of this bifurcation is found in the work of Paul Tillich, who differentiates between “religion” and “quasi-religion”:

> Religion is the state of being grasped by an ultimate concern, a concern, which qualifies all other concerns as preliminary and which itself contains the answer to the question of the meaning of our life. Therefore this concern is unconditionally serious and shows a willingness to sacrifice any finite concern that is in conflict with it. The predominant

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religious name for the content of such concern is God—a god or gods. . . . In secular quasi-religions the ultimate concern is directed towards objects like nation, science, a particular form or stage of society, or a highest ideal of humanity, which are then considered divine.

. . . “quasi” indicates a genuine similarity, not intended, but based on points of identity...

Tillich’s definition, however, does not offer a method of discerning between religion and quasi-religion except to say that one is more ‘authentic’ than the other. There seems to be no consideration of the possibility that they might basically involve the same anthropological action. Abraham Heschel, for instance, called all outward religious form and ritual “psalmody,” and described it as “theotropy.” He kept open the possibility that such definitions are not limited merely to self-declared ‘religion,’ but might also describe the worship of false gods. This possibility is, of course, in keeping with the biblical record that speaks of many gods of which only One is effective and true. The seriousness with which the Old Testament refers to gods other than the God of Israel compels us to take seriously the diversity of supernatural powers and the possibility that some are ‘false gods’; not ‘false’ in that they do not exist, but in that they are misleading powers and principalities. The New Testament record, in fact, treats this view very seriously and, as Christopher Morse has pointed out, calls us not only to faith in God, but to faithful disbelief as well (“Beloved, do not believe very spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God . . .”).

Tillich’s distinction, however, does little to encourage such discernment. In an effort to be all-inclusive or pluralistic—perhaps with concurrence to polytheistic or non-theistic religions—much of public theology does not admit to the reality of ‘false gods’ at all.

The distinction within Christian faith is sometimes described as the difference between eros and agape, a distinction that does not determine eros as outside of the confessing Church, or distinguish devotion between that which is “religious” and “quasi-religious.” For instance, the distinction between self-love and self-giving love in Paul’s letter to the Corinthians concerning

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8 Paul Tillich, Christianity and the Encounter of World Religions, (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1963), 4-5.
the Lord’s Supper (ICor.11:17-22) does not suggest that eros is a form of unfaithfulness identifying those outside the Church, but that it is precisely a problem of competing commitments within the community of faith. Religious practice that is self-serving—even in a positive sense—is eros. Tillich himself touches upon this ambiguity when he wrote about “Christianity Judging Itself in the Light of Its Encounter with the World Religions.”

The bifurcation of “religion” and “quasi-religion” clearly fails to satisfy the need for tools of discernment required to define religion, or to root out idolatry within the Christian house, because it provides an a priori reconciliation of convenience for the Christian who is, for instance, also a member of a racially segregated organization. The non-Christian activity is not religious—it is at most “quasi-religion.” It does not, therefore, represent his or her “ultimate concern,” and it is not part of her or his religious life.

To suggest that a person’s practices outside an explicitly religious life do not represent her or his “ultimate concern” is delusional. What someone calls “his religion,” said Lesslie Newbigin,

... may in fact be other than the ultimately authoritative factor in his thinking and acting. It is, for example, obvious that a person may be a Christian and yet limit the operation of his Christian commitment to a restricted field (for example, to the private and domestic life) while his ultimate commitment is to some other way of understanding experience, to his traditional tribal “myth” or, in the case of contemporary Western man, to the modern scientific world view. In this case his commitment to Christ will be conditioned by his commitment to the overriding “myth,” and the latter will be his real religion.\(^{11}\)

Newbigin agreed with Tillich and Smith on the “notoriously difficult nature” of the term ‘religion,’ and substantively agreed with Tillich about “religion” as “the state of being grasped by an ultimate concern.” However, he did not allow for a definition extraneous to biblical terms of reference, or which allows for an easy bifurcation. Instead, Newbigin used the term ‘religion’

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\(^{10}\) Tillich Christianity and the Encounter of World Religions, 79ff.: “Where does Christianity find its criteria? There is only one point from which the criteria can be derived and only one way to approach this point. The point is the event on which Christianity is based, and the way is the participation in the continuing spiritual power of this event, which is the appearance and reception of Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ... This is the point from which the criteria of judging Christianity in the name of Christianity must be taken.” (Emphasis added)

... to refer to that which has final authority for a believer or a society, both in the sense that it determines his scale of values and in the sense that it provides the models, the basic patterns through which the believer grasps and organizes his experiences. When the word is used this way it follows that it will include ideologies as well as what are usually called religions.\textsuperscript{12}

It is with this understanding that Luther wrote in his \textit{Larger Catechism}: “... trust and faith of the heart create both God and false god. Whatever you hang your head upon and trust, that is actually your God.”\textsuperscript{13}

This definition provides an understanding of ‘religion’ that does not slide into compromises that make our view of the phenomenon ‘religion’ a necessarily positive one. It conforms to the biblically-described notion of devotion found in the gospel according to Luke when he warns us that “where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (Lk.12:34)

Newbigin’s definition, then, will serve as the working definition in the approach to religious diversity that I will follow in this paper. I have adopted it believing it to be clearly Christian in terms of language, commitment and the expression of hope, and which simultaneously stands against positions of religious superiority; all facets to an approach that is urgently needed in the current context of religious plurality.

\textbf{(2) State of the Question: Current Theological Approaches to Religious Plurality}

The current context is one of religious plurality in all societies, but most especially in the societies of Western Europe and North America. An examination of the basic statistics from 1981 to 1991 demonstrates that there was virtually no change in the number of people who consider themselves to be Christians in North America, and an increase of 20% in Europe. Concurrently, however, the numbers of people describing themselves as Jew, Sikh, Muslim, Buddhist or Hindu have increased by about 64% in North America and 73% in Europe.\textsuperscript{14} These

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{14} As cited in the 1982 and 1992 Year Books of the \textit{Encyclopaedia Britannica}. 
factors, as well as current economic, technological and environmental conditions make imperative a new era of global co-mingling as a matter of survival. Religious plurality is a major factor in the context of the church today. It is, therefore, one of the fundamental categories for theological discussion in the post-modern era. Any work of theology in the West, if its author expects it to be taken seriously, must submit to the reality of religious plurality in our communities, marketplaces, schools and churches. Indeed, scholars of religion and theology such as Paul Tillich, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, Karl Rahner, Hans Küng, Rosemary Radford Ruther, Monika Hellwig, Dorothea Soelle, Alan Race, Leonard Swidler, John Hick, Douglas John Hall, and Paul Knitter—to name only a few—all dedicate whole works, or portions thereof, in order to focus upon the relationship between God, the Christian and the neighbour who is not Christian.

Since Schleiermacher first published On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers in 1799, the predominant methodology involved in theological discussion of religious plurality has been inductive; it has involved an approach “that begins with ordinary human experience,” which explores the “‘signals of transcendence’ to be found in it,” then moves on to “religious affirmations about the nature of reality.” Such a method moves from encounter to synthesis, often with a definite result in mind; a consequence or teleology into which pre-existent factors such as scripture or tradition are expected to fit. The logical consequence of this approach has

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17 The progressive influence of inductive methodology and its reductive counterpart seems to fulfill the expectations made by William James in the classic Varieties of Religious Experience (New York: Mentor Books, 1960): “If [philosophy/theology] will abandon metaphysics and deduction for criticism and induction, and frankly transform herself from theology into science of religions, she can make herself enormously useful.” (346). James thus speaks both to the practice of theology as “something of use,” and to theology as an expression of need rather than as faith seeking understanding (Anselm).
been the theological approach generally known as “pluralism.” Before we move on to discuss theological pluralism (a major focus of this thesis) let us take note of another possible stance that attempts openness in dialogue with other religions: that form known as “inclusivism.”¹⁸

a) Inclusivism

Inclusivism basically holds that Christian claims to Truth are merited, but that those same principles can be found in other religions. “Although inclusivists hold that God has revealed himself definitively in Jesus Christ,” explains Harold Netland, “and that Jesus is somehow central to God’s provision of salvation for human kind, they are willing to allow that God’s salvation is available through non-Christian religions.”¹⁹ Primary examples for this approach are found in the work of Hans Küng and Karl Rahner, and have also had immense influence on doctrinal interpretation through Vatican II, The World Council of Churches, and The United Church of Canada.

In the latter half of the 20th century, the inclusivist sine qua non has arguably been Karl Rahner (1904-1984). Rahner was a rigorous and orthodox Roman Catholic theologian who, nevertheless, explicated an inclusivistic approach to theology that was highly influential in the development of Vatican II documents.

Rahner’s characteristic themes affirmed that salvation is available outside the bounds of the Christian church, and included the implicit faith in God that lies behind much human activity. His starting point was always the ancient credo, extra ecclesiam nulla salus. But, he continued,

... can the Christian believe even for a moment that the overwhelming mass of his brothers, not only those before the appearance of Christ right back to the most distant past ... but also those of the present and of the future before us, are unquestionably and in principle excluded from the fulfilment of their lives and condemned to eternal

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¹⁸ The typology is owed to Alan Race’s typology in *Christians and Religious Pluralism: Patterns in the Christian Theology of Religions*, (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1982), and developed further by Paul F. Knitter in *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World Religions*, (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1985).

meaninglessness? ... the scriptures tell him expressly that God wants everyone to be saved (1Tm. 2:4). ...

Rahner was wholly unsatisfied with any phenomenological description acknowledging religious plurality without explanation. Concurrently, he sought some way of saying that all people must be capable of being members of the Church, but held true to the attestation that such potential cannot be a matter of human ontology because grace is the intentional self-communication of God explicitly stated in Christ. Rahner also said that grace might speak in the human implicitly before she or he accepts it by virtue of a decision, or even before hearing it as the gospel of Christ. The person who acts grace-fully toward his or her neighbour might already belong to Christ—but anonymously. Even one who denies God, yet...

... testifies to him by the radical acceptance of his being ... anyone who has let himself be taken hold of by this grace can be called with every right an ‘anonymous Christian.’

Rahner stated his subtle argument on the basis of four theses: Christianity understands itself as the absolute religion, intended for all people, which cannot recognize any other religion beside itself as of equal right; until the moment when the gospel enters into the historical situation of an individual, a non-Christian religion contains supernatural elements arising out of the grace which is given to humanity as a gratuitous gift on account of Christ; therefore, Christianity does not confront the member of an extra-Christian religion as a non-Christian per se, but as someone who can and must already be an “anonymous Christian.” Christians, then, may not regard themselves as part of an exclusive community of those with a claim to salvation, but rather as the vanguard and explicit expression of what the Christian hopes is present as a hidden reality even outside the visible Church.

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24 Ibid., 121.
25 Ibid., 131.
26 Ibid.
Non-Christian traditions might therefore include elements of the truth that are normatively expressed within the Church. God’s saving grace is available to them in spite of their incompleteness; anyone who is faithful to his conscience is an “anonymous” or “Advent” Christian.\(^\text{27}\)

Hans Kün, while counting himself among the inclusivists, calls the term “anonymous Christian,” an attempt to “sweep good willed humanity . . . into the back door of the ‘holy Roman church,’” thus trying to save the “‘infallible formula’ of ‘outside the church, no salvation.’”\(^\text{28}\) Kün does, however, describe the world religions as the “‘ordinary,’ the common, way to salvation, whereas Christianity makes up the ‘extraordinary,’ the special way.”\(^\text{29}\)

Christianity remains, then, normative for religion which he understands, along with Rudolph Otto and others, as an “encounter with the holy” that informs—explicitly and implicitly—every aspect of a person’s life and living. Religion is a . . .

. . . living socio-individuated realisation (in doctrine, conduct and above all ritual) of a relationship with something that goes beyond or enfolds human beings and their world and that prolongs itself into a tradition and in a community . . .\(^\text{30}\)

Both examples serve to demonstrate how inclusivist formulations depend strongly upon pneumatological epistemology that allows one to discern the work of the Holy Spirit in all religious endeavours. This perspective simultaneously encourages an imperative for seeking and recognizing God’s salvific activity in and through the religious world. As Raimundo Panikkar puts it:

We should now develop theologically a thesis which flows immediately from the christological faith, namely the unity of Christ. Whatever God ‘does’ \textit{ad extra} there is


Christ at work. The presence of God in other religions amounts to proclaiming the action of Christ in those fields... for in him all things subsist.31

While by no means exhaustive examples of those whom David Tracy calls “revisionist theologians,” Rahner and Küng provide an illustration of two points that must be considered.

There is, first of all, a tendency within the inclusivistic enterprise to limit religion in terms of those activities, institutions and rituals that are self-declared and acknowledged as religions. Other activities claiming sovereignty over the human mind and spirit are, at best, deemed “quasi-religious”—which is another way of saying that they are not really religious at all. Such partitioning means that religious dialogue and dialectic is not possible with, for instance, corporate capitalism, endeavours of race supremacy, or monopolistic nationalism. Those activities are simply not within the purview of the religious analysis and critique so far as inclusivism is concerned.

Consequently, diverse religions are regarded with a kind of official optimism that deems the religious enterprise as the work of the Holy Spirit and, therefore, positive in intent and content. This position is articulated in terms of possibility by Schubert M. Ogden, who claims to offer an attempt to avoid monistic qualities in citing Christianity as normative for religion. Ogden maintains that the logical response to the monism inherent in exclusivistic and inclusivistic positions need not go so far as the pluralistic position that asserts that there actually are many true religions, but simply that there can be.32 Pamela Dickey Young builds upon Ogden’s proposition that religions other than Christianity can be formally—even when not materially—true by suggesting that aesthetic rather than ethical criteria be called into service to determine common ground and relationship amongst people of religious commitment.33 Both approaches, however, build upon assumptions that are both Western and Christian in origin, and represent another form of the pneumatological epistemology, however unstated, which is part of

32 Schubert M. Ogden, Is There Only One True Religion or Are There Many?, (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1991), 83.
33 Pamela Dickey Young, Christ in a Post-Christian World: How can we believe in Jesus Christ when those around us believe differently—or not at all? (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 105ff.
inclusivism. As such, they represent a kind of modified inclusivism that suffers from the same assumptions. By building upon the proposition that there can be many true religions, the critical point of the cross is missed: that where religion is a human ‘work,’ no religion is ‘true’.

The general approach of inclusivism is scriptural and firmly placed within the Christian tradition. The universality of the Holy Spirit and the universal lordship of Christ are emphasized in, for instance, the Gospel of John (1:1-18; 3:8). The emphasis upon the work of the Holy Spirit is also ecumenically plausible. It is, for instance, a primary emphasis of the Eastern Orthodox Church. Yet pneumatological doctrine alone fails to provide a sufficient foundation for a critical—let alone self-critical—theology that encourages and even demands relationship with the neighbour who is not Christian. Harold Wells made the point when he wrote:

... in our context a theology of the universality of the Spirit of God needs to be kept in tension with the particularity, even exclusivity, of a ‘theology of the cross,’ if genuine dialogue is to occur between Christians and people of other faith communities and between Christianity and atheism.

And further, that while a...

... theology of universality of the Spirit could appear to be at loggerheads with the exclusivity and particularity of a theologica crucis. ... this opposition is more in the nature of a dialectic. 34

Without this dialectic, however, the a priori positive regard for religion, as such, might quickly move from grace recognized in some religions and religious persons, and even among non-religious or atheist persons, to a position where God’s grace is simply assumed. In terms of classical Protestant theology, such a development indicates both the absence of a doctrine of sin and the expression of a theologicae gloriae. Such is the case with pluralist developments emerging in recent years that have established the terms of reference for much contemporary theological development.

b) **Exclusivism**

There have been, however, exceptions to this process of reduction, some of which represent work of profound theological significance in this century, but which have been largely discarded in the current context as being too “exclusive.” Notable among these is Hendrick Kraemer, whose landmark book, *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World* was the result of a request by the International Missionary Council for their international conference in India in 1938.\(^\text{35}\) Considered by some to be the definitive text for Christian exclusivism, Kraemer affirmed the uniqueness and sufficiency of the Incarnation while insisting upon a radical discontinuity between God’s revelation in Christ and all human religious practice. Thus outlined, the distinction is made between *authentic* Christian faith and other religions, rejecting in no uncertain terms the notion of religions as equal paths to salvation, and concurrently opening up the possibility of an inauthentic Christianity. Like Barth, Kraemer affirmed that ‘religion,’ whether Christian or other, is neither true nor salvific in and of itself.

Barth’s work in relation to religious plurality, along with that of Jürgen Moltmann, will be considered in Chapter IV. It is sufficient to say at this point that those who identify with this stance have been discarded as ‘exclusivist’ by those wishing to carry on the various agenda begun by Schleiermacher, an enterprise that has proceeded and developed towards the pluralist models.

c) **Pluralism**

While I will deal more fully with pluralism as articulated by Wilfred Cantwell Smith and Paul F. Knitter in Chapter V, it seems helpful at this point to generally introduce this approach to religious plurality.

This approach has produced work of immeasurable influence. It possesses, however, a reductive quality, referring to the “history of religion” as its point of departure, and tending to treat religions as phenomena having common foundations in the ‘transcendent other.’ Pluralist

approaches understand all religions as being related to one another as more-or-less ‘equal paths to God.’ This approach to religious diversity has been identified as “pluralism.” Called the “contemporary orthodoxy” by at least one author36, this complex and diverse school of thought yields considerable control over Western theological speculation: “That the agenda for the contemporary theology of religions is being set by the so-called pluralist school,” writes Terrence Merrigan, “... there can be little doubt.”37

The pluralist approach, according to John Hick, regards the “great religious traditions” as constituting “different human responses” to “ultimate Reality.”38 It is a perspective that seeks to differentiate between “the Real” an sich and “the Real” as humanly experienced and articulated—a dichotomy considered to be universally common to all religious systems, and experienced in particular concrete forms: Yahveh, Siva, Visnu, Allah, the Qur’anic Revealer, God the Father of Jesus Christ, etc., each having its own particular historical character.39

Accordingly, the pluralist perspective owes a great deal to Immanuel Kant.40 In particular, two points dominate: the first is the recognition that the human mind contributes to all conscious awareness; the second is Kant’s distinction between noumenon and phenomenon. As regards the first concept, Hick describes the apprehension of “the Real” as a “conscious awareness of the mind” involving concepts, some of which are common to humanity and others which are culturally specific. In the case of religious awareness, the concept through which “the Real” is met and experienced is articulated in terms of deity for theistic traditions, and “the Absolute” for nontheistic traditions.41

The second point, involving the distinction between the noumenal and phenomenal,

40 Ibid.
41 Ibid., 332.
suggests that the phenomenal world is the one structured in terms of human concepts. Though it is not a “mere appearance,” the phenomenal world is actually the noumenal (real) world as 
*humanly experienced.* That is to say, the Real is never experienced as such, but always . . .

. . . finitely, inadequately, and no doubt often distortedly thought of and perceived by different human communities of faith. . . . Hence we have the hypothesis of one infinite 
divine noumenon beyond the grasp of human concepts, and a range of divine phenomena 
constituting the Real as perceived through the lenses of different religious cultures.  

**. . .**

All of these theological developments have generated lively and fertile discussion within both the ecumenical and inter-religious communities. However, inclusivist, and especially pluralist, approaches seem to arise out of a distinctly Western post-Enlightenment milieu. As such, they might represent Western imperialism on an intellectual level. Pluralism, as well as some strands of inclusivism, seems to treat religious phenomena as *a priori* positive human activity, separating destructive activity with religious overtones such as racial supremacy, political despotism, and corporate capitalism into non-religious or “quasi-religious” categories—
if they deal with them at all. Such an approach, I shall argue, with its insistent optimistic overtones and celebratory regard, are *theologiae gloriae* that fail to maintain a distinct and purposeful Christian identity for the sake of service to the world, and fail to remain coherent to those who share the name of Christ.

Pluralist approaches in particular reject theological method purporting to arise from scripture and revelation as “exclusivistic.” They therefore exclude much of traditional Christian theology—and much of the contemporary theological world. What remains is what David Tracy calls a “‘kind of Will Rogers pluralism’: one where theologians have never met a position they didn’t like.”  

There is, therefore, no criterion for discerning substantial differences among

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42 Ibid., 333.
43 Placher, *Unapologetic Theology,* 17.

There are two prevalent consequences to this failure: (i) every particular religious enterprise is relativized in terms of that which is held in common, therefore emphasizing religion as a human work and discarding the relational fruits of disagreement and diversity; and (ii) biblical Christian theology is left to the fundamentalist and populist power-politics of the Christian religious right, a constituency that plays an increasingly important role in the North American context of this new century.\footnote{Cf. also Michael von Brück, "Identifying Constructively Our Interreligious Moment," in \textit{The Uniqueness of Jesus: A Dialogue with Paul F. Knitter}, edited by Leonard Swidler and Paul Mojzes, (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1997), 35-43, 41ff.} It is clear that pluralism as an approach to the theology of religion in our time cannot, and will not, be considered seriously by that segment of the Body of Christ that defines itself in triumphalistic terms of power, control, and political and economic influence. What is urgently needed is an approach that can not only be taken seriously by a broad range of ecumenical Christians, but one that also has some claim to universal normativity within Christian thought and that compels the Christian to a thoughtful, self-critical regard of the religious 'other' in ways that might be counted as repentance in the coming Kingdom of God.

Such an approach already exists in the theological genre of \textit{theologia crucis}. 
(3) **GOALS OF THE THESIS**

The title of this thesis states that this position needs to be “rediscovered.” While “rediscovery” is an appropriate term, it is the existing precepts of *theologia crucis* that need to be rediscovered, and then amplified and applied to the current context of theological inquiry related to religious pluralism. The enterprise, then, is not one of simply repeating Luther, Bonhoeffer or Barth, but of developing the general insights of Martin Luther’s theology of the cross, as well as those of later theologians, and applying them to the current context of theological discourse related to religious pluralism. The first precept of a theology of the cross, I contend, is one of *identity*: one proceeds into the world from the point of having answered Jesus’ invitation to “follow me.” From the crossing of the Red Sea to Jesus’ agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, the biblical record describes identity as that which makes possible relationship with others, and with God. As with Israel in Egypt, the Church of Jesus Christ must break with its slavery and seek freedom and possibility from a point that clearly marks its own identity. It is necessary, therefore, to articulate a theology that not only stands *against* the captivity of Christ’s Church by powers of oppression and violence and which resists absorption, but which also articulates from a clear and unmistakable point of identity as those who know God in Jesus Christ. That point is the cross of the risen Christ, from which God makes Godself known.

Proceeding from this precept, I will demonstrate how Luther’s theology of the cross provides the basis for a contemporary theology of religion that is:

i) faithful to the Gospel, centred in and founded upon the Cross of the risen Christ;

ii) as broadly coherent as possible within the Church, yet inherently self-critical, therefore providing a critique of religious superiority and triumphalism;

iii) resistant to the assumption that ‘religion’ is *a priori* positive, and therefore enabling a vision of the negative and demonic in ‘religion,’ particularly in Christian religion;

iv) helpful in preventing complicity with oppressive practices;
v) able to encourage an open and appreciative attitude to people of other religions by appealing to God’s universal salvation in the cross of the risen Christ, and thus emphasizing the freedom of the Christian to serve others in the confidence that the non-Christian is one for whom Christ has died.

a) Outline of the Thesis by Chapters

In the first chapter, I will chart the Pauline basis for Luther’s theologia crucis, and describe evidence supporting a critical theology of religion that is found in the Gospel of John and, to a lesser extent, in Luke. This exegesis will be informed by Abraham Heschel’s distinction between anthropotropy as God turning to humanity, and theotropy as religious ritual and practice.

... religious events must be divided into two types. They are experienced either as a turning of a transcendent Being toward man, or as a turning of man toward a transcendent Being. The first may be called anthropotropic, the second theotropic...

The unique quality of the awareness that characterizes biblical religion goes beyond what Schleiermacher called “absolute dependence.” It is rather an awareness of God who helps, demands, and calls upon man. It is a sense of being reached, being found, being sought after; a sense of being pursued: anthropotropism. . . .

Theotropism, man’s turning to God, is a structure of experience that may be attained through the performance of ritual acts, prayer, meditation.46

Stating the precedence of anthropotropy over theotropy, Heschel constructed a critical approach that is, first and foremost, self-critical. This description will form the hermeneutic lens with which I will then examine the Gospel of John.

The Gospel of John, while often understood as anti-Jewish, is closely identified with Jewish perspectives. It is therefore particularly susceptible to examination upon the basis of Heschel’s description of prophecy. Drawing upon the work of Paul Anderson47, and with reference to various articles by Raymond Brown48, I will demonstrate that the fourth Gospel

represents Jesus as both suspicious and critical of religious presuppositions and practices (theotropy), rather than as merely anti-Jewish.  

I will show how this suspicion is articulated from the point of view of Jesus’ impending passion, and directed toward three more or less distinct groups: the Pharisees and scribes; the Sadducees of Temple Judaism; and the followers and hangers-on who are the protagonists in what I shall describe as a ‘proto-temptation trilogy’ (John 6:14-15; 25-26; 7:4-5). It is suspicion directed not against Jews per se, but against those who are religiously occupied in the world. As a form of prophetic writing, that suspicion was directed most critically toward those identified as God’s elect.  

I will apply this perspective to two pericope within the Gospel of Luke and another in Mark in order to establish their aptness.  

Developing upon this view, it will be seen that those who claim a place closest to Christ fall most deeply under the shadow of his cross.  

This chapter will not represent an exhaustive exegesis of Paul’s letters, the gospel of John, or Luke. It will, rather, focus upon the question at hand: the biblical witness as it pertains to the practice of religion (i.e. “devotion”) in the broadest terms afforded in New Testament documents.  

Chapters II and III consist of a description of theologia crucis as a starting point for theology in a pluralist context. The theology of the cross with which this thesis will be most concerned is that of Martin Luther. Luther’s theocentric soteriology (bearing the marks of an anthropotropical position) profoundly changed the course of Christian thought, and subjected every religious proposition—Christian and non-Christian—to the criticism of the cross.  

These chapters will describe Luther’s distinction between theologia crucis and theologiae gloriae in terms of both ratio and syneresis, and then his critique of diverse religious practices both Christian and non-Christian. It will therefore describe a critical theologia crucis of religion.  

While Luther was, perhaps, the first Christian theologian to develop a comprehensive
critical theology of religion, it would be a mistake to assume that his is the only theology of its kind. More importantly, it would be negligent to assume that we can take his late-Medieval perspective and simply superimpose it upon the twenty-first century. In order to provide some understanding of the on-going existence and influence of this genre of theology, it is necessary to explicate some contemporary forms of theology of the cross, the ways in which they show Luther’s influence, and their critical application to religious plurality. This will be the task of Chapter IV. Some highlights of theologia crucis as explicated by Karl Barth and Jürgen Moltmann will be made, with no pretension to thoroughness, in order to demonstrate the flexibility and persistence of this genre of theology. Although primary texts will be used, secondary texts will aid in providing the description of this living tradition of theology.  

Chapter V will involve a description of Christian triumphalism and the “Religious Right” as an aspect of religious plurality that is too often ignored in our modern context.

I shall then describe pluralism, primarily in terms of Wilfred Cantwell Smith’s work, and Paul Knitter’s “globally responsible, correlational dialogue of religions.”

Knitter’s approach depends upon his movement from a non-normative theocentric approach to dialogue, to a multi-normed soteriocentric approach. This movement, according to Knitter, has involved a revision of what it means to be Christ-centred, effectively rejecting a constitutive christology in favour of a representative christology. Developing from his approach to contemporary human experience “as mediated through historical context or culture,” and Christian tradition—which subsumes biblical sources—Knitter presupposes a positive view of religion as human phenomenon with common elements of salvific content.

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Despite their ethical sensitivity and a desire to be aligned with liberation theology, the pluralist approach shares elements of a (theotropic) theology of glory with forms of right-wing Christian religiosity. In the end, they may regard each other as simply competing opinions concerning salvation by human initiative. As such, both are theologiae gloriae, and are directly addressed by an approach that understands the Word of God as always arriving in opposition to human expectations and desires.\textsuperscript{32} Biblically and in terms of Christian tradition, that approach is a theology of the cross.

The final section will summarize the content and conclusions of each chapter.

b) Methodology

This thesis will briefly explore the meaning and implications of theologia crucis for developing an approach to inter-religious relationships. Such a starting point is not only an attestation of God’s power and intent for humanity in creation, but is also a light that shines upon humanity’s inability to contrive its own salvation. It is, therefore, a critical theology that provides a necessary corrective to modern manifestations of theologiae gloriae including “officially optimistic” views of religion in general, and Christianity in particular.

The methodology for this paper will be formed by a limited but primary tradition of the church: theologia crucis. First biblical, then historical, developments of theologia crucis will be described. The resulting terms of reference will then be brought into dialogue with secular and religious assumptions extant within the current context, including forms of triumphalism and the Christian religious right. This explication of a critical theology of religion will be made by examining theologies of the cross, first that of Martin Luther, then—much more briefly—of selected twentieth century theologians, in the light of a broad exegesis of the biblical witness. Drawing upon the descriptive work of Abraham Heschel, New Testament texts directly addressing what we now call ‘religion’ will be traced and described. The normative sources for

\textsuperscript{32} Rebecca Chopp, \textit{The Praxis of Suffering: An Interpretation of Liberation and Political Theologies}, (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1986), 100.
theology in this dissertation will be limited to the biblical witness and, because of my own ecclesial location, the intellectual heritage of the Reformation tradition.

This process will provide an essential core of precepts with which religious diversity can be viewed. These terms of reference will be critically applied to the work of an early major pluralist, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, whose formal christology demonstrates some of the nascent limitations of a theology of the cross “sans cross”; and then applied to the propositions of pluralist par excellence, Paul F. Knitter. Throughout the thesis, a primary criterion will be the comprehensibility and criticism of triumphalistic Christianity that is so palpably contrary to any *theologia crucis*.

c) **Limits of the Thesis**

I will not examine all theologies related to inter-religious relationships, but will provide an overview that will owe much to the work of pluralist scholars. I will not provide a comprehensive examination of Luther’s *theologia crucis* and secondary studies, but only a focused discussion of developments arising from and in continuity with that concept. I will not survey all of Martin Luther’s work, but will focus only upon his *theologia crucis* and *theologiae gloriae*, his statements regarding religion in general, and his response to plurality within his context. I do not intend to provide an exhaustive exegesis of prophetic texts, Paul’s letters or the gospels, but I will offer a focused view of selected texts that are inherently suspicious of formal religious practice in keeping with a prophetic hermeneutic, texts that support a critical theology of religion.

This work, then, is conceived of as prolegomenon to future developments which will, I hope, not only be as helpful in generating insight and activity as has pluralist work, but which will also serve as a catalyst for dialogue at all inter-religious and ecumenical tables.
LUTHER, THE INFLUENCE OF PAUL, AND RELIGIOUS PLURALITY

Christian theology must first—and always—correspond to the biblical witness.

Martin Luther understood this tenet of Christian faith, and understood the price that came with it. Therefore, while by no means the first person to use the term “theology of the cross,” Luther was the first to explicate the approach based in biblical terms. Driven to a decision to turn from a life in law prescribed by his father, Luther was compelled by a promise made when imperiled by lightning on a road near Stotternheim in 1505. In a scene entirely reminiscent of Paul’s experience when on the road to Damascus (Acts 9), Luther was thrown from his mount. Crying out, “Ste. Anne, save me!” he promised to become a monk. This kind of ‘bargaining religion’ is something that Luther eventually left behind. In the years that followed, Luther would be further driven to what Bainton described as two more crises of faith to embrace the primacy and initiative of God as revealed in the cross of the risen Christ. The second began on the occasion of his first priestly presiding over the Lord’s Supper, and the realization of his own insufficiency to call upon the omnipresent and omniscient God. With that crisis, Luther gradually grew to realize the impossibility and inability of any human creature to satisfy God by confession, charity, and adherence to the Church through piety and knowledge. The third crisis occurred simply and quietly in the midst of the “performance of his daily task”: study in a tower of his beloved monastery while preparing lectures on the Psalms, Paul’s Epistle to the Romans, and the Epistle to the Galatians. While by no means the most powerful personal experience, the third was the most compelling and provided the greatest stamina for pursuit of truth in a life that changed the church forever, and helped form history from the Sixteenth Century to the present.

Luther’s own theology of the cross relied upon Paul’s letter to the Romans and his epistles to the church in Corinth. In these texts Luther found the inspiration and empowerment that led him, beyond any possible resistance it seems, to a dedicated pursuit of theology

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2 Ibid., 60-61.
proclaiming God's unrelenting love for the world in which salvation takes place by God's grace alone, depending not at all on human righteousness or human capacity:

There are many who indeed for God's sake, regard temporal blessings as nothing and gladly renounce them, as, for example, Jews and heretics. But there are very few who regard also their spiritual gifts and good works as nothing, seeking to obtain only the righteousness of Christ. Of this Jews and heretics are incapable, though without this no one can be saved. They invariably desire and hope that their own (righteousness) will be esteemed and rewarded by God. But His verdict forever stands: "So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy" (Rom.9:16).³

The continuity with which Luther perceived the primacy and critical power of these letters can be seen in the intratextual hermeneutical circle employed in his Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans. Following his lectures at Wittenberg from November 1515 to September 1516, Luther constructed his commentary in such a way as to offer the Corinthian letters as illumination of Paul's letter to Rome. Later, in the 1522 German edition of the New Testament, Luther's prefaces indicate a further polishing of this critical application of the Gospel within canonical works when he examines the contents of James and Jude in terms of Paul's explication:

... because, in direct opposition to St. Paul and all the rest of the Bible, it ascribes justification to works, and declares that Abraham was justified by his works when he offered up his son. St. Paul, on the contrary, in Romans 4 [:3], teaches that Abraham was justified without works, by his faith alone, the proof being in Genesis 15 [:6], which was before he sacrificed his son.⁴

Luther was quite clear as to which books pronounced and announced the true Word of God, and that they were the texts by which all other texts should be measured:

The true kernel and marrow of all the books, those which should rightly be ranked first, are the gospel of John and St. Paul's epistles, especially that to the Romans, together with

St. Peter’s first epistle. Every Christian would do well to read them first and most often, and, by daily perusal, make them as familiar as his daily bread.5

Thus we find Paul’s writings everywhere in evidence throughout Luther’s work. In The Freedom of the Christian, Luther proclaims the essential tenet of justification by faith, “by virtue of his mercy by the word of his grace when we believed. [1 Cor. 1:21]”6 Fundamentally, then, it is Christ who is a “stumbling block and a sign that is spoken against,” who is an “offense and a cause for the fall and rising of many.”7 It was for Luther the only principle of proclamation that Christ is preached, “and him only as the crucified.”8 Even in his first lectures on the Psalms, Luther read with a constant eye to that which is always “foolishness to those who are perishing”:

Indeed, if under the glory of the flesh God would give the glory of the spirit at the same time, if under the riches of the flesh, the riches of the spirit, if under the grace and honor of the flesh He would give the grace and honor of the spirit at the same time, His thoughts would still rightly be called deep. But now, because He gives under the opposite and the sign does not agree with the thing signified, now they have become not only deep, but exceedingly deep. For who would know that those who are humiliated, afflicted, rejected, and killed visibly, are at the same time exceedingly exalted, consoled, taken up, and made inwardly alive, unless he were taught by the Spirit through faith? And who would think that those who are visibly exalted, honored, strengthened, and made alive, are in the same degree wretchedly cast down, despised, weakened, and killed inwardly, unless the wisdom of the Spirit taught him? Thus it pleased God through the foolishness of the cross (1 Cor. 1:21) to save the believers and by the wisdom of salvation to condemn the unbelieving. This is because by such wisdom they did not know God in the wisdom of God, for they could come out of such wisdom into the wisdom of God and thus know God.9

Thus, even in Luther’s earliest expositions, we find a deep intuition that the power and wisdom of God is found in that which is “a stumbling block” to those who are most religious, and “foolishness” to those who rely upon human reason (1 Cor. 1:23). In time, perceiving God always and only in terms of this “foolishness” came to be a primary term of reference (dare we

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5 Ibid., 18.
7 Ibid., 333.
8 “An Appeal to the Ruling Class,” LW44, 123-217, 140.
9 LW11, 230-231 (re. to Ps.92). Cf. also LW10, 61 (Ps.4); 14, 343 (Ps.2), and elsewhere.
call it a “principle”? by which Luther discerned the will of God.\textsuperscript{10} Writing later in life upon Galatians (1535), Luther would say:

But true Christian theology, as I often warn you, does not present God to us in His majesty, as Moses and other teachings do, but Christ born of the Virgin as our Mediator and High Priest. Therefore when we are embattled against the Law, sin, and death in the presence of God, nothing is more dangerous than to stray into heaven with our idle speculations, there to investigate God in His incomprehensible power, wisdom, and majesty, to ask how He created the world and how He governs it. If you attempt to comprehend God this way and want to make atonement to Him apart from Christ the Mediator, making your works, fasts, cowl, and tonsure the mediation between Him and yourself, you will inevitably fall, as Lucifer did (Is. 14:12), and in horrible despair lose God and everything. For as in His own nature God is immense, incomprehensible, and infinite, so to man’s nature He is intolerable. Therefore if you want to be safe and out of danger to your conscience and your salvation, put a check on this speculative spirit. Take hold of God as Scripture instructs you (1 Cor. 1:21,24): “Since, in wisdom, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.” Therefore begin where Christ began—in the Virgin’s womb, in the manger, and at His mother’s breasts. . . . He wanted us to fix the gaze of our hearts upon Himself and thus to prevent us from clambering into heaven and speculating about the Divine Majesty.\textsuperscript{11}

Similarly, we find Luther relying upon Paul’s epistle to the Romans to illuminate Galatians with reference only to the initiative of God in Christ:

Why, do we then nothing? Do we work nothing for the obtaining of this righteousness? I answer: Nothing at all. For the nature of this righteousness is, to do nothing, to hear nothing, to know nothing whatsoever of the law or of works, but to know and to believe this only, that Christ is gone to the Father and is not seen: that he sitteth in heaven at the right hand of his Father, not as a judge, but made unto us of God, wisdom, righteousness, holiness and redemption: briefly, that he is our high-priest intreating for us, and reigning over us and in us by grace. Here no sin is perceived, no terror or remorse of conscience is felt; for in this heavenly righteousness sin can have no place: for there is no law, and where no law is, there can be no transgression [Rom. 4:15]\textsuperscript{12}

\textsuperscript{10} Oberman calls 1 Cor 1:23 “a shaping factor in the exegetical work of his first Psalm lectures,” \textit{Luther, Man Between God and the Devil}, p.258.

\textsuperscript{11} \textit{LW}26, 28-29.

\textsuperscript{12} “Commentary on Galatians,” \textit{Martin Luther: Selections}, 105
Indeed, for Luther it is through the letters of Paul that we find the noetic basis for confidence as people of faith; an epistemological basis linked inextricably to the crucified God:

From this we can see that the knowledge of God's predestination and foreknowledge remained with the common people no less than the awareness of his existence itself. But those who wished to appear wise went so far astray in their reasonings that their hearts were darkened and they became fools (Rom. 1: 21f.), and denied or explained away the thing that the poets and common people, and even their own conscience, regarded as entirely familiar, certain, and true.

I go farther and say . . . how religious [religiosum], devout, and necessary a thing it is to know them. For if these things are not known, there can be neither faith nor any worship of God. For that would indeed be ignorance of God, and where there is such ignorance there cannot be salvation, as we know. . . . But how will you be certain and sure unless you know that he knows and wills and will do what he promises, certainly, infallibly, immutably, and necessarily? And we ought not only to be certain that God wills and will act necessarily and immutably, but also to glory in this fact; as Paul says in Romans 3: 4: "Let God be true though every man be false," and again [Rom. 9: 6]: "Not as though the word of God has failed . . ." 13

Nowhere, not even in his explication of Pauline text, did Luther abdicate his reliance upon Paul.

It was, however, during that same series of lectures on the Psalms (1513-1516) given concurrently with those on Romans that Luther first presented the "salient ideas" that were to form and develop into the theology of his maturity.14 For this reason, we can locate Luther in continuity with a uniquely Israelitic faith expressed in the prophetic literature of the Old Testament.

To understand this, we must first accept that the apostle Paul, who exercised such a powerful influence on Luther's theological development was, of course, a Jew. As a Jew, he was steeped in the history, heritage and hermeneutical perspectives of the prophets. From that perspective, Paul encountered a religiously diverse world and, having perceived the universality of the gospel, applied that Jewish prophetic perspective with welcome and understanding to those who had yet to hear of the God of Abraham. Consider, for instance, Acts 17:22-32 where Paul spoke to the Athenians, and Acts 19:30, where he wished to calm the rioting silversmiths of

13 "Bondage of the Will," LW33, 41-42.
14 Bainton, Here I Stand, 51.
Ephesus. He spoke critically—even with some invective—to those closest to him, particularly fellow Jews within the community of Christian faith. Such a pattern is typical of a critical theology of religious activity that is, first and foremost, critical of those closest to the ‘speaker’ who was, in this case, the apostle Paul. “This is the tension between prophet and priest,” explains Rabbi Dow Marmur, “...a prophet typically antagonizes people by delivering a critique of the community’s failure to live up to God’s standards...The priest, on the other hand, soothes and comforts.”

This perspectival pattern clearly derives from Jewish prophecy. To understand the meaning of a theology of the cross, it is first necessary to understand something of this prophetic tradition. One may then perceive its influence on a broad spectrum of New Testamental literature that involves more than just the seminal writings of Paul. The influence is as powerful, I contend, within the Gospel of John, which may be well beyond the influence of Paul. Luther understood the Gospel of John to have normativity in the intratextual hermeneutical circle, of equal weight to that of Paul’s epistles. It is in the fourth gospel as well that we find that the criticism is directed most vigorously to the human enterprise that we call “religion,” a pattern we can recognize most readily with reference to Heschel’s distinction between “theotropy” and “anthropotropy.”

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15 Cf. e.g. David Demson, “Israel as the Paradigm of Divine Judgment: An Examination of a Theme in the Theology of Karl Barth,” Journal of Ecumenical Studies, 26/4, Fall, 1989, 611-627.
17 Cf. e.g. “Preface to the New Testament,” 18: “If I were ever compelled to make a choice, and had to dispense with either the works or the preaching of Christ, I would rather do without the works than the preaching; for the works are of no avail to me, whereas His words give life as He himself declared. John records but few of the works of Christ, but a great deal of His preaching, whereas the other three evangelists record many of His works, but few of His words. It follows that the gospel of John is unique in loveliness, and of truth the principal gospel, far, far superior to the other three, and much to be preferred.”
ANTHROPOTROPY AND THEOTROPY: PROPHECY AND RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY

An adequate presentation of the prophetic faith of Israel would be a vast undertaking. Here I shall indicate only briefly certain aspects of prophecy that are relevant to our comprehension of a theology of the cross.

Abraham Heschel described the prophetic figure in terms of a divine imperative, whose significance lay “not only in what they said but also in what they were,” whose “situation is composed of revelation and response, of receptivity and spontaneity, of event and experience.”

Heschel goes on to say that “the fundamental experience of the prophet is a fellowship with the feelings of God, a sympathy with the divine pathos, a communion with the divine consciousness which comes about through the prophet’s reflection of, or participation in, the divine pathos.”

The prophet, speaking out of this sympathy with the divine pathos is, according to Heschel, an example of anthropotropy—of God turning to humanity. Its correlative, theotropy, is manifested in psalmody; religious ritual and practice. The latter constitute, in the Kantian sense of the word, a religious phenomenon that might well be an end in itself. Anthropotropy, however, is a means to an end that is always incalculable. Put another, somewhat polemical way, theotropy refers to the fulfilment of human needs for devotional expression; anthropotropy seeks to give voice to God’s outreaching grace and exhortation to acts of repentance.

According to Heschel, the prophetic consciousness is derived radically from God. It is distinguished by six characteristics. I quote here directly:

1. It is not brought about by the prophet, but comes about without and even against his will. It presupposes neither training nor the gradual development of a talent. It comes about as an act of election and grace.

2. It is not an absolutely mysterious, numinous, wholly other source from which inspiration comes to the prophet; it proceeds from the known God.

3. It is an event, not part of a process; it is not a constant, it happens.

4. It is an event in the life of God; it happens in God in relation to the prophet; it is an event in which both decision and direction come upon a person as a transcendent act.

5. It is not an act of imparting general information. Prophecy is God’s personal communication to man. It deals with what concerns God intimately.

6. It is more than a state of mind; it is the apprehension of a divine state of mind, being present at a divine event. What the prophet senses as time is not a passive, quiet presence, but an approach, an imminence.\(^\text{21}\)

We must also consider the setting from which the prophet speaks. It is not “the elegant mansions of the mind,” but the gutter: “The world is a proud place, full of beauty, but the prophets are scandalized, and rave as if the whole world were a slum.”\(^\text{22}\) Nothing can be assumed; the prophet of Israel cries out God’s love for the people of God, but in doing so recognizes that “the enemy may be God’s instrument in history . . . Instead of cursing the enemy, the prophets condemn their own nation.”\(^\text{23}\) That nation, as with Isaiah, Jeremiah and Amos, is the nation of Israel upon which the “day of the LORD” will be visited (Is.13:6; Jer.46:10; Ezek.30:3; Am.5:18; and others).

If we accept these characteristics of prophetic discourse, and recognize that theotropy (religious institution) is subject to the critique of anthropotropy (prophecy), then we can see that the Jesus of scripture bears the marks of a prophetic/anthropotropic figure. He proclaims the kingdom of God, and submits to the will of the Father (Jn.12:27ff.), specifically the redeeming God of Israel (Jn.1:19-34). His life is a unique event, the fulfillment of the messianic hope (Jn.4:25-26) concurrent with the life of God (Jn.14:6,7), who communicates in and through him always as the specific person in whom God’s presence is made known (גַּאֹלָה אִיוֹם). In the prophetic tradition, John’s Jesus is most critical of those with whom he shares the most in

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\(^{21}\) Ibid., 223.

\(^{22}\) Heschel, Vol.1, 3.

\(^{23}\) Ibid., 12.
common: people of Jewish devotional practice. Reading from the point of view of anthropotropy, therefore, provides a clear alternative to reading these New Testament texts as simply anti-Jewish. They are, in fact, very Jewish. Jesus, the prophetic figure, lashes out at those with whom he is most closely identified. This paradigm is most obvious, once donning the lenses of theotropy and anthropotropy, by looking at certain selections from the fourth gospel.

(3) **THE GOSPEL AND RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY**

In John’s gospel, where he is almost wholly represented as within the religious community of his time, Jesus is described in terms that bear these marks of a prophetic/anthropotropic figure. It is particularly in the fourth gospel that Jesus is situated in close proximity with those who share his own religious context, and with those who make some claim to religious priority as a result of their own proximity to Jesus. That context and proximity is Judaism.

Paul Anderson, in *The Christology of the Fourth Gospel*, has pointed out that this polemic is much more complex than when seen as simply anti-Jewish text. Concentrating primarily upon christological themes found in chapter six of John’s gospel, Anderson represents the fourth Gospel as a textual dialogue born out of one noetic encounter that insists upon the next:

... the entirety of the fourth gospel is christocentric, but christocentricism serves another end: the leading of all humanity to the Ground and Source of all Being, who effects the healing of the world. 24

As such, John’s gospel provides a point of view in opposition to that which it is often represented as holding. Instead of a monolithic adherence to a particular religious expression, John represents

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Jesus as one who is both suspicious and critical of religious presuppositions and practices ("theotropy").

This suspicion is articulated from the point of view of Jesus' impending passion, and is directed toward three more or less distinct groups: the Pharisees and scribes; the Sadducees of Temple Judaism; and his own followers and hangers-on who are the protagonists in a 'proto-temptation trilogy' (John 6:14-15; 26-26; 7:4-5). In every case, the people described are among those who are religiously occupied within their world.

This observation must not be interpreted as an attempt to dismiss centuries of oppression executed by a triumphant Christendom against Jewish people. It does, however, offer a critical point necessary to a theology of religious pluralism. Jesus, as a Jew, stood in sharp opposition to those structures and individuals who sought superiority over others, and personal benefit for themselves, on the basis of their relationship with God and with Jesus. Nor is it meant to impugn those who are pluralists! On the contrary, it is meant to help those who follow Jesus to be suspicious of themselves.

Instead of producing a superior position toward those who are not identified with the way of Jesus Christ, this approach brings into suspicion and criticism those who identify themselves most closely through their relationship with Christ. When read in this way, texts sometimes understood as anti-Judaic (e.g. the cleansing of the Temple, Jn.2:13ff; Jesus' cleansing of the ten lepers in Lk.17:11-19) or oppressive toward women (e.g. Martha and Mary, Lk.10:38-42), and the account of Christ's passion (Mk., Ch. 14-15), which can be read as suspicious of ritual and religious institution, and of human spiritual or moral self-sufficiency.

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25 By 'proto-temptation trilogy,' I mean that there are within the Johannine narrative three stories derived from an earlier, possibly oral tradition, which therefore pre-date the redacted Gospel forms, and that bear the paradigmatic appointments of the temptation narratives of Matthew and Luke, but are not identified as such.
a) The Proto-Temptation Trilogy of John

To see this suspicion clearly, we must search for the description of temptations and
tempter in John’s gospel where suspicion, criticism and testing of those who claim to be closest
to God are most freely described.

Raymond Brown has identified the whole of chapter six as a “Discourse on the Bread of
Life.” This chapter is divided, according to the NRSV, into four parts: “The Feeding of the
Five Thousand” with five barley loaves and two fish (vss.1-15); Jesus’ walking on the water (16-
21); Jesus’ preaching on “The Bread from Heaven” (vss.22-59); and then his conversation with
disciples who found the teaching “difficult” (60-71). Anderson identifies a “testing motif” that
runs through the entire chapter. Those tested include the disciple Philip (vs.6); the crowd of
ordinary people (ὀχλος πολύς, vs.2); the Jews, and “even some of the disciples are tested as to
whether they will seek the nourishment of Jesus, or will be satisfied with something less”
(vs.66).

Brown elsewhere attempts to mediate between two schools of thought that involve
either an antisacramental (or nonsacramental) reading of John, versus an ultrasacramental
reading of the book. Anderson points out that either reading is probably anachronistic, the issue
being a “problem in the post-Reformation age.” We have reason to suggest, however, that the
Johannine author[s] or redactor[s] may have been making a sweeping point about religious ritual
and practice. The reason why this issue may be raised concerns the “testing motif,” the objects of
which are identified as Philip, the crowd, the Jews, some disciples . . . and Jesus. Brown points
out that, while “Satan is not specifically mentioned,” there is a close correspondence between
temptation in Matthew and Luke, and John. Anderson, in his analysis of Peder Borgen’s

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26 Raymond E. Brown, The Anchor Bible: The Gospel According to John (i-xii), (Garden City: Doubleday &
27 Anderson, 107. His emphasis. Cf. also 193: “Thus . . . God (through his agent, Jesus) addresses the world, the
whole world responds (having been ‘tested’), resulting in the receiving or forfeiture of God’s saving love. This is
the unifying them which runs as a connective thread throughout the entire chapter—and the Gospel as well. Thus
to the fourth Evangelist, Jesus’ words are not ‘attesting miracles’—but ‘testing’ signs.”
29 Anderson, 115.
examination of unity and disunity in the sixth chapter of John, ascertains 6:31 (Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness . . .”) not as the opening text of a sermon, but as a “rhetorical challenge to Jesus, ‘tempting’ him to produce more bread . . .”31 It is not spoken by Jesus in explanation, but by the crowd as a challenge and temptation to prove his relationship with God.32

This is a very important key to a critical theology of religion. We must first recall that the anthropotropical position is one which is always critical of the world, but understand, too, that the criticism is voiced most severely against those who are closest to God’s choosing. It makes sense that, in John’s context, Jesus’ criticism is against those with whom he shares the most in terms of religious identity. He therefore violently overthrows the tables in the Temple (John 2:13-25), and bundles up Sadducees and Pharisees into one target for his criticism (“the Jews”). Yet in encounters with those who are outside of the religious community identified as Jesus’ own, John represents Jesus as gentle even when stern as with the Samaritan woman at the well, and the Greeks (Hellenistic converts to Judaism?) who come to Jesus (12:20-26). In a particularly poignant fashion, even Pilate’s culpability is softened by Jesus because of Pilate’s inability to understand (“You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above; therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin.” 19:11).

Somewhere in between lies a critical denunciation against those whom Jesus has called and who claim some authority for themselves, and to those who have been given a place closest to him. In order to find that denunciation, it is simplest to look outside of the Johannine text to the Gospels of Matthew and Luke.

In chapter four of both of those books the temptation narratives describe Jesus as being tested by “the devil” who is generally accepted—possibly because of being specifically named “Satan” in Mark—to be the theological equivalent of קֵדֶם (“The Adversary”) of Hebrew

31 Anderson, 59.
32 The Good News, NEB and NRSV translations all reflect this possibility, while both the NAV and KJV texts are presented in such a way as to make the source of these words ambiguous.
literature. Although in different order, perhaps indicating different issues and priorities of their authors, the two temptation narratives concern bread (more than is needed), the control of temporal kingdoms, and religious legitimacy as symbolized in the Temple of Jerusalem.

The Fourth gospel is usually thought to have obtained its completed form around the turn of the first century, much later than the synoptics, and there is substantial debate over the relationship between John’s narrative and the synoptic gospels. Some parts of John’s account may have developed much earlier than the final redacted form, some perhaps earlier than the texts of Matthew and Luke. There may be reason to suggest, therefore, that John contains an earlier and more primitive temptation narrative, a ‘proto-temptation narrative,’ laced into the overall scenery that illustrates the motif of testing, abandonment and betrayal. This motif suggests an anthropotropic view critical of those who consider themselves closest to Jesus.

The first instance is found in 6:15, when Jesus had multiplied the loaves for “a crowd.” Impressed by the miracle, they begin to proclaim Jesus as “the prophet who is to come into the world.” Realizing that “they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew . . .” This is the first temptation of John: sovereignty over worldly kingdoms, a sovereignty identified with Satan as the “prince of this world” in 12:31, 14:30, 16:11 and Jn.5:19.

The next temptation takes place in Jn.6:26-34, when that same crowd followed Jesus across the sea to Capernaum. No sooner had they greeted Jesus (“Rabbi, when did you come here?”), and Jesus accused them of following him for the sake of filling their bellies: “Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.” On the first occasion, Jesus provided bread because it was needed for the Passover. No

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such need is in evidence here; the crowd could have dispersed and sought their own resources. Instead they pursued Jesus for their supper without need: the temptation of bread.

Finally, in 7:1-4 we find those described as “his brothers” urging Jesus to go to Jerusalem, the city central to Jewish devotion, for the Festival of Booths where he might perform miracles and thus convince even more people to follow him. This parallels the temptation of religious legitimacy and affirmation, Matthew’s second and Luke’s third temptation where Jesus is invited to prove his relationship to God by jumping off the Temple of Jerusalem.

Brown notes, with considerable understatement, that the parallel accounts of temptation incidents are “interesting.”35 They may, however, be read even more deeply. Jesus first recognizes that those seeking him intend to make him something he could never be: a ruler of nations. Then Jesus recognizes those who wish him to do so as wishing it for their personal benefit; and finally, Jesus rejects the urgings of those who claim a blood relationship to gather a following by performing miracles. The first temptation leads us to question any notion of a “Christian nation,” the second rejects any consideration of privilege as part of the relationship to Christ, and the last denies any currency to claims of a “natural” relationship with Jesus (i.e. being “born a Christian”). All three suggest with withering subtlety that any claim to a position of power or influence is, in actual fact, a claim to solidarity with the “prince of this world.”36

The view of scripture suggested by Heschel’s anthropotropy suggests that the Gospel of John is not an anti-Jewish document. It is a book that sheds suspicion on any claim of status and privilege because of proximity to Christ. It further suggests that the Evangelist saved his darkest invective for those who claim a place closest to Christ: equivalency with Satan. Thus we have the sharpest possible grounds for a rejection of Christian religious triumphalism.

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35 Ibid., 206. Luther made an allusion to John 6 as being concerned with temptations, cf. LW23, 170-171; 205.
36 According to P.-H. Menoud, this defense of these passages as being temptation narratives goes back at least to 1939 in an article by H. Preisker, “Zum Charakter des Johannes-evangeliums,” in Luther, Kant, Schleiermacher in ihrer Bedeutung für den Protestantismus. Cf. Brown, 1965, 206 n.32.

It has been demonstrated that the application of Heschel’s distinction between anthropotropy and theotropy to a reading of the Gospel of John reveals the possibility of a scathing criticism and deep suspicion of those who might claim any privilege because of proximity to Jesus. The viewpoint, however, has little currency if it does not have general application across the scriptural tapestry. Sheer bulk precludes an extensive study of how an anthropotropical reading of scripture might inform our consideration of status and position in our religiously diverse context. Two examples, both from Luke, might assist in biblically supporting a critical theology of religion that is first and foremost self-critical. The first is the story concerning Jesus’ healing of ten lepers (17:11-19), the other concerning Martha and Mary (10:38-42).

Luke 17:11-19

The nine verses that describe Jesus’ healing of ten lepers create a terse, step-by-step description of an event illustrating the relationship between faith and wholeness. Jesus enters a village and is approached by afflicted people for healing. He responds by telling them to show themselves to their priests as though they’d already been healed in accordance with Levitical law (Lev.13:2). The diseased people experienced healing as they travelled, but only one leper turned back and gave thanks to God, and submitted to Jesus. Only then do we learn that he was a Samaritan, not a Jew. There follows a brief query by Jesus: “Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they? Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?”

The narrative has been used to describe the faithlessness and ingratitude of the Jews who were to reject Jesus, while the “faithless” Samaritan (as it signifies a non-Jew, one may read
An anthropotropic reading suggests something further. First, it is noticed that Jesus conducts no inquiry before the healing; he simply directs all ten lepers to a theotropical act of gratitude, one that was in keeping with the Judaic practices of the time. The Samaritan, along with the other nine lepers, responds as he is directed. It is only upon discovering their redemption that the one leper (now healed) turns back to give thanks to God and submit to Jesus.

We can see that Luke’s story makes a distinction between two responses—one centred upon devotional ritual seeking to evoke God’s presence (that of the nine), the other on responding to God’s living presence in gratitude. Neither response, it must be noted, is summarily rejected: Jesus directs the theotropical action in the first place, and does not condemn or vilify the nine for following his directions. Jesus’ summary question in verse 17, however, leaves no doubt that it is one’s grateful response to God’s presence that is preferred, and that one’s status on the basis of religious group or adherence to the dominant religious practice is at best a secondary consideration. Further, the Samaritan as a non-Jew would have no recourse to the Temple practices of blessing. The story might suggest that the only response considered legitimate for a non-Jew is the response demonstrating direct, personal gratitude to God made known in Jesus Christ. This reading of the passage is certainly a Christ-centred interpretation, but hardly anti-Jewish. Instead, it affirms the Jewish theotropical practice, but also affirms that direct and humble submission in gratitude for God’s gift is the better part, particularly for a non-Jew.

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Few pericope are as influential, or have been examined as thoroughly, as Luke’s description of the relationship of Jesus with Mary and Martha, identified in John’s gospel as the sisters of Lazarus (Jn.11:1). Their exclusive appearance in the gospels of Luke and John suggest a relationship between the two accounts. Reading the Lucan text with an eye for anthropotropical perspectives might enhance a view of their similarities as inherently critical of those who seek recognition for works of righteousness. Mary, as one who is a listener to the word, seems very ‘close to Christ’ in this story. Martha, on the other hand, is the one engaged in δοξασμα, and seeks approval and merit for her good works.

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza suggests a compelling and innovative feminist critical view of the reading.38 Employing a “hermeneutics of suspicion” which explores “the liberating or oppressive values and visions inscribed in the text by identifying the androcentric-patriarchal character and dynamics of the text and its interpretations,” she seeks to “investigate how and why the text constructs the story of these two women as it does.”39 Schüssler Fiorenza points out that the term used for Martha’s service at table, δοξασμα, is used elsewhere in Lucan text to describe the serving of the Lord’s Supper (e.g. Acts 6). Her analysis leads to the conclusion that Martha, and hence all women, are prevented by gender from presiding at the Lord’s Supper.40 Jesus concurrently affirms Mary’s participation as a listening, learning disciple:

\[ \ldots \text{Mary, who receives positive approval, is the silent woman, whereas Martha, who argues in her own interest, is silenced.} \ldots \text{the text is not descriptive of an actual situation. Rather the narrative is prescriptive, pitting sister against sister in order to make a point.} \]

The “point” is that the δοξασμα of Martha “is not the ‘one thing needful’ and hence must be subordinated to ‘listening to the word,’ while Mary’s “good portion” is “not the diakonia of the

39 Ibid., 57.
40 Ibid., 64.
41 Ibid., 62.
word . . . not the preaching but rather the listening to the word.⁴² The purpose of Luke’s representation, according to Fiorenza, is not to affirm women in terms of a ministry “of the word” over and against a sacramental service to the church, but to insist upon the place of women in a passive role, as listeners only.

Schüssler Fiorenza’s extensive study of this narrative is quite impressive, and it is not necessary or possible to refute it in this exploration. She touches upon the critical question of anthropotropy vs. theotropy when she acknowledges the long history associating the Martha/Mary story with Acts 6-8. In those passages, seven Hellenists are appointed to devote themselves to διακόνα so that the apostles could spend their time more fruitfully in preaching. These chapters, then, clearly indicate that scripture affirms the service of the Word over that of the service of the table. If this comparison were the final word, it could be said that the function, not Martha, is subordinated.⁴³ But neither conclusion is necessarily true. The division of labour is not its stratification per se (though in practice it may well be), and there is reason to believe that διακόνα is the result of proclamation. For instance, in the prophetic summons of Israel to faithfulness in the social and political realm, the announcement of the Word is a summons to life, and thus to service (διακόνα). There is, in effect, a kind of recursive loop between proclamation and service.

However, as Schüssler Fiorenza poignantly indicates, Mary is not acclaimed because she is elevated to the service of the Word, but is approved of because she acquiesces to being a passive receptor of the word. Mary is not, therefore, represented as a “minister of the word.”⁴⁴

Suspicions of gender bias in the Lucan writings are well founded. Yet one might wonder if the feminist hermeneutic of suspicion is satisfactory in this application, given that scripture typically makes assumptions about the knowledge and awareness of the reader. It could well be

⁴² Ibid., 65.
⁴³ Ibid.
⁴⁴ Ibid., 66.
that what is left unsaid is, then, as important as that which is said. While Acts speaks of “ministers of the word” exclusively as men, for instance, there is no reason to assume that those who were in other ministries—some considered by Schüssler Fiorenza’s interpretation as passive—were necessarily women. There were undoubtedly men among them. Conversely, while Stephen was dedicated a minister of διακόνα, he was martyred for preaching the word. Is it not possible, even likely, that others designated to particular service also preached the Word?

Perhaps even including women?

Other texts, some within Luke’s narrative, indicate that women and men were involved in many ministries within the body of Christ. Not all of those ministries are clearly identified. Tabitha/Dorcas (Acts 9:36f.), for instance, is identified as “a disciple . . . devoted to good works and acts of charity . . .” The phrase used here is ἐργαζόμενοι ἁγαθοῖς: “love work.” While it is also used in ITi.2:10 to describe the proper adornment of women, further improved by her silence and full submission in verse 11, it is also found in Eph.2:10 describing the proper attitude of grateful service of one saved through faith: “For we are what [God] has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works (ἔργοις ἁγαθοῖς) which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.” The same phrase is used in Phil.1:6 in connection with one who “began a good work,” and who would complete it among them. At least one commentary suggests that this worker is none other than God, who would “bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ.”45 Similarly, 2Cor.9:8 employs the same phrase in connection to God’s gift of abundance which can be shared “in every good work,” and Col.1:10 describes believers’ good works as the fruit of spiritual wisdom and understanding.

While the term is connected to the silencing of women in one instance (I Tim.), it is otherwise used to describe the work of the whole people of God. Indeed, as its use in both Philippians and 2 Corinthians indicates that such work is the initiative of God, its use suggests

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something of being authentically human. We may safely assume that this work includes preaching and the service of the Lord’s table, and concurrently notice that in the only instance where it is applied to a specific individual it is used in reference to the active role of a woman within the community of Christ’s followers. While Schüssler Fiorenza’s conclusions about the gender bias of Luke’s gospel are no doubt accurate, they are not exhaustive. It is appropriate to be suspicious of the text on the basis that Luke chose to pit two women against one another in his anecdotal criticism of one kind of activity having priority over another.

It is fundamental, however, to note that scripture consistently calls into question the activity of those who claim personal priority on the basis of performing ritual, or theotropical, acts. Martha’s insistence may suggest that her activity affirms proximity to Christ; Jesus’ response suggests that it is his own presence that affirms or sanctifies the activity. In other words, we might say that it is neither Martha’s nor Mary’s act that matters, but it is Mary’s anthropotropical receptivity to Jesus as God’s grace that contrasts favourably with human good works and righteousness. For *theologia crucis*, it is God’s grace alone that brings salvation, and not human works and righteousness.

Thus, with reference to the anthropotropical priority of these scriptures, we can acknowledge that the text of which we might be suspicious . . .

. . . is also suspicious of us.

c) Mark 14-15: The Critical Content of Christ’s Passion

That suspicion is borne out by recognizing the anthropotropical, and therefore critical, content found in the passion narrative of Mark, chapters 14 and 15. That criticism, as Elaine Pagels points out, is leveled against the community most central to the concerns of Mark: the Jewish community. “And here, as in most human situations,” says Pagels, “the more intimate the conflict, the more intense and bitter it becomes.”

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This conflict is rendered in the fourth chapters of both Luke and Matthew as temptation narratives. The same event is described with primitive simplicity in Mark, which is generally accepted as pre-dating the other synoptics. But there is no content; there are no details. Following Jesus’ baptism, “the Spirit immediately drove [Jesus] out into the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan . . .” (1:12). It seems devoid of the critical content as explicated in Matthew and Luke. Nor does it seem to possess the strident power found in the ‘proto-temptation trilogy’ I have describe in John.

But the critical power is there, aimed precisely at the religious assumption of power. As Pagels explains:

Mark . . . sees his movement essentially as a conflict within one “house”—as I read it, the house of Israel. Such religious reformers see their primary struggle not with foreigners, however ominously Roman power lurks in the background, but with other Jews who try to define the “people of God.” Yet while Mark sees the Jewish leaders as doing Satan’s work in trying to destroy Jesus, his own account is by no means anti-Jewish, much less anti-Semitic. After all, virtually everyone who appears in the account is Jewish, including, of course, the Messiah. Mark does not see himself as separate from Israel, but depicts Jesus’ followers as what Isaiah calls God’s “remnant” within Israel.47

The paradigm presently described is not unique to Mark.48 Describing the movement of events in that book will help, however, to illustrate the universal perspective of this critical view within the New Testament. Forming as it does a critical description of the most identifiable religious community in Jesus’ horizon, this paradigm therefore describes an explicit criticism of religious claims to power in general.

In chapter 14 of Mark, Jesus is at the home of a leper named Simon. A nondescript woman enters the room and anoints Jesus’ body “beforehand for its burial.” (14: 3-9). If we understand this point of the story as being parallel to Jesus’ baptism in Matthew and Luke, we can recognize that instead of Jesus being driven into the wilderness, Judas Iscariot goes to the

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47 Ibid., 34.
“chief priests” to put in motion the events leading up to Jesus’ death. Jesus’ baptism marks the beginning of his ministry. His anointing predicates the events leading up to the resurrection, and therefore to the genesis of the church.

Following this event, Mark gives an account of preparations for the Passover meal, the “festival of Unleavened Bread.” During the meal, Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me.” (14:18) Each disciple denied it could be he. Jesus then said, “It is one of the twelve, one who is dipping bread into the bowl with me . . .” (14:20) We assume that he was speaking of Judas, but there is every indication that Jesus meant that they would all betray him since each person there would have dipped bread from common bowls. Immediately following the meal, Jesus took his students out to the Mount of Olives to pray, telling them in no uncertain terms that they would “all become deserters . . .” (14:26)

Jesus then predicted that even Peter, the rock upon which the church would be built (16:18) would betray him. While Jesus asked God for deliverance from the violence and suffering that would befall him, those with whom he shared bread fell asleep. Jesus is ultimately betrayed when his friend and student, Judas Iscariot, identified him to the Temple guard with a kiss.

The scene of Jesus’ betrayal unfolds entirely around the sharing of bread, something that we quite significantly share in the Lord’s Supper to this day. As the institution of the Lord’s Supper is part of the narrative (14:22-25), it is important to consider if this shared act is a reminder of how followers of Christ betray Jesus as well as serving as a sign of God’s abiding grace in Jesus Christ. 49

The involvement of Caiaphas, the high priest of the Temple, and of all the priests and elders is the object of the next movement. Peter, who would someday be known as the first priest of the Christian Church, denies Jesus three times before morning. During that time, Jesus is put

49 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Christology, translated by John Bowden, (London: Collins, 1966), 36: “... Christ goes through the ages, questioned anew, missed anew, killed anew. . . . Christ is always betrayed by the kiss . . .”
on trial by the most religious people in town. Scripture tells us that these religious people “were looking for testimony against Jesus to put him to death; but they found none. For many gave false testimony against him, and their testimony did not agree.” (14:55-56) Jesus did not respond; in the presence of religious power, he remained silent. He was condemned for blasphemy. They spit on him, and hit him, and tried their best to humiliate him. Most of those nearby, including his friend Peter, neither spoke nor acted in his defense. This is therefore an indictment, or at least a statement of suspicion, against religious institution and practice (theotropy) that claims power over or against others, or which remains silent while others suffer.

The punishment for blasphemy was death by stoning, but only the state could carry out capital punishment. That state was the occupation force of Imperial Rome. By condemning Jesus of blasphemy and then accusing him of insurrection to the state, the Markan text identifies the possibility of theotropic religious practice as linked too closely with cultural and nationalistic interests; a theme all too familiar in the twentieth century. The power of military and political might was represented in the person of Pontius Pilate and his cohort. The religiously righteous turned Jesus over to him, claiming that Jesus was inciting rebellion. Jesus was silent, as before. Pilate can prove no case against him. As was his custom, according to Mark, Pilate offered to set Jesus free. However, the crowd (διχλος πολυς) preferred to see a prisoner from an earlier rebellion, a man named “Barabbas,” set free. The oldest manuscripts sometimes refer to the rebel as Jesus Barabbas. “Jesus” was a not uncommon name, and since the name “Barabbas” means “son of the father” in Aramaic, it is sometimes thought that the crowd was confused.50 However, it is equally likely that the text is warning us that it is all too common to reject Jesus for what he was and is. Jesus of Nazareth was not the saviour they wanted. They therefore chose a Jesus more to their liking, condemned their true saviour, and had Barabbas freed.

Concurrently Pilate, who loathed the people of Jerusalem and the priests of Temple, was willing to kill Christ for the sake of stability, national security, and the expressed interests of those whom he hated. Pilate’s lackeys then dressed Jesus up and pretended to kneel before him in a mockery of prayer, even as they abused his body (15:16-20). Because Jesus was weakened by their abuse, the guards made a stranger bear the weight of their actions by carrying the cross to Golgotha (15:21-22). Finally, Jesus hung on the cross, strangled by the weight of his body, which was covered with wounds and bruises from beatings. While he died, soldiers cast lots for his few possessions and refused to let anyone near him (15:24). He was hanged between two criminals, and people said words of respect in sarcastic and disrespectful tones: “Save yourself and come down from the cross,” they said (15:30). “Let the Messiah, the King of Israel, come down from the cross now, so that we may see and believe.” (15:32) Those in positions of power, particularly the power of officially sanctioned religious office, as well as those holding power over others in terms of the power of the state, are indicted by this final scene.

There is therefore a temptation trilogy introduced by an anointing/baptism that parallels the temptation narratives in the other synoptics. First bread, then religious ritual and practice, and finally political, military and economic power are all equally proscribed when manifested as power over others. The first two are described in terms of Christ’s betrayal; the latter as consequences of that betrayal. Faithlessness, Mark seems to say, leads to the imposition of suffering and the triumph of abusive and exploitive powers. Mark illustrates how human misery in the form of physical and spiritual cowardice is revealed on the last dying day of the crucified God. Mark does not relate a trial of Christ’s temptation that is equally ours, but instead describes in awful detail the misery of God who suffers as a result of the ease with which humanity submits to temptation. The cowardice of those who share the bread of Christ, the manipulations and tragedy of religious power over and against the helpless and marginalized, and especially the exploitation and arrogance of the state in an effort to gain the favour of popular opinion
regarding the work and person of Jesus Christ, all betray God. The story, which is far from over at this point, represents how real-life misery results from temptation’s victory, which is precisely the seeking and acquiring of power over or against the powerless. It is a realized temptation that reduces the human religious effort (a “path to God”) to unwillingness, faithlessness, inauthenticity and mockery. God’s grace is all that effectively remains; God’s initiative is made all the more apparent by human inability. That initiative is made clear not in the “triumph of the church,” nor in the august nobility of human reason, but in the humiliation of the cross of the risen Christ, which protests the suggestion that any religious enterprise in and of itself has the power to convey, and therefore withhold, salvation.

This is the perspective with which Martin Luther was steeped; a perspective that permeates the very fibers of scripture. In its nascent form, it is articulated in the deep mourning of the Psalms of lament, in Lamentations, in the dire warnings of Isaiah and Amos, and in the hopefulness of the Torah that communicates God’s insistent, abiding expectations of the people of God. Luther was bound to the scriptures in a way that formed him, conforming him to the reality of what Heschel called divine pathos: a view of reality based on the premise that...

God is concerned about the world and shares its fate. Indeed, this is the essence of God’s moral nature: his willingness to be intimately involved in the history of man.\textsuperscript{51}

It is a willingness made specific and concrete in the cross of Christ planted firmly in creation, reaching out to the world which had previously known only the shrine of the Unknown God to which Paul alluded in his speech to the Athenians (Acts.17:23). It is the specificity of that cross upon which Paul depended in his determination to preach only Christ crucified as God’s self-revelation and God’s revealing of human sin, and in which he defied piety and reason:

Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided through the foolishness of our

\textsuperscript{51} Heschel, \textit{The Prophets}, Vol.II, 5.
proclamation, to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God’s weakness is stronger than human strength. (ICor. 1:20-25).

This prophetic, anthropotropical perspective was so deeply ingrained in Luther’s reading of scripture and his view of the world that almost nothing escaped its corrosive illumination. This is the biblical basis for Luther’s *theologia crucis*, which persists as the most critical—and self-critical—genre of Christian theological discipline. It is therefore the biblical basis of a critical theology of religion. The *theologia crucis* is a discipline that insists on nothing less than following the crucified God against the imposition of suffering, and therefore against the comfort and consolation of *theologiae gloriae* that presupposes the religious enterprise to be *a priori* positive.

It is from the basis of the prophetic orientation of scripture, which formed and developed in Luther’s wide-reaching hands, that we may now turn our attention to the *theologia crucis* of Martin Luther.
CHAPTER II: LUTHER’S *THEOLOGIA CRUCIS*:
SIGNIFICANCE FOR ‘RELIGION’

In this chapter I will describe Luther’s *theologia crucis*, and demonstrate how this particular methodology functions as a critical theology of religion within the corpus of his work.

This intent is expressed with some caution. Luther’s application of *theologia crucis* to ‘religion’ was neither systematic nor intentional. In the first place, Luther’s work defies too much organization, however one approaches it.¹ In the second place, Luther’s work often seems to be gripped by an almost reckless spontaneity that has been pejoratively described as “instinctual.”² Yet insofar as Luther’s work can be systematically organized, it can be done with reference to his *theologia crucis*. Von Loewenich describes it as a “principle of Luther’s entire theology” that “may not be confined to a special period in his theological development.”³

Luther’s theology of the cross bears the marks of an anthropotropical approach, according to Heschel’s description of prophetic discourse. That is to say, Luther paid the costly price of delivering a critique of his community’s failure to live up to God’s standards. He fiercely maintained this perspective by insisting upon God’s initiative in all things with constant reference to the event by which God is made known: the cross of the risen Christ.

Rooted only and always upon the initiative of God, Luther’s *theologia crucis* bears witness against any suggesting that the seed of salvation is part of being human, an ontological trait rather than a gift of God’s grace. Luther ultimately rejected any doctrine of ‘synteresis,’ for any such perspective would suggest a direct way to God from human competence, an obviously optimistic theotropy that could only be described as a theology of glory.⁴

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² Ibid., citing Maritain, 3
⁴ There is no single definition for ‘synteresis.’ Biel understood the concept as being neither an act nor a habit, but an inalienable possession of the human creature binding the conscience with the authority of laws contained in scripture. “Through this close interrelation of natural and written law, man should be able to achieve by “doing what is in him” a virtuous life. (Oberman, *Harvest...*, 65-68.) The concept has been extant in one form or another throughout Christian history, and generally refers to a residual ‘spark’ of conscience in human ontology.
1) **CRITICISM PRO NOSIS**

Nygren called Luther’s battle a “Copernican revolution,” which insisted, in “opposition to all egocentric forms of religion, upon a purely theocentric relation to God.” The theocentric relation, contends Nygren, pronounces judgement ...

... not only on Catholic ‘work-righteousness,’ but on ‘all religions under heaven.’ Here there is no difference between Jews, Papists and Turks; in them all we find the same religious attitude, that false religion characteristic of reason (ratio), of which the basic idea is: ‘If I do this and that, God will be gracious to me.’

“Thus,” Luther declared, “monasteries and all religions under heaven are condemned.”

In this way Luther bifurcated religion, but not according to that which is self-declared, and that which bears an unintended similarity to ‘religion.’ Instead, Luther distinguished between devotion seeking “blessedness,” and devotion accepting “transformation.” The first focused upon an experience of affirmation, the latter upon God’s judgement and condemnation of, and for the sake of, the one offering devotion. Theologia crucis is always an attack pro nobis: an attack upon human sin, an attack upon our spiritual aspirations, an attack upon what we consider the best in our religion, and an ultimate contradiction to our usual religious thinking, but for our sake (pro nobis). It is an offensive theology. Crux probat omnia, Luther would say: the cross judges everything ...

... and, one might add, finds everything wanting.

Accordingly, a theologian of the cross distinguishes between God’s path, and temptation.

It was with this sting that Luther goaded and disparaged even those who would be his friends, for he could not abide any view that compromised the primacy and initiative of God in all things:

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6 Ibid., 688. The quote is from Luther, WA 40, 1, 366. “Ergo damnatur monasteria et universae religiones sub coelo; omnes cultus damnatur, quaternus volum parare iustitiam.”
8 Forde, 1, 2.
A theologian of glory does not recognize, along with the Apostle, the crucified and hidden God alone. He sees and speaks of God’s glorious manifestation among the heathen, how his invisible nature can be known from the things which are visible and how he is present and powerful in all things everywhere. This theologian of glory, however, learns from Aristotle that the object of the will is the good and the good is worthy to be loved, while the evil, on the other hand, is worthy of hate. He learns that God is the highest good and exceedingly lovable. Disagreeing with the theologian of the cross, he defines the treasury of Christ as the removing and remitting of punishments, things which are most evil and worthy of hate. In opposition to this the theologian of the cross defines the treasury of Christ as impositions and obligations of punishments, things which are best and most worthy of love.”

No one is safe from the criticism of the cross, so far as Luther was concerned. His outrage and criticism were directed against the dominant practice of the Christian religion of his time as self-serving. The _Heidelberg Disputation_ of 1518 clearly delineated between theology of the cross and theology of glory (thesis 21). Thesis 28 takes a blunt instrument to any notion of religion as salvific: “The love of God does not find its object but rather creates it. Human love starts with the object.”

The object of human love is, in other words, a love of self. This remains Luther’s first principle of religion. Three hundred years before Feuerbach, Luther was taking an axe (and a broad one) to the anthropology of desire in religion. The notion of ‘many paths to God’ would never occur to Luther, for a theology of the cross _pro nobis_ judges—and rejects—anything but God’s path to us. It is always the path of _Deus crucifixus et absconditus_; God’s way to the world is the way of God crucified and hidden. McGrath provides a moving summation:

The _Theologia crucis_ passes judgement upon the church where she has become proud and triumphant, or secure and smug, and recalls her to the foot of the cross, there to remind her of the mysterious and hidden way in which God is at work in his world. The scene of total dereliction, of apparent weakness and folly, at Calvary is the theologian’s paradigm for understanding the hidden presence and activity of God in his world and in his church. Where the church recognizes her hopelessness and helplessness, she finds the key to her continued existence as the church of God in the world. In her very weakness lies her greatest strength. The ‘crucified and hidden God’ is the God whose strength lies hidden behind apparent weakness, and whose wisdom lies hidden behind apparent folly.

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11 Forde’s translation (112f.) is even more telling: “The love of God does not first discover but creates what is pleasing to it. The love of man comes into being through attraction to what pleases it.”
The theology of the cross is thus a theology of hope for those who despair, then as now, of the seeming weakness and foolishness of the Christian church. How can it survive, let alone prosper? For Luther, the answer was clear…

That answer was found, and continues to be found, in God’s initiative of suffering and crucifixion by which God has been revealed, and through which God continues to both maintain the church and reveal the futility of salvation by human contrivance. It is, therefore, an approach that is soteriologically theocentric, but with a christocentric knowledge that provides a mode of discernment for every religious affirmation. “If you should hear,” Luther warned Melancthon, “that [their experiences] are pleasant, quiet, devout (as they say), and spiritual, then don’t approve of them, even if they should say that they were caught up to the third heaven,’… do not listen even to the glorified Jesus, unless you have first seen him crucified.”

2) Development in Outline

This critical methodology was frequently turned against conventional religious and secular thinking. It was developed in four primary essays, but is found in virtually every aspect of Luther’s thought and speech. The Theses for the Heidelberg Disputation provided the skeleton. An Appeal to the Ruling Class of German Nationality as to The Amelioration of the State of Christendom, published in August of 1520, added muscle and movement to that framework. The Babylonian Captivity was published less than two months later, thus consciously providing the theological viewpoint that made the Reformation necessary. Within weeks, The Freedom of the Christian was published, providing the theological heart and soul of his reforming efforts.

Finally, as the movement to reform grew, his 1525 explication on The Bondage of the Will provided the flesh and identity of his theologia crucis.

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13 Alister E. McGrath, Luther’s Theology of the Cross: Martin Luther’s Theological Breakthrough, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1985), 181.
15 Martin Luther, Selection, 249.
In April of 1518 Johann Staupitz, vicar of the German Augustinians and one of Luther’s mentors, requested that Luther and his associates participate in a discussion of the “newer evangelical ideas.” He stipulated that “controversial and debatable points” were to be avoided.\textsuperscript{16} As a result of this request, the twenty-eight theses of the \textit{Heidelberg Disputation} were produced. Roughly divided, theses 1-10 deal with the differentiation of human work as opposed to God’s work, and emphasize the verity of God’s work independent of human work or discernment. Theses 11 and 12 link “works” with “presumption,” and lead into a discussion of “sin” and human will as co-joined concepts in theses 13-18, concluding that one “must completely despair of himself in order to become fit to obtain the grace of Christ.”\textsuperscript{17} Having established that God’s work in Christ is always and only by God’s initiative and will, theses 19 and 20 state that this is the work of the \textit{Deus crucifixus et absconditus} and that all speculations are expendable:

The one who beholds what is invisible of God, through the perception of what is made, is not rightly called a theologian. (Th.19)

But rather the one who perceives what is visible of God, God’s ‘backside,’ by beholding the sufferings and the cross. (Th.20)

The theses then end with the series of eight statements (21-28) summarizing the manifestations of \textit{theologia crucis}, and which might be paraphrased as follows:

(21) A theology of the cross results in clarity of discernment;
(22) A theologian of the cross acts in humility stripped of speculation concerning God;
(23) One experiences freedom from the confusion and lifelessness of moralism arising from such speculation;
(24) At the same time, one may gain the ability, with God’s grace, to faithfully utilize the wisdom of the world;
(25) The sufficiency of God’s justification by faith in Christ is learned;
(26) The futility of moral legalism becomes apparent;

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 500.
\textsuperscript{17} \textit{LW}31, 51-52.
Works are entered into as a grateful response to God (as opposed to seeking God’s grace by merit);

‘Goodness,’ both in life and action, is known as a bequest of God’s love (“Therefore sinners [and their work] are attractive because they are loved; they are not loved because they are attractive.”)\(^{18}\)

These points represent Luther’s summation of the terms of reference for *theologia crucis*.

Luther’s assertions, even in the absence of “controversial and debatable points,” earned him a notoriety that surprised him.\(^{19}\) His arguments would be sharpened against the stone of his order, his relationship to the hierarchy of the church, and his temporal location. From 1518 until 1520, Luther would enter into formal and public disputations with emissaries of the Pope and defenders of current orthodoxy, such as Cajetan at the Diet of Augsburg in October of 1518, and Johannes Eck with whom Luther debated at Leipzig through June and July of 1519.

Luther received the bull, *Exsurge Domine*, in October of 1520. He publicly burned it on December 10, 1520, but not before preparing his case in the form of three expositions built upon the framework of the Heidelberg Disputation.\(^{20}\)

The first of these, written by Luther in Latin before having received the bull, was *An Appeal to the Ruling Class of German Nationality as to The Amelioration of the State of Christendom.*\(^{21}\) This publication actually stands as a report to that segment of the church from which Luther experienced some support. Woolf states that “Many young men, of the upper classes in particular, were strongly possessed by the new spirit of nationality then just beginning to be felt; they seem quickly to have realized that Luther was a man they must support.”\(^{22}\) Luther was recognized as one who defended the German people against the tyranny of Rome (though Luther most likely did so because they suffered under the conditions of the time, not because

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\(^{18}\) Ibid., 57. Cf. also commentary throughout Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross*.

\(^{19}\) Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 64.

\(^{20}\) The closing paragraph of “The Babylonian Captivity of the Church” clearly indicates this agenda: “I heard a rumour that new bulls and papal maledictions are being prepared against me . . . If that rumour is true, I desire this little book to be part of the recantation that I shall make . . . ,” *LW* 36, 125.

\(^{21}\) “An Appeal to the Ruling Class of German Nationality as to The Amelioration of the State of Christendom,” *LW* 44, 123-217, 124.

they were German). Conversely, Luther recognized these “princes” as those responsible for the execution of the papal decree who could also be the redemptive arm of God in his own case, and on behalf of all those who suffered under the state of affairs current at the time. His *Appeal* demonstrates that the *theologia crucis* serves as a lens that can reveal injustice. It was among the first of his writings that bridged doctrine based upon the revelation of the crucified and risen Christ and praxis in the life of the faithful outside of religious or devotional life. It speaks largely of abuses and scandals within the church, and ends with an inventory of actions that could be taken by the ruling class to ameliorate, correct and resist the effects of such abuse.

In the *Appeal*, published as a letter to his colleague Nicholas von Amsdorf, Luther provided for himself—as if in an elaborate play—the role of a humble monk who is avowed to be involved in the work of the world “even if he has to be painted in.” *Luther thus introduced the theology that compels a theologian to comment on political matters and exhort rulers to action. That action was directed against papal power, which was already in play against Luther.* He therefore identified and brought into question the authority of the Roman See, which claimed to stand protected behind three “walls”:

(i) that secular force has no jurisdiction over the Roman Church;

(ii) that where the faithful have questioned the Church on the basis of scripture, only the Pope is competent to explain scripture;

(iii) and that only the Pope could summon a council.

These three walls stood, said Luther, as a way of bifurcating the world into the “religious” and the “secular,” placing the secular below the religious, and the religious lawlessly above criticism. Priests, bishops and the Pope are thus glorified instead of God, and they become rulers and oppressors, rather than servants. What more evident example of “theology of glory” could one imagine?

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23 *LW*44, 136.
By way of scriptural references and the history of the church Luther decried this privileged status, and affirmed that faithful Christians who are responsible for secular order do, indeed, have a responsibility and a right to call the Church into account:

... Abraham had to listen to Sarah [Gen.21:12], who was more completely subject to him than we are to anyone in the world. Similarly, Balaam’s ass was more perspicacious than the prophet himself [Num.22:28]. Since God once spoke through an ass, why should He not come in our day and speak through a man of faith and even contradict the pope? Moreover, St. Paul upbraided St. Peter as a wrongdoer [Gal.2:11]. Hence it is the duty of every Christian to accept the implications of the faith, understand and defend it, and denounce everything false.24

Luther thus launched a ‘critical theology of religion’ directed against the dominant religious practices of the time. It was a critical theology that was both self-critical and the responsibility of every Christian, thus establishing the necessity for the priesthood of all believers.

The Babylonian Captivity was published almost simultaneously with his Appeal. Published in Latin to protect the laity,25 it was written in reaction to Alveldt of Alfeld, who spoke against Luther concerning communion in both kinds for the laity. Luther wrote his essay in anticipation of his own excommunication, and directed it to both the learned and the priests. It stands as one of the most important documents on sacramental doctrine in the history of Protestantism, and was so provocative that it was refuted by England’s Henry VIII, for which he was granted (somewhat ironically, as it would turn out) the title of Defensor Fidei by Leo X.26

The Babylonian Captivity, in print only days before Luther received his excommunication, established the theological groundwork of the Reformation. Indeed, it may well have created the circumstances that could only result in a rupture of the church. Striking and far-reaching in its argument, judgement and articulation of faith, the document provided the theological foundation for emancipation from an ecclesiocentric church, and the imperative for forthright and responsible action by all baptized Christians seeking to follow Christ.

24 Ibid.
25 Woolf, Reformation Writings, 205.
26 Ibid.
THE GROWING DEBATE

Luther's initially objected to the practice of selling indulgences, which had become a "flexible fund-raising device of the church" instead of a tool for penitential instruction for which it was originally conceived.\(^27\) His critique, by his own admission not the most important of theological criticisms,\(^28\) served to break down the inhibitions that conspired against criticism of ecclesial practice as described by Rome. The breaking down of those inhibitions meant that ecclesial practices could be criticized, an enterprise that Luther felt was more important than debate about indulgences. First among these were the practices that symbolized the Church as having authority over and above the faithful.

Luther refuted the existence of seven sacraments, saying simply "there was only one sacrament, but three sacramental signs."\(^29\) These three he identified as baptism, penance, and the Lord's Supper, available to the laity in both elements. Luther proposed that a sacrament was always and only an act of the faithful that points past the Church to the place where God is revealed under the concealment of suffering. A sacrament must always point to the anguish of the cross of the risen Christ "revealed in flesh, vindicated in spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among Gentiles, believed in throughout the world, taken up in glory." (1 Tim.3:16) Those acts that affirm or confirm the power and authority of the Church, or which represent ecclesial power and authority as divine rather than human—a perspective with Pelagian overtones in that human work is required for redemption—are described as pointing not to God's act in the crucified and risen Christ, but to the Church itself. If this latter perspective were true, it would be the ecclesia of the Church that saves, not Christ. This was a theologiae gloriae. Luther found this abhorrent.

As a result, he eventually advised that only the Lord's Supper and baptism are 'sacramental.' Penance—confession—is sacramental as well in that it calls the confessor to conformity in Christ, and the one to whom the confession is made to Christ-like action. The


\(^{28}\) LW 36, 12: "... I beg both the booksellers and my readers that after burning what I have published on this subject they hold to this proposition: THE PAPACY IS THE GRAND HUNTING OF THE BISHOP OF ROME."

\(^{29}\) Ibid., 18. The one sacrament is Christ crucified and risen.
psychological and anthropological benefits of confession were similarly expounded. Abuses were likewise explicated, and in the end Luther recognized no lasting case for the inclusion of penance as a sacrament. Four more ordinances considered sacramental by the Church—confirmation, marriage, ordination and extreme unction—were all rejected as sacraments on the basis that their sacramental status glorifies not God, but the ecclesial class of the Church.

*The Freedom of the Christian* was the next tract to be made public. Luther published it first in Latin, then in a German version that was not an actual translation of the first. It was the latter, intended for the broadest possible spectrum of the laity, which had the greatest effect. Luther’s intent was to gather up into a few pages all that had been said before, and to ‘give it legs,’ so that the material might be disseminated as broadly as possible.

Of the three main publications during this period only this one that presents Luther’s arguments in a conciliatory tone. It thus represented to the broad readership an appearance of good will and openness. If Luther’s intent was to gain the support of the laity before a possible trial, it would appear that he succeeded. The effect on Pope Leo X, assuming he ever read it, would have been much different. In *The Freedom of the Christian*, Luther addressed the Pope as an equal in a pastoral and almost avuncular tone while offering advice “as though he were the papal father confessor, and expressed his evangelical views without a sign of retraction.”

The content of this classic piece deals not so much with the paradox of Christian faith with which Luther begins, but rather with the freedom of God, whose work can be neither induced nor merited by human appeal or initiative. It is the work of God in Christ that binds a person to the cross, and it is the work of Christ that frees her. The work of the human creature is, then, only to acknowledge God’s work in gratitude and trust. It is not the Church, nor the sacraments, nor good works that save the believer from sin, but only faith in God that subsequently binds the believer by love to serve the neighbour.

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30 Ibid., 86: “As to the current practice of private confession, I am heartily in favor of it, even though it cannot be proved from Scriptures. It is useful, even necessary, and I would not have it abolished . . . it is a cure without equal for distressed consciences.”

31 *LW*31, from the notes by editor Harold J. Grimm, 330.
A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.  

The simple assertion was complex in its implications. According to this premise, the Christian is freed from all obligations to human servitude for the sake of salvation including the sacraments of the Church! No longer is the believer bound to the ecclesiastical powers of the Church in fear of divine retribution. Through Christ, each baptized 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. . . . all things are made subject to him and are compelled to serve him in obtaining salvation . . . 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 [sic]. 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’ [II Cor. 12:9] and that in all things I can find profit toward salvation [Rom. 8:38], 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 . . . Yes, since faith alone suffices for salvation, I need nothing except faith exercising the power and dominion of its own liberty. Lo, this is the inestimable power and liberty of Christians.  

In this way, through an open letter to the Pope, Luther stressed the indivisible relationship between faith and the courage that it gives. It was a courage for which he prayed, and which he hoped for all Christians.  

4) **THE DEBATE BROADENS**

The five years that followed *The Freedom of the Christian* were eventful, productive and challenging as Luther gradually worked out and developed the full implications of his theology of the cross. Indeed, the tumult of the time should make us wonder if the theological discussions that interest us now were particularly noticed. The papacy changed hands from Leo X to Hadrian VI in 1522, and then to Clement VII in 1523. The seeds for the English Reformation were already sown, and the affairs of the empire following the election of Charles I of Spain as

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33 Ibid., 354-355.
34 Hendrix, *Luther and the Papacy*, 116-117.
Emperor Charles V were no less chaotic. The empire was at war, uprisings were a constant threat, and the might of Suleiman's armies was posed to strike. Luther's contributions to the chaos may have been more like a persistent mosquito than a boar in the orchard!

There were, however, serious developments with decidedly theological aspects that highlighted Luther's agenda as more than merely annoying. A series of peasant uprisings took place in 1524 and 1525 that, while similar to uprisings of previous years, differed in that the rebels espoused a significant religious motivation. "Enthusiasts" such as Thomas Müntzer inflamed the crowds with commendations of the Holy Spirit to rise against their rulers. Much of his encouragement was an avowed adaptation of the teachings of Martin Luther. Luther's sympathy for them in their poverty and suffering did not override his own sense of the need for secular authority. Failing to inspire them to peaceful protest, he called upon the Saxon princes to suppress the movement. Tens of thousands died in the following months, deaths for which Luther could not abdicate some responsibility.

It is quite obvious that even while Charles V was determined to stamp out the Lutheran heresy, he could not afford to alienate his German subjects who supported Luther while he was fighting on so many fronts. Luther's allegiance coupled with the tempestuousness of the times probably saved him from martyrdom, but some, such as Jürgen Moltmann, have argued that he failed to follow through with the political implications of his *theologia crucis*. There was, concurrently, a growing debate between the claims of Luther and humanistic philosophy, with which his claims bore some amiable concurrence. Foremost among the humanists of the day was Erasmus. Though Luther and Erasmus never met, reference to one another was congenial until 1517 when their differences in approach inevitably diverged, particularly where Luther perceived Erasmus as too anthropocentric:

35 Oberman, *Luther...*, 60-61.
38 Moltmann's criticism will be described in Chapter IV of this thesis. Cf. also Hall, *Lighten Our Darkness*, 146-147.
I am at present reading our Erasmus... I fear he does not spread Christ and God's grace sufficiently abroad... the human is of more importance to him... 39

It was not enough for Luther that he and Erasmus agreed about the scandal of the church. Erasmus needed to have the right reasons, founded in the cross of the risen Christ. 40 Their relationship deteriorated over several years, particularly after a letter to Oecolampadius criticizing Erasmus was inadvertently published. Their scholarly disagreements heated up and resulted in the production of significant work on both their parts. After Erasmus published *De libero arbitrio*, Luther produced the work which was, arguably, his magnum opus: *De servo arbitrio: The Bondage of the Will*. This work is very much in continuity with a further development of the *theologia crucis* of the Heidelberg Disputation.

It is essential to realize that Luther's masterpiece was not born fully-formed out of his own head. While he did not refer to Erasmus as a theologian of glory (he seldom used the term after the Heidelberg Disputations), it was written as a virulent personal response to what he perceived to be an attack by Erasmus, whose penchant for avoiding conflict has been amply recorded. 41 Initially loathe to respond, Luther nonetheless exploded with a refutation nearly four times the length of Erasmus' original exposition. His refutation was governed by the structure of Erasmus' argument, which sometimes obscures Luther's depth of thought, clarity and balance.

The thrust of his argument is still clear. Neither salvation nor damnation, Luther declared, has anything to do with human merit. It is always and only the initiative of the *Deus absconditus* whose own freedom cannot be determined by human activity—including, it would seem obvious, human religious activity. God is love and justice, and whatever God does is justice. What God has done is Christ, so that the human creature might see and respond to the love and justice that is Christ. There is, then, a triple revelation in Christ that is clearly anthropotropic in orientation:

So far, therefore, from showing man what he ought to do and can do, they show him what he ought but does not and cannot do unless he is radically transformed by grace, that is, by God himself. 42

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40 Cf. Oberman, *Luther*... , 213. Luther suspected Erasmus "of being the first Christian atheist."
41 Cf. e.g. Philip S. Watson's introduction to *LW* 33, 5–13.
42 Ibid., 11.
God is revealed in concealment, the human creature as helpless to overcome sin; true humanity is revealed as the transformed recipient of grace. There follows two insights to this exposition.

First, human will is understood as a conduit through which God may act; but this is a “mere illusion that only persists as long as things are not considered in the sight of God.”\(^43\) The will remains distinct to the individual, but is subject to the initiative of God. This subjection is by virtue of God’s power, which is always pro nobis even in its judgement and denial. The point of the argument is not, then, human nature in terms of choice, but God’s nature in terms of grace:

For we are not discussing ‘being by nature,’ but ‘being by grace’ (to put it in current terms). We know there are things free choice does by nature, such as eating, drinking, begetting, ruling, so that Diatribe cannot laugh us out of court with her shrewdly idiotic remark that if we press the word ‘nothing,’ it would not be possible even to sin without Christ, although Luther has admitted that free choice avails only for sinning. . . . our contention is that man apart from the grace of God remains nonetheless under the general omnipotence of God, who does, moves, and carries along all things in a necessary and infallible course, but that what man does as he is thus carried along is nothing, in the sense that it is worth nothing in the sight of God, and is not reckoned as anything but sin. So in the realm of grace, anyone who is without love is nothing. Why, then, since Diatribe herself admits that in this passage we are concerned with the fruit of the gospel, which is not apart from Christ, does she at once shy away from the question at issue and start playing a different tune, with quibbles about the natural work and human fruit—unless because no one is ever consistent who is devoid of the truth?\(^44\)

Concurrently, God’s actions may be hidden acts and conventions within the Church, even while the Church is not the True Church:

But here is the task, here is the toil, to determine whether those whom you call the Church are the Church, or rather, whether after being in error all their lives they were at last brought back before they died. . . . Who, then, even at the present time would venture to deny that, concealed under those outstanding figures—for you mention none but men of public office and distinction—God has preserved for himself a Church among the common people, and has permitted those others to perish as he did in the Kingdom of Israel? For it is characteristic of God to lay low the picked men of Israel and slay their strong ones (Ps.78:[31]), but to preserve the dregs and remnant of Israel, as Isaiah says [10:22].\(^45\)


\(^{44}\) LW33, 240. “Diatribe” refers to the full title of Erasmus’ original exposition, De libero arbitrio diatribe sive colliatio.

\(^{45}\) Ibid., 85-86.
Secondly—and this point is repeated in Luther’s condemnation of religious practice—God’s freedom insists upon the possibility that God’s grace may and does extend extra ecclesiam:

Why do you not rather express amazement at this... from the beginning of the world there has always been more outstanding talent, greater learning, and more earnest application among the heathen than among Christians or the People of God? For as Christ himself confesses, the children of this world are wiser than the children of light [Luke 16:8]. What Christian can be compared to a Cicero alone (not to mention the Greeks) for talent, learning, or diligence? What, then, are we to say impeded such men, so that none of them was able to attain to grace? For they certainly exercised free choice to the utmost of their powers, and who will dare to say there was none among them who sought after truth with the utmost application? Yet we cannot but assert that none of them found it. Will you here too say it is incredible that all through history God should have left so many great men to themselves and let them strive in vain? 

Scant though it is, this last line suggests the possibility of God’s grace as operative outside the Church, but subject to the critical criteria of the anthropotropical position of scripture: “There is therefore another, an external judgment, whereby with the greatest certainty we judge the spirits and dogmas of all men, not only for ourselves, but also for others and for their salvation.”

We turn now to Luther’s ambivalent relationship to “reason” as it relates to his training in nominalism and subsequent developments in his theology in tension with that broad school of thought. From that point, his critique of the basic principles of nominalism and the conventions of Christian practice of his day will be explored. Following this exploration, specific statements and publications will be presented in light of the transcendental, rather than affirmative, necessity of authentic religion as theologia crucis upon which Luther rested his head.

5) **Reason: Gift of God, The Devil’s Whore, and the Handmaiden of Faith**

The corollary to Luther’s insistence upon salvation as always and only the initiative of God in Christ is the inefficacy of human desire and ambition to achieve grace by decision or act. This is the anthropology of the “Beggar’s Theology”: the human creature is helpless to do that

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46 Ibid., 87.
47 Ibid., 90-91.
which God does without asking. This is, of course, “foolishness” (I Cor. 1:23), and also the very core of Luther’s understanding of human reason.

Luther’s relationship to “reason” could be and has been understood as “ambivalent.” He was not a philosopher, nor in his suspicion of reason (ratio; Vernunft), particularly with respect to that which he termed “natural reason,” did he pretend to be one. But Luther was trained and influenced by philosophers, and had a particularly referential relationship to the work of William of Occam, his “beloved master.” Holl cautions us of Luther’s apparent praise, knowing that his pejorative tendencies could be expressed with a convincing irony. Luther was concurrently deriding followers of the via moderna as “hog-theologians.”

While it is open to debate as to whether Luther could be called an “Occamist” or a nominalist of any kind, we cannot avoid the fact that he was profoundly influenced by the via moderna school of thought broadly called “nominalism.” That influence, whether in concurrence or criticism, is one that provided a variety of tensions contributing to Luther’s own thought and development. It is fair to say that the concept of ‘reason,’ as broadly attributed to late-Medieval nominalism, played a preparatory role toward Luther’s theology of the cross.

Nominalism itself developed out of a rigorous criticism of Thomistic theology. The Middle Ages expressed an urgent anthropology of unity in all things. Everything was seen in terms of a hierarchy flowing from universals, considered to be quite real, of which God was the absolute ideal: the “Unmoved Mover” of all things. As part of that perspective, Aquinas postulated that the divine intellect took precedence over all other attributes of God; God first recognizes and then wills to reward moral human work on the basis of merit.

48 Gerrish, Grace and Reason, 4ff.
49 Ibid., 44-45, and footnote 3.
50 It must be noted that Luther was influenced by Occamism, the mysticism of John Tauler and Gerard Zerboid of Zutphen, and Augustine (cf. Dennis Ngien, The Suffering of God According to Martin Luther’s ‘Theologia Crucis,’ (New York: Peter Lang, 1995), 19-54. These influences are nested tightly within one another, but for the purposes of this thesis an exploration of Luther’s derivation of nominalism will suffice.
52 McGrath, Christian Theology, 49-50.
By the early fourteenth century, Duns Scotus took Aquinas’ view in a contrary direction. He declared that it is the divine will to reward the moral actions of the human creature without an evaluation of inherent worth. The impact upon views of justification and predestination, to name only two, was shattering to the entire presumption of the Middle Ages. No longer was God considered to be ‘like’ a temporal ruler writ large, who would decide upon and evaluate merit in order to reward and punish according to some cosmological order. God was instead seen as one who has decided to act before ever evaluating the inherent worth of the moral action, a doctrine sometimes referred to as “voluntarism.” God was recognized as ‘moved’ after all; not according to human moral reason, but as a free divine decision in solicitude for the human creature!

The door was thus opened for the development of a via moderna to replace the via antiqua of the high Middle Ages, whose vision depended so much on Aristotelian methodology. This via moderna came to be known, somewhat spuriously, as “nominalism.” It was, perhaps, the first self-consciously critical theology; its proponents rejected assertions that were proposed as universal theological truths based upon the evidence of nature and natural reason.

William of Occam’s teachings were dominated by two elements. The first was “Occam’s Razor,” the “principle of parsimony,” which demanded the elimination of inessential hypotheses. This ‘principle’ was never far from Luther’s hand. The second follows: universals were declared to be unnecessary hypotheses and were therefore eliminated. Instead, Occam and others, such as Gabriel Biel, spoke of that which God could do (dei potentia absoluta) and that which God has done (dei potentia ordinata). A dialectic proceeds from the proposition that as God decides upon the actualization of any possibility, others are decided against. That which God could do at one time is no longer possible except in special circumstances (dei potentia absoluta), possibly in terms of miracles and incidents of divine intercession. In this way, God is understood in terms of self-limitation as a consequence of solicitous decisiveness pro nobis.

53 Ibid., 44-45.
54 Oberman, Harvest . . . , 30-38.
At this point the tensions between late-Medieval rationalism and Luther’s *theologia crucis* begin to become apparent. Luther, a student of those who followed the *via moderna* even after he became a student of theology,\(^55\) formally adapted their methodology to his chosen discipline. Thus, abstract Universals were expunged from theological formulations, and every proposition was tested to determine if its place and function was one of necessity or adornment.

These rules of discourse, when applied to theology, also heralded Luther’s break with the notion of philosophy as having normativity for Christian theology. Luther determined early on that a serious inconsistency lay at the root of nominalist thought: an irreconcilable conflict between the doctrine of syneresis and the initiative of God in salvation. The exclusion of non-essentials as a principle of nominalism has a direct bearing on this discernment. As McGrath put it, “the entire discussion of man’s justification before God on the part of the theologians of the *via moderna* proceeds without reference to the incarnation and death of the Son of God.”\(^56\) One may, of course, make reference to the crucified Christ, but it is not necessary. What is not necessary may be discarded. God, instead, rewards by grace one who does his or her very best within one’s natural powers (*facere quod in se est*). “If we do not add our merits to those of Christ,” said Gabriel Biel, “the merits of Christ will not only be insufficient but non-existent.”\(^57\)

But, declared Luther, it is philosophy that is non-essential: Christ alone, scripture alone, faith alone override the speculations of scholasticism and present all that need be known. In Christ we know God’s salvation. If reason suggests that the human creature does not need Christ for salvation, then reason is a liar. “To be short,” wrote Luther in the Commentary on Galatians, “[reason] is an enemy to God. . . . If reason then be not killed, and all kinds of religion and service of God under heaven that are invented by men to get righteousness before God, be not condemned, the righteousness of faith can take no place.”\(^58\)

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\(^56\) McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 62.

\(^57\) Cited by Oberman, *Harvest . . .*, 268.

\(^58\) “Commentary on Galatians,” (1533), in *Martin Luther: Selection . . .*, 128.
Luther actually followed Gabriel Biel in his early support of the doctrines of *facere quod in se est* and synteresis. As late as 1515 Luther continued to subscribe to the necessity of this doctrine and the proposition that human nature includes a "residue of former goods" that cannot be extinguished.\(^5^9\) At about the same time, however, Luther began to recognize such concepts as Pelagian, perhaps under the influence of Staupitz, who differed markedly from Biel.\(^6^0\) Nevertheless, by 1517 in his *Disputation Against Scholastic Theology*, Luther repudiated almost all of the principles of Biel and nominalism. Forde explains:

> ‘... the real and true work of Christ’s Passion is to make man conformable to Christ, so that man’s conscience is tormented by his sins in like measure as Christ was pitiably tormented in body and soul by our sins... Now the world closes in upon you...’
>
> Conscience can no longer defend us. Luther thus projects for us an inescapable awareness of being drawn into the event: ‘... when you see the nails piercing Christ’s hands, you can be certain that it is your work. When you behold his crown of thorns, you may rest assured that these are your evil thoughts...’\(^6^1\)

Still, Luther owed much to the discipline of the *via moderna*, particularly to Occam.\(^6^2\)

First, he was convinced that “universals” were a speculative and inessential abstraction. Everything could be said to be a representation of itself. *Humanitas*, then, does not refer to a common humanity in all people, but to each person individually. This ascription had implications for Luther’s sacramental theology over and against Thomistic doctrine, which perceived the elements in terms of ‘accident and substance.’ A thing is what it appears. Secondly, Luther used dialectical (rather than rhetorical) methodology, which he reputedly adapted from nominalism.

Next, Luther’s assertion of the Pauline proclamation of justification by faith through grace is coherent with the nominalist assertion that God could grant eternal life (*dei potentia absoluta*) without any works or the impartation of sanctifying grace.

Pertaining to the first debt, Luther disapproved of the nominalist concession to the teachings of the church, became convinced of the error of ‘Transubstantiation,’ and declared

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\(^6^0\) Ibid., 37.

\(^6^1\) Forde, 7-8. Citations are from *LW*42, 10 and 9 respectively.

instead that the body and blood of Christ are present in and with the bread and wine. While
Luther himself would never have identified himself with a term nodding toward Aristotelian
metaphysics, his interpretation later came to be called “consubstantiation.” 63

Luther drew a line, however, where ratio called into question the ways of God and God’s
revelation in Christ. Such a query would be mere speculation, something against which the
nominalists were themselves opposed. Where natural reason ruled the Earthly Kingdom as the
gift of God, or served to humbly regenerate the household of faith subject to the Word of God,
Luther expressed gratitude. Where reason trespassed on the domain of faith and the Heavenly
Kingdom, Luther reviled it as the “Devil’s Whore,” and the mere plaything of evil incarnate. 64

The polemic is inescapable and pervaded Luther’s view of everything he encountered.
‘Reason,’ as something of the natural sphere, cannot be avoided and might even be part of God’s
good creation. But reason is not, and cannot be, a substitute for God’s revelation in Christ, and
may neither judge nor comprehend what has been done in God’s act. His criticism was most
harshly sharpened for any approach that could logically proceed without the crucified and risen
Christ. And, in a style consistent with the anthropotropical view of the prophet, his criticisms
were most vitriolic for those with whom he felt the closest proximity in terms of thought and
education, in this instance the purveyors of reason in the late Middle Ages.

6) AGAPE VS. CARITAS: LUTHER’S REJECTION OF SYNTERESIS

Having described the principle terms of reference and the substantial influence of one
broad school of thought on Luther’s theologia crucis, I turn next to a significant, pivotal point

63 Justo L. Gonzalez. A History of Christian Thought: From the Protestant Reformation to the Twentieth Century,
64 Cf. LW40, 174, fn. 134: “In Germanic mythology, Fria Hulda is the name of the leader of a group of elfin
creatures who were looked upon as the instigators of good and evil among men. Like them Fria Hulda is of a
capricious nature, now friendly, now hostile especially in times when disorder arises among men. She may
therefore be regarded as a personification of order and clever reasoning. However, in matters of faith Luther
looked upon reason as seductive, hence as ‘the devil’s prostitute.’ ” Cf. also Oeberman, Luther . . . , 204: “Nor did
he regard ‘conscience’ as identical with the inescapable voice of God in man. Conscience is neither neutral nor
autonomous . . . it is not the autonomous center of man’s personality, it is always guided and is free only once God
has freed and ‘captured’ it.”
that arose as a result of the distinction made between Agape and Caritas. The distinction is relevant to Luther’s eventual dismissal of the doctrine of syneresis.

To make the distinction between these two (one Greek, the other Latin) as clear as possible, it is necessary to consider the distinction between two Greek words: Agape and Eros. Anders Nygren made this distinction in his book Agape and Eros. The two terms are usually defined today as “self-giving love” and “selfish love,” but to overlay those meanings on the words used at the time of Christ would be misleading. One must pay some attention to the meanings that the Greeks themselves gave to them. While the word eros was undoubtedly used to describe self-serving love, even lust, in Greek literature, its contrast to agape pertains to a distinct concept of love, the classical example being Plato’s “Heavenly Eros.” It is a human love for the divine; a love of the human creature for God. Eros is a yearning desire aroused by the qualities of its object, and the human creature seeks God to satisfy this hunger. There is a more than ample correspondence of this meaning of eros with Heschel’s theotropy.

Agape, on the other hand, is God’s love, which is God’s self. That love is extended into the world by the act of creation, and subsequently the act of salvation. Agape is thus manifested in the world by faith as a grateful response, which in turn encourages and gives rise to courage and conscience that neither serves the one who is faithful, nor expects reward.

While eros and agape are appositional, they are not necessarily in opposition. Just as Heschel is careful to say that theotropic practice is a necessary expression of the human desire for God, eros is an empowering force for change and artistic expression that does not necessarily require domination or submission. Process theologians such as Rita Nakashima Brock, Alfred North Whitehead, and Bernard Meland describe eros as the source of power that makes available an “open play space” for being and becoming if grace is concurrently maintained in life.

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65 Anders Nygren, Agape and Eros, translated by Philip S. Watson, (London: S.P.C.K., 1957). While this source has undergone significant criticism in recent years, it still provides a thoughtful approach to this distinction.

66 Ibid., from the translator’s preface, viii.

Nygren represents the two terms as “Conflicting Fundamental Motifs.” Agape had entered into a world already impressed by eros as a primary aspect of human nature, and thereafter had “gathered up into itself all that there was of idealism in the ancient world,” including eros. They therefore became so entangled as to make it almost impossible to pull them apart. With the use of the Latin term Caritas, which became most commonly used in the Middle Ages, the tension between Eros and Agape became almost imperceptible. Luther himself used the term Caritas in this positive sense during his early lectures on Ps. 119 (vs.40), to describe the difference between “greed” (concupiscentia) and the longing for God’s love:

This verse sums up all that has been said in love and spiritual longing. It stands at the same time with the aforementioned fear of the Lord, yes, it brings it in and is brought in by it. Here “longing” (concupiscentia) cannot be understood in any other way than as the longing of love (caritas) which has been born of the law of faith and, having now been born, causes the Law to be loved and desired more and more, and moves him always to pray, “Quicken me in Thy righteousness.” For love knows no end and rest for its desire until it lays hold of God.

It could not have been lost on Luther that even Augustine recognized that Paul seldom if ever spoke of Agape Caritas as directed “up” to God. It is directed, instead, toward the neighbour.

In point of fact, Paul was bound to drop the idea of man’s Agape towards God: that was simply a necessary consequence of his whole conception of Agape. If Agape is a love as absolutely spontaneous and entirely unmotivated as the love manifested in the Cross of Jesus, then it is plain that the word Agape can no longer fittingly be used to denote man’s attitude to God. In relation to God, man is never spontaneous; he is not an independent centre of activity. His giving of himself to God is never more than a response. At its best and highest, it is but a reflex of God’s love, by which it is ‘motivated’. Hence it is the very opposite of spontaneous and creative; it lacks all the essential marks of Agape. Man’s devotion to God must therefore be given another name: not αγάπη, but πίστις. By 1519 Luther’s distinction was well-developed. In his lectures on Galatians, he said:

... love is the law of Christ. But to love means to wish from the heart what is good for the other person, or to seek the other person’s advantage. Now if there were no one who

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68 Nygren, Agape and Eros, 53.
69 Ibid., 55.
70 Ibid., 56.
71 LW11, 446-447.
72 Nygren, 124.
73 Ibid., 125-126.
errs or falls—that is, no one who needs what is good—whom are you going to love, whose good are you going to desire, whose good are you going to seek? Love is not even able to exist if there are none who err and sin, who, as the philosophers say, are the proper and adequate ‘object’ of love [objectum caritatis] or the ‘material’ of love [materia dilectionis]. Carnality, however—or love that consists in lust—looks for others to wish for its benefit and to want for it what it itself desires. These people . . . want to live not on earth but in Paradise, not among sinners but among angels, not in the world but in heaven. . . they make the cross of Christ to no effect (I Cor. 1:17) in themselves, and the love they have is inactive, is snoring, and is carried on other shoulders.\textsuperscript{74}

Because he was lecturing in Latin Luther did not make a clear break with the synthesis of caritas. He made a distinction nonetheless, one which was amply described by Augustine between caritas and cupiditas.\textsuperscript{75} For Augustine caritas was a synthesis of agape and eros wherein God loves us so that we may learn to love God.\textsuperscript{76} The influence of eros is thus clear, and for Augustine, “Neoplatonic Eros has become the means of discovering Christian Agape.”\textsuperscript{77}

In a way, then, one’s yearning for God (eros) is satisfied by love for the neighbour. It is no longer self-giving love, but is a God-given love expressed by charitable (i.e. caritas) works.

Left at this point, Augustine would be hilariously represented as Pelagian. However, Augustine noted that Pelagius’ notion of grace as limited to the freedom of the human will, the law, and the forgiveness of sins is of no service.\textsuperscript{78} Augustine insisted that works, no matter how ‘beneficial,’ are self-serving (cupiditus) unless they are the result of God’s initiative in self-giving (caritas). “He who asserts that we can possess God’s Caritas without God’s aid,” said Augustine, “what else does he assert than that we can possess God without God?”\textsuperscript{79} Grace and caritas are thus combined in movements simultaneously both ‘upward’ and ‘downward.’ Put another way, “all love—even that which is directed to God—is acquisitive love and so, in a certain sense, self-love.”\textsuperscript{80} This was, perhaps, the dominant view prior to the Reformation, a view that worked itself out ecclesiologically as though the grace of God produces a yearning for

\textsuperscript{74} L\textit{W}27, 391-392.
\textsuperscript{75} Nygren, 391.
\textsuperscript{76} Ibid., 453.
\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., 460.
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., 519.
\textsuperscript{79} Ibid., 521.
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid., 532. Nygren is careful to observe that there is a differentiation made by Augustine in which Amor sui is not, in and of itself, caritas. Cf. 545-548.
God satisfied by obedience to the Church. Luther attacked and overcame this synthesis in the renewal of the agape motif Nygren called “a Copernican Revolution”: “...Luther insists, in opposition to all egocentric forms of religion, upon a purely theocentric relation to God.” Any attempt at constructing a path ‘upward’ to God is destroyed, for righteousness is not something done by the human creature; it is done by God in the human creature:

God does not want to redeem us through our own, but through external, righteousness and wisdom; not through one that comes from us and grows in us, but through one that comes to us from the outside; not through one that originates here on earth, but through one that comes from heaven. Therefore, we must be taught a righteousness that comes completely from the outside and is foreign. And therefore our own righteousness that is born in us must first be plucked up.82

These words, written during his Lectures on Romans in 1515-1516, indicate Luther’s growing commitment to the concept of Christian love as thoroughly theocentric agape. Love is not, therefore, something we enact in order to be noticed by God, but is possible in us because God has noticed us (“Therefore sinners are attractive because they are loved; they are not loved because they are attractive.”) It denies all that the human creature holds dear in him/herself and wishes to preserve even against God’s judgement. Luther articulates, therefore, an anthropology that is not only bound up with an inherent desire to be with God, but with the inevitability to sin. It is a theology of judgement and of transformation denying any inherent features as worthy of preservation, which yet lifts up in wonder God’s love for the unlovely human creature. This is salvation, for Luther: that God lifts the human from self-interest (even if expressed as the love of God), to recognize and make manifest God’s love in the world. This the human cannot do on her own, but only by the grace of God from which faith, courage, and conscience result.

This is a clear rejection of the doctrine of syneresis: the proposition that the human creature “does one’s best” in response to an inborn, ontologically innate disposition to ethical conduct. The concept was so deeply ingrained in the late medieval mind that, rather than reject it, almost everyone chose merely to redefine it. Aquinas and Scotus maintained that humanity

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81 Ibid., 681 ff.
82 LW25, 136.
possesses an innate understanding of good that was not eradicated by the Fall. Occam, preferring to maintain the primacy of free will, understood the reception of grace as a reward fitting to good deeds initiated by the faithful even without the aid of grace.\textsuperscript{83} Biel maintained that synteresis is an infallible moral ability or knowledge directing the human creature to just and right activity.\textsuperscript{84}

No doubt the young Luther held similar views, and was most particularly in debt to Biel for them. During his lectures on the Psalms (1513-1515), Luther made reference to synteresis as an unchallenged tenet of human existence: “Therefore through tribulation a man enlarges his syntereses,” he said, in reference to Ps. 4:1.\textsuperscript{85} Later, on Ps. 11, Luther said, “For no one is so evil that he does not feel the murmur of reason and the voice of conscience (synteresium).”\textsuperscript{86} In reference to Ps. 42:7, Luther said that, “...such a longing is natural in human nature, because the synteresis and desire for good is inextinguishable in man, though it may be hindered in many.”\textsuperscript{87} Von Loewenich records that, according to a sermon delivered in December of 1514, he struggled to redefine the concept as a necessary condition for the effectiveness of grace.\textsuperscript{88}

By 1516 Luther began to realize that the doctrine of synteresis was largely a speculative concept inserted into Christian discourse for the purpose of uplifting the human creature, not for the glorification of God. He further began to realize that there were serious christological implications, in that God’s initiative was seen as secondary to human ontology and salvation in Christ was altogether unnecessary if the human creature possessed even the slightest ability to save himself. In his Lectures on Romans, Luther started out with a cautious nod to this deeply-held concept: “This major premise of the ‘practical syllogism,’ this theological ‘insight of the conscience,’ is in all men and cannot be obscured.\textsuperscript{89} Within months, however, Luther began to articulate his discovery of cracks in the concept’s foundations. Regarding Romans 3:10, he wrote, “...[a man] is always inclined toward evil to such an extent that except for the grace of

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{83} Ngien, \textit{The Suffering of God}, 21, 23-27.
\item \textsuperscript{84} Von Loewenich, \textit{Luther’s Theology}, 53.
\item \textsuperscript{85} \textit{LW}10, 49.
\item \textsuperscript{86} Ibid., 99.
\item \textsuperscript{87} Ibid., 197.
\item \textsuperscript{88} von Loewenich, \textit{Luther’s Theology}, 54-56.
\item \textsuperscript{89} \textit{LW}25, 156 [\textit{hec Synteresis theological est inobscureabilis in omnibus}].
\end{itemize}
God he could not be moved to anything good... for we are so entirely inclined to evil that no portion which is inclined toward the good remains in us, as is clear in the synteresis.  

By the time he reached the fourth chapter of Romans, Luther seemed to be almost foaming at the mouth in his rejection of the concept:

But when a person desires and loves something else, can he really love God? But this concupiscence is always in us, and therefore the love of God is never in us, unless it is begun by grace, and until the concupiscence which still remains and which keeps us from "loving God with all our heart" (Luke 10:27) is healed and by mercy not imputed to us as sin, and until it is completely removed and the perfect love for God is given to the believers and those who persistently agitate for it to the end.

All of these monstrosities have come from the fact that they did not know what sin is nor forgiveness. For they reduced sin to some very minute activity of the soul, and the same was true of righteousness. For they said that since the will has this synteresis, 'it is inclined,' albeit weakly, 'toward the good.' And this minute motion toward God (which man can perform by nature) they imagine to be an act of loving God above all things! But take a good look at man, entirely filled with evil lusts... The Law commands him to be empty, so that he may be taken completely into God.

The human being, emptied of all things, is emptied of the spark of conscience as well. There is, therefore, no significance in some 'divine attribute' within the human. Only God's power is effective; human power is not. It is only what God does with, in, and through the human being that concerns the theologian of the cross. The theology of the cross...

... is not only a gift but also an accusation. It is not the rock on which our house could be built. Rather, it really has to do with a destroying, a radical demolition and a complete reconstruction of the foundations. And because the doctrine of the synteresis has obscured this, it has no place in the theology of the cross. In all seriousness the watchword must be turning around, not turning inward, beyond, not inside.

These developments have deep significance in terms of Luther's theologia crucis for a critical theology of religion. The validity of any assertion that the human creature can construct a 'path to God' is denied, because even those desires deemed 'good' are to emptied by God's act. Any 'natural' ability to affect salvation is denied by the very evidence of Christ, his cross and resurrection: "Such bullets and such artillery must be used," said Luther in 1535, "to destroy the

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90 Ibid., 222.
91 Ibid., 262.
92 von Loewenich, Luther's Theology, 58.
papacy, all the religions of the heathen, all ceremonies, all works, all merits. For if our sins can be removed by our own satisfactions, why did the Son of God have to be given for them? But since He was given for them, it follows that we cannot remove them by works of our own.93

Luther did not, however, simply commit himself to a blind iconoclasm that would leave a vacuum into which human imaginings could pour. Luther loved the world and its people far too much, if for no other reason than the very love of God for the world. Any precept of theology or reason that he destroyed had to be replaced, he knew, with an affirmation and proclamation of God’s love as known in Jesus Christ, and therefore of the three-fold revelation of God’s act in Christ: the revelation of God’s being, of human sin, and God’s intent for human destiny. The human dependency upon sola gratia was, for Luther, the very freedom of the human creature from the bondage of fear, self-service, and fundamental inability. There is a solidarity among all people, according to Luther, but not the solidarity of a seed of conscience and the ability to effect one’s own salvation; it is the solidarity of God’s justification or acceptance of the sinful creature through faith alone. Every person can, therefore, be known as one who is simultaneously sinner and righteous, simul iustus et peccator.

This faith cannot exist in connection with works—that is to say, if you at the same time claim to be justified by works, whatever their character—for that would be the same as “limping with two different opinions” [I Kings 18:21], as worshiping Baal and kissing one’s own hand [Job 31:27-28] . . . the moment you begin to have faith you learn that all things in you are altogether blameworthy, sinful, and damnable . . . When you have learned this you will know that you need Christ, who suffered and rose again for you so that, if you believe in him, you may through this faith become a new man in so far as your sins are forgiven and you are justified by the merits of another, namely, of Christ alone.94

God’s grace compels the believer to action in the world, not to seek God’s favour or union with God in a desire to achieve holiness. Fellowship with God becomes, instead, a fellowship of sinners who are recipients of God’s grace simul iustus et simul peccator, and becomes a love that gives. Righteousness is not earned or achieved, but comes from God, and if, “reason is not

93 LW26, 32-33.
94 LW31, 346.
slaughtered, and if all the religions and forms of worship under heaven that have been thought up by men to obtain righteousness in the sight of God are not condemned, the righteousness of faith cannot stand.\textsuperscript{95}

The works of a believer are like this. Through his faith he has been restored to Paradise and created anew, has no need of works that he may become or be righteous; but that he may not be idle and may provide for and keep his body, he must do such works freely only to please God.\textsuperscript{96}

These developments, perhaps among the most pastorally significant in the history of Christian thought, bring with them not only the necessity of relying upon God but also a presumption of suspicion regarding any religious affirmation based upon human competence. It is with this presumption, so like the suspicion with which the prophet regards his own community, that Luther engaged the world around him.

It is to those engagements, then, that we will now turn our attention.

\textsuperscript{95} Martin Luther: Selections . . ., 128.
\textsuperscript{96} LW31, 360.
CHAPTER III  THE CRITICAL APPLICATION OF THEOLOGIA CRUCIS

Luther did not breathe purified air. He was not confined to the towers of the university or the mind, but was bound up in the ferment of personal and political life around him. Being a pastor, a teacher, an advisor to the great and lowly, a husband and father, were all part of his day to day life. And his life was by no means confined merely to these activities! It is essential, therefore, that we realize the complexity and breadth of Luther’s life, in order that we might also regard with charity those times his words seem simplistic, naïve, or shallow. We might also consider with some awe that Luther’s development of the theologia crucis, to which we owe so much, grew and matured in direct interaction with his personal daily life. It is my contention that those encounters constitute, for his day, what we would today call encounters with religious plurality. Where Luther’s responses are governed by his theology of the cross coherent with biblical anthropotropical prophecy, we can perceive that they do indeed constitute a critical theology of religion. In this chapter, I shall examine Luther’s statements regarding secularity, the Roman church, the papal office, Judaism, Islam, and those whom he referred to as ‘enthusiasts’.

1) **THE TWO KINGDOMS: ENCOUNTER WITH THE SECULAR**

Luther’s late-medieval consciousness knew nothing of “secularism.” There was, however, a distinction made between forms of authority, primarily ecclesial and imperial authority. Though in actual practice the distinction may not have been so clear, it was an important distinction nonetheless. Given Luther’s vulnerability in both realms it is no surprise that his first public pronouncements were upon this distinction. Those pronouncements may represent the most prevalent encounter experienced by the western Christian in today’s world. It is the encounter with what has come to be known as ‘the secular’, although our modern concept is foreign to any frame of reference that Luther may have had.

Luther addressed this issue through his development of the ‘Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms.’ Its synthesis is certainly related to the description that Augustine of Hippo gave to
his doctrine of the two cities in *De Civitate Dei.* It is largely overlooked that much of medieval political thought followed similar lines, and that Gabriel Biel, whose work greatly influenced the early Luther, held a similar view of ‘two powers.’

In Biel’s exposition, ecclesiastical power is the gift of Christ to the apostles and their successors. Their commission is to lead the church in the enforcement of evangelical law to eternal life. The church is not, however, synonymous with the hierarchy of Rome; it includes the secular courts as well. The Pope presides over the spiritual power of the church, and the head of the State is the highest power in secular matters. Both are accountable to God for authority, and it is the responsibility of the State to protect the church and punish those who trespass divine law. In matters of heresy and blasphemy, then, the State is the servant of God through the church.\(^1\)

Luther’s classical learning was of little help, based as it was in a desire to harmonize princely and priestly rule. Concurrently, his nominalistic influences were largely a reformulation of the notion of a positive Christian State that also served to affirm the disintegrating medieval theocracy of Luther’s time. Luther was encountering something new under the sun, and he was hard pressed to articulate it. Hence the development of his doctrine of the Two Kingdoms.

The issue had personal import to Luther, since *An Appeal to the Ruling Class of German Nationality* was based on the premise that spiritual authority is distinct from and, to some extent, accountable to secular authority. Conversely, within a year of that publication Luther would refuse to comply with the order of the Emperor to recant. Following his excommunication he would deny the validity of several orders forbidding the ownership and reading of his books. Could such resistance be held congruently with a validation of secular authority?

In response to these questions, and some specific situations, Luther wrote the piece that has been entitled *Temporal Authority: To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed* in 1523. Based upon

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1 Heinrich Bornkamm, *Luther’s Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms in the Context of His Theology,* translated by Karl H. Hertz, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 19-28. Augustine, says Bornkamm, was concerned only with the relationship between the earthly and heavenly realms; Luther with the question of a relationship between the church and state, given the political context of his day. Cf. 19.

2 Oberman, *Harvest . . . ,* 419ff. The influence of Biel must not be overstated. Luther acknowledged only Augustine as a source for his doctrine, Cf. “On War Against the Turk,” LW46, 163-164.
the third and fourth of a series of six sermons preached at Weimar, it represents an ethical theology of relationship with what has come to be known as the secular world.

Development of the doctrine is linked closely to Luther’s distinction of law and gospel, and therefore to God’s initiative in all things, for both are manifestations of God’s love. It is occasionally misunderstood that the law is a ‘divine no’ to all things, a kind of cosmic superego against which the divine ‘yes’ of the gospel, affirming God’s love for and value of every living thing, seems a deep, oppositional contrast. The truth is to the contrary, however. The same Word of God can be law or gospel, the law restraining the wicked and providing necessary order for social living and for the proclamation of the gospel, and the gospel providing freedom from fear and personal limitations to serve the neighbour. In anticipation of this doctrine, then, we might remember the three-fold disclosure of God as Deus absconditus: God is revealed in concealment; the human creature is revealed as helpless to overcome sin; true humanity is revealed as the transformed recipient of grace. Law also expresses God’s will constituting condemnation. It is judgement for the sake of the one being judged, even when exercised by non-Christian secular authority. Christians, said Luther, need no governance. But there are few true Christians, and secular authority must be obeyed for those who are in need of such regulation:

If anyone attempted to rule the world by the gospel and to abolish all temporal law and the sword on the plea that all are baptized and Christian, and that, according to the gospel, there shall be among them no law or sword . . . He would be loosing the ropes and chains of the savage wild beasts and letting them bite and mangle everyone . . .

There is, then, no dualism in terms of conflicted opposites. Temporal authority is a gift of God for the sake of those who cannot govern themselves, or refuse to conform to the discipleship of Christ. It has been recommended, therefore, that to translate Luther’s zwei Reichen as oppositional forces is patently false. We have, instead, two ‘governments’: “The term ‘governments’ denotes the two ways in which God effects his will in the secular and spiritual realms of the world. Both duality and unity thus seemed to be preserved.”

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3 LW45, 81-129, 91.
4 Bonkamm, 2.
Dietrich Bonhoeffer made an extended comment on the productive interplay of the two kingdoms as complementary manifestations of God’s will:

[Since] ... Luther engaged in polemics on behalf of the secular authority against the extension of ecclesiastical power by the Roman Church, so, too, must there be a Christian or ‘spiritual’ polemical reply to the secular element when there is a danger that this element may make itself independent, as was the case soon after the Reformation and especially in nineteenth-century German secularist Protestantism. ... Luther was protesting against a Christianity which was striving for independence and detaching itself from the reality in Christ. He protested with the help of the secular and in the name of a better Christianity. So, too, today, when Christianity is employed as a polemical weapon against the secular, this must be done in the name of a better secularity and above all it must not lead back to a static predominance of the spiritual sphere as an end in itself. 

For Luther, the two kingdoms represented the manifestation of God’s love for the human creature. Ecclesial authority is a power to serve other Christians as servants of the church. Secular authority is a power to maintain order for the sake of the Godless and disordered among whom Christians in ‘name only’ number mightily! Luther was concerned that ecclesial authority not give up the power to serve, for the sake of lawless personal power over the lives and conditions of ordinary people. This was made obvious in his earliest criticisms of the church. But he was equally concerned that secular authority not dictate the faith of the masses, and that the Body of Christ not become an ingratiating court chaplain that serves secular authority.

Luther’s exposition of the two kingdoms, then, stands as a careful attempt to hold the two realms in tension. There can be no Christian state, asserted Luther, simply because the way of Christ cannot be imposed upon others: “... even if all Jews and heretics were forcibly burned no one ever has been or will be convinced or converted thereby.”

Consequently, Luther was careful to emphasize the words of Jesus found in Matthew 5:39: “Do not resist evil.” He does not interpret this as a message to Christians to resist the authority of government to take up arms against an enemy, but to behave ...
... in such a way that you bear everything, so that you may not need the governing authority to help you and serve you or be beneficial or essential for you, but that you in turn may help and serve it, being beneficial and essential to it. I would have you be too exalted and far too noble to have any need of it; it should rather have need of you.

The Christian, then, is responsible for bearing witness to Christ into the secular world in order to serve those in need. Luther rejected the assumption of power by Christian authority, whether by Church or enthusiasts, as the assumption of power over, rather than for, those in need of good order. While Luther expected Christian princes to rule in a Christian manner, he rejected the notion of a “Christian nation” as presuming upon and assuming God’s election and blessings.

Luther’s argument concerning the doctrine of two kingdoms served not only as a critical theology of secular rule, but also as a critical theology of religion over and against the presumption of political power and the legislation of religious practice. The consequences of his analysis have not been without detriment. Some theologians such as Douglas John Hall, Gregory Baum and Jürgen Moltmann have suggested that the doctrine of the Two Kingdoms has left the secular world to perdition, withdrawn the church and Christians from political criticism, and created the ground for ‘apolitical theology.’ While such consequences are due more to the distortions of the later Lutheran tradition, it must be said that Luther’s own timidity in the face of the Peasants’ Revolt suggests that the doctrine may have a certain neutralizing effect at its most radical level. Nevertheless, Luther’s doctrine of the Two Kingdoms was a critical doctrine intended to warn Christians away from presuming power over others, and to encourage the use of power as a gift of God for the sake of those unable to govern themselves or who are vulnerable to the abuses of others. It was, in its own way, a statement of God’s ‘preferential option for the poor,’ though this is undoubtedly too optimistic since the doctrine has been all too easily distorted by Luther himself, and by many who have followed him.

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8 Ibid., 95.
2) **The Roman Church**

Luther’s battle with the Roman hierarchy can be seen as a ‘critical theology of religion’ arising from his developing *theologia crucis*. As this was the first of his critical encounters and closest to his own heart as a pastor the terms of reference for prophetic engagement with those most closely associated apply. Though his relationship to and comments on the Roman Church and the Papacy are intertwined, they are not identical in every way. Nor was his attack on the papacy a necessary extensions of Luther’s struggle with the practices of the Roman Church.

Ordained to the priesthood in 1507, he presided at his first mass at the age of twenty-four. His account of that event is necessary in order to appreciate his critique of ecclesial authority:

> ... I was utterly stupefied and terror-stricken... shall I, a miserable little pygmy, say ‘I want this, I ask for that?’ For I am dust and ashes and full of sin and I am speaking to the living, eternal and the true God.  

In spite of considerable accomplishments at a young age, Luther described himself in self-derisive terms. He knew himself to be unworthy of standing before the divine Majesty of God.

No act of the church, not even the sacrament of ordination, could mitigate this state: God’s initiative took priority over any authority of this world. From the beginning of his ministry it was clear that the church would not be a haven from temptation, for temptation and his desire for divine approval and the assurance of merit were part of him. A lesser person might have abandoned the church. Luther chose a path of personal transformation beginning with a deep journey into scripture. His order afforded the journey. Luther was sent to Wittenberg in 1508 to lecture on moral philosophy, travelled to Rome in 1510, and returned to Wittenberg in 1511 where, after receiving a doctorate in theology, he began lectures on the Psalms.

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12 Ibid., Bainton, 30-33
13 William Acheson, retired professor of history at the University of New Brunswick, has offered this comment as part of some personal correspondence: “Luther’s going to this backwater was in some ways providential. A devout and gentle Christian reflecting the piety of an age already under attack, Frederick the Wise possessed the largest collection of holy relics in Europe (127,977 years of freedom from purgatory). Luther became the intellectual jewel of his new institution and Frederick greatly admired and defended him although he probably never understood him. Frederick was one of the seven electors who chose the Holy Roman Emperor, and was one of the most respected princes—the pope tried to persuade him to stand for Emperor in 1520. . . . Without Frederick, Luther would never have survived beyond 1520.” (Aug., 2000).
Luther’s biblical explorations during these lectures brought into focus all of his doubt and concern about ecclesial practices. He began to see that the usurpation of mediational power by the church was contrary to the witness of scripture. Previously, Luther had understood his lack of peace in terms of his own inability. Through his exploration of scripture, he became aware that even the church, presuming to act on God’s behalf, could not allay his own failings.

Luther’s conclusion arose from the method with which he read the Psalms, understanding them as describing the life and death of Jesus Christ in advance of the event. By the time he lectured on Ps. 22, Luther knew in Christ someone beset by the same Anfechtung as he himself experienced, not Christ in the glorious power of the church, but Christ in the vulnerability of a judge suffering the punishment of the judged.\(^4\) Luther was well on his way to viewing all things in terms of the initiative of God in the cross of Christ. The scholarly and existential influences of his past were coming together in an inevitable conflict with existing ecclesial structures.

This conflict was by no means the result of any fundamental ambiguity about the church on Luther’s part. On the contrary, it was because of Luther’s high regard for the priesthood and the church that he came to criticize them at all.\(^5\) He saw himself as inseparable from the life and hierarchy of the church, and so his admonitions were directed as much to himself as to others. Luther saw this criticism as a necessary for the love of the church and its people. He became progressively aware of the connection between the inefficacy of all human endeavours to affect salvation, including and especially the sale of plenary indulgences by the church guaranteeing the forgiveness of all sins and the cancellation of temporal penalties by the church. The proceeds were to go toward the construction of St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome while also paying off Albert’s debts acquired during negotiations with Rome for permission to hold three ecclesiastical offices at once.\(^6\) Thus, says Hendrix, “the scandalous details are a good illustration of the way in which the indulgence practice had become a flexible fund-raising device of the church.”\(^7\)

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\(^4\) Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 31, 47.
\(^7\) Hendrix, *Luther and the Papacy*, 25.
As scandalous as these events were, they were not Luther’s primary concern. His growing anger was the effect their promotion had on the people, who were always his first concern. In effect, the sale of indulgences made confession and acts of penance superfluous to all but the very poor, who could not literally buy the grace of God from the church. Luther wrote of his concerns to Albert of Mainz in October of 1517, emphasizing the pastoral duties of the church. Included with the letter were the now-famous “95 Theses” that Luther wrote with the intention of provoking an open debate on the efficacy of indulgences. The Theses were received as an act of defiance. Particularly inflammatory were theses 42 - 52, which presumed to say what “Christians should be taught . . .” regarding what the pope wants or would do, possibly without knowledge of what the pope had already declared with regard to these indulgences.  

By criticizing the sale of indulgences, Luther entered into conflict with a central pillar of the Roman Church: the episcopacy. The conflict did not have to escalate as it did. Luther put himself in a vulnerable, defensive position by criticizing the authority of the pope in such matters.  

Eck, correctly associating Luther’s challenge with that of Johannes Huss, labeled the position “Bohemian poison.” John Tetzel, the indulgence preacher against whom Luther raged, responded vehemently with the support of academic and ecclesial authorities. While Luther may have been dismayed, it must be said that his desire to inspire debate on the subject of indulgence and penance was successful. What he did not intend at the time of publishing his Theses was a debate on ecclesiology per se, the authority of the papacy, and the person of the pope.

By March of 1518 the debate took some ugly turns. Albert, Bishop of Mainz, and John Tetzel tried to impugn Luther with Church authorities. Students in Wittenberg burned the theses produced by Conrad Wimpina and defended by Tetzel. In this climate that Luther preached his Sermon on Indulgence and Grace. He did not mention papal authority, but confined himself to refuting the assertions of scholastics and ecclesiastics—obviously directed at Tetzel and Wimpina—concerning the salvific power of indulgences. It was a sermon, however, preached by

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18 Ibid., 25
19 Ibid., 35
a true pastor to his beloved pastorate. In this sermon, Luther maintained in twenty points the
initiative of God and the priority of God’s act in Christ as revealed in scripture. Here we find, in
nascent form, elements of *theologia crucis*. Four points are of particular weight:

Thirteenth: it is a great mistake for anyone to think he can make amends for his own sins;
so God always forgives them freely out of His infinite grace, requiring nothing more than
a blameless life afterwards. The Christian church should give help; and so it may and
should pronounce forgiveness, and not impose any severe or intolerable penance.

Fourteenth: indulgences make a place for themselves because there are many imperfect
and indolent Christians who refuse to do good works diligently or who are indifferent and
careless. Indulgences do not help to make people better, but tolerate their imperfections
and let them remain. Hence indulgences ought not to be condemned; but, on the other
hand, no one ought to be urged to use them.

Fifteenth: the ground is much safer, and it is far better, when a man, just for God’s sake,
makes a gift to the building of St. Peter’s, or whatever is specified, than if he buys an
indulgence with that object. The danger is that he will make the gift for the sake of the
indulgence, and not for God’s sake.

Sixteenth: it is much better to do a good work to someone in need than to make a gift
towards the building of St. Peter’s; and much better than buying an indulgence for that
purpose. For, as I have said, it is much better to do one good work than to be excused
many. An indulgence, however, excuses many a good work, but otherwise effects
nothing.²⁰

The irenic tone, while giving no ground regarding the issue of indulgences, cannot be missed.
Yet conciliatory efforts were in vain. Much occurred to incite further passion, including the fact
that Luther’s learned senior colleague, Karlstadt, appropriated some of Luther’s propositions
when he issued 380 theses against Tetzel and Eck in May of 1518

It was at this point that Luther’s friend and mentor, Johann Staupitz, tried to bring clarity
and order to the situation; as dean of theology at Wittenberg and the vicar of the local
Augustinian chapter, he could do no less. Staupitz asked Luther for the document now known as
*The Heidelberg Disputation*, which was used as the basis for debate within the Order itself.

The move served to clarify positions and to move Luther, along with other advocates of
Church reform, more confidently toward their goal. Reform was not to be realized, however. By

²⁰ Ibid., 53.
July of 1520, Luther became aware of rumours concerning his excommunication. He had also received two documents, one by Alveld of Leipzig and another from an anonymous source in Italy that raised his ire to new creative heights. The result was *The Pagan Servitude of the Church*. In its publication Luther made known, in irrefutable and comprehensible terms, the distinction between sacrament and superstition and opened the door for emancipation from a priest-centered system, and the power of a corrupt church.\(^1\) Luther had incited a “theocentric revolution.” Here he called into question the authority and, indeed, the motives of a priestly class who presumed to dispense salvation. He did so as a priest, and a lover of the church. Knowing himself unable to do that which only God could do, he called upon faithful Christians to depend not upon the capricious dispensation of humans claiming the authority of God, but upon God alone. From this point, all encounters with ‘the religious’ become critical encounters *a priori* in Luther’s thought. Nothing that is not explicitly expressed as dependent upon the initiative of God, hidden in the crucified Christ, could be understood as authentically ‘religious’ in terms of transformative power. Further, any ecclesiology that presumed to mete out that which God freely gives could only be considered contrary to God’s act in the cross of the risen Christ.

The argument regarding indulgences had become secondary. Luther, a priest among priests, fundamentally called the authority of priests into question on the basis that the church can never proclaim itself, but must proclaim only God for the sake of nourishing Christians with the Word of God. That task could not be taken lightly; neither could it be assumed to be done simply by holding office in the church. The church, with which Luther identified most closely, was the object of a criticism from which no one could be spared, not even himself. One becomes a theologian, said Luther, “by living, by dying and by being damned.”\(^2\) His was a mission to exhort, cajole and convert those closest to him:

\(^1\) Martin Luther, “A Sermon on Indulgence and Grace,” in *Selections*, 49-55, 53. Note: Woolf dates this sermon Oct.31, 1517, when it was probably preached. Publication is dated Feb.17, 1518. Hendrix, dates the publication in March of 1518 after students burned the Tetzel/Wimpina theses. The difference in date, unresolved, has to do with Luther trying to keep his pastorate from reacting violently, and dissociating himself from their actions.

\(^2\) From WA 5:162.28. The entire quote is as follows: “Vivendo, immo moriendo et damnando fit theologus, non intelligendo, legendo aut speculando.”
I am a preacher who ought to have teeth in his mouth, to bite them and irritate them and to tell them the truth, and if they don’t want to hear it, to excommunicate them, to bar them from heaven, to send them to hell’s fire and give them to Satan for God’s sake.\footnote{Cited by Harry McSorley, “Luther: Exemplar of Reform—Or Doctor of the church?” in The Theology of Martin Luther: Five Contemporary Canadian Interpretations, edited by Egil Grislis, (Winfield: Wood Lake Books, Inc., 1985), 43. From “Sermon on Mt.5:44, 1532,” LW21, 123-124.}

In doing so, Luther also called into question the office and person of the one who dispensed such authority: the pope.

3) **THE POPE AND PAPAL OFFICE**

Once Luther took a stand on indulgences and penance he became a critic of established ecclesiology. It is important to affirm here the two reasons for the critique. First, if God is the author of salvation then there is no need of priestly mediation. If Christ is the only mediator, then none other is necessary, and what is not necessary is dispensable. Thus developed his criticism of a religious ‘theology of glory,’ whereby human beings presume to effect God’s grace.

The second is the more important to Luther, for it concerned the pastoral needs of the people. Luther continuously asked why forgiveness and dispensation, if under priestly control, would not be given instead of sold. Further, he would repeatedly affirm the need of the faithful to act in gratitude for God’s gift of grace, made unnecessary by the purchase of indulgences.

On both these counts, Luther indicted the clergy of the church and called into question the authority of a human construct to effect that which only God could do. He ‘rediscovered’ God’s acceptance of the human creature as always and only a matter of grace.

It may not have been Luther’s intention to call into question the office of the pope. The question could not, however, be avoided. Luther handled the issue in a way that was by no means revolutionary in Theses 42-52 of the 95 Theses. Others, such as Occam, d’Ailly and Gerson, had already dealt critically with papal authority, though in a manner far more qualified than Luther.\footnote{Hendrix, *Grace and Reason*, 8.}

It is important to note that Luther was not a ‘church anarchist.’ He attested to the need for established Church hierarchy in the same way that he insisted upon the need for secular authority.
as being for the sake of those who could not govern, discipline or protect themselves. His argument was not with hierarchy per se, but with the authenticity of that hierarchy.

John Eck pushed Luther from private misgivings to public opposition to the papacy. When scheduled for a debate with Karlstadt, Eck used the opportunity to publish twelve theses against Luther. The basis of these theses was the historical primacy, according to its own authority, of the Roman Church. Luther’s response, his first public challenge to the authority of the Holy See, came to be known as “Proposition Thirteen.” In it, he stated that only . . .

. . . the most unconvincing decrees of the Roman pontiffs issued within the last four hundred years prove that the Roman Church is superior to all others; against these stand the accepted history of the last fifteen hundred years, the text of divine Scripture and the decree of the Council of Nicea, the holiest of all councils.

In this exposition, Luther affirmed the human right of the pope to be head of the Western church, but denied divine right in such matters. He did this by illustrating the lack of any scriptural basis. Scripture, said Luther, affirms that Peter received the keys of the kingdom of heaven (Mt. 16:18-19), but only on behalf of all of the apostles. In addition, such commendation came with the condition of Jesus’ commandment to “Feed my sheep.” (John 21:16) Fueled by the same argument that had provoked the conflict on indulgences, Luther opposed papal claims to rule by divine right because such claims could only be made on the basis of nourishing God’s people with the Gospel. Authority claimed by the pope and the hierarchy was, however, the authority to withhold salvation. It represented, therefore, a rule of tyranny and oppression, a ‘spiritual extortion’ to which Luther could not acquiesce.

He did make attempts at conciliation. The last of these was An Open Letter to Pope Leo X, written in September of 1520. Luther tried to dissociate his criticism of the church hierarchy from Leo himself. One cannot help but wonder how Luther could possibly believe that Leo would be mollified by his description of authorized, invested officers of the church as “monsters” and “godless flatterers”, and the Roman Church as . . .

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25 Ibid., 78.
26 Ibid., 81.
...the most licentious den of thieves, the most shameless of all brothels, the kingdom of sin, death, and hell. It is so bad that even Antichrist himself, if he should come, could think of nothing to add to its wickedness.\textsuperscript{27}

Luther said all of this, and much more, despite the risk to his own security, for the sake of telling his Pope the truth. There was, however, a deeply incisive criticism of the papal office through which Satan had "already made much progress". Addressing the Vicar of Christ, Luther presumed to recover the original meaning of the term and its implications for the church today:

See how different Christ is from his successors, although they all would wish to be his vicars. I fear that most of them have been too literally his vicars. A man is a vicar only when his superior is absent. If the pope rules, while Christ is absent and does not dwell in his heart, what else is he but a vicar of Christ? What is the church under such a vicar but a mass of people without Christ? ... what is such a vicar but an antichrist and an idol?\textsuperscript{28}

Luther's point is that if the pope and the church claim that the office of the pope is the Vicar of Christ, then the claim to authority is dependent upon Christ being absent from the church. If Christ is absent, then it is not the church, and the papacy has no such authority. In the presence of the living Christ the papacy needs no authority of its own declaration; in the absence of the living Christ, it has none. The argument is circular, and devastating. While it is unclear as to whether Leo ever read the missive, those invested with the authority of Rome who did read it were incensed. Luther's books were burned at a public display in Louvain in the middle of October, 1520, followed by similar events at Cologne and Mainz, Ingolstadt, Leipzig and Merseburg. Luther responded on December 10 by publicly burning volumes of canon law, papal decrees and scholastic philosophy. He then burned the copy of \textit{Exsurge Domine} that had been delivered to him. In his published explanation Luther wordily condemned the many articles of the pope as antichristian and unchristian, declaring that "the pope has never once refuted with Scripture or reason anyone who has spoken, written, or acted against him, but has at all times suppressed, exiled, burned, or otherwise strangled him with force and bans, through kings, and other partisans, or with deceit and false words..."\textsuperscript{29}

\textsuperscript{27} \textit{LW31}, 336.
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 342.
\textsuperscript{29} "Why the Books of the Pope and His Disciples Were Burned," \textit{LW31}, 383-395, 394-395.
Luther seemed scarcely concerned with any particular pope, but this pope, Leo X, was one in whom Luther was particularly disappointed. His acrimony did not depend upon this one person, however. Luther made frequent reference to the pope as Antichrist over the years. His early reference to the “two woes” of the church changed in time from reference to “the Turk and Mohammad” to “the Turk and the pope,” indicating the threats to Christian faith from both outside and inside the church.\(^\text{30}\) As Luther aged, his temperament did not mellow. The vilification with which he lashed out at all around him was also made evident in his long and bitter diatribe of 1545, \textit{Against the Roman Papacy, an Institution of the Devil}.\(^\text{31}\) Published less than a year before his death, Luther’s vilification was borne from the opening words, “The Most Hellish Father, St. Paul III ...” In it, Luther maintained the political sovereignty and freedom of the state—specifically the German state—from the tyranny of Rome. The unusually long address was to be presented to the Council of Trent in an effort to account for the historical and theological poverty of the papacy and the hierarchy of the Roman Church, which Luther called \textit{meine grosse Anfechtung}. He died before the final edit of the Latin translation.

Luther’s scorn for the papacy bore his deep disappointment, which he could only express as vitriol. Even in later writings, Luther saw the papacy as an office of the first pastor whose authority lay not in power as seized or manipulated, but as coming from the investment of trust and faith of the people of Christ’s calling. Hendrix eloquently describes Luther’s motives:

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... \text{to protect the people from coercion and from the undermining of their faith. As long as the papacy persisted in that deception, Luther persisted in opposing the papacy. As long as the pope did not allow the faithful to believe, Luther would not allow the people to believe the pope. As long as the Antichrist under the guise of the papacy was still seducing the people, he would continue to expose that abomination and to denounce the popes as archliars. Because the responsibility lay so heavily with the papacy in Luther’s eyes, his reform was much more distinctively antipapal than that of urban reformers such as Zwingli, Bucer, and Calvin. At the same time, the criterion that Luther urged every true Christian to apply to the pope could be applied to the bishops as well. That criterion was their faithfulness to the commission of Christ to feed the people with the word of God, without which the church could not survive. Luther himself applied this criterion with provocative zeal. If he became convinced of anything new during his last years, it}
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\(^{30}\) Cf. \textit{LW}49, 217, and especially 289, fn.20.

\(^{31}\) “Against the Roman Papacy, an Institution of the Devil,” \textit{LW}41, 263-376.
was that the starvation of the flock of Christ was owing not merely to the negligence of the papacy but also to its malicious intention to suffocate the people of God. Disappointment and anger at that perversion of the pastoral office spurred Luther to exercise ‘the duty of a good pastor’ to the end of his life.  

Luther had, from his biblical exegesis, understood a few things thoroughly. God loves all people, regardless of their merit, and effects reconciliation with all people through the gracious act of Jesus Christ. ‘Religion’ is, at best, the grateful act in response to God’s initiative by which people can serve one another, or those less fortunate. It is, however, distorted by sin into a human quest for God’s approval by way of self-saving works and self-serving hierarchy. As such, the church had fallen into inauthenticity and abandoned Christ’s commission. It had become, according to Heschel’s description, theotropic; a “path to God.” The priests, bishops and the pope had all abandoned their primary commitment as servants to those who serve Christ. Luther, as a priest among priests and a pastor among pastors, reviled them for it.

Luther spoke as a prophet to those with whom he most closely identified. He did so with vigor, in language, logic and bile not unlike the attack that he made upon others whom we might think have little in common with the hierarchy of the Roman Church: the Jews.

4) Luther and the Jews

No aspect of Luther’s considerable work is more distasteful than that concerning the Jews and Judaism. While much of his thought tends to be burdened by a weight of vociferous invective, some of Luther’s later comments on Judaism can be read only with difficulty due to the strong language and deep hatred revealed in them. It was for this reason that The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America dissociated itself from Luther’s anti-Semitic writings in 1993, followed by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada in 1995.

The invective with which Luther spoke makes it almost impossible to find and defend the theology that can be found beneath it. Any attempt to excavate his theology must not be

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32 Hendrix, Grace and Reason, 159.
33 Cf. e.g. The Christian Century, August 16-23, 1995, 770.
confused with justifying his vitriol. Excuses must not be made. Neither can Christians afford to lose the treasure of his thought, though it be covered in filth.

Luther’s poisonous attitude toward ‘the Jews’ has been described and explained in terms of his context, in connection with his own sense of disappointment about the scarcity of conversions among the Jews, and his failing health. Indeed, all these explanations have some merit. Martin Bertram, in his introduction to Luther’s On the Jews and Their Lies, noted that Luther’s lectures on the Psalms (1513-1515) bore the burden of the argument expressed in the later essay, thus indicating their general acceptance within the structures of thought of the time.34 There were also many stresses contributing to his state of mind. His beloved daughter Magdelena died within the same year in which The Jews and Their Lies was published (1543). Failing health, his reputation plagued by his implication in a serious scandal involving the bigamy of the landgrave, Philip of Hesse, and the splintering Protestant movement all contributed to his difficulties at this time. The beginning of a Roman retrenchment was well underway. Luther must have felt surrounded by enemies, beleaguered, and weary of repeating himself.

Yet such explanations are unsatisfactory. While Luther’s anti-Judaism is coherent with the dominant myths and values of the 16th century, his position was reviled by opponents and allies alike. Osiander, an ally since the Marburg Colloquy in 1529, rebuked him for The Jews and Their Lies.35 Bucer, formerly considered by European Jews to be their greatest antagonist, noted that the essay sounded more like “the composition of a swineherd rather than that of a renowned shepherd of the soul.”36 Luther’s antinomian foe, Agricola, publicly defended Jews against the accusations encouraged by Luther’s abusive recommendations.37 Luther had plenty of opportunity to consider both his position and the virulence with which he expressed himself. His viciousness cannot be excused as simply coming from a ‘man of his time.’ Nor was it mere

37 Bertram, LW47, 135-136.
anti-Judaism; Luther was generous with his abuse. Nor can his extremes be attributed to his
pressures. In fact, Luther’s work in theology and ethics were honed to the end of his days.\textsuperscript{38}

It must be considered whether Luther’s virulence was fundamentally related to the
decidedly anthropotropical position of \textit{theologica crucis}, though augmented by these other
factors. The earmarks of that position have been described in Ch. I, and expressed by Luther in
his adaptations of the nominalistic “principle of parsimony” (the disposal of non-essentials), the
literal meaning of scripture as christological, and his assertion (stated in the doctrine of the Two
Kingdoms) that ‘law’ is necessary for the correction and control of the ungodly.

At the same time, three ‘blights’ affected Luther’s development, forcing him into
reaction. The first was the growth of so-called ‘spiritualist’ factions, including the involvement
of Thomas Müntzer. This blight will be considered in a subsequent section. The other two
factions are represented in Luther’s struggle with both Sabbatarians and Antinominians. Both
indicate a great deal about the theological thought underlying Luther’s remarks against Judaism.

‘Sabbatarianism’ refers to a complex of movements that has appeared throughout Church
history, each of which is marked by an insistent return to Jewish Sabbath observance. Luther
published an open letter \textit{Against the Sabbatarians} in 1538.\textsuperscript{39} While earlier, though scant,
reference to a Moravian group of Sabbatarians suggest that Luther saw no connection between
the movement and Jewish proselytization, he was convinced of such a connection by the time he
wrote this essay. His argument, coherent with Thesis 28 of the \textit{Heidelberg Disputations}, was
based on his misunderstanding of the Jews’ relationship to God through the law of Moses. Luther
believed that Jewish adherence to the 613 \textit{mitzvot} of the Torah was an attempt to curry favour
with God (‘theotropy’), instead of a response to God’s initiative and presence.\textsuperscript{40} Whether or not

\textsuperscript{38} Bainton, \textit{Here I Stand}, 300.
\textsuperscript{39} LW47, 65-98.
\textsuperscript{40} Cf. e.g. Ibid., 70-71: “... Moses tells them in a powerful sermon and in many words that they are not entering the
land of Canaan because of their righteousness ... No, they were entering the land because God wished to punish the heathen who dwelt therein ... the Jews were not brought into the land of Canaan on account of their
righteousness or their penitence, but by virtue of God’s promise ...”, and later on 92, “[God] is far more
concerned about the sanctifying than about the celebrating of [the Sabbath] ... The Jews, however, lay greater
emphasis on the celebrating than on the sanctifying ...”
Luther was in error concerning Judaic belief and practice, he may have been correct about the Sabbatarian adaptation of Jewish practices. His argument against the Sabbatarians was that their energy was misplaced: the point of living in the presence of the crucified God is not to celebrate a certain day of the week as though that work will make one acceptable to God, but to consider every day holy since the coming of Christ so that the word of God can be heard and lived:

... Isaiah, too, declares in chapter 66 [:23] that the seventh day, or, as I call it, Moses' adaptation of it, will cease at the time of the Messiah when true sanctification and the word of God will appear richly. He says that there will be one Sabbath after another and one new moon after another, that is, that all will be sheer Sabbath, and there will no longer be any particular seventh day with six days in between. For the sanctifying or the word of God will enjoy full scope daily and abundantly, and every day will be a Sabbath.  

During the same period, Luther was coping with the "Antinomian controversy" which had at its centre Luther's one-time colleague and friend, John Agricola. Agricola's position is more nuanced than can be illustrated here, but it can be said that he was spurred partly by an exaggerated misunderstanding of Luther's treatise on The Freedom of the Christian, and partly by the assertion that repentance was the result—and not the precondition—of faith. Agricola asserted the perspective that the Law is no longer a material aspect of Christian faith. If it were, the solidarity of humanity simul iustus et simul peccator, subject to God alone, would be lost. Further, in Agricola's formulation, Christ becomes a past event now assumed into human ontology. This would once again propose a notion of syneresis, though not of the kind previously described. The difference is that in nominalism syneresis makes the event of Christ inessential. In Antinomianism, the presence of Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit is made inessential because if there is no need of repentance then there is no need of God's presence:  

... if there is no sin," wrote Luther, "then Christ is nothing . . .

Why should he die if there were no sin or law for which he must die? It is apparent from this that the devil's purpose in this fanaticism is not to remove the law but to remove Christ, the fulfills of the law.  

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41 Ibid., 93.
Both had at least the outward appearance of operability without God’s grace known explicitly in the crucified and risen Christ. Sabbatarianism involved works righteousness; Antinomianism lacked a doctrine of sin. In both instances, salvation through Christ alone was inessential.

Luther projected these propositions upon Jews whom he (mistakenly) believed held and spread them: that following the 613 mitzvot would satisfy God and ensure acceptance; second, that as the ‘Chosen People,’ Jews had no need of repentance. He made these points with fury:

Now you can see what fine children of Abraham the Jews really are, how well they take after their father, yes, what a fine people of God they are. They boast before God of their physical birth and of the noble blood inherited from their fathers, despising all other people, although God regards them in all these respects as dust and ashes and damned by birth the same as all other heathen. And yet they give God the lie; they insist on being in the right, and with such blasphemous and damnable prayer they purpose to wrest God’s grace from him to regain Jerusalem.  

But we must also consider the implausible. Luther, condemned as one of the Jew-haters of all time, might have acted and spoken in the way he did because he identified most closely with them in terms of theology and scripture. Immersed in the prophetic position, Luther could be expected to expend his greatest rage against those with whom he most closely identified, his ‘spiritual nation.’ To understand this, we must consider his biblical and pastoral methodology.

It is clear that Luther held Hebraic scholarship in high regard. Long before his own fame spread, and to his own peril, Luther had sided publicly with John Reuchlin against John Pfefferkorn’s movement to ban all Hebraic literature. Reuchlin, a Christian Hebrew scholar highly influenced by the kabbalistic mystical approach to deep reading, was attacked as a heretic for writing against anti-Jewish activity, especially book burning. Luther wrote against the destruction of Hebraic literature for different reasons. To Luther, the Dominican practice was “unGodly” since it contradicted the writings of the prophets who said that the Jews would always “curse and revile their lords and kings,” and the “blasphemies” of the Talmud “represented a God-ordained fact that no man could alter.”

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scholarship lay in the exact meaning of words, the *proprietas verborum*, which he learned at the University of Erfurt. He was not defending Jews, nor even Reuchlin, but rather scripture and free scholarly pursuit. Luther quite simply loved scripture for its own sake, and sought constantly to relate to all biblical writing as if in relationship with a living being.

George Lindbeck, in a paper entitled “Martin Luther and the Rabbinic Mind,” considers the relationship of Luther to Judaism. If, says Lindbeck, we emphasize the pastoral and catechetical side of Luther’s work over his theologically controversial work, then Luther is seen to be deeply rooted in narrative (that is, scripture), rather than in dogma. This description is supported by the fact that in Luther’s later years his preaching, story-telling and hymn-writing became more pronounced and refined. Lindbeck suggests that this emphasis is parallel to the rabbis’ priority of *aggadah* over *halakah*: narrative (biblical story) over law. The latter, in the case of both Luther and the rabbis, is intended to . . .

... guide the interpretation and use of the biblical stories to shape lives. To believe that the Redeemed became human . . . is to accept as one’s Lord the Jesus depicted in the gospel stories.

Coherent with rabbinic thinking, Luther believed that the worst error concerning the law was to think that salvation depends upon obedience instead of upon God’s gracious initiative. To the Jews, that initiative was found and understood in the narrative of God’s abiding among the chosen people, the Exodus, the giving of the Torah, and in the Messianic promise. To Luther, that same abiding, liberating, hopeful presence was *pro me* and *pro nobis* in the giving, the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ.

Therefore, where the rabbis would read texts messianically, Luther read them christologically. To him, it meant the same thing. It is here that we can see the source of his vigorous poison against the Jews. Luther understood that they stood upon the same road, gazing at the same hill, impaled by a cross upon which hung the same bleeding Jew, as promised in the


46 Ibid., 147.
same scripture. So far as Luther was concerned, the Jews willfully misunderstood revelation. To Luther, they should have shared admiration and devotion for Christ; instead there was an impenetrable wall of incomprehension between them. Like Amos and Isaiah, Luther did what any biblical prophet would do: he cried out God’s love for the people by denouncing them, thereby demanding that they enter into right relationship with God.

Luther’s poisonous discharge at Jews and Judaism cannot—must not—be excused or explained away. He fell prey, in this regard, to his own hubris and thus betrayed his own theologia crucis. Still, his pronouncements may be mined to find the theology and religious practice that lay beneath it. At its heart, we find a pastoral intention that all people be called to the hope and promise of Christ, and a consistent theology of religion that strives for more than the consolation of acceptance and glory: a critical theology of religion.

5) COMMENTS ON ISLAM: THE TURK AS THE “ROD OF GOD”

Given Luther’s biliousness toward the Jews, the Roman Church and the Papacy, one might well expect little else toward those who threatened the very borders of his homeland and his own German people. It is at first glance surprising, then, to find that Luther’s writings in relationship to Islam were often less than vituperative. His disposition to “the Turk” seems inconsistent until placed in the framework of the anthropotropical orientation of theologia crucis.

Since the middle of the 11th century European Christians had been partially united against the forces of the Muslim world, which became more and more commonly referred to as ‘the Turk’. In eight crusades, from 1095 to 1270 CE, forces from diverse nations came together to liberate the Holy Land, often with tragic results. The two hundred and fifty years following the last Crusade included repeated conflict between Christian and Muslim forces, the fall of Constantinople to the Turks in 1453, and the liberation of Spain from Muslim forces in 1492.

Turkish forces were at the gates of Vienna by 1529, and posed to invade Germany. Only the combined efforts of German forces, united in spite of their religious differences, and domestic issues in Suleiman’s court, resulted in their withdrawal. They were to return again, in
force, to conquer Hungary. In 1540 the Turkish threat was once again poised against Western Europe.

Luther, like most authors of his day, was compelled to write on the Turks. While never completely free of his penchant for bigoted condescension, his work is distinguished by first-hand research into the Qu’ran, his even-handedness in reporting the enemy’s atrocities and benevolence, and the clarity with which he regarded the imminent Turkish invasion.

As early as 1518, in his *Explanations of the Ninety-five Theses*, Luther identified the enemy—“the Turk”—as the judgement of God made manifest.47 This would remain his primary evaluation of the Turkish threat. Luther clearly understood himself as a prophet: “I am sure that I am a prophet, so much so that I suffer under the burden of it and wish that what I am saying were not true, as the prophet Micah did.”48 As with the prophets of the Old Testament, Luther proclaimed that God’s wrath was to be visited upon the errant people of God from the outside.

While Luther made frequent polemical pronouncements against the invading hordes, he also made a theological assessment of the threat, and of Islamic beliefs as he understood them, most notably *On the War Against the Turks*, and *Appeal for Prayer Against the Turks*.

In both cases, Luther draws upon his distinction between the “Two Kingdoms.” In 1529, Luther decried the Crusades and the confusion of the state, responsible for the protection of citizens, and the church, responsible for the care of those named in the Beatitudes:

... the priests and monks drove kings and princes into the corner and persuaded them that to serve God they must undertake other works, such as hearing mass, saying prayers, endowing masses, etc. In a word, princes and lords who wanted to be pious men regarded their rank and office as of no value and did not consider it a service of God.49

Luther accepted the threat of invasion as an opportunity to exhort the laity to perform their ministry in the secular world, rather than to abhor the enemy. Whereas he assumed that Jews and Christians alike should acknowledge the Lordship of Jesus Christ, it is apparent that he considered the Turk so much “other” than Christian that he could not assume their knowledge of

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47 *LW* 31, 91-92: “To fight against the Turk is the same as resisting God, who visits our sin upon us with this rod.”
48 *“Appeal for Prayer Against the Turks,” LW* 43, 219-241, 223.
49 *“On War Against the Turks,” LW* 46, 161-205, 163.
Christ nor their fault in rejecting Jesus. The occasion of Turkish invasion was a call to Christians to repent; Christians had been foolish, and “Fools should be beaten with rods.” Suleiman’s army was that rod, “God’s rod and the devil’s servant” at one and the same time.

With reference to the Turk, Luther demonstrated a talent for thinking in terms other than his own preferred method. He showed great insight in practicing what might be called a primitive ‘comparative religion’ based on phenomenological practices. For the most part, he demonstrated how the Christian in error (e.g. the Crusader), and the papist and the Turk have a number of things in common such as the way the Turk goes into battle with the name of “Allah!” on his tongue, and the “pope’s soldiers cry, ‘Ecclesia! Ecclesia!’” At least, opined the reformer, the Turk calls out the name of God, though they fail to distinguish one God from another.

However, the Turk’s religion does not escape Luther’s criticism. In the 1529 essay On War Against the Turk, Luther demonstrated the discipline of a scholar by making a first-hand study of Qur’anic writings available to him. Luther clearly did this brief exegesis in order to encourage Christian to stand against the Turk on the basis of faith, but it is equally clear that he was convinced that people should be equipped with real information, and not mere opinions. He therefore made three theological points:

1) Islam praises Christ and Mary as sinless, while simultaneously affording Jesus no more efficacy than that of a prophet;

2) Mohammed declares himself a prophet who supersedes the prophet Jesus;

3) Therefore all doctrine illustrative of the Gospel is discarded in favour of a doctrine of works, the most prevalent of which is the work of the sword. Thus, “all abominations, all errors, all devils are piled up in one heap.”

Luther then proceeded upon a remarkable and propitious path. He made a connection between Qur’anic statements on Jesus, classical formulations of heresy within Christian tradition

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50 Ibid.
51 Ibid., 170.
52 Ibid., 183.
53 Ibid., 182.
54 Ibid., 176 ff.
(particularly Arianism and Donatism), Müntzer’s ambitions for the theocracy, and finally the papacy. Each of these (by Luther’s estimation) held in common the wish to put aside the power of the gospel for the power of worldly domination. All were, to Luther, abominations.\footnote{Ibid.}

The difference lay in the proposition that Christendom created the necessity for God to take up a rod to punish and correct those who should know better. Islam is the manifestation of that necessity. While Luther lacked no criticism for the Turkish religion and actions, he did not attack them with the poison he had for the Jew, papist and enthusiast. They were not of the same house, and were a necessary manifestation of God’s transforming power \textit{pro nobis}:

\begin{quote}
The Turk, you see, is our ‘schoolmaster.’ He has to discipline and teach us to fear God and to pray. Otherwise we will do what we have been doing—rot in sin and complacency.\footnote{\textit{LW}43, 224.}
\end{quote}

That lesson was one in which the distinction of the Two Kingdoms was clarified and sharpened. The Turks must be fought by the Emperor as one who has the God-given responsibility of defending those who cannot defend themselves. Further, the followers of Christ must devote themselves to prayer, both for the defeat of the despised Turk and for the transformation of the servants of Christendom into servants of the Risen Lord. Only two kinds of people may oppose the Turk, each in execution of their authentic office: the Christian who takes the rod of God’s anger from the Turk’s hand by prayer and repentance; and the emperor, in whose army the Christian may serve for reasons of repentance.

We can see, then, that Luther’s abhorrence of ‘the Turk’ as the Devil’s army is mitigated by his view that this enemy, his threat and religion are all necessary for the sake of Christ, his church, and the people of God. They are the adversary that drives the Christian to repentance, but ‘the Turk’ is not close enough to the cross of the Risen Christ to fall under its shadow.\footnote{\textit{LW}46, 181-182. On this point we again find a subtle similarity with the 20th C. rabbinic mind. Consider, for instance, Will Herberg’s description of Franz Rosenzweig’s exposition on Jewish/Christian relations: “... as Rosenzweig puts it, man is either a pagan or a Jew or Christian. (Islam presents a problem; Rosenzweig does not regard it as a distinct way...[but] as a kind of Jewish-Christian heresy.),” in \textit{Jewish Perspectives on Christianity}, edited by Fritz A. Rothschild, (New York: Crossroad, 1990), 253.}
This is the closest that Luther comes to expounding a *theologiae gloriae*. At this point he stands at the brink of proclaiming his own church of being in the right:

... if the papists will not listen, but insist on dragging us along into this tribulation, then let the little flock not despair of God. I say this even though it won’t be easy to bear the burden of the sins of others. We need to pray God that he will not make us suffer for the iniquity of others (for we are scattered among them, and they among us, and either they will benefit from our prayer or we will have to suffer for their sin).  

Nevertheless, Luther in the end spoke more of confidence than of certainty, and of bearing suffering for the sake of others. As a result, he maintained his *theologia crucis* even within his considerations of Islam, as well as the anthropotropical view that holds those most accountable who claim a place close to the cross of Christ.

6) **DIE SCHWÄRMER: LUTHER’S CRITICAL RELATIONSHIP**

This survey would be far from complete without considering Luther’s diatribes against those whom he called “false brethren,” “enthusiasts,” “fanatics,” and *die Schwärmer*. His opposition, directed against such diverse and otherwise unrelated persons as Karlstadt, Müntzer and Schwenckfeld, differed markedly from his invective against, for instance, the Roman Church. Not the least reason for this difference is the fact that these “false brethren” were known to call upon Luther’s work to substantiate their claims. Luther, in turn, called upon his own name and authority to substantiate his attack against them.  

This paper is written with concern for Luther’s theological objections. To make this analysis, I will primarily draw upon writings of Luther from 1524 and 1525 leading up to the Peasants’ War. Luther’s objections were concerned with the confusion of the Two Kingdoms by the false brethren, their threat to the safety and well-being of the people to whom they were commissioned to serve as pastors, and the problem of authority—specifically the question of the authority of *sola scriptura*—in their formulations that emphasized personal spiritual experience.

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58 LW43, 226.
59 Cf. e.g. Mark U. Edwards, *Luther and the False Brethren*, 1975, 1-5.
Luther’s efforts must be considered keeping two things in mind. First, the false brethren were not his only concern, although they occupied much of his effort along with the “papists.” He translated the Bible, preached, served as advisor to several levels of government, and carried on a voluminous correspondence. While Luther had not yet begun a family, he did have a rich personal life. The movements he disdained as die Schwärmer were among many in his gaze.

The second thing to keep in mind is that those he attacked as die Schwärmer were by no means a single group. Ranging from Antinomians to Anabaptists, from iconoclasts to those with theocratic ambitions, it might be said that the only thing they had in common was Luther’s broad category and his virulent rejection of their teaching and actions. At the same time, they were intensely dissatisfied with Luther’s Reformation, finding it to be incomplete in various ways.60

It would also appear that, with the notable exception of Müntzer, they had in common a grudging respect for, and identification with, the great reformer. Edwards has pointed out that while Luther was stridently abusive toward all opponents, he reserved a certain special vengeance for the false brethren. While his Catholic opponents exchanged acid for acid, Luther’s evangelical opponents seldom “repaid in the same coin the unqualified condemnation he meted out to them,” except Müntzer who, in 1524, published a pamphlet with Luther as his clear target. It was entitled, “Speech against the Mindless Soft-living Flesh in Wittenberg.”61

Having said all of this, it is clear that an historical review of the relationship between Luther and the various groups of enthusiasts is beyond the scope of this thesis. It is sufficient to say that, in the work of Karlstadt, Müntzer, Melchior Hoffman, Sebastian Franck, Caspar von Schwenckfeld and others, Luther formed the opinion that

Spiritual religion is superior to historical religion and is the means and essence of the true church whether this church be the restoration of the past prophetic and apostolic community or the future church of the Spirit. In both cases the goal of the Christian life is sanctification which at least initially included the drive for a regenerated church and a

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godly state. The church and its ministry is to be recognized by its fruits which varies among its exponents from a theocratic world rulership to an interiorized form of piety.  

Solus Christus, sola scriptura, sola fides were subordinated to a personal experience of the divine; the individual, and her or his experience, became central to all that followed. The individual “possessed” the experience of the divine, thereby implying a form of ontological potential not dissimilar to syneresis. The individual’s spiritual experience became the basis for his or her actions, which served to affirm the experience, thus forming a kind of ‘justification according to works.’ Further, in the case of some of the Anabaptists at least, one “decided” according to his or her experience, thus mitigating the essential initiative of God in all things. “Both Müntzer and Karlstadt were denounced by Luther,” according to Lindberg, “because in one way or another they insisted on coercing the Kingdom of God.”  

Luther perceived in his spiritualist opponents a ‘law of the Spirit’ determining that all ‘should’ worship, pray and live, by force if necessary, according to the statutes of the false brethren.

Though Karlstadt and Müntzer were his primary targets for criticism, Luther painted with too broad a brush in his attacks on the ‘enthusiasts.’ He implicated anyone with even the mildest affiliation to these assertions. It is obvious that Luther’s criticisms could not be applied against all of the Anabaptists, and none would apply to some such as Menno Simons and Conrad Grebel. Further, if Luther had been more supportive of the peasants and admonished his Protestant princes to treat them more generously, the conditions that made people receptive to Müntzer and his disciples and the tragic carnage that followed may have been diminished. In his attacks on the enthusiasts Luther exposed his own relationship with the powerful, which was altogether too comfortable. Nevertheless, it is clear that Müntzer did inspire a Peasants’ Revolt that cost many lives, and Karlstadt did incite his followers to iconoclasm. Luther’s concerns and reproach were not without basis. If his warnings had been heeded, hundreds of lives may have been preserved.

62 Lindberg, 56.
In his July 1524 Letter to the Princes of Saxony Concerning the Rebellious Spirit, Luther outlined his objections concerning the bases for Christian rebellion while merely alluding to doctrinal concerns.⁶⁴ Those concerns, he said, had been dealt with already.⁶⁵ The letter was addressed against Müntzer in particular, but in a later Letter to the Christians at Strassburg in Opposition to the Fanatic Spirit, Luther continued with similar accusations against Karlstadt.⁶⁶ Karlstadt denied any connection, but it is clear that some of his followers were allied with the Zwickau prophets. It is clear as well that Müntzer and Karlstadt shared some concept of direct illumination by the Spirit, which made scholarship and learning unnecessary for understanding scripture. This too Luther interpreted as an emphasis on ‘the self’ as the center of faith.

Concerning the Rebellious Spirit began with Luther’s first-hand account of a meeting with Müntzer’s followers, the Zwickau Prophets, who asserted the necessity of using the sword to carry out their agenda. Luther, in an apparent bid to have the Prophets placed under investigation, mentioned his “hunch that they would go so far as to overthrow civil authority,” an obvious breech of the distinction between the Two Kingdoms.⁶⁷ Luther went on to say that the rebelliousness of the Allstedt party in destroying churches and burning images had the effect of diminishing the real progress of the Reformation, and substantiating the claims of the Roman Church, its rites, rituals and shrines are efficacious. The former needs no explanation: people acting like thugs will be seen as thugs.⁶⁸ The second, however, is related to Luther’s theology of justification by faith through grace, the freedom of the Christian, and the theologia crucis.

We find intimations of this connection in the fifth of the “Eight Sermons at Wittenberg.” In that sermon, concerning both kinds in the sacraments, Luther made it clear that the sacrament should be received in both kinds, but that . . .

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⁶⁴ LW⁴⁰, 49-59.
⁶⁵ Ibid., 51. Those occasions when he criticized doctrine were probably in 1522, during the “Eight Wittenberg Lenten Sermons” (LW⁵¹, 69-100), and his treatise “On Both Kinds in the Sacrament” (LW³⁶, 237-267).
⁶⁶ LW⁴⁰, 65-71.
⁶⁷ Ibid., 51.
⁶⁸ We again find evidence of Luther’s lack of critical relationship to those in power, one could ask whether Luther was sufficiently critical of princes acting like thugs, and whether this absence of criticism reflects a radical weakness in the doctrine of the Two Kingdoms.
... it must not be made compulsory nor a general law. We must rather promote and practice and preach the Word, and then afterwards leave the result and execution of it entirely to the Word, giving everyone his freedom in this matter. Where this is not done, the sacrament becomes for an outward work and a hypocrisy, which is just what the devil wants.  

The work of destroying the icons and shrines also destroys the freedom of the Christian to receive the Word of God and reject ritualistic practices on the basis of the initiative of God in the Word of God. Their destruction, however well-motivated in order to 'save' others from this 'idolatrous' practice, usurps God's initiative in Christ Jesus, which is the only salvation. Luther taunted Müntzer to lay aside his self-justifying work and to come forward to publicly debate his assertions. "But," wrote Luther, "the spirit of Allstedt avoids this as the devil avoids the cross."  

While Luther was obviously disappointed in these developments, especially concerning his former colleague Karlstadt, he did not seem overly surprised. Indeed, taken along with the attacks of the Roman Church it almost seemed an affirmation of his reforming message:  

For if our gospel is the true gospel, as I am convinced and have no doubt that it is, then it must naturally follow that it will be attacked, persecuted, and tested from both sides... ‘For,’ says Paul, ‘there must be factions among you in order that those who have stood the test among you may be recognized’ (1 Cor. 11:19). Christ finds not only Caiaphas among his enemies, but also Judas among his friends.  

In late 1524 to January of 1525 Luther tried to further his public explication of the errors being made by “the heavenly prophets” through a two-part publication, Against the Heavenly Prophets in the Matter of Images and Sacraments. While not a personal attack upon Karlstadt, Luther spared no ink in illustrating the subjectivity and lack of biblical basis for the position of ‘the prophets,’ while at the same time attacking the sacramental doctrine of Ulrich Zwingli. Even Melancthon was disturbed by the force of Luther’s attack, which did indeed serve the purpose of stopping the spread of those teachings among his own followers and students.  

Luther essentially compared the teachings of the enthusiasts to those of Pelagius with respect to works-righteousness, and to those of Arius, who denied the incarnation and the salvific

69 LW51, 88-91, 90.
70 LW40, 52.
71 Ibid., 66.
efficacy of Jesus Christ. The “heavenly prophets,” said Luther, essentially do the same things: they reduce the Holy Spirit to a personal experience, reduce the sacrament to a reminder, and seek God’s favour by the destruction of images, churches and shrines, thus seeking “a new kind of mortification, that is, a self-chosen putting to death of the flesh.” Luther thus equated the spiritualist enterprise with his own evaluations of the Roman Church, though his attack took a more personal form. They were two heads of the same snake, according to Luther: merely human attempts to buy one’s way into heaven. Or, in different terms, the results represent the anthropocentric manifestations of theotropical desire for egocentric purposes.

Their idea that they can please God with works becomes a real idol and a false assurance in the heart. Such legalism results in putting away outward images while filling the heart with idols.

Luther relentlessly attacked the position of the spiritualists as represented by Karlstadt. The argument is, by no means, a personal one. Luther had the capacity to survey the entire field of conflict in a way that most, including Karlstadt and all of the Schwärmer, could not. From Luther’s vantage point, the view of a prophet of God, he could survey the attacks from the papacy and the attacks from the enthusiasts and estimate what armament was necessary for defense. That armament, he knew, could not be found in the inward, spiritual experience of some personal experience of divinity, nor in a humanistic understanding of the life of Jesus, nor in the manifestations of works—constructive or destructive—that reduce Christian freedom to an imposed response such as formulaic prayer or the purchase of indulgences. The normative basis for Christian life must be the Word of God as revealed in Jesus Christ and given in scripture by the power of the Holy Spirit. In the end, Luther demonstrated that the spiritualist position was noetically weak, based only in their own ‘good ideas’ and subjective feelings:

... in no place do they teach how we are to become free from our sins, obtain a good conscience, and win a peaceful and joyful heart before God. This is what really counts. This is a true sign that their spirit is of the devil, who can use unusual new words to

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72 “Against the Heavenly Prophets,” *LW*40, 79-223, 80f.
73 Ibid., 81.
74 Ibid., 85.
excite, terrify, and mislead consciences. But their spirit cannot give quietness or peace, but goes on and teaches special works in which they are to exercise and discipline themselves. They have no idea how a good conscience can be gained or ought to be constituted. For they have not felt or ever recognized it. How can they know or feel it, when they come and teach of themselves, without a call? No good can come in this way. The grace of God be with us all. Amen. 

7) **TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THEOLOGIA CRUCIS**

Luther expressed a `critical theology of religion' which, I have argued, was intuited during his initial lectures on the Psalms and Romans, first articulated in the Heidelberg Disputations, and consistently applied in his later writings. From these expositions we can derive critical terms of reference that Luther applied to pronouncements, actions and statements made by those whom he encountered. Luther applied these criteria on the basis of faith that God works under the sign of God's opposite. They may be summarized as relevant to the theology of religion as follows:

1) The God of Jesus Christ is not found in being sought, but in God's initiative to seek us;
2) This God seeks us as a “hidden God” who is self-revealed;
3) That self-revelation is known in the event of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ, of which the source of knowledge is scripture, not reasoned speculation;
4) The revelation of God denies claims to personal power and authority, and is therefore critical—first and foremost—of those who claim influence and mediational office between God and the human creature;
5) No human endeavour, including the religious, can be in and of itself a vehicle for salvation without the initiative of God's grace.

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75 Ibid., 222-223.
76 Similarly, Von Loewenich (Luther's Theology of the Cross, 22) has provided the following points of definition:

1) The theology of the cross as a theology of revelation, stands in sharp antithesis to speculation;
2) God's revelation is an indirect, concealed revelation;
3) Hence God's revelation is recognized not in works but in suffering, and the double meaning of these terms is to be noted;
4) This knowledge of God who is hidden in his revelation is a matter of faith;
5) The manner in which God is known is reflected in the practical thought of suffering.

The “double meaning” in (3) refers to God's revelation recognized not in human works, but in God's work—the suffering of Christ, and not human suffering per se. The correspondence to Heschel's six characteristics of the prophet may be inferred here, though an explication of their coherence is beyond the scope of this thesis.
These are among the principle terms of reference with which the theologian of the cross encounters the world. Luther’s premises, certainly not restricted to those listed, are congruent with Abraham Heschel’s description of the anthropotropical figure. They were applied universally, even to his earliest mentors and to those whom he encountered throughout his career, as can be seen in his writings related to the conflicts and events in which he was involved.

Martin Luther’s *theologia crucis* did not die with Luther, nor remain frozen as a testament to the limitations of his life. It has continued to grow and develop into the present age. In the next chapter I will describe two examples of twentieth century *theologia crucis* that owe much to Luther’s development, especially as they pertain to the theology of religion.
While Luther may have been the first Christian theologian to develop a substantial 'critical theology of religion,' it would be a mistake to assume that his is the only theology of its kind. More importantly, it would be negligent to assume that we can take his late-Medieval perspective and simply superimpose it upon the twenty-first century. Before applying his critical insights to the contemporary context of religious plurality, it seems desirable to explicate some contemporary forms of theology of the cross, the ways in which they show Luther's influence, and some of the ways they differ in response to very different circumstances.

The possible examples are almost endless. The acknowledgment of suffering resulting from the imposition of power has been an extensive theme in the twentieth century, and has produced much by way of theologia crucis. The cross of the risen Christ has been illustrated with atrocities photographed, described and published through world wars, nuclear holocaust, and killing fields without number. Creation groans in agony from suffering and degradation imposed without precedent in human history. Theology has sought to describe the presence of God in the midst of "the kingdom of death." and has found it once again in language arising from the cross of the risen Christ. Christian theologians as diverse as Dietrich Bonhoeffer, David Kwang-sun Suh, Douglas John Hall, Dorothy Soelle, Monika Hellwig, and Jon Sobrino, to name only a few, have all sought to encourage faithful vision and expression in the language of theologia crucis.

In this chapter I will attempt to explicate, with no pretension to comprehensiveness, some highlights of theologia crucis as a critical theology of religion according to two of the most influential theologians of the cross of that tumultuous century: Karl Barth and Jürgen Moltmann. Each of these authors has been deeply under the influence of Luther, and will help us to see the relevance of theologia crucis for a theology of religion in our own time.
1) **KARL BARTH: THE GRACE OF THE CROSS, AND RELIGION AS ‘UNBELIEF’**

Few people have so affected the way in which Christians see and think about the world as has Karl Barth. Swept into the vicissitudes of his time, Barth responded in a profoundly theological manner to almost every major event of the mid-twentieth century. His was a cruciform vision that saw the onset of World War I, worldwide depression, the Second World War, nuclear holocaust, the ‘Cold War’, the age of mass media, and the pre-conditions of the ‘global economy.’ His major intellectual mentors, according to Hall, were Franz Overbeck and Søren Kierkegaard, although to suggest that his influences were so limited would be simplistic. Hall’s observation is compelling, however, in that both of these thinkers articulated in some way a severe criticism of religion, first and always in terms of religion as “Christian.” Kierkegaard declared official Christianity in Europe to be “a forgery.” Overbeck was, according to Barth, even more condemning, declaring that...

... all Christian theology, from the Patristic Age onward, is unchristian and satanic, for its [sic] draws Christianity into the sphere of civilization and culture, and thereby denies the essentially eschatological character of the Christian religion. However one-sided these influences might have been, the point remains. At a very early stage in his thinking Barth was tutored by great minds who were unafraid of the possibility that religion, and Christianity first among all, is spawned from human will and pride, and not from the grateful adoration of God. Speaking specifically of Overbeck’s indictment, Barth applied it first to himself, and then to “the enemy.” The anthropotropical methodology cannot be missed: his suspicion was always directed first toward himself and his own community before being applied elsewhere. Criticism was always directed toward “the enemy” of the gospel who, as Luther said, included both Caiaphas and Judas, those most religious and those who claim a place closest to Christ for the sake of personal gratification. For this reason, Barth maintained an almost eerie

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2. Ibid., 15.
resonance with the great critic of religious anthropology, Ludwig Feuerbach. In doing battle with that eminent philosopher, Barth wrote:

One had better look out if one picks up the only weapon that will take care of Feuerbach. No one may strike him with it unless he has himself been hit by it. This weapon is no mere argument which one exploits in apologetics, it should rather be a ground on which one can stand, and with fear and trembling allow to speak for itself. Whether or not we stand on this ground will be tested by our answer to this question: are we capable of admitting to Feuerbach that he is entirely right in his interpretation of religion insofar as it relates not only to religion as an experience of evil and mortal man, but also to the ‘high,’ the ‘ponderable,’ and even the ‘Christian’ religion of this man? Are we willing to admit that even in our relation to God, we are and remain liars, and that we can lay claim to His truth, His certainty, His salvation as grace and only as grace?4

God’s initiative in grace, known and recognized only because of the Gospel, is the central theme of Barth’s theology.5 Grace is always and only made known in Christ, to whom scripture testifies through the Holy Spirit. It is “not a religious message to inform mankind of their divinity or to tell them how they may become divine.”6 It is God’s initiative to effect true humanity:

It was God’s self-attestation . . . without any co-operation on the part of a human witness serving it. As we say, it was the very model of a gracious act of God, the Son of God as such being active only as the recipient, God the Father alone being the One who acts, and God the Holy Spirit alone the One who mediates His action and revelation. This made the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the very first the sure and unequivocally transcendent place, the true other side here on this side, from which we can look back with enlightened and indubitable assurance on the first act of God which took place in His death, and forward to the determination which is there newly given to the being of man.7

As such, the Gospel event is self-sufficiently the decisive and determinative Word of God.

Human insight, what Luther called ratio, adds nothing, not even understanding. It is the cross of Jesus Christ that exposes, illuminates and judges everything, and not the other way around.8

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6 Barth, The Epistle to the Romans, 28.
7 CD IV/1, 356.
8 Ibid., 150.
authentic Church is made up of people who know "that the judgment upon it has already been executed. It knows the justification accomplished on the cross of Golgotha."9

No description of Barth's theologia crucis can be adequately made in a work of this modest size. If it is to be attempted, however, it must begin where Barth himself began: within the Church of Christ. From that point, Barth proceeded to explicate the Word of God in his doctrines of God, creation and reconciliation, all of which proceed from the centrality of Christ who, for Barth as for Luther, simultaneously reveals God, sinful humanity, and true humanity. In the interest of space, I will proceed from Barth's starting point in the Church, to a short explication of Barth's view of Christ as God's gift of grace, then to his soteriology, which remains open to the possibility of universal salvation.

a) The Church: The Disciplined Community of Disciples

To Barth, the church is nothing more nor less than the gathering of those who proclaim God's grace in the world. That grace is known in and through Jesus Christ, God's word made flesh and the true human being, in order that humanity, by virtue of the salvation of Jesus Christ, is saved from self-centered sinfulness for service in the world.

Barth's commitment to the starting point of the Church was illustrated by a willingness to abandon a course of action he himself had set in his first major work in systematics, Christian Dogmatics, published in 1927. After his 1930 study in Anselm, however, Barth could no longer state his findings and discoveries in quite the same way. He abandoned the practice of general identity, expression and application articulated in the word "Christian," and brought his focus to the center of the target—the Church, the disciplined community of discipleship:

When the word "Church" replaces the word "Christian" in the title of the book, that means firstly that with regard to renouncing the light-hearted use, so much combated by myself, of the great word "Christian" I might proceed with good precedent—but also the material fact, that a priori I might point to the circumstance that dogmatics is not a "free" science, but one bound to the sphere of the Church, where and where alone it is possible and sensible. The lament over the general course of my development will undoubtedly at

9 Ibid., 727.
once ring out... be that as it may, in this new edition the lines will be found drawn more sharply in the actual direction indicated by this alteration.\textsuperscript{10}

As such, his work of dogmatics was intended as a form of self-definition for the community of faith, which is neither a “divine revelation institutionalized,” nor a “voluntary association for the cultivation of impressions, experiences, and impulses which men may have received from divine revelation.”\textsuperscript{11} It is, simply, the place where God is heard from scripture\textsuperscript{12}, the human testimony of divine revelation that governs the church.\textsuperscript{13} But the church is not the ecclesial institution, which Barth deemed “clericalism” dramatically echoing Luther’s theology of the cross:

Clericalism is the rule of those who claim to have gained knowledge of a unity of nature and grace. There is no tyranny more terrible than such an one. For in its every form it is nothing less than the rule of the anti-Christ.\textsuperscript{14}

As with Luther, Barth viewed justification and sanctification as the simultaneous act of God in Christ. Barth made clear his sympathy even when criticizing the young Luther, whose lack of clarity failed to distinguish adequately between justification and sanctification, because of the material christocentricity of Luther’s expression. Barth expressed himself in anthropotropical terms, describing Luther’s early formulation as a ...

\ldots theologia crucis which had strangely enough all the marks of a theologia gloriae: a theology which saw everything together from the standpoint of God (which will also be that of the believer).\textsuperscript{15}

As with Luther, Barth understood there to be an appropriate confidence in God’s election to Christian faith that brings with it a humble joy in being known by, and knowing, Christ crucified. It is thus an “appropriate theology of glory”\textsuperscript{16}: a theologia crucis. But while Luther expressed the theologia crucis in terms of hostility against those who did not share this view, Barth expressed

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  \item\textsuperscript{10} CD I/1, ix. The actual reasons for the shift have been seriously questioned by Bruce L. McCormack in Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 421-448. “... the reasons for which Barth would change the title were already well established in his outlook before he began work on the Anselm book.” (448)
  \item\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., 22-30.
  \item\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 30.
  \item\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 37.
  \item\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 37.
  \item\textsuperscript{15} CD IV/1: 526.
\end{itemize}
his as a call to faithfulness for those who claim to be followers of Christ and who might therefore see “from the standpoint of God.” While maintaining that there is no knowledge of God to be had apart from Christ (which appears to be, at first, a theologiae gloriae), it was Barth’s assertion that such knowledge, far from bringing with it special privilege or superiority, involves a commitment to treat others as those for whom Christ has died. The authentic Church of Christ stands in an epistemological position from which the believer may see the world as the place in which God’s grace is given. And grace is given in Jesus Christ.

b) The Judge Judged in Our Place

In every instance, there is some irony in trying to isolate part of Karl Barth’s theology for analysis and explication. Barth only isolated categories of theology in order to communicate them, and seemed to develop upon a few basic propositions, which then expanded into a vast and intricate embroidery. The first of these propositions is that the relationship between human being and God is the fruit of God’s initiative, arising entirely out of God’s free choice. A second essential proposition is that this knowledge of God and of ourselves is not, nor can it ever be, something that we possess. We know God in a dynamic, living relationship, by that which God gives us of Godself to understand. Therefore, according to Barth, we cannot speak adequately about any person of the Trinity without eventually saying everything. This thesis cannot aspire to such breadth and scope! However, since Barth understood the Church to be the body of those who see the world in terms of knowledge of God, given by God in grace, that gift being Christ, an attempt to glimpse an outline of Barth’s christology is in order.

Barth began with the theme of reconciliation, and therefore revelation. God’s act of reconciliation reveals both the fall of humanity and God’s intent for humanity in the act of creation. This is overviewed under the heading of “The Work of God the Reconciler.” The first issue dealt with is one of anthropology: the human need for reconciliation.

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17 CD IV/1, 3-78.
Reconciliation, said Barth, is the work of “God with Us.” It is necessary because humanity has denied the sovereignty of God as Creator, and usurped the position of “god.” God’s act of reconciliation in Jesus Christ demonstrates that human “choice,” and attempts through the Enlightenment and existentialism in modern times, place the responsibility for meaning in the hands of the human creature. We are therefore compelled to have power over and against our neighbour who might jeopardize our own self-concept of meaning and assumed dignity.

The situation of man in this event is this. He occupies a position quite different from that which he ought to occupy according to the divine intention. He does not conduct himself as the partner God has given Himself to receive His redemptive grace. He has opposed his ordination to salvation. He has turned his back on the salvation which actually comes to him. He does not find the fulfillment of his being in participation in the being of God by the gift of God. Instead, he aims at another salvation which is to be found in the sphere of his creaturely being and attained by his own effort. His belief is that he can and should find self-fulfilment. He has himself become an eschaton.

Barth may have been deconstructing Enlightenment and existentialist propositions. It seems fairly clear, however, that he is not so much reacting to them as asserting what he considered to be the basic propositions of Christian faith while engaging in an “intensive, although for the most part quiet, debate with Rudolf Bultmann.” whose hermeneutic methodology emphasized the task of the human creature to infer meaning in a process of “demythologizing.” God’s act of reconciliation, Barth might say, is not primarily a statement about humanity at all: it is certainly not a problem to be solved by human intellect. Reconciliation is not merely anthropology—an explanation of who we are. Yet God’s act in Jesus Christ constantly erodes our own concepts about ourselves and exposes the bare bones of our existence as having meaning only in relationship with God. This is not to say that humanity is “nothing,” but that, because we are in relationship with God by God’s initiative, humanity is not prey to “nothingness.” We therefore ask the question, with Barth, “Who is God?”

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18 Ibid., 6.
19 Ibid., 10.
20 Ibid., ix.
21 Ibid., 84-88.
To put it in the simplest way, what unites God and us men is that He does not will to be God without us, that He creates us rather to share with us and therefore with our being and life and act His own incomparable being and life and act, that He does not allow His history to be His and ours, but causes them to take place as a common history. That is the special truth which the Christian message has to proclaim at its very heart.  

The Christian message, therefore, is a proclamation of an act of God: Jesus Christ. This act is performed for the purpose of salvation. Salvation is not simply being, but is the fulfillment of being. It is not merely a realized affirmation, but something to which we may—must!—look forward with anticipation. It is not part of who the human creature is, but what God intends for us. It is not necessary from the point of view of God’s “need,” but because of our forfeiture of true freedom. It is God fulfilling God’s own will for the redemption of humankind, made necessary by our active exercise of “choice” over and against the grace of God. This is God’s condescension to us, whereby we are lifted up, given a place and awakened to our true being and destiny, which frees us for God in virtue of the reality of “God With Us.” Reminiscent of Luther’s emphasis upon the transcending, rather than affirming quality of religion, Barth’s view emphasizes the poverty of human existence, and the necessity of God’s act of condescension and uplifting in Jesus Christ. This is done through Christ in suffering:

. . . Jesus Christ must still be understood as truly the beginning of all God’s ways and works. . . . the election of the man Jesus is specifically His election to suffering and that it is for this reason and in this form that it is the basic act of the divine election of grace. . . . From its very source the election derives from the man Jesus. And as election by Him it is indirectly identical with that beginning willed and posited by the condescension and self-suffering of God.  

The God who suffers elects to suffer with humanity, and thus effects reconciliation. Reconciliation, and therefore revelation, is always God’s initiative through grace. “Works” can

\[ Eq \text{\footnote{Ibid., 7.}} \]
only be attributed to our own response in gratitude. This is an act of God’s freedom, not out of any ontological necessity on God’s part (which would imply that creation is merely part of God’s being, thus dispelling agape in favour of eros), but an act of self-giving love.  

The way of His humiliation is simply the way which leads Him to us, the way on which He draws near to us and becomes one of us. And this means first that the mortal peril in which man stands becomes and is His peril, the of man His need. He did become—and this is the presupposition of all that follows—the brother of man, threatened with man, harassed and assaulted with him, with him in the stream which hurries downwards to the abyss, hastening with him to death, to the cessation of being and nothingness. With him He cries—knowing far better than any other how much reason there is to cry: “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Mk. 15) Deus pro nobis means simply that God has not abandoned the world and man in the unlimited need of his situation, but that He willed to bear this need as His own, that He took it upon Himself, and that he cries with man in this need.

God’s grace is wholly sufficient, and the human creature wholly helpless—too helpless to even recognize the conditions of despair were it not for God’s gracious act in Christ.

Meynell has criticized Barth on this point, citing Aquinas as saying that “medicine has both to be provided for a patient and taken by him.” His criticism suggests that Barth’s notion of transcendence annihilates the human creature. But this criticism represents neither the biblical witness nor Barth. Meynell, and other critics on this point, forget that Barth is primarily talking about God and not the human creature. It is God’s act of grace in Jesus Christ that forms the human creature in true humanity and freedom: the freedom to serve God and the neighbour. This

23 CD II.2. 120. 121-122.
24 It is necessary, therefore, to retain a dualism between “God” and that which is “not God.” Its loss would suggest that God does not act in the world for the sake of the world, but for God’s sake. This would be an erotic act i.e. not an act for “the other,” but for the self. Without the distinction, any act would, further, be an “autoerotic” act (a dangerous metaphor at best!). The event of Jesus Christ would, then, not be one of grace, but of pleasure, and Jesus Christ would be subordinated to the position of a device for such pleasure. The cross would obviously be lost, and the ethical implications of being made in the image of God would be lost with it.
25 CD IV.1. 215.
is the simultaneous relationship of χάρη and εὐχαριστία. Barth contends that three things happen to exemplify the new and true being of the reconciled human being:

First, a verdict of God on man is executed and revealed whereby man is both rejected and accepted in the substitutionary work of Jesus Christ (93ff.), this being his justification and involving faith (96ff.). Second, a direction of God to man is also executed and revealed in which he is pointed to freedom in the house and Kingdom of God (99ff.), this being his sanctification and involving love (101ff.). Third, the promise of God is executed and revealed in which man is given his destiny (108ff.), this being his vocation and involving hope, namely, hope in Jesus Christ as both the ultimate and penultimate expectation (111ff.).

These are not successive stages of God’s operation, but simultaneous dynamics within the relationship between God and the beloved creation. They cannot be regarded separately in material or methodological terms. In saying all of this, Barth establishes that there is no separation between the person of Christ and his work. This differentiated identity between the will and act of God, and the will and act of Christ, is the proposition that lays the basis for explicating the relationship between the Father and the Son. Further, says Barth, to divide the person and work of Christ would result in taking the direction of Arianism or Pelagianism. The concurrency of this dynamic insists on the point that the Triune God revealed in Jesus Christ in the God of agape. To speak of Jesus is to speak of God and the love that binds them together: a love that is shared with humanity:

It is in the particular fact and the particular way that Jesus Christ is very God, very man, and very God-man that He works, and He works in the fact and only in the fact that He is this One and not another. His being as this One is His history, and His history is this His being. This is the truth which must light up the doctrine of reconciliation as Christology. When this is done, it will naturally follow that, as a whole, as a doctrine of the justifying and sanctifying and calling grace of God, as a doctrine of thankfulness, of faith and love and hope, as a doctrine of the community, its human and divine reality, its existence and

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27 CD IV/1, 41. This theme of God’s act that changes us, thereby providing a response, establishes a thread throughout the exposition.
29 CD IV/1, 128.
task, it will be completely dominated and determined by Christology. It will also follow that Christology will not be idle or come under the suspicion that it may be dispensed with. It will take its place without diminution or alteration as the necessary beginning.

Having established Barth’s ‘criterion’ of Christology and the relationship within God we now turn from the immanent to the economic, to Barth’s understanding of that relationship and its implications for the human creature.

c) The Obedience of the Son

The relationship between the Son and the Father is laid out in §59, “The Obedience of the Son of God.” Though by no means limited to those two hundred pages, this section lays the basis for all that is to follow. §59 is divided into three subsections: “The Way of the Son of God into the Far Country”; “The Judge Judged in our Place”; and “The Verdict of the Father.” The first subsection describes God’s condescension in the act of reconciliation with the human creature. In this way, Barth affirms that God’s reconciling act is history; it is in the world. Concurrently, the act tells us about Jesus Christ while being of Jesus Christ. That Lordship, unlike any other sovereignty, is known not because Jesus is Lord by evaluation (i.e. a human “choice”) nor by ascription (which would be emanative, modalistic or Arian). Jesus is, intrinsically, Lord. The Son is obedient, and in obedience became flesh (specifically Jewish flesh) in solidarity with fallen humanity, thus accepting humanity’s guilt and rejection. The Son is obedient, and in obedience became flesh (specifically Jewish flesh) in solidarity with fallen humanity, thus accepting humanity’s guilt and rejection.

The Word became Flesh and dwelt among us as the true human, and the true human is obedient and humble even to the point of suffering. The lynchpin of this obedience, though, is that the incarnation . . . is not to be thought of as describing an event which overtook Him, and therefore overtook God Himself, but rather a free divine activity, a sovereign act of divine lordship, an act of mercy which was necessary only by virtue of the will of God Himself . . . God is always God even in His humiliation. The divine being does not suffer any change, any diminution, any transformation into something else, any admixture with something else,

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30 Ibid.
31 Ibid., 161-171.
let alone any cessation. The deity of Christ is the one unaltered because [of the] unalterable deity of God. Any subtraction or weakening of it would at once throw doubt upon the atonement made in Him. He humbled Himself, but He did not do it by ceasing to be who He is. . . . He never became a stranger to Himself.32

To say otherwise would side with the Arians and (by coincidence) existentialist subjectivism by "juggling away the cross."33 Jesus Christ is God’s act, the act arising out of God’s being.

The conformity of the Son to the will of the Father to the point that there is no division of will affirms the co-unity of Father and Son. Without it the Son and the Father would be alien to each other, the logical conclusion of which would be polytheism, ontological subordination, and the loss of salvific efficacy such as Athanasius ascribed to Arian claims. But . . .

. . . the one “personality” of God, the one active and speaking divine Logos, is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Otherwise we should obviously have to speak of three gods . . . Christian faith and the Christian confession has one Subject, not three. But He is the one God in self-repetition, in the repetition of His own and equal divine being, and therefore in three different modes of being. He does not exist as such outside or behind or above these modes of being. He does not exist otherwise than as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He exists in their interconnexion and relationship. He exists in their difference, not in their identity: the Father in His mode as the Father of the Son; the son in His as the Son of the Father; the spirit in His as the Spirit of the Father and the Son.34

By making this statement, Barth reasserts the relationship of the Father to the Son in trinitarian form that affirms that the Son, in his conformity to the Father’s will, condescended into the far country for our sake and not for the sake of God. It is enacted out of the power of God that is the power of agape. God came as the Son to save us. To do so, the triune God had to first judge us.

How is that judgement made? By God’s very presence. A mundane example might help to illustrate the paradigm.

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32 Ibid., 179-180
33 Bromiley, 181
34 CD IV/I, 205. It is Barth’s use of the term “mode” that prompts some to argue that Barth may have been modalist (though not “Sabellian”). Cf. e.g. Catharine LaCugna, God for Us. (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1973), 152. However, Barth’s use of the term Seinweisen probably has more to do with the limitations of our perception than with God’s ontology.
When someone joins a new community she encounters a variety of dynamics, some of which are discerned as limiting or even crippling. She may, out of caring and love, without overt criticism, incorporate some ideas into action: a new way of running meetings or involving the marginalized members of the community such as children. She does so out of a genuine understanding of the needs of the community. But in doing so, her action stands as a criticism of the existing structures. It is implicit in the act, but explicit in effect. As a result, she may be ostracized and even rejected from the community, an act that constitutes the judgement of the community and confirms the initial judgement of the person who brings a "new thing."

The one who judges, is judged. That judgement becomes its own condemnation.

The example fails, of course, because Jesus Christ is God’s act. God takes our place as Judge and liberates us by displacing us from our own judgement. God takes our place as the judged and liberates us from the bondage of our own judgement. We are left only with the possibility of ευχαιρίστεια in the form of repentance. By taking our place, God relieves us of the strangling fear of divine retribution and establishes the justice of God, which is the re-establishment of right relationship.\(^{35}\) God initiates all of this in Jesus Christ pro nobis, whether we know it or understand it or even believe it; God’s judgement in Jesus Christ is movement to right relationship with God and with each other. It is an all-sufficient act that cannot be arrived at by argument or understood by demythologizing.

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35 ibid., 231-272.
be left hanging in the void as an anthropological or psychological or sociological myth, and sooner or later it will break and fall to the ground.\textsuperscript{56}

If this were the final word, then the human creature would be permanently displaced not only by the act of Jesus Christ’s coming, but also by our adherence to judgment in rejecting him. That would be our continuation in death. It is not the last word, though, for God so loved the world that God not only gave us the Son, but also pronounced a verdict upon humanity and upon death by giving us Christ for eternity in the resurrection. It thus affirms God’s love for creation, but also the Father’s love for the Son—a free and gracious act of God independent of human will and action, answering human usurpation of judgement with God’s judgement of insistent, undeniable and undeniable grace, thus establishing Jesus Christ eternally as the mediator within human history as an act done in Jesus Christ, and for us, in the resurrection. Human mediation through religious theotropic acts is, therefore, ineffective in terms of salvation through God’s grace. It is always God’s initiative of \( \chi \alpha \pi \tau \zeta \), eternally oriented for the sake of the salvation of humanity, the ultimate in anthropotropism.

We see by this brief description that Barth maintained the centrality of God by maintaining the centrality of Jesus Christ as the one in whom God reveals Godself. By virtue of the fact that one can only reveal oneself, we understand the One sent as very God and very Man in shared relationship with the One who sends. There is no impersonality to the act; it is the intentional and self-giving act of God calling the human creature, made in God’s image, into relationship with God through service to the suffering God and suffering neighbour, not because of an argued conclusion or self-preservation, but out of self-giving love.

d) Religion as ‘Unbelief’

Barth agreed with much that Luther says about justification. His doctrine of sanctification, however, is much more carefully developed than Luther’s, and in the \textit{loci} on vocation, Barth introduced material not touched by Luther under that heading. Even when speaking of sanctification, Barth asserted that “participation in this event of the \textit{testimonium}”

\textsuperscript{56} ibid., 273.
Spiritus sancti is not for everyone.”37 To Barth, it is precisely because of God’s act in Jesus Christ that God’s voice might be heard from outside the Church. However, he only identifies secular society in this regard:

... we cannot possibly think that He cannot speak, and His speech cannot be attested, outside of this sphere. We who in contrast to others have our place and task here, and to whom it is given to know what others do not know, can and must expect that His voice will also be heard without. We can and must be prepared to encounter ‘parables of the kingdom’ in the full biblical sense, not merely in the witness of the Bible and the various arrangements, works and words of the Christian Church, but also in the secular sphere, i.e., in the strange interruption of the secularism of life in the world.38

Even as Barth seemed to open up to the opportunity to affirm that God “speaks” in other religious spheres, he did not. Obviously, given the strong statement just cited, Barth could have indicated that Christian faith affords the adherent a glimpse of God’s command, love and grace as communicated, however partially, in non-Christian religions. For instance, in Barth’s theology of religion he indicated a respectful, albeit superficial understanding of non-Christian religious parallels, particularly with reference to Hindu Bhakti and forms of Japanese Amida Buddhism.39 But these he deemed ‘unbelief’ because they have as the object of their faith one who is other than Jesus Christ, and therefore the source of salvation (however defined) is the projected self articulated as something divine. This perspective therefore dislocates the primary assertion of faith as given in Christ’s cross, which maintains God’s initiative in Christ alone.

Alan Race, among others such as Paul Knitter, understands this ‘rejection’ as an attempt to “pronounce on other faiths without a thorough prior knowledge of their beliefs and practices.”40 He cites as proof the well-known example that Barth was asked how he knew that Hinduism was unbelief, when he had never met a Hindu. “A priori,” replied Barth.

Barth is easily misunderstood on this point because it is often assumed that he was speaking in terms of comparative religious phenomenology. Nothing could have been further

37 CD IV/2, 39.
38 CD IV/3/1, 117.
39 CD I/2, 340-344.
40 Race, 16; Knitter, No Other Name?, 80-87.
from his agenda: Barth was clearly engaged in an enterprise that was explicitly and specifically
Christian: a "Church" undertaking. It was also a critical one. Barth was determined to make
Christian theological assessments about all human activity, including the religious. In that
thoroughly Christian enterprise Barth rejected the notion that the Church is in any way the means
of revelation or reconciliation: "... we can speak of 'true' religion only in the sense in which we
speak of a 'justified sinner.'" As justification is always and only God's work in Christ through
the power of the Holy Spirit, it is never the work of the human creature. Therefore:

Religion is never true in itself and as such. The revelation of God denies that any religion
is true, i.e., that it is in truth the knowledge and worship of God and the reconciliation of
man with God. For as the self-offering and self-manifestation of God, as the work of
peace which God Himself has concluded between Himself and man, revelation is the
truth beside which there is no other truth, over against which there is only lying and
wrong. ... No religion is true. It can only become true, i.e., according to that which it
purports to be and for which it is upheld. And it can become true only in the way in
which man is justified, from without: i.e., not of its own nature and being, but only in
virtue of a reckoning and adopting and separating which are foreign to its own nature and
being, which are quite inconceivable from its own standpoint, which come to it quite
apart from any qualifications or merits. Like justified man, religion is a creature of grace.
But grace is the revelation of God. No religion can stand before it as true religion.

Religion, and Barth was speaking primarily of Christian religion, is always unbelief. We may not
speak "in any special way about Christianity" or "give it any special or assured place in face of
that judgment."

Referring specifically to Christian religion, Barth is clear that its only claim to truth is
external to itself. "Truth," as it were, claims the Church, and not the other way around. It is not a
"religion of revelation," but a "revelation of religion." Yet only insofar as its members respond
gratefully to the grace of God, and not claim to be the arbiters of grace or to glorify themselves:

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41 CD 1/1, ix.  
42 Lochhead, Dialogical Imperative, 34ff.  
43 CD 1/2, 325.  
44 Ibid. 325-326. (Emphasis added).  
45 Ibid.  
46 Lochhead, Dialogical Imperative, 34
The Christian religion is the sacramental area created by the Holy Spirit, in which the God whose Word became flesh continues to speak through the sign of His Holy Spirit. And it is also the existence of men created by the same Holy Spirit, who hear this God continually speaking in His revelation. The Church and the children of God do actually exist. The actuality of their existence is quite unassuming, but it is always visible and in its visibility it is significant. It is an actuality which is called and dedicated to the declaration of the name of Jesus Christ. And that is the sanctification of the Christian religion.47

This constitutes the a priori of Barth’s judgment of non-Christian religion: that Christianity itself, where it does not submit to the judgement of God in the crucified Christ, is unbelief and idolatry. Once accepted as both the revelation of God’s grace and human sin, all human activity falls before it—including non-Christian religion. “We cannot differentiate and separate the Church from other religions on the basis of a general concept of the nature of religion... religion is unbelief.”48 As Lochhead explained:

If that is what religion is, Barth argues, then we have to understand that the Gospel places all religion under judgment. Religion is the human attempt to establish fellowship with God. The Gospel is the “good news” that God has in Jesus Christ established fellowship with humanity. In the Gospel, fellowship with God is established from God’s side in spite of the incapacity of humanity for fellowship with God. Religion, then, is the negation of the truth of the Gospel. In attempting to establish fellowship with God, religion ignores the fact that God has already established fellowship with us.49

Barth’s theology of religion is a critical theologia crucis of religion, and remains critical even as its application moves from the Church to the world.

The temptation here is to confuse this critical approach with the subordination or rejection of non-Christian religion. To do so would be incorrect. It is merely the extension of methodology based upon the distinctly Christian genre of theologia crucis. It is also one that has considerable merit in the non-Christian world. For instance, it has been demonstrated that the great Jewish theologian Franz Rosenzweig, who extolled the virtues of dialogue, viewed dialogue not only as mutual affirmation, but primarily as judgement. Judgement, according to Rosenzweig, produces “not mutual understanding, but the harsh and harrowing assessment of

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47 CD, I/2, 359
48 Ibid., 298-299
49 Lochhead, Dialogical Imperative, 33.
one point of view over and against another . . . premised on real difference, and this means that dialogue aims not at consensus, but rather at changing each partner’s view of herself.”50 In this paradigm, judgement propels first oneself, and then the ‘other’ to self-judgement and therefore redemption. “At best, judgment by the other can produce a self-judgment.”51

Barth’s theologically responsible and primarily self-critical theologia crucis of religion, if properly understood, serves as the basis for a comprehensive theology of religion based upon an explicit religious commitment.52 In that light it is most useful because, as a theology of the cross, the one who uses it must first subject herself or himself, their own community of commitment, and doctrine to the same criticism. He leaves no room to maneuver for anyone merely seeking the phenomenological expressions of faith, though the doubter and the seeker are always precisely those who are called in spite of their doubt to be the church by the grace of God in Christ.53 As such, Barth falls under his own observation of Luther, for his crux becomes a gloriae in and of itself. But it glorifies neither the Church nor the habits and self-congratulations of a particular cultural-religious heritage. His critique of religion is specifically of the Christian religion that does not conform to the initiative of God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ, that is, which does not culminate in the Christian imperative of love for the neighbour, whomever that neighbour might be. Any religious thought, especially one calling itself ‘Christian,’ which results in acts of rejection of, violence toward, or superiority over the neighbour is not Christian. For God desires a ‘good end’ for all people, and it is God’s judgement that prevails:

. . . there is no good reason why we should forbid ourselves, or be forbidden, openness to the possibility that in the reality of God and man in Jesus Christ there is contained much more than we might expect. . . . that in the truth of this reality there might be contained the super-abundant promise of the final deliverance of all men . . . of an apokatastasis or universal reconciliation . . . If we are certainly forbidden to count on this as though we had a claim to it, as though it were not supremely the work of God to which man can

51 Ibid., 531.
have no possible claim, we are surely commanded the more definitely to hope and pray for it as we may do already on this side of this final possibility... 

Indeed, if Barth has articulated a **theologiae gloriae**, it is that he glories in the way God reveals Godself in vulnerable self-loss and suffering, which therefore reveals a humanity with little cause for glory but great cause for thanksgiving through service to the world of God's love. That service is not through seeking the presence of God through religious acts, but in celebrating God's presence through faith and faithful relationships. That faith is in God who chooses to be creator, reconciler, and redeemer to all of humanity *before* choosing or rejecting any human creature. This same God assumes the rejection of humanity, and elects the human creature to participate in God's own glory. This divine self-determination is also a determination for the human creature.

Barth's doctrine of salvation, however, stops well short of a supralapsarian doctrine of universal predestination. He never says that we can know the unknowable, only that we can know the crucified Christ who suffered for the sake of all creation, all people. He explicitly stated, however, that in the light of that revelation it is appropriate to pray and hope for that which is known as *apokatastasis*, the ethical extension of which is that a Christian acts toward others as those for whom Christ has died, and who have therefore been reconciled in Christ.

While critics of Barth are correct in saying that he refused to grant the possibility of salvific efficacy to non-Christian religions, it is important to realize that Barth viewed no religion as salvific, most especially Christianity. His formulation was fiercely theocentric, for he

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54 *CD* IV/3/1, 477-478.
55 *CD* II/2.
56 Ibid., 94ff.
57 Cf. **George Hunsinger**, *Disruptive Grace: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth*, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., 2000), 243: “Although Karl Barth is often labeled a ‘universalist,’ he is best understood as standing in the tradition of holy silence... Barth deliberately leaves the question open, though not in a neutral fashion, but with a strong tilt toward universal hope... his final concern as a theologian is not so much to respect the compromised ‘freedom’ of fallen humanity, but rather to respect above all the sovereign freedom of divine grace. The result is holy silence, or as it has sometimes also been called, ‘reverent agnosticism.’”
maintained that only God saves. But Barth’s theocentric soteriology was explicitly christocentric in its epistemology and, as such, Barth was far from exclusivistic in his soteriology. He promoted, by virtue of what God reveals in Christ, at least the hope of a clearly open universalism of salvation.

2) **JÜRGEN MOLTМАNN: THE WAY OF THE CRUCIFIED GOD**

A significant example of *theologia crucis* in our time is found in the contributions of the German Reformed theologian, Jürgen Moltmann. His significance for us in this endeavour rests not only upon his congruence with Martin Luther, but indeed with his divergence. Like Luther, Moltmann understands salvation to be strictly the initiative of the Triune God, whereby the human creature is justified by faith alone through God’s grace alone, even while still sinful. And so, like Luther and Barth, he stands within what Heschel describes as the prophetic anthropotropical tradition. For Moltmann, the ethical manifestations of faith follow a path that weaves between the horizons of the holocaust, racial and nationalistic enmity, imminent nuclear destruction, and a global sense of helplessness and hopelessness. It might be said that Luther’s *theologia crucis* attacked and criticized hubris as the fundamental sin, in that he recognized the religious usurpation of God’s sovereignty by ecclesial authorities. Moltmann, on the other hand, responds to ‘sloth’ as the ground in which the cross of Christ is planted in our current context. 59 Sloth is, for our time, the “little point where the battle is raging” as Luther put it. 60

The corrective, according to Moltmann, is found in a “theology of hope.” The whole of his work can be said to depend upon a theology of history that is never limited to the conventional notion of history that looks forever backward, lost in nostalgic fantasy and the despairing fatalism that whatever has happened was meant to be. 61 Nor is it based upon the

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nihilism of futuristic cataclysm in which God’s creation is something from which we must escape. For Moltmann, all history is looks forward. It is the history of hope based in the ‘God of the promise’, and in the proleptic act of God in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ:

In actual fact, however, eschatology means the doctrine of the Christian hope, which embraces both the object hoped for and also the hope inspired by it. . . . Christian eschatology does not speak of the future as such. It sets out from a definite reality in history and announces the future of that reality, its future possibilities and its power over the future. Christian eschatology speaks of Jesus Christ and his future.

A theology of hope is oriented to God’s hope for all creation, and for the human creature within it. Therefore, for Moltmann, we speak of God known in Christ and experienced in the power of the Holy Spirit as an immanent reality with imminent potential. God is pro nobis. For that very reason, the God who is God for us also expects something from humanity. The human creature lives in active anticipation of, and participation with, the relentless expectation of God.

In pursuing this explication, Moltmann places Christian hope in inextricable, material continuity with the history of Israel. “Christian existence,” asserts Moltmann, “does not displace or supersede Jewish existence. It is dependent on that existence, and is its companion along the same road.” In particular, he refers to the intentional pathos of God for the covenant people and their response of sympatheia, a perspective that is avowedly derived from the anthropotropic perspective of Abraham Heschel. It is not, however, identical. Moltmann points out that the presupposition of the covenant exists only in continuity with the people of Israel, but that it is God’s act in Jesus Christ that locates the Christian within that continuity. He thus insists that only a christocentric trinitarian epistemology is sufficient for Christian theology:

Where for Israel immediacy with God is grounded on the presupposition of the covenant, for Christians it is Christ himself who communicates the Fatherhood of God and the

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62 Jürgen Moltmann, The Coming of God.
63 Moltmann, Theology of Hope, 16-17.
64 Ibid., 338.
power of the Spirit. Therefore Christian theology cannot develop any dipolar theology of the reciprocal relationship between the God who calls and the man who answers; it must develop a trinitarian theology, for only in and through Christ is that dialogical relationship with God opened up. Through Christ, God himself creates the conditions of entering into that relationship of \textit{pathos} and \textit{sympatheia}.\footnote{Ibid., 275.}

While there are numerous ways in which Moltmann’s theology of the cross could be described, his explication of eschatology followed by an overview of his description of God as revealed in the crucified Christ will prove most fruitful for this thesis. From this point, I shall turn to his description of the church as responding in \textit{sympatheia} to God’s \textit{pathos}, then to his doctrine of creation as the location of God’s exhortation to serve the world in which God has lived and suffered with humanity.

a) \textbf{The Theology of Hope}

Eschatology is the starting point of theology for Moltmann. the “passionate suffering and passionate longing kindled by the Messiah.”\footnote{Moltmann, \textit{Theology of Hope}, 16.} As such, the only real problem in theology is the “problem of the future.”\footnote{Ibid.} The God of whom we speak as the God known in Jesus Christ is the ‘God of hope,’ a God whose essential nature is “future.”\footnote{Ibid., citing E. Bloch.} As such, this same God cannot be possessed: no nation, culture, individual or religion can speak of God as something belonging to ‘us.’ God is always and only God whom we await in “active hope.” “A proper theology would therefore have to be constructed,” states Moltmann, “in the light of its future goal.”\footnote{Ibid., 275.} That goal must always be God’s goal. This is the starting point of Christian theology. The theology of hope is from the onset, therefore, a \textit{theologia crucis}. He thus upholds the initiative of God in all things, and locates that initiative in the revelation of God in Christ. It is not \textit{our} future, nor, most emphatically, is it anything of \textit{our} desire stemming from human experience: “Christian eschatology speaks of Jesus Christ and \textit{his} future.”\footnote{Ibid., 275.} Yet it must always be a “hoping against hope,” that identifies human experience as a “god-forsaken transient reality” submitting to that

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\item 67 Ibid., 275.
\item 68 Moltmann, \textit{Theology of Hope}, 16.
\item 69 Ibid.
\item 70 Ibid., citing E. Bloch.
\item 71 Ibid.
\item 72 Ibid., 17.
\end{thebibliography}
which is not seen, but which inspires hope. It is resurrection hope. It is this hope that
transcends—indeed, rejects—the experience of reality as composed of suffering imposed by sin.

Hope finds in Christ not only a consolation in suffering, but also the protest of the divine promise against suffering. . . . That is why faith, wherever it develops into hope, causes not rest but unrest, not patience but impatience. It does not calm the unquiet heart, but is itself this unquiet heart in man. Those who hope in Christ can no longer put up with reality as it is, but begin to suffer under it, to contradict it. Peace with God means conflict with the world, for the goad of the promised future stabs inexorably into the flesh of every unfulfilled present.

Moltmann primarily cites Calvin on this point. Nevertheless, and especially so since he relies upon Paul’s Epistle to the Romans as his substantiating text, Moltmann asserts with Luther that the Christian is one who lives in, but not according to, the world (Rom. 12:2): “[Calvin] did not mean by this that Christian faith flees the world, but he did mean that it strains after the future.”

As such, Moltmann establishes coherence with Luther’s primary term of reference that all of humanity is simul iustus et peccator, and that the Christian can—must—recognize it as such. Similarly, any authentic response to this perspective (and this must include the religious response) is one that is transformative, and not merely affirmative. Faith must strain toward a future that transforms the reality of the human creature, and indeed the human creature itself. Theology, therefore, does not rest solely upon the dictum, fides quaerens intellectum. More is required, a doctrine that knows without knowing that God has intent for humanity within creation, a docta spec: spes quaerens intellectum.

Moltmann goes to some effort to substantiate his view as coherent with that of Luther, though it must be said that he does not do so slavishly. The believer, says Moltmann, essentially hopes and therefore determines his own future as dependent upon Christ’s future. In this way, the believer comes “into harmony with himself in spe, but into disharmony with himself in re”:

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73 Ibid., 18.
74 Ibid., 21.
75 Ibid., 18. “To us is given the promise of eternal life—but to us, the dead. A blessed resurrection is proclaimed to us—meantime we are surrounded by decay. We are called righteous—and yet sin lives in us.”
76 Ibid., 19.
77 Ibid., 36.
Hence the man who hopes is of all people the one who does not stand harmoniously and concentrically in himself, but stands eccentrically to himself in the facultas standi extra se corum Deo, as Luther called it.\footnote{Ibid., 91.}

One who is in Christ is always located outside oneself in Christ, and oriented to the neighbour. Such hope does not rely upon our own merits, nor even in the merits or attributes of God; but neither is it spes purissima in Deum purissimum, as Luther put it.\footnote{Ibid., 119. From WA 5, 166.} Faithful hope is substantial hope in the lordship of God, and peace and righteousness on earth.\footnote{Ibid.} It acknowledges and confesses hopelessness, and sees "not only the forgiveness of sins and the right of the godless to life before God, but . . . also God’s right to lordship."\footnote{Ibid., 207, fn. 1.} This concretely conceived, externally located hope therefore mitigates against any and all conceptions of reason and morality. It is hope that exposes that which is of the world and which is not of God’s intent.\footnote{Ibid., 290: "... because we are to be new men . . . we should also have other and new thoughts, minds and understandings and not regard anything in the light of reason, as it is for the world, but as it is before [God’s] eyes, and take our cue from the future, invisible, new nature for which we have to hope and which is to come . . . .", from WA 34, 480ff} Faithful hope is thus a "protesting hope" coherent with T.W. Adorno’s critical theory, wherein all things are viewed from the standpoint of redemption: "Perspectives must be created in which the world looks changed and alien and reveals its cracks and flaws in much the same way as it will one day lie destitute and disfigured in Messiah’s light."\footnote{Ibid., 335, citing Luther WA 39, 1, 47: Habito enim Christo facile condemnus leges. et omnia recte judicabimus . . . ("For when we have Christ we shall easily issue laws, and judge all things aright . . . ").} Faithful hope is a "creative hope" that leads to the recognition of potentialities and freedom in a given situation.\footnote{Ibid., 290-291, citing T.W. Adorno, Minima Moralia, 1962, 333f.} Such hope brings about a "new understanding of the world," which as a result of hope in God’s future with us . . .

... becomes free in believing eyes from all attempts at self-redemption or self-production through labour, and it becomes open for loving, ministering self-expenditure in the interests of a humanizing of conditions and in the interests of the realization of justice in
the light of the coming justice of God. ... the hope of resurrection must bring about a new understanding of the world.⁸⁵

"The world is not yet finished," warns Moltmann, "but is understood as engaged in a history."⁸⁶ It is history far from limited by the past; it is as much formed by a future—a "horizon of expectation which transcends the world." It is the future of the crucified Christ, the disclosure of which is the task of the Christian church.⁸⁷

b) **God Crucified, the Church Empowered**

"A theology which did not speak of God in the sight of the one who was abandoned and crucified," warns Moltmann, "would have had nothing to say."⁸⁸ This includes any claims to authority by the church, but also includes criticism of the church as well. All theology, including ecclesiology, must submit to the central tenet, *Crux probat omnium*:

There is an inner criterion of all theology, and of every church which claims to be Christian, and this criterion goes far beyond all political, ideological and psychological criticism from outside. It is the crucified Christ himself. ... only by Christ is it possible to tell what is a Christian church and what is not.⁸⁹

While for Luther the cross of Christ is a completed event by which Christ's righteousness is transferred to the sinner, Moltmann understands the cross of Christ as the initiation of a process in which God, through Christ, participates:

> In the action of the Father in delivering up his Son to suffering and to a godless death, God is acting in himself. He is acting in himself in the manner of suffering and dying in order to open up in himself life and freedom for sinners.⁹⁰

As will be presently demonstrated, this process view is wholly consistent with Moltmann's doctrine of creation that includes the imperative for action in *sympatheia* to God's *pathos* as a commitment of human *being* itself, and not just limited to Christian concerns. Any such action

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⁸⁵ Ibid., 338.
⁸⁶ Ibid.
⁸⁷ Ibid.
⁸⁹ Ibid., 2.
⁹⁰ Ibid., 192.
includes the demand for participation in the social/political spheres as the necessary
manifestation of faith identified with the Cross of Christ:

The worship of such a `crucified God' contained a strictly political significance which
cannot be sublimated into the religious sphere. . . .

Thus as a second theological dimension to the history of Jesus which led to his
crucifixion as a `rebel', we can definitely add the political dimension of the gospel of
Jesus within a world in which religion and politics were inseparable. 91

Thus Moltmann emphasizes suffering as a chosen path of solidarity by which God and humanity
join together in the struggle against all suffering.

If one conceives of the Trinity as an event of love in the suffering and the death of
Jesus—and that is something which faith must do—then the Trinity is no self-contained
group in heaven, but an eschatological process open for men on earth, which stems from
the cross of Christ. 92

Moltmann's *theologia crucis* is not contradictory to his established "theology of hope": it is
complementary. Faithful hope begins with the resurrection of the crucified Christ, while theology
of the cross begins with the cross of the risen Christ. 93 Without it, the theology of hope might fall
into the historic tendency of mere consolation that in fact denies the presence of and exhortation
to respond to suffering in the world. Moltmann is therefore able to articulate a political theology
that understands and interacts cooperatively with vigorous points of view that might be seen as
incompatible with Christian faith. Resonating with Luther's use of *theologia crucis* as a "new
principle of theological epistemology," Moltmann perceives it as "not talking of theology as
knowledge of God in itself, but of the theologian." 94 The theology of the cross is therefore
divorced from philosophical speculations about the existence and nature of God, and insists upon
the ethical existence of the one who knows God in *this* act of suffering protest against the

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91 Ibid., 144.
92 Ibid., 249. Luther, conversely understood suffering as beneficial for driving people from dependence upon
themselves to dependence upon God. For a somewhat spurious comparison of Moltmann and Luther on these
points, Cf. Burnell F. Eckardt, Jr., "Luther and Moltmann: The Theology of the Cross," *Concordia Theological
*Theological Gathering* 1. Fall. 1996.
93 Ibid., 5.
94 Ibid., 208.
imposition of suffering. It is in a sense ironic, then, that the *theologia crucis* is posed in contradiction to conventions of Christian religious affirmations of the immortality of the soul and the immutability of God that nest so well with the idols of nationalist political power.\(^95\) while simultaneously finding concurrence with the insights and actions of forms of atheism that scream a similar outrage against the imposition of suffering by principalities and powers.\(^96\) With reference to critical theory, for instance, Moltmann recognizes that...

Max Horkheimer... has criticized the religious idols of religion, and also the idols and the totalization which have appeared in capitalism, in nationalism and in established Marxism as true images of earlier religious idols. His critical theory of society... is based on the presupposition that we do not know what God is. This is an old theological principle: *Deus non est in nilo.* His critical theory is therefore in essence a negative theology which prohibits images: it is critical, to the degree that it cannot be satisfied with any immanent idols and righteousness... In his critical theory he challenges both traditional theism and its brother, traditional atheism.\(^97\)

This is where Christian theology and protest atheism meet, declares Moltmann: in the open question of suffering that has no answer, and the question of righteousness that cannot be surrendered.\(^98\) Crude atheism and classical theism, as well as simple monotheism, all prove themselves to be equally superficial. Concurrently, Christian theology must be accountable to the assertions of protest atheism that demand a response to the imposition of suffering in the world.

Moltmann's assertion is that the...

... only way past protest atheism is through a theology of the cross which understands God as the suffering God in the suffering of Christ and which cries out with the godforsaken God, 'My God, why have you forsaken me?' For this theology, God and suffering are no longer contradictions, as in theism and atheism, but God's being is in suffering and the suffering is in God's being itself, because God is love.\(^99\)

We can thus see that the complementary dynamic of hope and suffering illuminates the double crisis of the church: the crisis of relevance and the crisis of identity, which Moltmann identifies

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\(^{95}\) Ibid., 215.

\(^{96}\) Ibid., 224.

\(^{97}\) Ibid., 223.

\(^{98}\) Ibid., 226.

\(^{99}\) Ibid., 227.
as the identity-involvement dilemma. Meeks calls this the "dialectic of reconciliation," and considers it to be the "ultimately distinguishing characteristic" of Moltmann's theology. Theologia crucis is the common denominator that makes complementary this dialectic between the crisis of relevance and the crisis of identity in which the Church is always caught.

The more theology and the church attempt to become relevant to the problems of the present day, the more deeply they are drawn into the crisis of their own Christian identity. The more they attempt to assert their identity in traditional dogmas, rights and moral notions, the more irrelevant and unbelievable they become... Reflection upon the cross leads to the clarification of what can be called Christian identity and what can be called Christian relevance, in critical solidarity with our contemporaries.

This last point brings us to Moltmann's extension of his theologia crucis in relationship to the religious other. For Moltmann, critical solidarity is the modus operandi of all relationships:

Every relationship to another life involves the future of that life, and the future of the reciprocal relationship into which one life enters with another. When the church talks about hope, it is talking about the future of Israel, for it proceeded from Israel, and only together with Israel can its hope be fulfilled. When Christianity talks about hope, it is talking about the future of nations—the whole of mankind—because it exists for the nations and its hope is given it for mankind's sake. When Christianity talks about hope, it is talking about the future of the world, mankind and nature, in whose history it is, in practical terms, involved.

Christian hope ("eschatology") is, then, not just for Christians, but also for all religions, social systems, and nature. The main christological point of Christian faith is found not in ecclesial forms, but in the solidarity of God with humanity in suffering. It is a solidarity made manifest in the cross of the risen Christ.

In this way Moltmann can be seen to be very much like Luther in his theologia crucis, for both engage the theology of the cross as a primary epistemological perspective by which the Christian may be helped to see, and recognize, the presence and work of the Triune God. By implication, one may also recognize that which opposes God, and stand in protest against it.

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103 Ibid., 135.
Particularly in *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, Moltmann is exceedingly anxious to be open, respectful and in dialogue with world religions. But he never compromises the trinitarian theology crucis that gives openness and respectfulness the force of God’s commandment.¹⁰⁴ Moltmann could then say, in active dialogue and in direct reference to the cross on Golgotha:

- God is love.
- God is self-communication.
- Self-communication presumes self-distinction.
- Self-communication fulfills itself in self-giving.
- The love of God communicates itself to the other.

That is our freedom and our salvation.¹⁰⁵

**c) A God-Forsaken Space: Potential and Meaning**

To Moltmann, the task of theology is to illuminate and proclaim how we have been liberated by the event of Jesus Christ, his journey, his death, and his resurrection. The vehicle for that proclamation is ‘hope’: specifically, God’s hope for humanity in creation. It is, therefore, a relationship of God for humanity in the world. For Moltmann, this demonstrates that . . .

. . . . the divine creativity has no conditions or premises. Creation is something absolutely new. It is neither actually nor potentially inherent or present in anything else.¹⁰⁶

Creation comes out of Nothing (*creatio ex nihilo*), which means that the world was created . . .

. . . neither out of pre-existent matter, nor out of the divine Being itself. It was called into existence by the free will of God: *creatio ex libertate Dei*.¹⁰⁷

His doctrine of creation is an essential extension of the material necessity of trinitarian, as opposed to the monotheistic and deistic, expressions of Christian belief. It is basic to reconciling the notions of world/heaven, body/soul dualism that have permeated much of Christian theology

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 196. “If Christian anticipation is directed towards the resurrection and eternal life, then it will encourage everything in history which ministers to life, and strive against everything that disseminates death.”

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 73.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 75.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 75.
with such destructive consequences for so many centuries. Understanding creation as merely the emanation of God’s essential nature suggests that God had no choice in the matter. On the other hand, if we consider creation to be the “work” of God (or a Demiurge), then we might construe creation to be the result of an arbitrary and capricious subordinate act or deity.

In either case, creation would be the extension or result of God’s power over that which is made. Creation would thus be subordinated and made disposable, or at least placed outside of God. The world, in spiritual terms, would be something to “get out of” in order to “get into” God. God’s gracious gift of righteousness to the human creature simul iustus et peccator would be irredeemably lost as well; there would have to be human cause for God’s righteousness in order for it occur. Yet as no cause can be given, grace would be withheld. Such a view must conclude with despair. Such despair would be accompanied by the presumption that the world can get no better. “God is in his heaven, the snail is on his thorn, and all is right with the world,” as the philosophy of deism would have it. Both views are the conclusion of hopelessness. To conclude that there is ‘Godless’ space is to conclude that ‘God is less’ than God.

Yet Christian theology has described God’s work of creation in just these terms since the fourth century: operatio Dei ad extra, opus trinitatis ad extra, actio Dei externa, etc. For Moltmann, there are at least two major problems with this view coherent with those described.

One problem lies in that if we describe Creation as being an act outside of God, then we set limits on God by delineating an “outward aspect to God.” The second is that creation conceived of as outside of God is not trinitarian. It does not describe or allow for the work of God in the world among those who know hope, for having placed this border around God how can God be outside Godself? If the message of “God with us” is true—and if it is not, then all Christian theology is false—then God is in the world. Christian hope is based upon this belief.

But an understanding of creation ex nihilo can free us to understand that creation is the result of divine resolve. God decides to create the world out of God’s freedom. For Moltmann,

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108 Ibid., 86.
when we speak of God freely creating the world, “we must immediately add ‘out of love’.” Not almighty power, but the self-communication of the good. Creation is not the demonstration of God’s, but the communication of God’s love: ‘God forsaken,’ but not ‘God-less.’” Moltmann illustrates and resolves the contradiction of *operatio Dei ad extra* by appealing to the concept of *zimsum* from Jewish kabbalism.  

*Zimsum* builds upon the ancient Jewish doctrine of *shekinah*, a term that derives from the Hebrew word “to inhabit.” *Shekinah* is a term that appreciates the reality that God dwells among God’s people, and that the infinite can freely and lovingly contract itself to dwell in the temple. It is a concept not unlike Luther’s interpretation of *hoc est corpus meum*, in which the infinite is perceived with the finite: God in the bread, God in Jesus, and God in the world. Moltmann takes it further, saying that...

...the same thing is true in its own degree of the indwelling of God in the creation of his love: he gives himself away to the beings he has created, he suffers with their sufferings, he goes with them through the misery of the foreign land. The God who in the Spirit dwells in his creation is present to every one of his creatures and remains bound to each of them, in joy and sorrow.

*Zimsum* is a corollary concept in which God withdraws. *Creatio ex nihilo* is not otherwise possible. If God is omnipresent, creation would be made of God. But it is not. It is created “out of nothing.” If God withdraws, “nothing” happen. *Zimsum* is a concept that suggests that God sets self-limits in order to allow “nothing” to emerge. The possibility for creation, then, is “literally a God-forsaken space.”

A formal understanding of *zimsum* has implications for our understanding of christology as the exhortation to true human being in terms of *theologia crucis*, which, to Moltmann, is synonymous with the potential of God in *absconditus*. It may therefore have important implications for a distinctly Christian understanding of human relationship, and therefore to the basis of relationships between Christians and non-Christians.

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109 Ibid., 75-76.
110 Ibid., 86ff. The parallels between *zimsum* and the Nominalist concepts of *Dei potentia ordinata absoluta* cannot be explored here. The are touched upon by Moltmann (Ibid., 80-81).
111 Ibid., 15
112 Ibid., 87
Moltmann himself cites a long line of theologians who recognize that “when God permitted creation, this was the first act in the divine self-humiliation which reached its profoundest point in the cross of Christ.” Moltmann does, however, lay out an ordered way of thinking about God’s abandonment as the foundation for creation. God’s withdrawing into Godself is an act of divine self-humiliation in which God gives up omnipotence and omnipresence in order to allow potential on a cosmic scale. God gives up control so that all things might be possible. What must be re-thought, then, is the notion of God ad extra in terms of what is God, not-God, and counter-God. God surrounds creation and permeates creation, constantly speaking it into being. It is an ongoing labour of God’s freedom to call lovingly to creation. Zimsum is, then, an act of servanthood and an action of invitation.

The perceivable structure of the creation account and zimsum is accessible when we consider Jesus Christ, the suffering servant who died the death of a slave crying out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mt. 27:46) Anguish and anger at being abandoned, at that moment when all of history convulses, is articulated in that cry. God withdraws—abandons—Godself and allows the ‘nothing’ from which everything is made possible. But further:

When the triune God restricts his omnipresence in order to permit a creation outside himself to be ‘there’, he does not leave behind a vacuum, as the kabbalistic doctrine of zimsum suggests. He throws open a space for those he has created, a space which corresponds to his inner indwellings: he allows a world different from himself to exist before him, with him and in him.

This representation reveals a mirror-image of creation and the event of Jesus Christ. The first starts with God’s abandonment and results in a celebration of creation as we know it, while the second starts with the world as we know it and ends with God’s message of what the world could be. In this way, God is not only seen to be acting out of a love that necessitates some withdrawal. God is ultimately expressed and found in hope in the midst of, and over and against, the

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113 Ibid., 87.
114 Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, 298-299
suffering of the world. For Moltmann, in a way that continues on from Luther and corresponds with Barth\textsuperscript{115}, this is the greatest power of God and the best hope for humankind:

There can be no theology of the incarnation which does not become a theology of the cross. ‘As soon as you say incarnation, you say cross.’ God did not become man according to the measure of our conceptions of being a man. He became the kind of man we do not want to be: an outcast, accursed, crucified. Ecce homo! Behold the man! is not a statement which arises from the confirmation of our humanity and is made on the basis of ‘like is known by like’; it is a confession of faith which recognizes God’s humanity in the dehumanized Christ on the cross. At the same time the confession says Ecce deus! Behold God on the cross! Thus God’s incarnation ‘even unto the death on the cross’ is not in the last resort a matter of concealment: this is his utter humiliation, in which he is completely with himself and completely with the other, the man who is dehumanized. Humiliation to the point of death on the cross corresponds to God’s nature in the contradiction of abandonment. When the crucified Jesus is called the ‘image of the invisible God’, the meaning is that \textit{this} is God, and God is like \textit{this}. God is not greater than he is in this humiliation. God is not more powerful than he is in this helplessness. God is not more divine than he is in this humanity.\textsuperscript{116}

When we speak of Jesus, therefore, we do not speak of a magical talisman invoked to protect us from the fearsomeness of the world. We speak of the figure of God’s resurrection in the world, who died the tortured death of slavery, and was resurrected. It is the ultimate event of God’s unveiling, which we know through Jesus’ abandonment on the cross that does not . . .

... make the world equal by bringing down the night in which everything looks alike, but by enabling people to criticize and stand back from the partial historical realities and movements which they have idolized and made absolute.\textsuperscript{117}

The cross is, then, the noetic point from which we see the sinfulness of the world and the uniquely Christian reminder of our own death, and from which we are beckoned to faithful living in this life. In that cross we find God, whose act of abandonment and creation provides constant fuel for the outward expression of our fragile faith. We find God who, rather than stop all suffering, chooses to directly and deliberately participate in it. We find the compassionate God

\textsuperscript{115} Cf. e.g. \textit{CD} IV/1, 192. ‘... so far as I know Gregory of Nyssa was the only one of the Church fathers expressly to mention: that the descent to humility which took place in the incarnation of the Word is not only not excluded by the divine nature but signifies its greatest glory... The mystery reveals to us that for God it is just as natural to be lowly as it is to be high, to be near as it is to be far, to be little as it is to be great, to be abroad as to be at home’

\textsuperscript{116} Moltmann, \textit{Crucified God}, 205. Moltmann, as with Barth, builds upon statements by Gregory of Nyssa.

\textsuperscript{117} Ibid. 17
who is affected by the suffering of the world and of whom we make demands and cry out with Jesus, “Why . . . ?” It is not, therefore, a God outside of the world that ignores the poverty and despotism of human manipulation of power over others. But neither is it a superstition of God “between the gaps” that relegates the believer to passive wishing for a magical or mysterious solution to the world’s problems. Moltmann’s *theologia crucis* understands God as participating in the world, and as exhorting the human creature to participate in kind as the “image of God.” It is, therefore, a starkly critical theology. As with Luther, Moltmann maintains the position of *Crux probat omnia* . . .

. . . and all is found wanting.

d) **Critical Theology and Religious Diversity**

Moltmann’s eschatological theology of hope is inherently a theology of relationship, for it is a hope rooted in God’s relationship to humanity by the incarnation, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is this very centrality that insists upon the ‘far horizons’ of relational existence:

There cannot be any christological concentration unless we simultaneously go to the utmost limits. There can be no knowledge of the centre without the simultaneous knowledge of the furthest horizon for which this centre is the centre. ‘Loss of the centre’ is the dominant characteristic of a church that loses itself in time. ‘Loss of the horizon’ is the mark of a church that seeks to preserve itself into eternity. But centre and horizon will always be lost or won together.  

Those ‘far horizons’ bring the church into what some might find to be a surprising solidarity with protest atheism over and against ecclesial structures, as has been described. They also lead the Christian to relational conclusions that differ significantly from Luther’s, primarily in terms of relationship to the state, to Judaism in particular, and to the broad landscape of religious life.

Moltmann’s departure from Luther is important precisely because of his location in our current context. Moltmann himself provided a partial summation of these points of departure

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as early as 1982, and developed upon them in his book, *On Human Dignity*, in 1984.¹²⁰ In both volumes, Moltmann described that departure in terms of the complex diversity and lack of clarity concerning Luther’s doctrine of the Two Kingdoms.

That doctrine, according to Moltmann, actually describes four kingdoms: the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of the devil, the spiritual regiment and the worldly regiment within the Kingdom of God. The latter represent two kingdoms within the world.¹²¹ Misuse of the doctrine has created a “hands off” relationship between the two realms that has resulted in a loss of the critical-polemical relationship between Church and state, and the designation of faith to the realm of personal and private opinion (making faith world-less and the world faith-less).¹²² This false distinction was able to happen, says Moltmann, because of Luther’s uncharacteristically erroneous starting point. Instead of starting with God’s victory over sin following the crucifixion, Luther began with the “struggle of faith with unfaith, and of God with Satan.”¹²³ Secondly, the two kingdoms theory places the worldly regiment under the law without indicating which law: Israel, natural law, or given law. “Mostly,” said Moltmann, “it is the latter, and with this consequence: these laws . . . are also declared to be the laws of God—*tanquam ordinationes Dei . . .*”¹²⁴ By Moltmann’s own criteria, such a point of view indicates presumption. Criterion for judging the justice of any given law is lost, therefore, and despair prevails.

There are, finally, no criteria for a Christian ethic in the doctrine, but only for recognizing secular ethics. It is, therefore, a “theology of history but it is not a foundation for Christian ethics.”¹²⁵ It sharpens the conscience but does not motivate “world-transforming hope.”¹²⁶

According to Moltmann, then, his departure from the theology of Martin Luther is at least partly explained at the point where Luther ceases to be critical of faithful action in such a way as

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¹²¹ Ibid., 25.
¹²² Ibid., 35-36.
¹²³ Ibid., 38.
¹²⁴ Ibid. (“As if they were God’s ordinances.”)
¹²⁵ Ibid.
¹²⁶ Ibid.
to encourage Christians to faithful action. “As a result,” he writes, “the church seems often to have considered herself as ‘the soul of the nation’ more even than as the ‘body of Christ.’”127 The need for this critical relationship transcending the limits of mere dialogue has been seen in the conditions giving rise to The Barmen Declaration, the escalation of nuclear weaponry, and excommunication of the South African Reformed Churches during the years of Apartheid.128 For Moltmann, authentic Christian faith must retain its critical edge because one who is faithful finds in the crucified Christ a living contradiction to a . . .

. . . God who reveals himself indirectly in the creation and in history. For Jesus died abandoned by God. . . . if this is the point at which faith comes into being, this means first of all that Christian theology cannot be a pure theory of God, but must become a critical theory of God.129

It is, therefore, criticism of all that follows from the word “God”: church, society, social institutions, and the individual. Luther failed to formulate his theology as social criticism, and . . .

. . . did not express the critical and liberating force of the cross, the choosing of the lowly which puts the mighty to shame, nor the polemic of the crucified God against pride and subjection, domination and slavery . . .130

Because Christian faith is founded upon the bleeding Jew, Jesus, the relationship with Judaism is never understood in terms of subordination or supersession. Israel is, instead . . .

Christianity’s original, enduring and final partner in history. If the church loses sight of its orientation to Israel, then its religious, political and earthly relationships will also be turned into pagan ones, indeed into post-Christian and anti-Christian ones.131

It is not going too far to say that Moltmann understands the relationship between Christian faith as being historically and ultimately dependent upon Judaism, in radical discontinuity with Luther. To explain this, Moltmann points out that ‘the kingdom of God’ is the comprehensive Christian horizon of life, the imminence of which is liberation from the godless and inhuman


128 Ibid., 150.

129 Moltmann, Crucified God, 69. (Emphasis added).

130 Ibid., 72.

131 Moltmann, Church in the Power of the Spirit, 135.
relationships of the world. Through the Jew Jesus, the hope of God is made universally visible to those who follow him. But it is still irrevocably and undeniably the hope of Israel, and Christians must know it as such:

That is why ‘the church of the kingdom of God’ asks about Israel’s hope, the hope of the world religions, the hope of human society, and the hope of nature. Christian eschatology is not merely eschatology for Christians; if it is to be the eschatology of the all-embracing kingdom, it must also be unfolded as the eschatology of Israel, of the religions, of human social systems and of nature. 

The authentic Church is, then, the Spirit-led witness to this critical and liberating force. Christ’s witnesses within it stand in a critical relationship to all they encounter: church, social institutions, the religious other, and themselves on the basis of faith in the cross that distinguishes Christian faith even from its own superstitions. That critical relationship is always, however, maintained for another as one for whom Christ has died, and to whom God—who participates always in creation—calls the believer in order that she or he might become that which God hopes. It is a hope for all people, and for creation itself. Those who follow Christ share that hope with a vision given by the suffering God from the cross of the risen Christ. Such a hope empowers the Christian with the love of God that neither overpowers nor absorbs the religious particularity of the one who suffers, but which forms a lens through which we recognize the . . .

. . . charismatic quickening of different religious gifts, powers and potentialities for the kingdom of God and the liberation of men. . . . If it is Christianity’s particular vocation to prepare the messianic era among the nations and to make ready the way for the coming redemption, then no culture must be pushed out and no religion extinguished. On the contrary, all of them can be charismatically absorbed and changed in the power of the Spirit. They will not be ecclesiasticized in the process, nor will they be Christianized either; but they will be given a messianic direction towards the kingdom. . . . Christianity must not suppress these but must fill them with hope.

Yet this service to the neighbour, this appreciation and respect and solicitude toward those of non-Christian religions, must never be confused with mere prosyleitism. Conversion to

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132 Ibid., 134-135.
133 Ibid., 135.
134 Ibid., 38.
135 Ibid., 162-163.
Christianity by force or compulsion is never desired. In this way, Moltmann once again agrees with Luther! Moltmann, however, is much more subtle than to simply ascribe to the vulgar exertion of economic and technological force to conformity of non-Christian peoples that so often merely went hand in hand with cultural imperialism.\textsuperscript{136} At the same time, he recognizes the imperative for action in sympathy that will produce the conditions so that “Christians will enter into living relationship with people of other faiths.”\textsuperscript{137} To this end, he envisions Christianity the world over, but not in its European form. Instead, Moltmann foresees indigenous forms of Christianity that will be relatively powerless, in dialogue with prevalent religions and cultures. It is a vision of faithful living with and for the neighbour akin to a “little leaven in the loaf.” “That is,” he predicts, “a new situation for the Christianity that is scattered all over the world.”\textsuperscript{138} It is a condition of circumstances to which he asks a question, and answers:

\begin{quote}

What task can Christianity have towards the other world religions? It is one goal of mission to awaken faith, to baptize, to found churches and to form a new life under the lordship of Christ. . . . It thinks in terms of quantity and evolves strategies for ‘church growth’. . . . But mission has another goal as well. It lies in the qualitative alteration of life’s atmosphere—of trust, feeling, thinking and acting. We might call this missionary aim to ‘infect’ people, whatever their religion, with the spirit of hope, love and responsibility for the world.

. . . If it is true that Islam produces a fatalistic attitude, then the encounter with Christianity brings about the discovery that the world can be changed and that people have a responsibility for changing it. If it is true that many religions have social indifference, then the presence of Christians makes them recognize social responsibility and the activities appropriate to it.\textsuperscript{139}

Moltmann’s theologia crucis, which is really an eschatologia crucis, serves as an example of how a theology of the cross exhorts, empowers and encourages an open and appreciative attitude to people of other religions.\textsuperscript{140} Moltmann provides a radically new starting point that never assumes the positive nature of any religion \textit{a priori}, but which anticipates the
\end{quote}

\begin{footnotes}

\item\textsuperscript{136} Ibid., 150-151.
\item\textsuperscript{137} Ibid., 151.
\item\textsuperscript{138} Ibid., 152.
\item\textsuperscript{139} Ibid., 152, 158.
\item\textsuperscript{140} Please refer to page 19, “Goals of the Thesis.” (v).
\end{footnotes}
interfaith encounter as a Christian's call to serve the suffering needs of others in sympatheia to the pathos of God, known in Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

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Both Karl Barth and Jürgen Moltmann demonstrate the ongoing, creative and enlivening continuation of theologia crucis in our present day. The work of these two theologians, as well as many others, continues to produce dialogue of depth and profound creativity within Christian theology, in relationship with the secular world, and within the larger inter-religious context. That dialogue and those relationships are never without differences, never without criticism, and never without the proclamation of hope for all human creatures and for creation itself, as made manifest by God who has communicated Godself in suffering.

From these two examples we may return to the terms of reference for a theology of the cross at the end of Chapter III, and add two more as traits of a critical theology of religion:

vi) A theology of the cross develops in continuity with the faith of Israel;

vii) A theology of the cross possesses the quality of universal intent.\textsuperscript{141}

By this last point the theologian of the cross asserts that what is said about God is not only true for her or himself, but for everyone: not as an argument to be won, but as a faith to be lived. This aspect is particularly important as we turn to the subject of the next chapter.

Theologia crucis is a paradoxical affirmation of God's wholly sufficient self-sacrifice that frees the world from any further sacrifice. We therefore begin to describe an 'inclusivistic

\textsuperscript{141} I leave this term unqualified, but realize that my use of it depends upon the description found in Michael Polanyi's Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-critical Philosophy, (London: Rutledge and Keegan Paul Ltd., 1958). Cf. e.g. 65: "Intellectual commitment is a responsible decision, in submission to the compelling claims of what in good conscience I conceive to be true. It is an act of hope, striving to fulfil an obligation within a personal situation for which I am not responsible and which therefore determines my calling. This hope and this obligation are expressed in the universal intent of personal knowledge." (emphasis mine). Cf. also Wilfred Cantwell Smith re. "Humane Knowledge," in Towards a World Theology: Faith and the comparative History of Religion, (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1981), 56-80; and Lessie Newbigin, Proper Confidence: Faith, Doubt & Certainty in Christian Discipleship, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 43.
theology of the cross that can help us perceive, by critical application of the *theologia crucis*,
the value of religious expression beyond the church. It may well liberate the Christian to perceive
the possibilities of the presence of the Holy Spirit beyond the confines of the confessing church.
and the wholly biblical perception of the Adversary within the church. That liberation includes
freedom from the need to oppose or negate any religious system in which the Holy Spirit may be
discerned, and proclaims Christian faith as more than mere opinion or personal values. *Theologia
crucis* declares the ontological necessity that the church of Christ proclaims the Gospel of Christ
(Mt.28:18-20). A silent church, even one that whispers, is not the church at all. But according
to the cross of the risen Christ, that very proclamation must always be of God’s work in the
world, and not the church or particular beliefs. It is, in fact, a great commission that compels one
with faith to seek discernment of the life of God in the power of the Holy Spirit that dwells
among all people, and which may be seen in the life of non-Christians and their religious
activity. God, revealed in Christ’s crucifixion, rejects the possibility that a follower of Christ can
ever proclaim himself or have power over another, and still be faithfully Christian.
Simultaneously, that same revelation opens the eyes of the Christian to see the ‘Spirit of Life’
avive in religious and secular enterprises that provide the conditions for life in relationship and
mutual service. The Triune God, eternally inter-related in Godself without absorption or
ontological subordination, is in loving relationship with the world in all its diversity.

As humanity is the image of God, we are given to understand that there is an ontological
necessity for distinction in the world that abhors absorption of others, conformity to self-
gratifying egocentric standards, and the annihilation of those who differ from the dominant and

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142 Karl Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline*, (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1958), 146: “... this group is sent out: Go and preach the Gospel."
powerful. In accordance with the solidarity of suffering revealed in that same cross, the Christian is led by the Spirit to regard the ‘religious other’ as one for whom Christ died, for “in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us.” (2 Cor. 5:19)

The assertion of Christian faith as theologia crucis is, therefore, an approach to religious plurality that insists upon the distinction and value of religious expression beyond the Christian church, for while Christ rules, Christians serve. It is always a critical faith that demands much of the faithful, but it is a criticism always for the sake of promoting the conditions of life. And it is first self-critical, always seeking to ferret out religious affirmation that seeks power over, and not for, the one who suffers. By virtue of the cross, God’s presence is recognized not within a particular belief system or ecclesial construct, but as hidden in the “God forsaken space” of suffering without regard for the religious conviction of one who suffers. Where there is suffering, God resides. That is pathos. What remains is not the assertion of dominance, or of absorption or homogenization by the Christian, but of sympatheia—active response by one who is in the grip of God’s grace. This is a ‘God’s eye’ anthropotropical view of the world according to a theologia crucis of religion.

In the final chapter of this thesis I shall describe aspects of our current theological context. The question to which we turn is this: How should Christians value and relate to the ‘religious other’ in the spirit of theologia crucis? I shall presently discuss religious pluralism, an approach that theologians of the cross will readily recognize as a theologiae glorae.
In this chapter I will examine selected propositions of ‘pluralism’ according to the theology of the cross and explore the ideas of two major pluralist theologians. It is important, however, to first consider the contextual conditions within which those propositions are set. In this way, the effectiveness of pluralists’ positions can be determined against their own standards.

The plurality of religions is self-evident in our current context. Much has been written already about the multi-religious character of our society, which needs no repetition here. What is not so self-evident is that which constitutes plurality in religion. For this reason, a significant portion of the introductory section of this thesis delineated a “working definition of religion,” and concluded that ‘religion’ is that “which has final authority for a believer or a society;” and included, “ideologies as well as what are usually called religions.” I contend that pluralist theology assumes and operates with a theology of religion that fails to recognize, as religion, a great deal of ‘religious’ activity. That failure, which is due to a lack of critical (Rosenzweig would say “judgemental”) dynamic, results in an inability to stand against powers and principalities as religious entities. A concept of religion that does not include the demonic and the toxic, or which is unable to discern and unmask toxic forms of religiosity, lacks the critical cutting edge that is so crucially important in our current global context. In addition, it leaves questions of religious identity and the history and meaning of doctrine to those whose apocalyptic millenarianism masks a self-serving tribalism that is . . .

. . . politicized through ‘the moral majority’ of Jerry Falwell and others, who since the time of Ronald Reagan have linked this apocalyptic fundamentalism with the political right in the USA, and with the preparation for a nuclear Armageddon.1

Any discussion of pluralism must include the presence of oppressive movements and individuals calling themselves ‘Christian.’ It must be prepared to speak seriously, critically, and prophetically; to do otherwise is to abandon the Church to Judas and Caiaphas.

1 Moltmann, The Coming of God, 159.
I begin with a brief detour, then, into the power politics of Christian religiosity that has significant influence in the present day, and with toxic manifestations arising from them. This detour will help us to clarify our criticism of pluralism through *theologia crucis*.

1) **THE 'RELIGIOUS RIGHT' AND TOXIC RELIGION**

A definition of the so-called ‘religious right’ is elusive at best. This socio-political/religious phenomenon is vastly multi-faceted, ranging from the political expression of the ‘pro-life and pro-family’ agenda\(^2\) to the armed enclave siege-mentality manifested throughout North America, to the toxic ‘personal’ religiosity that serves to support paradigms of oppression and violence. This broad spectrum approach to political and contextual theology often takes on a mode of Christian expression that makes broad claims to truth regarding family values, the nature of society, and the work and worship of the Church.\(^3\)

To speak of political conservatism and Christian orthodoxy in the same breath has become a conventional assumption in some circles. But they are far from synonymous terms of reference, and we should not neglect the contributions that may come from that end of the theological spectrum. Where they are closely associated, however, some attempt at description is necessary. We therefore turn our attention to explore and describe this extraordinary linkage.

A definition of Jerry Falwell’s ‘Moral Majority’ by Gabriel Fackre might suffice as a starting point for this investigation:

\[
\text{... they seek to register Christian voters, alter science textbooks in public schools, oppose ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment to the U.S. Constitution and liberalized access to abortion, support the development of nuclear power and the restoration of capital punishment, and map events in the contemporary Middle East against an apocalyptic reading of biblical prophecies.}
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\(^3\) Hunsinger, *Disruptive Grace*. 164: “The lines are being drawn in our culture for a new intellectual cold war, and this cold war will have a theological front.”
we may confidently place the Religious Right on a \textit{political} spectrum because it has
emerged on the American scene in terms of the political causes it espouses. Yet its
institutional forms, motivation, and intellectual framework make it a religious entity:
hence the qualifier "Religious."\footnote{Gabriel Fackre, \textit{The Religious Right and Christian Faith}, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.,
1982), ix and 1, respectively.}

While not all propositions of the religious right are demonic or power-centered, I am concerned
with addressing forms of Christian religious expression described by Morrow as "toxic":

\begin{quote}
The over-controlling monotheism of perfectionist retribution theology is shown to
deprive suffering persons of their dignity and hope for life. As a shaming belief system, it
demands that all suffering be seen as divinely caused and thereby betrays the integrity of
\footnote{Ibid.. 265-266}}
\end{quote}

Morrow is concerned with the toxic manifestations of religiosity in which "the party with more
power over controls the behaviour and responses of the party with less power, usually with long-
term, damaging psychological effects."\footnote{Ibid., 265-266} Examples of this kind of religiosity can be found, for
instance, in guidebooks such as James Rutz's \textit{The Open Church}. Rutz provides some good
advice on developing and maintaining church community in small neighbourhood house-
congregations modeled after a biblical understanding of the congregation. But he also
subordinates the role of women within the congregation and defines mission in terms of
proselytism among Jews.\footnote{James H. Rutz, \textit{The Open Church: How to Bring Back the Exciting Life of the First Century Church}, (Auburn: Seedsowers, 1992).}

The subordination of other persons and traditions implies their
incompletion, and constitutes an assault that leaves the door open to racism and race hatred,
exploitation, misogyny, and violence. The paradigm Morrow describes is thus at odds with the
paradigm of prophetic anthropotropism, in which faithful pressure and proclamation is brought
to bear on persons or systems \textit{with} power, often from a position of relative powerlessness.

Morrow concentrates upon family systems, a focus which is by no means irrelevant to this thesis.
However, my concentration here is upon the belief systems of the religious right.
a) **Ralph Reed’s Christian Coalition**

The extent and influence of the religious right cannot be accurately measured, in part because it is not a monolithic force. That it exists and has tremendous influence is clear from even a cursory glance at the evidence. For instance, the Christian Coalition in the United States is an organization presided over by self-declared fundamentalist Pat Robertson. It boasted 1.7 million members in over 2,000 chapters across the United States in 1996. These numbers are all the more impressive when compared to 1989, when a rally of the Christian Coalition drew only six hundred supporters from a nation-wide membership of less than five thousand. According to a Campaigns and Elections survey taken in 1994, the radical religious right asserted what was described as “dominant strength” in eighteen state Republican parties with a combined electoral college vote of 239, and demonstrated “substantial” influence in 13 other states.

The Coalition is drawn from a wide-based demographic in the United States. In 1979, Jeremy Rifkin reported that there were 45 million ‘evangelical’ Christians in the United States, and that one in three Americans claimed to have been ‘born again.’ Nearly 20% of the viewing public are claimed by a growing number of evangelical broadcasting stations, and 150 million people are part of the expanding Christian radio audience served by more that 1300 stations. All of this is part of the “selling of Jesus” with the view that...

... the Christian gospel is incompatible with life in this world: either believers must make the world over ... or else they must create within it pockets of true belief which insulate believers against the temptations of the world. The latter thrust has led to the production, not only of such things as the ‘Christian Business Directory’ and the ‘Christian Yellow Pages,’ with their blatantly racist biases, but of whole complexes of living which ensure that believers can conduct most of their lives without contaminating contact with secular society.

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8 Reed, *Active Faith*, 3.
The movement known as the religious right was potently symbolized in the shift taken by former presidential hopeful Bob Dole. Dole moved from a platform espousing federal programs for the disabled, support for the renewal of the voting Rights Act in 1982, and the creation of social programs to alleviate child poverty, to one supporting the repeal of affirmative action laws and abandoning child poverty measures, and the repeal of equal rights measures for lesbians and gays. The shift was made after Dole named Judy Haynes as his deputy political director. Haynes was formerly executive director of the Christian Coalition.¹²

This is not meant to describe the movement as demonic, but to affirm the presence, and influence, of a multi-faceted entity identifying itself as the Christian religious right. Within that movement, there exists a triumphalistic self-understanding that cannot be missed in terms of its own willingness to assume authority on the basis of numeric supremacy and proximity to Christ.

Consider the exultant words of Christian Coalition leader Ralph Reed:

No longer a bipolar world dominated by Republicans and Democrats, America has become a fragmented, fractious republic of what James Madison called “factions” . . . The most effective among these citizen efforts is an emerging coalition of evangelicals, Greek Orthodox, and traditionalist Roman Catholics. Their goal: to limit government, reinvigorate the family, and restore the culture’s Judeo-Christian principles. Their hierarchy of loyalties is uncompromisingly simple. They are people of faith first, Americans second, and Republicans or Democrats third. And they are proving yet again that man does not live by bread alone. The real battle for the soul of our nation is not fought primarily over the gross national product and the prime interest rate, but over virtues, values, and the culture.¹³

Early in the resurgence of the Christian religious right in America, the philosopher Kai Nielson attacked the movement as consisting of people who . . .

. . . look on themselves as the truest Americans . . . go in for a virulent anti-communism, regard themselves as a chosen people with a mission in life, confuse the Christian faith with the American flag, and “condone social exploitation as a necessary price of ‘economic freedom’.”¹⁴

¹² Rifkin, The Emerging Order, 105.
¹³ Reed, Active Faith, 8.
Nielson's attack is, at times, far too virulent to be helpful, especially when he describes someone as moderate as Billy Graham as engaging in "this very neanderthal religion, with its attendant neanderthal political theology." The point is well made, however: we find within the statements of this movement an ontological link between one who has faith in God (without, as I will demonstrate, the necessity of faith in Christ), and the triumphalistic presumption of one's own particular ethnic, national, or personal identity. At its best, the approach becomes a proclamation and celebration of one's own beliefs, ideals and history, rather than of the person and work of Christ. For instance, during the 1992 presidential primaries, Pat Buchanan proclaimed his vision of America as a "Christian culture". He rejected cultural pluralism, and emphasized "America first" as part of his "new world order." While describing himself as a "traditional Roman Catholic," Buchanan continued to press his agenda, even after coming under attack for conflicting with the teachings of the post-Vatican II church and the social encyclicals of Pope John Paul II. The fact that his opinions did not become a major issue as being in contradiction to the Roman Catholic Church is attributable more to Buchanan's failure to win a state primary against George Bush than to any judgement on the part of church officials.

Is this tendency toward personal triumph masked in the language of traditional Christian faith a trait of the Christian religious right? It is impossible to answer without prejudice, but one need only read Ralph Reed's book, Active Faith, to provoke the question.

Reed, the Executive Director of the Christian Coalition, holds a Ph.D. in American History and has been actively involved in politics as an identifiable 'conservative' since high school. Always a Christian, Reed recognized that "the allure of fame and power could not satisfy [a need for] ... a transcendent meaning" in his life. In 1983, at the age of 22, he made a "faith commitment." Almost with the same breath, he states that "my heart would be softened and my political style changed by a faith experience," but also that his religious beliefs never changed his

15 Ibid., 68.
17 Ibid., 159.
views on the issues "because my political philosophy was already well developed." Transcendence, within this view of political theology, does not include the transformation of one's own political preconceptions. In his book Reed refers constantly to faith, religion, being Christian, and Christian "values." He refutes charges of anti-Semitism by avowing pro-Zionism, and charges of racism with reference to the influence of Martin Luther King's eight mandates on his own faith journey. He rarely, and obliquely, refers to Christ. What holds steady for Reed are the values of "less government, lower taxes, tougher laws against crime and drugs, and policies to strengthen the family." These terms of reference are left largely undefined, and we may well wonder if these are normatively defined by the white middle class.

While it is undoubtedly true that Reed is personally "committed to Christ," it is obvious that his methods are not materially bound to the person and work of Jesus Christ. The point Luther made against nominalism and Erasmus could be equally applied to the Christian Coalition in particular, and the Christian religious right in general: the entire discussion takes place without reference to the incarnation and death of Christ.

b) David Duke's 'Theology of Rage'

'Right wing' political theology takes its more toxic form in the theology of rage promulgated by David Duke, a Republican representative to the Louisiana State Legislature. In his early twenties Duke graduated from Louisiana State University with a BA in History. That same year, he became the National Director of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan. He resigned in 1978, citing the inability of the press and public to differentiate between his group and "other" Klan organizations. He subsequently formed a white civil rights organization called the National Association for the Advancement of White People (NAAWP). He resigned from that organization as well, and is no longer associated with the NAAWP since his election to the House of Representatives in Louisiana. He is, however, the president of the National

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18 Reed, *Active Faith*, 23
19 Ibid.
Organization for European American Rights (NOFEAR). Although Duke has always been involved in legitimate political activity, his public work has been fueled by his encouragement of rage over the mythical degradation of the “white European” in American society in the wake of the advancement of black Americans through the civil rights movement.

Duke’s autobiography includes a chapter on his faith journey, describing the theological justification for his views on race and ethnic separation and “demonstrating” that God’s creation of racial difference implies segregation, each race to its own separate nation. He abhors the changes that have taken place in the Christian church since the 1960s, describing in nostalgic rhapsody the days of his childhood when churches in the South were segregated and “even the Catholic church had . . . separate seating during Mass for Whites and Blacks.” From the first paragraph, Duke’s theology emphasizes personal security, choice and individualism:

From the earliest times that I can remember, I was a believing Christian. My father is a devout Christian who taught me the salvation that Jesus Christ offers and about His lessons for living. Father was never dogmatic about his faith, and over the years he led my family to different churches without worrying about the denomination . . . The only important consideration for Father was the quality of the minister and the congregation.

My experience of being a renewed Christian had a profound impact not only on my Christian beliefs, but also on my secular ones, for it seemed I saw everything in a fresh light. When a man has confidence in his own beliefs, he is unafraid to joust with contrary opinions. Being ‘saved’ gave me a sense of security . . . The feeling of being ‘right with God and the world’ gave me freedom to explore challenging ideas. It was only a few months after my baptism that I read Race and Reason, the book that began my intellectual journey toward racial understanding.

We are therefore given to understand that Christian faith for Duke and his followers constitutes the historical, and therefore ‘right’ religion, of the numerically and economically dominant race with which they identify. It is clearly a ‘religion of affirmation’ supporting socio-political dominance over others.

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21 Ibid., 1.
22 Ibid.
c) **Divergence in the Christian Religious Right**

Reed and the Christian Coalition, and David Duke, demonstrate similarities even as they disavow one another. There is, at the very least, an assumption of some form of 'survival of the fittest' in which people do their best in a rather friendly, Darwinian way. In return, personal well-being is guaranteed as a result of winning God's favour. For vast numbers of people, however, the corollary to this view of cosmic reciprocity is poverty, disillusionment and despair, the just punishment for losing out in the competitive stakes. In neither case is Jesus Christ necessary to the belief structure, although in a formal sense reference to Christ is very important. Christ is not followed, but used to emphasize a point, or gain a following. Christ is not central, nor even necessary for the point being made. What is central is one's own nation, history, tradition and ideology, which are literally synonymous with God's intent. All others are subordinate.

Significantly, both adopt a cautious relativism, implying that the paths of others might be right for them in terms of their own 'nation'. This is illustrated by the fact that Reed protests against charges that the Christian Coalition is anti-Semitic because it supports Zionism i.e. the state of Israel, as if Israel is all that defines being a Jew. Duke concurrently supports "extreme Jewish nationalism and ethnocentrism in Israel and in Jewish communities around the world." "

Reed refers critically to Duke and the kind of Christian right he represents as "our white man's burden, a ball and chain of painful history that remains firmly shackled to our legs." Indeed, there is much found in Reed's assertions that significantly differentiates his approach from the racist politics of Reed's brand of fascist Christianism. But the theological point remains that both interpret God's will in terms of their own history, nation and ideology, and God's salvation in terms of what George Rawlyk described as "Manichean evangelicalism." Both practice, at bottom, a religion of the self: *theologiae gloriae*, a theology glorifying the self while

23 Reed, *Active Faith*, e.g. 209
25 Reed, *Active Faith*, 69.
pointing at the dissimilarity of others as their insufficiency, their 'sin.' Indeed, a brief examination indicates a woefully inadequate notion of sin, for their vision is always in terms of the sin of another. They claim God's grace and withhold it from others, but do not acknowledge their solidarity with all humanity as those whom God redeems *simul justus et peccator*.

d) The Canadian Expression: Cultural Conservatism as the Religious Norm

The influence and effect of the religious right in Canada is even more difficult to measure. In view of the Christian evangelical convictions of party founder Preston Manning, and his newly elected successor Stockwell Day, some herald the rise of the Conservative Alliance Party (formerly the Reform Party of Canada), as a new voice for Christian conservatism. There seems little cause for concern at this time: it is estimated that less than 10% of the voting population in Canada ascribe to the principles of the religious right.\(^{27}\) The rise of this particular party is accompanied by the increased power of 'conservative' parties at all levels of government, and the institution of neo-conservative policies in several provinces and by the federal government. This political development corresponds with a 14% to 29% increase in various so-called evangelical churches, including Pentecostalism in Canada between 1981 and 1991, and with the subsequent rise of conservative Christian groups such as Promise Keepers.

George Rawlyk noted that between 1988 and 1994, "non-Evangelical" Protestant seminaries in Canada experienced a 26% increase in full-time equivalent registrations, concurrent with a 10% decrease in students preparing for ordination through the Masters of Divinity program. Enrolment in "evangelical" seminaries during the same period remained almost the same for Masters of Divinity students preparing for ordination, with a 32% increase in overall enrolment. Further, some estimates indicate that as many as 25% of those enrolled in non-evangelical seminaries are self-proclaimed "evangelicals."\(^{28}\) There is no way of proving the material connection between the trends of 'conservative' Christianity and conservative politics and

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economics, except by correlation. It is, however, apparent that there is an increase in the number of people who consider themselves to be ‘evangelical’ Christians with sufficient seriousness to invest time and money in theological education for reasons of personal growth, at a time when support for conservative political and economic policy is growing.

The effect and influence of these ‘conservative’ trends upon social mores is perhaps more apparent in events such as one that recently unfolded in the Ontario riding of Simcoe North. The incident in question arose when Henry Freitag, a resident of Penetanguishene, Ontario, took his municipality to court because he objected to the recitation of the Lord’s Prayer to open municipal council meetings. As a non-Christian, Mr. Freitag claimed that the recitation infringed upon his right to freedom of conscience and religion according to the Ontario Charter of Rights and Freedoms. His lawsuit was initially unsuccessful, but in September of 1999 the Court of Appeal for Ontario overturned that ruling. In his statement, J.A. Feldman ruled that “the practice of the Town is unconstitutional” and enjoined the Town Council from continuing to “require or permit the Lord’s Prayer to be recited by members of Council at the commencement of its meetings.”

The ruling did not forbid prayer or Christian prayer, and in fact made recommendations for alternatives. The ruling forbade the exclusive and required use of the Lord’s Prayer in the public meetings of a particular municipal council. Public reaction was widespread, hyperbolic and tempestuous, and included the initiative of municipalities to eradicate the use of the Lord’s Prayer prior to any lawsuits being initiated. Both nominal and active Christians wrote hundreds of letters to the local papers decrying the Court of Appeal decision.

Progressive Conservative MPP Garfield Dunlop, a non-attending member of The United Church of Canada, developed a petition calling for the entrenchment of the Lord’s Prayer as part of the opening ceremonies of the Ontario Legislative Assembly. Although the Court of Appeal ruling is not effective as to the present practice within the Assembly, and there has been no
suggestion that the practice should be changed, Dunlop’s petition garnered 6,600 signatures.\(^{36}\)

The majority of Christian clergy in his riding (primarily Baptist, Anglican, and Reformed tradition churches) and their congregations, supported the petition in spite of the fact that the only reasons given were pride in the particular heritage of the Anglo-Saxon majority. When challenged as to this presumption, Dunlop claimed that his position is not based upon Christian faith but upon the history of the Legislature and Lord Simcoe’s institution of the traditional opening. The Lord’s prayer becomes ‘Lord Simcoe’s prayer,’ and is indistinguishable from the uncritical celebration of the self and particular cultural groups. What seems at first to be in defense of Christian faith is actually atheistic in that it assumes the Christian cause with no material—or even formal—relationship to the God of Jesus Christ. God, Jesus Christ, and even the church are disposed. God is unnecessary for prayer in this formulation. That a nominal Christian takes this position is unremarkable. That Christians supported the petition, including a majority of clergy, is extraordinary given that it is expressly atheistic; it makes propositions about the necessity of a devotional act without reference to God to whom it expresses devotion. Devotion is made, rather, to a select cultural heritage, history, and the numerical supremacy.

The government that considers itself a bastion of ‘traditional values’ has made similarly atheistic references to the church as a social phenomenon whose proper function is to support the state. The church is thus deemed to have a purpose defined by those holding secular power, and the Premier of Ontario can co-opt churches into involving one out of three citizens in gambling to ‘support’ charities while simultaneously chiding non-compliant denominations for refusing involvement in compulsory ‘workfare’ and—if we accept his logic—letting down the poor.\(^{31}\)

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These occurrences demonstrate a form of secular Pelagianism divorced entirely from any relationship to Christian faith. The support that Dunlop's petition and statements by civic leaders have received indicates a 'theology of glory' predominant within a culture in which individuals have become both mythically and psychologically their own saviours. Everyone is to 'pull themselves up by their own bootstraps' in order to reach a status and identity defined by a history of white Anglo-Saxon Protestantism. The church, by state order, is to support those views. Where there is no need of God to save us, there is no need of Christ. Yet those who identify themselves as 'conservative', even 'orthodox' Christians ironically endorse such positions where a particular socio-political ideology defines faith and faithful action for the Body of Christ.

The Christian religious right, then, represents an influential segment of North American society, and is a potent political and social presence. It seeks to preserve and enhance the power and influence of a dominant segment of society that possesses a particular cultural identity and political agenda. It is a religious movement that assumes its own identity as the triumphant crown of God's will for society, and contrasts sharply with the self-critical anthropotropical patterns of prophetic biblical faith. Its adherents suffer simultaneously from the sin of presumption and despair, proclaiming that theirs is the best of all possible worlds and cannot be saved without them. It is a movement that articulates a doctrine of sin directed at some cultural, economic, or religious 'other.' This approach hints at a doctrine of 'no salvation outside the church', with the 'church' defined as those who belong to their own identity group, or who are at least in agreement with their ideological point of view. Ethically, this results in a toxic religiosity excluding those outside narrowly defined boundaries. This religiosity manifests itself by treating others as subordinate or inferior, as those who have not been saved, as if Christ had not died for 'them'. All of this may be characterized as a particularly toxic form of religious 'Christian' exclusivism. It is part of the pluralistic landscape of this culture, and no theology of religion can be comprehensive and cogent unless it expressly takes account of such manifestations.
Contrasting theological movements that attempt to provide meaningful correctives and alternatives to their exclusiveness oppose the Christian religious right and its historic predecessors in proselitistic missionism. The approach called ‘pluralism’ is probably first among them. While pluralism is not simply a reaction to the Christian right, its adherents consider it to be a viable and ethical corrective to exclusivism in all forms. We must ask, though, if pluralism does provide a corrective or even an alternative to the movement of the Christian religious right.

I contend that theological pluralism in particular fails to provide a cogent argument against the triumphalistic theologies of the Christian religious right. Surprisingly, that failure is due as much to deep-seated similarities as it is to the relative merits of their argument.

2) RELIGIOUS PLURALISM AS THEOLOGY OF GLORY

Pluralism, briefly discussed in the Introduction, has been described as a “move away from insistence on the superiority or finality of Christ and Christianity toward a recognition of the independent validity of other ways.”33 Pluralism has had a startling influence upon common theological understanding, as can be seen in various study documents of, for instance. The United Church of Canada. Lesslie Newbigin even went so far as to say that pluralism now represents “contemporary orthodoxy” in current Christian discourse.34

a) Three Bridges

In defining a pluralist theology of religion, pluralists are fairly unified in praise of the general approach, if not in actual methodology. Raimundo Pannikkar and John Hick both called the enterprise a “Copernican Revolution” in theology.35 In The Myth of Christian Uniqueness, co-editors Hick and Knitter suggest that their enterprise is analogous to the crossing of a “theological Rubicon,” an enterprise for which three “bridges” are built.

The first of these is the "Historico-Cultural Bridge," which is built upon an awareness of the "limitation of all knowledge and religious beliefs, and the difficulty, if not impossibility, of judging the truth claims of another culture or religion on the basis of one's own."³⁵

The second bridge, according to this typology, is the "Theologico-Mystical Bridge." This approach is based upon the proposition that the infinity and ineffability of "Ultimate Reality" is beyond the grasp of any one tradition. It is therefore impossible for any one tradition to possess the one or ultimate truth. "Mystery" is, then, a common link between religions.³⁶

The third is the "Technico-Practical Bridge." The main impetus for this approach comes from a confrontation with suffering and the call for justice. This is a primary factor in pluralist self-definition. Adherents claim a praxis orientation based upon common experience and the imperative for standing against and overcoming the imposition of suffering in the world. This starting point mitigates against views of Christian uniqueness or the salvific primacy of Christ.³⁷

While pluralism is much broader and more diverse than is provided for in this description, it is apparent that pluralism:

i) rejects the ("Ptolemaic") particularist centricity of any single culture, world view or religion, supporting a broad world-view that embraces people of all faiths and ideologies; it is a crossing of the "theological Rubicon" against the dominant forces of official opinion:

ii) maintains that no religion can make universal truth claims, nor judge another on the basis of its own:

iii) maintains that "Ultimate Reality" is beyond the grasp of any one tradition;

iv) maintains that universal well-being is the primary concern of Christian faith.

Having provided a general outline of the pluralist approach, it is possible to describe the specific propositions of two pluralist scholars: Wilfred Cantwell Smith and Paul Knitter.

³⁵ Ibid., ix.
³⁶ Ibid., x-xi
b) Wilfred Cantwell Smith

This Canadian Islamic scholar described himself as an historian who was also a theologian. His life’s work was dedicated to establishing the foundations for a theology of world religion, an endeavour in which he was expressly ‘theocentric.’ 18 Yet he repeatedly described the conditions and perceptions related to his concept of a theology of world religions in christological terms with occasional shadings of a theologia crucis. 39 Further, Smith emphasized the personal dimensions of faith critically arguing that an understanding of ‘faith’ is only possible for someone who is authentically participating in the activity under investigation. Smith then described his own faith in terms of Jesus Christ. 40 This is most apparent with regard to his discussions of soteriology. Soteriology is a primary theme for Smith, who provides a basis for what may be described as “the principle of soteriological equality of all faiths” in his work. 41

As soteriology is also a major theme in subsequent pluralist thought, it is evident that Smith’s work in this area has been highly influential in those developments. I will therefore outline Smith’s soteriology as his attempt to stand in opposition to any doctrine, stated or implied, of extra ecclesiam nulla salus. As such, Smith’s soteriology is also an attempt to address the exclusivism of what he called “Christian idolatry,” corresponding to propositions of the Christian religious right.

“Idolatry,” by definition, in its literal usage denigrates one’s neighbour by leaving out the transcendence of his or her position. . . .

For Christians to think that Christianity is true, or final, or salvific, is a form of idolatry. For Christians to imagine that God has constructed Christianity, or the Church, or the like, rather than that He/She/It has inspired us to construct it . . . that is idolatry. 42

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39 Wilfred Cantwell Smith. The Faith of Other Men, (New York: New American Library. 1963), cf. e.g. 83f., which emphasizes a Christian moral imperative for dialogue.
40 Cf. e.g. Wilfred Cantwell Smith, Questions of Religious Truth, (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons. 1962). 122; Towards a World Theology, 170-1.
In doing so, Smith offered a distinction between faith and belief, proposed a christological epistemology, and then articulated an ethical soteriology of "transcendence."

i) Faith and Belief

Smith was "a very critical pupil in the school of common essence and perhaps would not even want to be on its roster."43 His conceptual perspective may be counted among those such as Schleiermacher's "feeling of absolute dependence"44, Rudolph Otto's "numinous"45, Toynbee's distillation of common faith experience from beliefs and practices, Ernst Troeltsh's "essential counsels and truths" and "nonessential practices and propositions"46, and, to a lesser extent, David Tracy's "common human experience."47 Of these, Smith's proposals may bear the greatest resemblance to those of Arnold Toynbee (1889-1975), who proposed that all religions contain a common essence that can be profitably explored only when faith and belief are differentiated.

Smith, like Toynbee, engaged the subject of the world religions in a similar comparative and historical fashion. He gave "common essence" the name "faith," while "nonessential practices and propositions" come under the heading of "belief."48

This distinction is at the heart of all that Smith has to say about religious experience and expression. To Smith, 'faith' in all of its varieties is the essential common human experience. Faith cuts across religious, cultural and temporal lines:

... many persons in modern times have found, once they have penetrated beyond the outward patterns to the quality of personal life that those patterns nourish, that there is less difference between the faith of Christians and that of Muslims and of Hindus than there is among the formulae and symbols by which that faith is visibly expressed. Secondly, they have found that the faith of a particular Christian may, once the outward wrappings are set aside, differ from the faith of a Muslim or a Hindu less than it differs

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43 Knitter, No Other Name?, 44.
48 Arnold Toynbee, *Christianity Among the Religions of the World*, (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1957). A major difference, of course, is that Smith never suggests as Toynbee does that "Christians today can face the future with confidence if they face it with charity and humility." (111)
from the faith of another Christian, next door or in a different denomination or a different century.49

Diversity in religious belief, which may be even greater than one might imagine, is credited to the same influences that create the diversity of cultures: history, economics, language, etc.

"Belief" in all of its manifestations is important, but faith is . . .

. . . deeper, richer, more personal. It is engendered and sustained by a religious tradition, in some cases and to some degree by its doctrines; but it is a quality of the person, not of the system. It is an orientation of the personality, to oneself, to one’s neighbour, to the universe; a total response; a way of seeing whatever one sees and of handling whatever one handles; a capacity to live at a more than mundane level; to see, to feel, to act in terms of, a transcendent dimension. . . . Faith, then, is a quality of human living.50

To Smith, faith is a primary experience, a personal response to reality, the source of energy and inspiration, devotion, vision, resolution, and the capacity to survive disappointment. Faith is a response to transcendence. Faith is not religion, nor is it belief, which . . .

. . . is the holding of certain ideas. Some might see it as the intellect’s translation (even reduction?) of transcendence into ostensible terms . . . To believe religiously—truly to believe—it has often been held, especially by recent Christians, is to believe with faith . . . we use the term strictly for an activity of the mind. (It is possible, therefore, to believe without faith).41

Smith therefore understood “belief,” defined etymologically as “to hold dear,” as a subordinate, secondary activity to faith. To “believe” involves the self-conscious holding of ideas based on cultural pre-suppositions. Belief is a deficient ‘knowing’ that lacks certitude: one may believe something which one also doubts. One may choose to believe. To profess ‘belief’ does not even require the experience of faith, only the acknowledgement of its possibility. To Smith, this is the critical failure of the Christian church:

. . . the role of belief has been quite major, at times decisive. Doctrine has been a central expression of faith, has seemed often a criterion of it; the community has divided over differences in belief, and has set forth belief as a formal qualification of membership. No

49 Smith, Faith and Belief, 11; Cf. also Towards a World Theology, chapter 7: “One fact, then, is already clear: that men’s faith finds expressions in many forms.” (171).
50 Ibid., Faith and Belief, 12.
51 Ibid.
other religious community on earth has done these things to the same degree, and some have not done them at all.  

His criticism of this peculiarity is unmistakable:

. . . a great modern heresy of the church is the heresy of believing.  

Yet to Smith, the higher mode of faith is based upon the work and example of Jesus Christ.

ii)  
Smith's Implicit Christology

A systematic, categorical and theological exploration of christology was not among Smith's goals. It would be an error, however, to think that a person 'has' a christology only when it is explicitly stated. Smith's christology stands implicitly within his enterprise. While Smith never made Jesus Christ the direct object of his study, he did treat the particular relationship of the Christian to the non-Christian as a relationship governed by the Christian's faith in Christ.

Smith's christological views were extensively investigated in a thesis by Rose Tadsen, in which she pointed out that "Smith's work offers a prolegomenon within which Christological questions could be asked and tentatively answered." While Smith's christology is minimally articulated, it is nonetheless implied in his development of a world theology as . . .

. . . an elucidation that is intelligible and even potentially acceptable to Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists. Smith aims for a theory about God who is God of all the world; one that explains, makes sense, does justice to the faith of all people—faith which occurs also in forms other than Christian.

Smith therefore sought to lay the groundwork for a theology, including within it a christology, which is "more than Christian," a theology that is "Christian plus." Smith therefore emphasized personal faith over corporate adherence and praxis over observance. In so doing, he emphasized two 'classes' of christological discourse: belief in or through Jesus Christ; and statements about Jesus Christ. The latter are propositions of "intellectual belief." It is with reference to the

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52 Ibid., 13-14.
55 Ibid., 163
56 Smith, Towards a World Theology, 112 and 125.
57 Smith, The Faith of Other Men, 94.
58 Ibid. Smith himself makes this distinction, somewhat spuriously, on 59.
former that Smith set the agenda for that portion of his work that might have stood against the triumphantic presumptions that find their expression in the Christian religious right.

In his 1962 address, *The Faith of Other Men*, Smith established the imperative for a new missiology that acknowledged the close connection between traditional Christian belief and Western imperialism as one that has “in fact encouraged Christians to approach other men immorally.” Such an approach, he contended, is in conflict with the freedom to follow Jesus Christ: “Christ has taught us humility, but we have approached them with arrogance.” This stands as the only confessional statement Smith made in this paper, a remarkable omission for a piece written to illustrate the correspondence of faith among peoples of different religious traditions. In a book published soon after, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, Smith makes occasional christological statements but usually voices them in the negative. Jesus was “not interested in Christianity, but in God and man.” Jesus was a “religious reformer” who sought “to reform men’s awareness of their total environment,” and who shattered reified religion “in order that that awareness and those lives may be restored to wholeness.” More positively, Christ is a “personal friend,” communion with whom transcends our existential reality. This relationship with Jesus Christ inspires, perhaps even demands, some form of expression.

Left at this point, it could seem that Smith might just as easily be speaking of any symbol with transcendental transformative meaning held within any religious system. But the nature of the relationship between Christ and faith is essential to understanding whether salvation is a matter of human or divine initiative: does Christ create and support our faith, or does our ‘faith’ create Christ as a symbol of salvation for us? For Smith, the latter seems more the case.

However, in *Questions of Religious Truth* Smith confronted his readers with personal attestations of his faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ may not be the “full revelation of God,” but

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59 Ibid., 130.
60 Smith, *The Faith of Other Men*, 106
61 Ibid., 128.
62 Ibid., 136
63 Ibid., 173.
“He is a revelation of God to me, and has been to many other people”.

Christ is one whom Smith follows, though limpingly. Christ is the source of reassurance in the face of great fear... for Christ has shown me... that God will Himself suffer rather than let me go.

Yet while these statements hint at a christocentric conviction implicit within his overall work, further investigation indicates that they may be more a matter of rhetoric than of substance. In Belief and History, Smith continued his exposition of ‘faith’ as the central religious category, first enunciated in The Meaning and End of Religion. None of his statements affirm an objective reality of revelation in Jesus Christ, save one that indicates that Christ has no significance or power except for that which is attributed to him by those who confess him:

... the Jesus of History is a rather shadowy figure; the Christ of faith has been historically real.

... it is the Christ figure of continuing faith in the on-going life of the Church that has in actual historical fact been primarily significant, operative, consequential.

While Smith maintains this rather relativistic position in his 1981 opus, Towards a World Theology, we also find this startlingly discordant note:

... cosmic salvation too is the same for an African Tribesman and for a Taoist and for a Muslim as it is for me, or for any Christian.

And if a fellow Christian ask me how I know that, how can I be so sure, my answer is really quite simple, although perhaps too naively Christian. I know the empirical dimension from my historical studies (and my friendships), and I know the theological dimension because of what I know of God; by what I find revealed to me of Him in Christ. The God whom Christ reveals is a God of mercy and love, who reaches out after all men and women everywhere in compassion and yearning: who delights in a sinner’s repentance, who delights to save... If St Paul or anybody else thought or thinks that only Christians can be saved, St Paul was wrong. It is Christ, and the God who has given me faith through Christ, that save me from believing so blasphemous a doctrine.

Such a statement of universal salvation is in some ways consistent with Christian teaching as far back as Athanasius, Origen, and to Paul: that the God who is revealed to us in Jesus Christ is the

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64 Smith, Questions of Religious Truth, 91. The sentence ends, “... though I know others to whom He has not been.”
65 Ibid., 117.
66 Ibid., 122.
67 Smith, Belief and History, 89.
68 Smith, Towards a World Theology, 170-171.
God of agape, self-giving love that saves all people. As Smith himself put it:

... the starting point of Christian faith is the recognition of God in Christ. ... Now we have tended to construct our systems of ideas, our theological doctrines, in such a way as to dig a great cosmic gulf between ourselves and other men—the saved and the damned. And we have acted in terms of this dichotomy, we have at times fallen into such appalling crimes as anti-Semitism, apartheid, and the whole sorry business of colour prejudice and Western arrogance towards the outsider that underlies the profound resentments of anti-colonialism.69

Smith thus emphasized the moral over the theological. orthopraxis over orthodoxy. deed beyond creed, as if ‘morality’ could not result in the distortion of self-righteousness. He thus proposed, as will be shown in the next subsection, a theological undergirding that takes the emphasis away from the initiative of God. and places it upon the human subject.

iii) Soteriology: God, Humanity and Transcendence

Smith identified Jesus Christ as the personal referent of faith who, for Christians, is ...

... primarily the focus of faith and the centre of the new concept ... an upsurge of a new recognition in human history: a sudden new awareness of what humanity can be, is, all about: the dawning of a new insight into what what [sic] had previously been called divine could, and should, be understood as meaning (God is not simply high and lifted up, in the sanctuary: He is a carpenter in a small town ...); a new recognition of human potentialities. one’s own, one’s neighbours, the proletariat’s. the drunkard’s.70

Jesus is, without doubt, a “symbol of God, but as quite literally the word of God”—for Christians.71 Smith unapologetically adopted this relativistic stance in an attempt to indicate that the way in which a particular human is lifted above his own self-interest through Christian faith can also be found (to paraphrase his 1963 essay) in the faith of other people. It is faith, not its object, which is essential to the human realization of purpose, identity and action. And faith, not ‘belief’, is the common human experience that allows for existential transcendence.72

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69 Smith, The Faith of Other Men, 93-94.
70 Smith, Belief and History, 87.
71 Ibid., 23-24.
72 Cf. Smith, 1981, where salvation is described as “metaphysical” and “historical” (167). During a personal interview, Feb 19, 1996, Dr. Smith expressed the view that salvation is of two kinds: existential and metaphysical. The historical and existential dimensions cohere in terms of transcendence in this world and life. and not with God’s “final disposition.”
Religious life is at heart a matter not of creed but of character and conduct. The world needs not a theology of comparative religion but a morality of it. And if you will allow me to say so, that sentiment would hardly seem foreign to Jesus of Nazareth.73

It is this moral transformation that describes Smith's notion of salvation. It is an apokatastatic doctrine, expressed in christological epistemology:

... a Buddhist who is saved, or a Hindu or a Muslim or whoever, is saved, and is saved only, because God is the kind of God whom Jesus Christ has revealed Him to be. Therefore other men do live in His presence, ...

We are not saved by our knowledge; we are not saved by our membership in the Church, we are not saved by anything of our doing. We are saved rather by the only thing that could possibly save us, the anguish and the love of God.74

It can be seen here that:

(i) personal or existential salvation is inseparable from metaphysical or 'eternal' salvation; and
(ii) salvation is effected by God, who is
(iii) revealed as the saving God by the passion of Christ.

There could be no more 'orthodox' formula. Yet Smith did not stop at this point, nor did he carry the point further to the point of a theologia resurrectionis, which would at least cohere with an appropriate theologia gloriae (according to Luther and Barth). Instead, he maintained that 'Christ' is a symbolic factor in a particular cumulative tradition, one among many found and articulated by diverse belief systems, all having salvific efficacy. An extended, compelling quote defining this view is unavoidable here:

My observation, as an historian of religion, would be put thus: in so far as he or she has been saved, the Muslim has been saved by Islamic faith (faith of an Islamic form, through Islamic patterns; faith mediated by an Islamic context; the Buddhist by Buddhist faith, the Jew by Jewish ...)

By 'saved' here, mundanely, I mean, in a way that unfortunately modern people are in a position to understand: saved from nihilism, from alienation, anomie, despair; from the bleak despondency of meaninglessness. Saved from unfreedom; from being the victim of one's own whims within, or of pressures without; saved from being merely an organism reacting to its environment. ... Muslims derive their courage, their dignity,

73 Ibid., 145.
74 Smith, The Faith of Other Men, 139
their capacity to suffer without disintegrating and to succeed without gloating, their sense of belonging to a community, of accepting and being accepted, their ability to trust and to be trusted, to discipline themselves, to formulate ideals, to postpone reward, to work hard towards a distant goal . . . and so on and on—they derive all this from, and nurture it through, a participation in an Islamic context for their lives. They have derived it from reading the Qur'an, from revering the law, from praying in a mosque.

. . . God saves us in any way He can, I suppose: but, thus far, primarily through our religious systems.\(^7\)

Much more along these lines could be presented to describe Smith's considerable contributions to the questions of interreligious dialogue, but a full discussion would exceed the limits of this paper. From the citation above, and from much of what follows in that particular book, it can be seen that Smith's underlying christological and soteriological presuppositions may be summarized as follows:

i) The nature of God is revealed or taught to Christians by Jesus Christ:

ii) Salvation is not ascribed to Jesus Christ, but is described in terms of Jesus Christ:

iii) Salvation is that which God achieves historically through religious systems.\(^6\)

This sketch may be juxtaposed with the dichotomy found throughout Smith's work:

i) 'Faith' is the relationship between God and the human creature:

ii) 'Belief' is the intellectual expression of 'faith' according to human activity, and particular religious systems are a form of 'belief.'

Taken as a whole, therefore, we have to say that if salvation is realized through religion, it is not God's act in Jesus Christ. Salvation is, instead, a human activity. Smith carefully and persistently identified his work as "theocentric." However, as one critical commentator puts it, he . . .

. . . makes a strange and unaccountable move. In spite of a plethora of references to faith as consisting of a response to the divine or the transcendent or, in one instance, to "the divine gift" in the human (Towards a World Theology, 117), he by and large ignores faith's focus, never attempting to delineate its "generic" qualities. Instead he seems to shift his attention to faith's human pole, concentrating almost exclusively on faith as "a transforming personal experience" (Belief and History, 92). It is there, at the existential level of personal orientation and encounter, in the interior reactions of the faithful, that he

\(^7\) Smith, Towards a World Theology, 168-170.

\(^6\) Ibid., 171.
locates commonalities. . . . the locus of faith is always the responding person: “it lies in the human heart” (Towards a World Theology, 47, 87). 

iv) Smith’s ‘Theology of the Cross’

Yet Smith’s theology resembles, in a strange and subtle way, a theologia crucis in several aspects. His epistemology of God, and God’s salvific intent, is linked to the ‘anguish of God’ as revealed by Jesus Christ. Smith described a God of all people, who initiates the salvation even of those who reject their need for salvation, however understood. Smith has thus articulated something like a concept of simul iustus et peccator, though he has not named it as such. Further, his distinction between ‘faith’ and ‘belief’ may be understood in terms of Luther’s own distinction between ‘affirming’ and ‘transforming’ religion, though to do so would require more imagination than substance. 

However, Smith then described Jesus Christ as a formal, symbolic figure with no unique significance in and of himself: any figure or symbol to which symbolic meaning can be attributed is effective. Without including within his definition of ‘religion’ forms of demonic or toxic religiosity, Smith opened the door to accepting as a matter of choice any ‘religious’ phenomenon, even if it is exploitative, abusive and oppressive. While his own ethical sensitivity would reject such phenomena, his theology lacks such a mode of discernment.

By exercising this theological relativism, Smith has assumed an a priori positive theology of religions based upon the willingness of adherents to define themselves as ‘religious’. By describing, but not defining, ‘transcendence’, Smith allowed for the subjective assumption of personal views of what ‘being saved’ means. It is completely unfair to say this of Smith as a person, since he rejected arrogant, imperialistic religions and theologies, and despised the

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78 Cf. e.g. Martin Luther: Selections.... 23. The translation chosen for this volume was from The Reformation Writings of Martin Luther, Vol.II, The Spirit of the Protestant Reformation, translated and edited by Bertram Lee Woof (London: Lutterworth Press, 1956), 284-300. That translation is as follows: “FAITH is not something dreamed, a human illusion ... out of their own resources, they conjure up an idea which they call ‘belief’, which they treat as genuine faith. All the same, it is but a human fabrication, an idea without a corresponding experience in the depths of the heart. ... Faith, however, is something that God effects in us.” The distinction is, however, inferred; Luther used the word “Glaube” where the translator indicates “faith” and “belief.”
exclusivity of the religious right just as he opposed the arrogance of Christian missionary imperialism. Nor would he accept ‘self-interest’ as an expression or experience of ‘salvation.’ But substantively, when extending his propositions to the existential realm, anyone who ‘feels good’ about themselves in association with their practice of devotion might consider themselves as being ‘saved’ according to their own efforts and evaluation. Smith would have been, I am sure, appalled at this suggestion. Still the fact remains, there is no mode of discernment in all of his work that mitigates against this possibility because Smith maintained an essential, though subtle, denial of grace, and promoted an underlying doctrine of self-salvation through moral action. The theology of glory loves works, warned Dr. Luther, which “puffs up, blinds, and hardens man altogether.” (Heidelberg Disputation, thesis 3 and 22)

Taken as a whole, then, Smith’s theology strangely resembles a theology of the cross. But, paradoxically, it is one in which the cross has no particular significance.\(^79\) Sin and human corruption are only described, and since God saves “primarily through religious systems.” then the religious endeavours of the human creature, not God. are the object of praise. The position is at best theotropical. His is a theology of affirmation, not transformation. The inherent ‘goodness’ of humanity, and the ability of humanity to effect its own salvation is lifted up, however minimally. Although he does not assert that salvation is in the power of the human creature alone, it is equally clear that the power of salvation is aided, if not initiated, by the power of human work. We might well recall Martin Luther’s powerful summative point in The Bondage of the Will: “What is ineffective power but simply no power at all?”\(^80\)

While we find within Smith’s overall structure a theology of a suffering God, there is prevalent a form of syneresis, i.e., the concept of a seed of conscience in human ontology which renders God’s act in Christ materially unnecessary. In Luther’s terms, therefore, Smith’s is in the

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\(^79\) Hunsinger, Disruptive Grace, 131: “... a high view of Christ’s work ... cannot be sustained without a suitably high view of his person.”

\(^80\) LW33, 67. (Emphasis added).
final analysis a theology of glory that affirms salvation as something attainable through human initiative and activity.

In the next section I shall explore some of the statements of another major pluralist theologian, Paul Knitter, the common characteristics of Knitter, Smith and the religious right as representative of *theologiae gloriae*.

c) **Paul Knitter and Ethical Soteriocentricity**

No Christian theologian has developed the pluralist option so extensively as Paul Knitter. His pluralist/correlational exposition has as its starting point both tradition and personal experience, the first being the history of theology of religion in the broad context of Western Christian thought.81 His own personal experience includes his dialogue from membership in the Divine Word Missionaries to being a self-proclaimed missionary for a pluralist approach to Christian theology.82

Knitter has developed a model for Christian theology that he calls “a globally responsible, correlational dialogue of religions.”83 By “globally responsible,” he means to urge religious persons to consider their relationships to people of other religious conviction in terms of a common commitment to “eco-human justice and well-being.” By incorporating the term “correlational,” he asks that we submit to the simple phenomenon of religious plurality as it exists in this day and age.84 This movement is parallel to another movement in his thought, from a non-normative *theocentric* approach to dialogue reminiscent of Smith (and others), to a multi-normed *soteriocentric* approach. Such a movement has entailed a revision, as opposed to a rejection, of what it means to be Christ-centered. While that revision is essential to this analysis, some description of Knitter’s overall development is necessary.

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81 Knitter, *No Other Name?*, Chapter 1.
83 Ibid., 15ff.
84 Ibid., 15-16.
Although Knitter follows Race in the application of the typology of exclusivism/inclusivism/pluralism, he claims in this early book (1982) to offer a “broader and more nuanced perspective.”⁸⁵ While admitting that the plurality of religions is nothing new, he hastens to point out that any one religion now confronts many in a new way because the . . .

. . . quantity and quality of this knowledge of many and other religions is today setting off a barrage of questions that religious persons of the past, secure in their own isolated religious camps, never had to face: Why are there so many different religions?⁸⁶

As a result, the religious person must not ask if, but rather how one should relate to those of other religions, what can be learned, and even whether one should belong to one religion rather than another. It is an aspect of our current global context loaded with both possibility and danger. It is loaded with possibility because, while religious diversity is apparently a fact of life, the need for unity in dealing with issues of common import brings with it an urgency to cut through the Gordian knot of diversity in order to eradicate uncomfortable differences. It is loaded with possibility because the encounter brings with it hope for planetary human coexistence.⁸⁷ To Knitter, the possibilities of a “unitive pluralism of religions” that neither absorbs nor pre-judges is compelling because, fundamentally, he recognizes that not only survival but life in mutual relationship as a community of communities is materially necessary to human existence and the future of creation.⁸⁸ For Christianity, says Knitter, it is a kairos moment in history: a moment of deep self-transformation into a “genuinely” new church.⁸⁹

Thus Knitter set the stage in terms very compatible with the aims of this thesis when he stated that diversity is a valued attribute of humankind created in the image of God, and that any ‘authentic’ religious response is one that embraces transformation rather than insisting upon

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⁸⁵ Knitter, No Other Name?, xv-xvi, with reference to Alan Race, Christians and Religious Pluralism: Patterns in the Christian Theology of Religions, (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1982)
⁸⁶ Ibid., 1.
⁸⁷ Ibid., 5-9. 16-18.
⁸⁸ Ibid., 14.
⁸⁹ Ibid., 20.
affirmation. It is apparent even at this early juncture in his development, however, that he does not offer a *theological* basis for this movement. To do so would be to proceed from a theistic starting point advocating one’s own religion or concept of the divine as normative for all others. Such a position, he claims, would necessarily lead to some form of religious imperialism implied or stated as superior to all others. Instead, Knitter points to the ethical imperative of peaceful coexistence in order to make possible the conditions of life in relationship. He therefore describes and rejects all previous models of Christian theology that speak of the relationship between Christianity and other religions.*

It is only when Christians move beyond these models to a “theocentric” orientation that is sensitive to cultural and religious pluralism that Christians might begin to appreciate the necessity and application of nonnormative christology. 91 Citing the developments of Hick, Pannikar, Samarth, Jewish-Christian Dialogue, and the “ethical hermeneutics” of liberation/political theologies, Knitter celebrates a “Copernican revolution” that is more of a “gradual evolution” from ecclesiocentrism to christocentrism, to theocentrism placing God at the center of Christian faith:

> What these different theologians are part of, what they are promoting, is an evolution that has been taking place within Christian consciousness from the early part of this century, an evolution from ecclesiocentrism to christocentrism to theocentrism. The evolution from ecclesiocentrism to christocentrism began to take place when the different Christian churches started adapting to the environment of Christian ecumenism. . . . A consensus grew that the church is not to be identified with the kingdom of God and that the church is not really necessary for salvation. These insights were applied to other religions. Jesus Christ was seen working mystically, cosmically, anonymously within all religions. He, and not the Christian church, was the center of the salvific universe.92

We cannot help but observe the semblance between this description, Nygren’s description of Luther’s development, and Smith’s contributions.93 Knitter, however, suggests that the evolution

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90 Ibid., Chapter 5 (The Conservative Evangelical Model); Chapter 6 (The Mainline Protestant Model); Chapter 7 (The Catholic Model).
91 Ibid., Chapter 8 (The Theocentric Model: Many Ways to the Center).
92 Ibid., 166.
must proceed even further, particularly in terms of christology, because in order to enable true relational dialogue Christ can remain neither constitutive nor normative for an understanding of God. Christology must be re-formed in terms of the "relational uniqueness" of Jesus." There is work to be done, however, before this reformulation can be grasped. For Knitter, understanding and knowledge follow praxis.

ii) The Primacy of Praxis

Drawing deeply from liberation theology Knitter states that abstract and individualistic theology is naively ideological and apolitical, inflicting a pious masochism on those who are oppressed and abdicating responsibility for those who benefit from the imposition of misery:

... liberation theologians are convinced that before one can make such lofty claims, before one can know whether such claims are really so, one must get one's hands dirty in the actual human situation of suffering, oppression, and the struggle for liberation. One must be involved in the nitty-gritty praxis of trying to live and carry out this God-world relationship, this full realization of human potential.

Echoing Jon Sobrino, Knitter states that "we cannot begin to know who this Jesus of Nazareth is unless we are following him, no matter what that demands." Faith is, then, a matter of orthopraxis before orthodoxy: one "does" before one "knows." In this case, one enters into the dangerous work of relational dialogue without the safety net of personal religious primacy and the security of our particular beliefs. Following Smith, Knitter writes:

Faith is different from beliefs, but it cannot exist without them. ... Yet—and here is the point that is often missed by both "common believers" and hierarchs—no belief or set of beliefs can "say it all." ... Although we need beliefs therefore, although we feel the need to be loyal to them, we must be ever ready to revise and move beyond them. Expressed more pointedly: if we are really willing to die for our faith, we must be ready to die to our beliefs.

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94 Knitter, No Other Name?, 171.
95 Ibid., 193.
96 Ibid., 191-197.
98 Ibid., 212.
Theologians must be converted, therefore, from speculation about the nature of God and the confines of their own particular religious tradition to a global, fundamental, systematic, and practical theology that moves through the permeable barriers between the world religions. Such a movement, says Knitter, necessitates a profound reformulation of the uniqueness of Jesus.

iii) The Reinterpretation of Jesus

That reformulation, however, is not meant to imply that Christians must, or even can, loosen a material dependency upon Jesus as one who is uniquely salvific. What is required, however, is an interpretation of Jesus that allows for and, indeed, insists that the Christian recognize the salvific efficacy of other religious systems:

I hope to show that while there are good reasons why Christians can and must continue to declare that there is “No Other Name” (Acts 4:12), such reasons do not remove the possibility—indeed the necessity—of carrying on conversation and cooperation between Jesus and the other religious figures of our history and contemporary times.\(^{100}\)

In order to do this, Knitter rejects a *constitutive* christology for a *representative* christology.

In the currency of contemporary christological discussion, one might say that an Easter christology looks upon Jesus as *constitutive*—as the cause and source—of God’s saving presence in the world, whereas a Wisdom christology views Jesus as *representative* of the divine love, which is there from the beginning and, in a sense, is the divine origin or cause of Jesus himself. So, by following a Logos or Wisdom christology, correlational Christians open the door to interreligious dialogue by locating the *particularity* of Jesus *within the universality* of God’s self-revelation, rather than locating God’s universality *within the particularity* of the historical Jesus.\(^{101}\)

Knitter builds upon the two sources of contemporary human experience “as mediated through historical context or culture,” and Christian tradition as biblical and traditional Christian teaching and practice.\(^{102}\) Accordingly, he postulates the necessity of a revision of the uniqueness of Jesus Christ that “does not at all question whether Jesus is unique but only how.”\(^{103}\)

Knitter states his argument for a revised Christology in five succinct theses:

\(^{99}\) Ibid., 227-229.
\(^{100}\) Knitter. *Jesus and the Other Names*, 1.
\(^{101}\) Ibid., 42. Cf. also Ogden, 83-104.
\(^{102}\) Ibid., 27.
\(^{103}\) Knitter. *One Earth, Many Religions*, 35.
i) Given the nature and history of christology, previous understandings of the uniqueness of Jesus can be reinterpreted.

ii) Given the ethical imperative of dialogue, previous understandings of the uniqueness of Jesus must be reinterpreted.

iii) The uniqueness of Jesus' salvific role can be reinterpreted in terms of truly but not only.

iv) The content of Jesus' uniqueness must be made clear in Christian life and witness. This content, however, will be understood and proclaimed differently in different contexts and periods of history. Today, the uniqueness of Jesus can be found in his insistence that salvation or the Reign of God must be realized in this world through human actions of love and justice.

v) The orthodoxy of this pluralistic reinterpretation of the uniqueness of Jesus must be grounded primarily in the ability of such a reinterpretation to nurture a holistic Christian spirituality, that is, a devotion to and a following of Jesus. The proposed understanding of Jesus as God's truly but not only saving word does meet this criterion.\textsuperscript{104}

Knitter therefore proposes a Christian pluralist spirituality in which Jesus is unique, but with a particularity that is not a "matter of superiority or arrogation of privilege . . . [but] rather a matter of distinctness, of specialness that will surely be different from but not necessarily better than others."\textsuperscript{105} That spirituality walks upon the aforementioned "ethico-practical" bridge and is, therefore, not unlike the developments of Wilfred Cantwell Smith in many ways. Knitter's concerns and analysis are well-described and convincing, exhorting Christians to respond to the needs of a world in danger of nihilism, and pointing out that such a response is a transcending experience emulating the life of Jesus of Nazareth. Indeed, Knitter's developments are based upon first-rate social analysis that responds in faithful acknowledgment to the plight of the poor, not unlike a theologia crucis that calls the Christian into the space created by suffering. It is therefore a theology coherent with God's "preferential option for the poor."\textsuperscript{106}

\textsuperscript{104} Knitter, The Uniqueness of Jesus: A Dialogue With Paul F. Knitter, edited by Leonard Swidler and Paul Mojzes, (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1997), 4-16

\textsuperscript{105} Ibid., 16.

\textsuperscript{106} Knitter, Jesus and the Other Names, 8-11. Cf. e.g. Jon Sobrino, Jesus in Latin America, (Maryknoll. Orbis Books, 1987), 89, 140-147.
find parallels with forms of liberation theology, particularly that of Latin America, which seek unity in diversity for the sake of the poor and oppressed, and the mending of the world. Knitter goes further in including among the "suffering Other... not just humans but also earthlings, indeed the Earth herself."\(^{107}\)

There are, however, suppositions and assumptions within Knitter's thought that identify his approach as clearly "theotropical" in orientation. Knitter has laid out a christological, non-normative, and eco-responsible theology that takes the pluralist/correlative position to its logical limits in a compelling and convincing manner. But its essential flaw rests upon the fact that he consistently limits his sources to tradition and experience, subsuming scripture and Christ into the category of tradition along with the Roman Catholic magisterium and ecclesiology.\(^{108}\) It appears that Knitter implicitly understands "Christianity" as normatively Roman Catholic, and even though Roman Catholicism officially rejects pluralist theology, his basis for development is understandable within that tradition. It is, however, difficult to reconcile with the evangelical and Protestant suspicion of church authority and the tenets of \textit{sola Christus, sola scriptura, sola fides} upon which so much non-Roman theology has been based since the sixteenth century. Knitter recognizes this disparity, but interprets it as the arrogance of Christianity as superior to other religions.\(^{109}\) Yet from our review of Barth and Moltmann, and even Luther, as well as the scriptural evidence of the gospel of John and elsewhere, this judgement is questionable. At worst, Knitter has constructed a device with all the outward appearance of creating dialogical possibilities, but which severs relationship with others whose theologies disagree, and whose influence and agenda are among those that Knitter wishes to refute. I refer here not only to the most toxic forms of the religious right, but to major streams of Christian thought.

\(^{107}\) Ibid., 10.

\(^{108}\) Knitter, \textit{One Earth, Many Religions}, 27.

\(^{109}\) Knitter, \textit{No Other Name?}, 17, \textit{One Earth, Many Religions}, 6; \textit{Jesus and the Other Names}, 7.
Among others, Knitter breaks with those among whom he would seek solidarity: thepraxis liberation theologians of, for instance, Latin America. Any endeavors, arising from the bowels of suffering, are explicitly christocentric:

Any christology must say that Jesus is the Christ. Liberation christology emphasizes that the Christ is no one but Jesus. Any theology must hold that Jesus is God. Liberation christology emphasizes that we only know what God is from a point of departure in Jesus.

But Knitter does not do this. Indeed, he seems to say that this is precisely what must not be done; that salvation is not effected by God in the saviour Jesus Christ, but is rather a matter of human ability, a syneresis of sorts, which is manifested through the agency of religious institution. Is it too simplistic to say that Knitter takes the ecclesiocentric soteriological principle which Luther so successfully exposed, and generalizes it to include religions in general? Perhaps we should consider Knitter's own words:

Only if Christians are truly open to the possibility . . . that there are many true, saving religions and that Christianity is one among the ways in which God has touched and transformed our world—only then can authentic dialogue take place.

Like Smith and the forms of exclusivism they hope to oppose, Knitter defines God's salvation in terms of human (theotropic) work i.e., 'religion.' It is therefore, like Smith's and the very Christian exclusivism they identify as dangerous to humanity and creation, a theologiae gloriae.

And because of their departure from a point other than the cross of the risen Christ, pluralist theology is easily ignored by the very perspective it seeks to oppose.

d) The Influence of Pluralism: The United Church of Canada

Smith and Knitter are among a long list of pluralist theologians who have had a profound influence upon the thinking of many people who are concerned with interfaith relations.

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111 Sobrino, Christology at the Crossroads, 9.
112 Knitter, Jesus and the Other Names, 30.
113 Hunsinger, Disruptive Grace, 99.
Although that influence is largely uncharted, much can be discerned in the policies and programs of various Christian denominations. In this subsection, I will consider the breadth of that influence within one major Canadian denomination, The United Church of Canada.

The purpose of this subsection could be easily misconstrued. It is not intended to "blame" the pluralists, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, or Paul F. Knitter for exerting influence in The United Church of Canada per se. But if we understand pluralism in terms of a Zeitgeist, it can be seen that there exists among great numbers of Christians a kind of readiness—at times a kind of urgency—to conform to the reductive ideals of pluralism as described by its masters such as Smith and Knitter. It is important, then, to take the general perspectives of pluralism very seriously, and to consider its influence on the landscape of Christian thought.

Pluralism, its general method and specific typology, is an intellectual construct that is useful only insofar as it aids in the discrimination among empirically available cases and makes possible understanding and explanation.\footnote{Peter L. Berger, *The Heretical Imperative: Contemporary Possibilities of Religions Affirmation*, (Garden City: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1979), 61.} It has, however, taken on the characteristics of a governing force in what Tom Driver calls a “principle of inertia in human systems.”\footnote{Tom F. Driver, “The Case for Pluralism,” in *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religion*, edited by John Hick and Paul F. Knitter, (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1987), 203-18, 203.} The pluralist typology itself has become ‘true’ almost without question, so much so that, when a Toronto Conference-wide meeting of United Church of Canada members interested in interfaith issues met in March of 1995, the convener asked those in attendance to declare themselves as either “pluralist” or “evangelical” (exclusivist) before beginning the discussion.\footnote{The meeting took place on Mar 9/95. The Moderator of the time, Marion Best, was in attendance. The convener was James Christie, past-president of Toronto Conference. While Best and several others refused to legitimize the distinction, the majority in attendance agreed to the dichotomy, including those who were there to represent the Billy Graham “Mission Ontario” organization. The event, and the complicity of those polarized against one another, suggests a broad acceptance of the pluralist typology as a “new orthodoxy,” at least within this segment of a particular denomination.} Pluralist views and typology have been used to describe much current thinking on and about religion in general, while concurrently upholding widely held ideals of tolerance and multiculturalism. It is important to note that I am not saying that the influence of pluralism is “rampant” or “demonic.”
It is suggested, however, that pluralism’s influence is significant and largely unselfconscious. In a report to the 37th General Council of The United Church of Canada, it was demonstrated that more than 20% of respondents who made a clear choice identified themselves as “pluralists.”

Congruent with Paul Knitter’s “eco-human justice and responsibility,” the . . . notion of “neighbour” was expanded in our study document to invite participants to reflect upon their relationship not only with the non-Christian neighbour, but also with all of Creation. . . . Clearly, for some, the call to love the neighbour is a call to care for this world in which God effects salvation in Christ. For them, the call to love the neighbour includes actively caring for the future of the earth.

Over 40% of those who responded severed, in some way, the person and work of Jesus from that of God. Jesus was described as a “role model” or “example,” and as “the way, but not the only way.” The results of the study as a whole indicate a very positive link between the person and work of Jesus of Nazareth and the imperative for ethical action. That link is not, however, a necessary one for a large minority of Christians in this particular denomination: Jesus is a saviour, though not the saviour, nor necessarily the only saviour. There is no reason to think that the findings of this study are not indicative of “mainline” Western Christianity.

These developments are not new to Canadian society, nor to our churches. They have been taking place for a long time. To appreciate these developments and influences, a brief review of several study documents and reports within The United Church of Canada would be helpful. Here we shall see in concrete form the outworking of the pluralist approach of Smith and Knitter in one denomination.

i) The United Church of Canada: A Heritage of Plurality

The United Church of Canada (UCC) is the child of an age of ecumenism and dialogue devoted to the ideals of Christian unity. The result of years of dialogue and effort, The UCC

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118 Ibid., 6.
119 Ibid., 12-14.
came into existence in 1925 by an act of Parliament ("The Federal United Church of Canada Act") that recognized the union of the Presbyterian Church in Canada, the Methodist Church, and the Congregational Churches of Canada "without loss of their identity."\textsuperscript{12}

As a result, The UCC is a denomination defined by congregational variation, and therefore by diversity. The UCC has, perhaps, never resolved the tension between Calvinism and Arminianism inherent in this complex of unions, and as a result has developed a praxis, as opposed to a credal orientation to theology. The christology report to the 37\textsuperscript{th} General Council reflects this orientation whereby the saving significance of Jesus was almost universally linked to ethical responses by the human creature.\textsuperscript{121} It seems natural that a church with such an inner diversity of belief and practice should grapple with the issues of religious plurality that have been the mark of the late twentieth century Canadian context. It also seems natural that there would be a predisposition to process and policy that is marked by the influence of pluralism.

The first major statement regarding The UCC position on religious plurality was made in 1936. This statement communicated a recognition that there "are elements in non-Christian religions which are common to Christianity, [and] other elements which might find their fulfillment in the Christian faith . . . ."\textsuperscript{122} In 1966, the "Report of the Commission on World Mission" reaffirmed the presence of God's grace in other religious traditions by stating:

\begin{quote}
The church should recognize that God is creatively and redemptively at work in the religious life of all mankind.

Christians have much to learn, as well as to contribute, through dialogue with people of other faiths. Their special responsibility is to present the knowledge of God in Christ Jesus in humble and sincere dialogue in ways which will respect each other's integrity.\textsuperscript{123}
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{121} "Reconciling and Making New . . . .", 2-4.


"The Lordship of Jesus"

This same report did not represent a *fait accompli* among the general membership of The UCC. In response to protests that the report contained an implicit denial of Jesus’ sovereignty, the Committee on Christian Faith prepared a lengthy and careful document entitled “The Lordship of Jesus,” which affirmed the priority of dialogue over “proclamation”:

Any genuine ‘proclamation’, for example as in a Sunday sermon, is based on a prior dialogue—an involvement of the preacher in and with the lives of his or her hearers. The report does not—emphatically not—suggest that the Christian hide his light under a barrel. It suggests only that the Christian’s speaking be accompanied by a reciprocal hearing. This is what involvement is about.  

This report clearly indicated a genuine and sincere effort to articulate a theological understanding of the relationship between the Church and the world on the basis of Jesus Christ. Yet subsequent documents produced by The UCC in study groups and conferences suggest that the methodology utilized in the “Lordship of Jesus” document has been subsumed within the more relativistic approach of pluralism. To illustrate this influence, I will briefly examine three documents produced for consideration or study within The UCC. These are: ‘Faithfulness in a Pluralistic World’: The Report of the Naramata Consultation on Interfaith Dialogue, June 10-15, 1983”; “Toward a Renewed Understanding of Ecumenism”: A Study Document by the Inter-Church Inter-Faith Committee of The UCC (1993); and “Bearing Faithful Witness”: United Church-Jewish Relations Today—Parts I & II re. The Use of Scripture.” Each of these documents will be described in turn.

“Faithfulness in a Pluralistic World”

In 1972 the General Council of The UCC established a committee on the Research and Education in Interfaith Relations and International Understanding, which was re-titled the Sub-Unit for Interfaith Dialogue in 1976.

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This committee held a conference in Vancouver in 1983, the theme of which was based on Smith’s newly published work, *Towards a World Theology*. Over fifty people attended the Naramata Conference, including members of the Order of Ministry, lay people, academic theologians, and officers of various divisions within The UCC. The final report was published in the 30th General Council Record of Proceedings. Group divisions made to facilitate the conference also delineated the report, and were entitled: (i) The Question of Salvation; (ii) The Doctrine of Christ; (iii) The Nature of the Church; and (iv) The Mission of the Church.

*The Question of Salvation*

This committee pursued the question of salvation by beginning with a confession that “our tradition has been exclusive” and rejecting the “old notion of no salvation outside the church”. Salvation, they said, is God’s intention for all of creation: the removal of bondage for the human family and the flowering of God’s creatures and creation. They therefore . . .

. . . affirmed a trust in the divine presence in other religious traditions and communities. In saying all this, they confessed the incompleteness of our appropriation and understanding of God’s saving work in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

*Doctrine of Christ*

This committee began its report with the affirmation that “Jesus reveals to us that God is love and that certain demands are placed on us by this love.” The affirmation that God is universal, loves all humanity, and wills salvation for all, led to the conclusion that God is present in grace to all humanity: “Although other faith communities do not encounter God’s love through an overt confession of Christ, we are confident that they too are encompassed by God’s love.” Christ’s call, then, describes a kind of “moral imperative” to love others as God loves—even if that stance includes an honest, critical relationship.

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125 The United Church of Canada, 30th General Council Record of Proceedings, 1984, 352-4.
126 Ibid., 353.
129 Ibid.
The uniqueness of Christ allows us to stand firm in love and honesty. Ultimately, in vulnerability and willingness to risk, we must listen attentively and carefully to those of other faiths, always seeking to empathize as Jesus did for us in our weakness. 130

"The Nature of the Church"

This group began with defining the Church as a sociological "community of men and women who share a religious tradition and faith." 131 The Church is, then, one social construct among others whose members have begun to learn about other traditions, what is held in common, and what is diverse. There are, according to the report, three patterns of response available to the Church:

(i) the community can avoid encounters with our new neighbours;

(ii) the community can compete with 'them'; or

(iii) may seek a "new form of community through encounter and dialogue."

Ultimately, the . . .

. . . doctrine of the Church must be a moral one, remembering that we are charged not to bear false witness against our neighbour. The church must become a listening, learning church. 132

"The Mission of the Church"

Similarly, the group discussing the mission of the church began with a sociological affirmation regarding pluralistic society. The church is encouraged in this milieu to recognize that it has been "lead [sic] by what we affirm to be God's spirit into new understanding of ourselves as a servant people, called to be part of a common humanity where there are men and women of different faiths, ideologies and identities." The mission of the church, then, is to . . .

. . . live out our Christian faith as we discern the nature of our context in the light of the scriptures, finding expression in methods of dialogue and sharing as the more constructive and obedient way to relate to 'this believing world.' Hence we are brought full circle from the dialogue of meaning to that of life, of concern for mutual action designed to create what God ordains for humanity and creation. 133

130 Ibid.
131 Ibid., 354.
132 Ibid.
133 Ibid.
While the pioneering work of the conference must be applauded, there are several assumptions that can be identified in this brief description that might be questioned as a fruitful methodology for exploring an appropriate basis for interfaith relations and dialogue. These assumptions all coincide with some general assumptions found within the pluralist position.

The most noticeable assumption is found within the general confession made by the first group: “our tradition has been exclusive...” It is unclear what is meant by the term “our tradition,” and by the term “exclusive.” Does the “tradition” refer to the tradition of the Christian Church for two millennia? The Protestant tradition[s] since the sixteenth century? The UCC? Apparently the committee is referring to the doctrinal position that would deny the working of God’s saving grace beyond the limits of the church, as if salvation is limited to the community of the institutional Christian church. This is congruent with the common reference to Barth, Kraemer, and Newbigin as examples of exclusivism. It is, however, apparent that the bulk of Christian theology agrees that faithfulness to God and scripture requires the rejection of *extra ecclesiam* exclusivism.

One such rejection can be found in the doctrine of the *Ecclesia Mixta*, that was spelled out as early as Augustine in his *Sermo*. In that doctrine, Augustine described the Church as a “mixed body” in which tares grow amidst the good grain so that not even the elect are free of sin.\(^\text{134}\) From Augustine through Luther and Calvin to our current day, including the statements of Vatican II, the predominant theological tradition clearly communicates that being in the Church is not necessarily a sign of salvation. One possible corollary to this proposition is that salvation is not limited to the Church, and there seems to be ample biblical support for this possibility (Jn. 10:16, “I have other sheep that are not of this fold.”; 14:1ff: “In my Father’s house are many rooms...”; Rev. 7:9, “... before me was a great multitude that no one could count, and from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb.”)

Consequently, even the earliest Church Fathers struggled with this question and often concluded, as did Justin Martyr in his *Dialogue with Trypho*, that salvation—however understood—extended beyond the limits of the Church.

If the charge of exclusivism is levelled at the Reformed/Protestant traditions, then it should be made with ample historical research in order to explore what is meant by the term. If the reference to exclusivism is made with regard to The United Church, the charge is equally suspect given the history of inquiry that has already been described. While that history does not demonstrate an adequate response to the current context, it does indicate the faithful struggle of sisters and brothers in Christ who have engaged the issues of religious diversity in their context in congruence with the Reformed tradition of *theologia viatorum post lapsum*.

The second assumption made throughout the report concerns the *a priori* rejection of the ancient doctrine of *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*. The conference participants seem to have assumed that this doctrine mirrors the understanding of exclusivism that they have described. Yet even minimal research reveals that this description is ahistorical at best. The 1967 edition of *The New Catholic Encyclopedia* describes three main interpretations, including the exclusivist, but also describes a universalist interpretation and the official interpretation of the Roman Catholic Magesterium, which is clearly inclusivist.\(^\text{135}\) There is no historical reading of this statement that indicates that it ever meant, "Outside the church, no grace." It has, rather, been applied to those who "reject the Gospel deliberately, or who show contempt for the sacraments, or who harbour lovelessness and bad faith towards the church."\(^\text{136}\) The doctrine in most of Christian theology appears to be an attempt to summarize the epistemological and material relationship between Christ, Church and salvation. It might be restated with a phrase like, "without the church, the


need for salvation is not recognized. While the possibility of an exclusivist interpretation of the doctrine is always present it is not the only or even the predominant, understanding of the axiom. The third assumption communicated by the document is aligned with the first two, and is concerned with the way in which "revelation" and "religion" are used as co-determined factors of God's presence i.e. by affirming "a trust in the divine presence in other religious traditions . . ." This assumption is, curiously enough, communicated in the statements on salvation and implicitly the statement on the "Nature of the Church," and is coherent with Vatican II statements that recognize other religions as "valid paths of salvation."¹³⁷ The point is also one found in the broad spectrum of "inclusivism," and raises a decisive question: Is any religious system a path of salvation? According to a theologia crucis, the answer would be, "No".

But perhaps the most serious assumption made by the authors and compilers of this document has to do with the basic response to the phenomenon of plurality within our current social context. It is assumed, it seems, that plurality is a manifestation of God's good creation from the outset. There is an a priori positive theology of religion at play in the document, which does not consider toxic forms of religiosity as part of its implicit definition of religion. Religious activity in its more demonic forms is never considered within the scope of its investigation. An example of this can be found in the Naramata Consultation Report, which interprets the story of the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11) as an illustration of God's desire for pluralism.¹³⁸ This is tantamount to declaring that something that has happened, should have happened: since it did happen, it is supposedly God's will. Here is triumphalistic theology of history par excellence. There seemed to have been no consideration that the text speaks to us of the consequences of human pride. The participants appear to have been consciously seeking to establish an a priori positive theology of non-Christian religion, and deliberately moved in that direction. In doing so, they failed to take into consideration the weight of theological and scriptural arguments that

¹³⁷ Cf. e.g. "Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions," which can be found in Unanswered Questions: Theological Views of Jewish-Catholic Relations, edited by Roger Brooks, (Notre Dame University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 17-47.
might contradict their agenda and totally ignored the Genesis account in chapter 10, "the Nations Descended from Noah," which might have lent scriptural support to their assumptions. Particularly with reference to the discussion on salvation, the influence of pluralism can be clearly seen. As such, the document ceases to be a theological exploration and becomes more of an extended essay on comparative religion. Qualifiers such as "for Christians" and "as Christians," and the affirmation that salvation is a matter of intra-religious definition all illustrate the pluralist presuppositions of the discussion. These assumptions cast long shadows upon the report and its future applications simply because they fail to account for much antecedent theological work done on the same subjects, because they may deliberately misinterpret or fail to define key terms and phrases, and because their statements fail to speak of "religion" in anything but a positive manner. They also impede the possibility of any religious tradition making claims within a social milieu which, in itself, is making religious claims of ultimacy in terms of global economics, human meaning, our relationship with creation, and the relationship between God and human being that directly contradicts and subsumes God made known in Jesus Christ.

"Toward a Renewed Understanding of Ecumenism" (TRUE)

The 34th General Council of The UCC authorized the compilation of this study paper in 1992 after receiving responses on the Ecumenical Agenda Research Project (EARP) that was commissioned in 1988. The purpose of this study paper, distributed in 1993, was to outline a "renewed vision of ecumenical understanding and action to congregations and other church bodies for discussion and feedback." 139 The paper was based upon the proposition that churches should "join with peoples of good will to work together for the cause of peace, justice, and the healing of God’s creation," and that the church should adopt a vision that puts "as the centre of God’s mission, not the splendid life of the church, but the equally splendid life in the wilderness of the world." 140

did not start, therefore, with any faith statement or even with a description of context *per se*, but with an assertion of a pragmatic-functional rationale for the statement to proceed; a position that one scholar quippishly described as “talk before you destroy one another.”

The authors of this study document first point to the traditions of The UCC, which include both ecumenical and interfaith partnerships in matters of common cause, for instance in providing food and medicine for children in Iraq during the Gulf War. The document then attempts to articulate what Knitter would later describe as a non-normative soteriocentric approach to Christian praxis in a section entitled, “The Reign of God Tradition.”

In this section, the movement of the Holy Spirit is described in terms of her unpredictable and un-containable qualities as communicated in Jn. 3:8 and Ps. 139. The universal nature of the Noachic Covenant is cited, along with various descriptions of *shalom* and justice, as clear indications of God’s will for the salvation of all creation. Further, New Testament citations were employed to illustrate that Jesus proclaimed the reign of God and not himself (e.g. Mk. 1:14-15), and that Jesus repeatedly pointed to those who were not religious but who lived out the gospel, however unaware (Mk. 9:41: “Whoever is not against us is for us”). The document does not ascribe equal weight to the “anti-Jewish” aspects of John, and instead treats them as aberrations within the overall text attributable to socio-political conditions at the time of John’s writing.

The document goes on to describe the “Interrelatedness of all Creation” and encourages a “Whole-World Ecumenism” based on “the biblical picture of the Reign of God, the unity of the human family, the interrelatedness of creation, and the reconciling activity of Christ”:

A United Church operating out of this understanding will no longer embrace ideas that, for instance, equated the Church with the Reign of God or present the church as the only vessel of salvation or identify Christians as the only children of God. Ecumenical renewal for the Church begins by turning away from such self-descriptions. Instead, it will choose pictures for itself that are more modest, pictures that respect God’s freedom to use not only Christians but also people of other religious traditions and those of none in the divine work of healing and liberating the creation and all its creatures.

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142 *TRUE*, 5.
The statement is, of course, commendable for its generosity and humility, and it demonstrated a greater adherence to the sensitivities of Christian expression and scholarship than the Naramata document. But it also reflected some of the same problems.

The first arises with the pragmatic-functional starting point for which there is little historical currency. While it cannot be denied that "the world is in serious trouble," it is apparent that common cause has seldom been a reason for unity. Imminent danger and shifts in social conditions might also create entrenchment, competition and hostility between religious groups, as in India during the 1940s and 50s, and as is apparent in the proliferation of militia groups and the rise of white supremacist and neo-Nazi groups in the Western world.

Be that as it may, the document is not wrong in saying this, nor is it wrong to say that the church must function in "the wonderful wilderness of the world." But TRUE fails to say why the church as the church must do this, except to survive. Survival is not a motive for openness.

The lack of any doctrine of sin seems to be the most significant single exclusion in the document. That lack translates, by extension, into every other aspect of Christian theology since the document includes no doctrine of grace, atonement, sanctification, justification, or vocation: the Christian is not called in any way that is distinct from that of any non-Christian. The proposals therefore lack any other imperative except for survival and an appeal to "good will." They remain a "good idea," a human invention, or an expression of Smith's "humane knowing." While God's initiative is never denied in this document, it is also never expressed. No more than a formal function is ascribed to Jesus Christ as an exemplar or teacher—a fact that lends an almost Ebionitic quality to the statement as a whole. In the end, the salvation to which the document points is a matter of human will, activity and survival. This kind of functional subordination of Jesus may well have unintended results, for a church without a material, that is to say, a necessary relationship with Jesus of Nazareth is also a church without a material relationship to the books of the Tanakh and thus to Judaism.
Two more concerns with this document include one about language, and another about epistemology. It should be noted that the TRUE document represents a communication by Christians to Christians. As such, language is used that is clearly Christian, but used with the presumption of application to non-Christians. An example of this is the term “ecumenical,” a key word in the document. The authors of TRUE attempt to recover the original meaning (“the whole inhabited world”) and then, throughout the document, try to use the term in this “original” sense. Thus they speak of “whole world ecumenism,” seeming to include the world religions in the “ecumenical movement.” However, the original meaning of a word is not necessarily the most authentic or best usage. Despite the authors’ attempt to re-define the term, when Christians speak of “ecumenism,” non-Christians will hear the implicit possibilities of conversion and inclusion within the Christian fold, and the Christians will hear the affirmation of Christian unity.

This is the problem with the central theme of the document, which is based on the “Reign of God Tradition” (pp.2-4). While the authors do not speak explicitly of “salvation,” they do speak of God’s intent for creation in terms of the Reign of God that Jesus proclaimed. This is the eschatological, and therefore soteriological, component. Yet even in the TRUE document, the proclamation attested to is inseparable from the proclaimer, Jesus Christ, even if only in a formal way. The specific content of the message that this document explicates is tied inextricably to this particular human being, this Jesus of Nazareth: “There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12) This is a serious lapse of logic in the document, for as Marshall points out (citing Karl Rahner) . . .

\[\ldots\] where “Jesus is nothing more than one of the relatively numerous exemplary persons (vorbildlichen Menschen), one would no longer be dealing with Christianity . . . [because ultimately] . . . Any need for salvation should find a saviour to be not only logically necessary, but materially decisive.”\[143\]

\[143\] Bruce Marshall, Christology in Conflict: The Identity of a Saviour in Rahner and Barth, (New York: Basil Blackwell. 1987). 54
To speak of God’s intent for creation in terms of the Reign of God is to speak, concurrently, of the one who is ontologically inseparable from the knowledge and realization of that reign. It is a necessary connection. Yet the document admits to no material christology whatsoever.

This is the epistemological concern as well. Since the authors refer to Jesus in only a formal sense they do not engage the question of how anyone is to know about this particular vision, this “Reign of God.” This is a key point, going to the heart of extra-communal comprehension. It is not that christological claims need to be validated externally, but they must be comprehensible. This requires a certain internal coherence lacking in the TRUE document because it purports to make a proclamation while attributing no particularity to the proclaimer.

Inherent in this omission is an unintentional duplicity suffering from the same kind of ‘back door’ proselytism of which Küng warns us. While the document has been replaced by “Mending the World: An Ecumenical Vision of Healing and Reconciliation,” TRUE remains a pertinent example of how pluralist presuppositions have influenced UCC faith statements.

“Bearing Faithful Witness: United Church-Jewish Relations Today”

This paper has been prepared by The UCC National Task Group on United Church-Jewish Relations as a response to a number of issues within religious discourse, including the “rising anti-Judaism, antisemitism, white supremacy and neo-Nazism in Canada and other countries in the name of Jesus Christ.” In response to this issue, and nine others, the authors submitted a paper responding to three questions:

i) Is our handling of the Bible consistent with the faith of Jesus?

ii) Is our handling of the New Testament consciously reflective of Christianity’s Jewish roots?

iii) Do our Sunday morning services bear false witness against our Jewish neighbours today?144

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145 Ibid.
Employing the techniques of historical and redactive criticism, the paper first investigated the dependency of the New Testament upon Hebrew scriptures, and then described the distinctions and mutual influences of the various books and epistles of the New Testament. In concluding this section, the authors noted that certain passages of scripture need not be interpreted as anti-Jewish when interpreted with understanding. Following this section, the authors proceeded with guidelines for the use of scripture and resources for implementation.

The aims of this document are necessary and laudable. By pursuing the subject of anti-Judaism as a Christian aberration that has overtaken the liberating message of the Gospel, the authors shine a bright light upon the darkest aspect of Christian history that has resulted in not only the oppression of Jewish people, but the denial of true life for Christians as people of God through adoption in Jesus Christ (Rom. 8: 1-9: 5).

The concern of our analysis, however, is with the influence of pluralist presuppositions and methodology upon UCC documents and study papers. In this regard, a possible influence is perceived from the very beginning in terms of the implementation of correlative methodology. Correlative methodology, described by Tillich as an attempt to "correlate the questions implied in the situation with the answers implied in the message," is by no means peculiar to pluralist theology. Tillich, for instance, could hardly be called a "pluralist": at the very least, it would be anachronistic to do so. The methodology is, however, a common feature of pluralism, which purports to encounter the current context of religious plurality and then return to the Christian tradition for a response. While the necessity of seeking a faith response to existential questions cannot be denied, nor should it be discouraged, the use of this method as a sole corrective for a perceived error must be treated with some suspicion. First, the method assumes some position of dominance and control where "we" have imposed, and are now able to correct, an historical injustice from the point of view of our "good reason," which we can now read back

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146 Ibid., 24-25.
147 Ibid., 5
into scripture. The preamble to the document reinforces this formal relationship with scripture as something to be *used*, rather than as something that forms us.

The second concern with the methodology employed in "Bearing Faithful Witness" is that it promotes the mutual correction and enrichment of gospel and culture.\(^1\) This seems to be the same as saying that gospel and culture are of equal weight, and that the gospel itself—and not just our interpretation of it—requires correction or "updating." Christologically, this means that it is our faith that enlivens Jesus Christ. This turns the relationship between the Christian and Christ on its head both biblically and ethically. Biblically, the assertion of Hebrews 13:8 is overturned. Ethically, Pilate’s question ("What is truth?" John 18:38), and not Jesus’ assertion of truth, becomes the guiding principle of theology. The overall effect is one of putting the cart before the horse, of submitting the gospel, and not our enculturated preconceptions, to scrutiny. While this endeavour may find some external validation—an important possibility—it clearly runs into problems with internal coherence and comprehension. While attempting to be inclusive, such an approach might have the effect of excluding much of the tradition from which it speaks, and may in fact place itself outside the tradition[s] in which it claims a voice.

Finally, the approach of the document circumnavigates the possibility that scripture is speaking exclusively and critically about some particular aspect of religious assertion. It is not an attack on "the Jews" *per se*, but is rather the employment of an ancient device of Hebrew prophecy, the *pathos* of God, to articulate suspicions and warning to its own community. It is sharp criticism for the sake of those being criticized, and is done *within* the community of faith. It is, therefore, a self-critical device. While Christianity has clearly inherited it, such a device is only appropriately used with the same intent and application.

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To summarize, these three documents of The UCC serve as examples that illustrate the influences of pluralist theology on one Christian denomination. While almost all statements of

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\(^{1}\) McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 95.
The UCC take final form as inclusivist expressions of faith, my analysis identifies the effects of pluralism in terms of:

i) An historical selectivity with a predisposition to _mea culpa_ formulations, which ignores or is unaware of attempts within historical theology to mitigate the sin of presumption with regard to salvation being exclusively within the Church:

ii) A tendency to speak of ‘revelation’, ‘religion’, and ‘culture’ in a manner that identifies all three as equally co-determined factors of God’s presence. ‘Authentic’ religion is a ‘path of salvation,’ a trait that is relativized and generalized across all religious boundaries. Concurrently, ‘culture’ is presented as a correlative corrective to the gospel;

iii) Plurality in religion is assumed to be a good thing in and of itself. The approach therefore lacks a sufficient doctrine of sin to consider the manifestation of evil in the world, nor does it provide any means by which its adherents might discern their own motives or actions;

iv) Christology, when it is brought to the forefront at all, is primarily ‘representative’ as opposed to ‘constitutive.’ While this approach might have some merit, it is not sufficient in and of itself because it has the effect of describing Jesus Christ in functional terms: the point of God’s activity is seen only in terms of ‘our’ salvation (however defined), and not in terms of God’s intention. Scripture, therefore, also becomes a matter of formal utility. In the end, the epistemological question looms large: we do not ‘know’ anything, but instead are left with expressing various ‘opinions’ of equal weight.

The intentions of these theological statements can and must be applauded because they reflect a spirit of solidarity, generosity and openness to the neighbour. However, the inability to simultaneously accept an approach proceeding from the Reformation affirmations of _solus Christus_, _sola scriptura_, _sola fides_, which understand human solidarity as both justified and sinful, and that are materially dependent upon God’s act in Jesus Christ, demonstrate a major failing of this approach to religious plurality. The result is a prideful theology, even if that pride seeks to be humble, because in the final analysis it proclaims itself instead of the Reign of God. Such an approach is a _theologiae gloriae_, though it expresses itself as merely one opinion among many. Further, it is an opinion that is without weight among those whom pluralism could oppose, such as the ‘religious right’ of Christianity.
During the period in which this broad genre of thinking has taken root, forms of the religious right have grown incrementally. The increase is significant even in Canada, where the religious right is identified as approximately 10% of the voting public, up from almost nothing less than twenty years ago. These polarities appear to compete within the social milieu that is evident within the churches as well. As such, their similarities are as important as their differences. I would go so far as to say their similarities are essential, for they are both fundamentally theologiae gloriae. As such, both come under criticism of a theology of the cross.

e) Triumphalism and Theologia Crucis

The suggestion seems absurd. That the affirmations of the religious right and the principles of Smith, Knitter, and other pluralists are, at a fundamental level, as alike as they are different, seems ridiculous. They are, after all, stridently opposed to one another.

It is often similarity, and not difference, that leads to stridency. This might well be the case in this instance. In view of our survey of selected samples from the Christian religious right, and pluralistic theology, as well as evidence of influence within one major Protestant denomination, we can see that there are many major differences worth noting. Right wing religiosity is expressed in terms that are specific to a particular culture, ethnicity or nation. Pluralism is expressed in terms of global responsibility and survival. More importantly, right wing religion is exclusive both expressly and soteriologically, while pluralism seeks to be ‘inclusive-plus,’ granting at least the possibility of salvation to all religious systems. Yet it is at precisely this point, where the two polarities seem so distant, that they are most alike. Both right wing religiosity and pluralism are primarily concerned with soteriology, however defined. Soteriocentricity is ultimately anthropocentric, and potentially ego-centered as well. The religious right claims possession of ways and means by which all people are to be ‘saved’ in terms of being made ‘more like’ a male, an American, a Christian, a Caucasian, etc. Pluralism claims that common cause, experience, survival, and religious phenomenology are the means by
which people effect their own salvation. The similarities can be illustrated by contrasting them with reference to the limited terms of reference for *theologia crucis*:

1) **The God of Jesus Christ is not found in being sought, but in God’s initiative to seek us.**

_Theologia crucis_ maintains that what we know of God, God’s intent for creation, and human sin is revealed in Jesus Christ. The Christian religious right, and derivative forms of toxic religiosity, articulate an understanding of God’s intent and involvement in terms of ‘moral values,’ which are culturally specific, and often egocentric e.g., American values are Christian values. Pluralists by and large define salvation in terms of human [religious moral] work. In either case, Jesus Christ is unnecessary for the knowledge of God, and God’s salvation of the world.

The two perspectives are similar. Both poles presuppose a ‘right path’ to God, one through the adoption of prescribed values and actions, the other through a worldview that emphasizes religions as ‘paths to God’. Neither approach is coherent with God’s gracious initiative in all things.

2) **God’s self-revelation is known in the event of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ, of which the source of knowledge is scripture, not reasoned speculation.**

Neither position professes the knowledge of God as conveyed in God’s self-revelation in Christ. The Christian religious right and its corollaries maintain an unconscious doctrine of _translatio imperii_, in which the Holy Empire is transferred from nation to nation until the appearance of the Antichrist, which it has the power to subdue.¹⁵⁰ That nation is, at this time, the United States. Knowledge of God is therefore attributed to a knowledge of what is necessary to maintain that nation’s supremacy. There are other more egocentric perspectives, some of which are quite atheistic, such as extreme forms of neo-Fascism, unbridled capitalism, and the state monopolies of the former Soviet Union.

Pluralism, on the other hand, speaks always of the imperfect knowledge of God equally transmitted by diverse religious systems. It is heavily reliant upon the Enlightenment value of

doubt as the basis for inquiry, while the Christian religious right demands certainty as the necessary outcome of inquiry. Neither is materially dependent upon Jesus Christ in its epistemological basis.

3) The revelation of God denies human claims to personal power and authority, and is therefore critical of those who claim influence and mediational office between God and the human creature.

There is more of a synergy than agreement on this point, as both give evidence of sin as illuminated by a theology of the cross. The claims of the religious right are precisely claims to power, including the power to mediate ‘right living’ based on a formal proximity to Jesus Christ. Pluralism, by abdicating any particular power to the person and work of the crucified God, also abdicates any responsibility, authority or hope derived from it. The first is the sin of presumption, and the second the sin of despair. In the final analysis, both assume that humanity can and must be the agent of its own salvation.

4) The gospel therefore defies all claims to power and mediation. God’s power is found in the weakness and suffering that calls the believer into faithful service to the neighbour. The power of Christ is for, and never over, the neighbour. Christian faith, then, does not encounter the neighbour uncritically, but acts only toward her or his suffering need.

The religious right obviously claims power over and not for, others on the basis of personal adherence to what they call ‘Christian.’ Once again, the principle of abdication applies for the pluralists: they ascribe to Christ, and therefore Christian faith, no particularity. Once again, we find that both assume human, rather than divine, initiative that in the end translates into pride that imposes suffering, or sloth that abdicates the position of identity that could make a difference.

151 Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 23: “... hopelessness can assume two forms... Both are forms of the sin against hope. Presumption is a premature, selfwilled anticipation of the fulfilment of what we hope for from God. Despair is the premature, arbitrary anticipation of the non-fulfilment of what we hope for from God.”

152 The word “over” is used to denote the assumption of control over others for personal gain. We must be mindful that when Christ renders a service for me, he is, as it were, beneath me (to uphold me). On the other hand, if he upholds me and sends me to others (and I don’t uphold him or send him to others), then in this sense he is ‘over me.’
Pluralism is based upon an ‘open’ and essentially uncritical engagement with the religious other for the sake of common cause. This is a necessary precondition, they say, for dialogue. Yet that approach is in no way coherent with faith in the crucified Christ, which reveals human sin in an act of unprecedented criticism. That criticism is, however, *pro nobis* in the same way as prophetic criticism, described by Heschel as ‘anthropotropism’. ‘True religion’, according to the *theologia crucis*, does not merely affirm. It transforms. The cross teaches us that, yes. God loves us—but God is not done with us yet!

The religious right does not lack critical faculty, but it is criticism levelled *against* others, and which is seldom (if ever) exercised as self-criticism. It is not, therefore. an adherence that risks personal opinions or preconceptions. and claims power over, not for. the ‘other’.

5) **No human endeavour, including the religious, can be in and of itself a vehicle for salvation without the initiative of God’s grace.**

By excluding those with whom they do not agree, both the religious right and the pluralists reject the initiative of God in all things. They prefer to choose their own message and messenger, in opposition to all biblical concepts of the prophets and prophecy where the message and messenger are strictly chosen upon the initiative of God. It is unlikely that either can regard their enemies as “the rod of God” (to recall Luther’s phrase), or greet her or him as one for whom Christ has died. For the pluralist, this would mean accepting the view that God, whom we meet in Christ, elects someone whose point of view they exclude or reject, be they ‘orthodox’, ‘conservative’ or ‘exclusivistic’. For the religious right it would mean letting go of claims to moral primacy, and accepting the prophetic reality that this same judgement is directed first and foremost against those who claim a place closest to Christ.

As has already been described, both the religious right and pluralism depend upon human initiative. For the former, it is conformity to the values and mores of a particular political and cultural view, to which Christ is attached like a talisman. For the latter, it is the common attribute
of `faith’ from which arises myriad religious practices and symbols, in which Christ is one symbol among many.

Both are, in different ways, theologiae gloriae. Both are theotropical in their own ways, and both practice forms of exclusivism.

These are, according to the first five terms of reference identified in Chapter III, some of the possible insights that can be gleaned from Martin Luther’s theologia crucis. In terms of the additional two gleaned from the work by Barth and Moltmann, we see that:

6) The theologia crucis demonstrates that Christian faith is always in continuity with the faith of Israel.

Theologiae gloriae always affirms itself. It possesses the trait of being based upon the ‘experience’ of its proponent. In the case of the Christian religious right, there is a discontinuity with the faith of Israel expressed as unbridled supersessionism, or even hatred. At the very least, principles of the religious right seek to be in continuity with the traditions and ‘values’ of personal experience, and not with the experience of God abiding among the people of Israel. Even Luther, with his reprehensible hatred of the Jews, never once tried to sever the person and work of Christ from the scriptures of ancient Israel.153

Pluralism, where it renders the relationship between Jesus Christ and faith as merely formal, and the relationship with scripture—particularly the scripture of Israel—unnecessary, renders itself ineffective in its contest with the exclusivism it hopes to vanquish. There is no frame of reference here by which someone claiming to be Christian, and who holds to a toxic religiosity, needs to listen. The pluralist gives up the only currency with which the soul of the Christian religious right might be purchased.

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153 Some have claimed otherwise. Adolph Hitler said, “I do insist on the certainty that sooner or later—once we hold power—Christianity will be overcome and the German church established. Yes, the German church. Without a pope and without the Bible. And Luther, if he could be with us, would give us his blessing.” As can be plainly seen from this survey, Hitler was wrong. From Hitler’s Speeches, edited by N.H. Baynes, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1942), 369.
The interesting thing is that both end up practicing a kind of modified Marcionism, the religious right by supersession and the pluralist by abdication. As will be demonstrated, some Jews are concerned by this. One must ask if either could be considered responsible theology in the post-holocaust era.

7) The gospel is proclaimed with universal intent.

The religious right makes no pretensions to proclamation with universal intent. It is a clearly ego-centered soteriology. The practitioners of extreme right-wing Christianity understand salvation as being ‘for me’, ‘for us’, or at best, ‘for you if you look and act like me’. The perspective has a wide range of intensity: from the simplistic efforts of white Anglo Saxon Protestants to legislate prayer on the basis of a heritage of the late nineteenth century, to the relegation of Jews to a strip of desert in Palestine. The effect is the same: those who do not share similarities of colour, heritage, history, and even economic status are treated as deficient.

Pluralism in most forms makes an intentional claim to universal intent. The question is, what is the claim that has universal intent? While Knitter does say that “truth that is not universal is not worth much.” the only truth expounded is the very laudable (and very real!) but easily ignored truth of the imminent threat to creation and human existence. If survival is the truth by which we are to be motivated, we must despairingly acquiesce to a history in which many Christians, Jews, Muslims and pagans alike have sought self-destruction in a shared manic Manicheism to leave this world for the promises of the next. Without a material understanding of God’s threefold revelation in the incarnation of Jesus Christ, one must wonder by what means pluralism makes any claim to knowledge of God other than from a seed of conscience. Yet the theology of the cross, providing as it does an understanding of the human creature both saved and sinful, also provides the knowledge that everyone we meet is someone for whom God suffers, and whom God calls to true life as a servant to the suffering neighbour in the space

154 Knitter, Jesus and the Other Names, 76; Smith, Towards a World Theology, 56-80.
created for new creation, as though God were absent. Nothing bears more universal intent than that each person be regarded as one for whom Christ has died whether they realize it, want it, or even believe. It is a perspective that is ever critical of the one with faith, yet ever available to the one with faith in the crucified God. It is a view that denies the limitations of any current condition, for the transformative power of God pro nobis. Both pluralism and the religious right seek the conformity of others to their own view and image. This is not ‘conversion,’ which involves a ‘circumcision of the heart’ of which Paul spoke (Rom.2:29). The theology of the cross describes the transformation of one’s self in conformity to God in Christ, while the theologies of glory prescribe the conformity of another to a pre-determined version of being ‘saved’.

To these terms of reference, we might add the following:

8) The Theology of the Cross shows us that ‘religion’ is not restricted to that which is self-declared as such. It is a human enterprise wherein human devotion and dedication are demanded.

William C. James describes the compartmentalization and alternation of religious adherence by the term, ‘dimorphism.’ He postulates that ‘situational use of various norms characterizes the manner by which many contemporary Canadians manage conflicts between religion and culture.’ In this same way, we find common ground between the religious right and pluralism. Pluralism, in this instance, honestly acknowledges the possibility of adhering to diverse religious systems as the need arises because they are, or at least may be, ‘paths to God.’ The close identification of the religious right with the dominant myths and values of a particular culture, however, create a similar set of conditions. It is common, for instance, for adherents of so-called ‘conservative’ Christianity to assume positions uncritical of dominant political and economic forces, and to engage in the sacrifice of children for the sake of national security and economic

155 As Bonhoeffer would put it, etsi deus non daretur, e.g. in Letters and Papers from Prison, (London: SCM Press, 1953). 120 and elsewhere.
157 Ibid., 275.
stability. The phenomenon remains even more insidious because it is so subtle. As a result, the
religious dimorphism is often unidentified because adherence to the state is unnamed as a
*religion of blood and soil.* Both the doctrine of the Two Kingdoms and the Reformed doctrine
of the Lordship of Christ were meant to mitigate this possibility. When one’s confessed religion
(Christianity) becomes dependent and synonymous with national, ethnic or race identity, then the
pagan religion of blood and soil becomes operant and even determinative for Christian practice.

Ultimately, then, both the pole of the Christian religious right, and that of pluralism,
though in opposition, share many attributes of *theologiae gloriae,* including the characteristic of
exclusivism. The exclusiveness of the religious right is clear: that of pluralism needs explanation.

Ironically, some of this explanation is aided by the two metaphors used by pluralists to
describe their enterprise: the “Copernican Revolution,” and the “Theological Rubicon.” These
metaphors are meant to describe the absolute commitment of pluralists, over and against the
common wisdom of the majority, to move from particular centristic propositions to those which
stress the commonality of the people of the world. But there is a possible *double entendre.*

Michael Polanyi, in *Personal Knowledge,* puts a different and revealing twist to this comparison
when he suggests that the movement from the Ptolemaic to the Copernican view of the universe
could just as easily symbolize a shift to anthropocentrism, because the shift involves moving
from the concrete and known to the abstract and unknowable—a realm that humanity prefers.\(^{158}\) Similarly, by “theological Rubicon,” pluralists mean to compare themselves to Julius Caesar who
committed himself irrevocably when he led his army across that small stream in defiance of the
Senate.\(^{159}\) His action was meant to encompass Rome’s neighbours within his own framework. In
the same way, pluralists might be promoting, consciously or unconsciously, perceptions that

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158 Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge,* Ch. 1. Note that Luther’s ‘Copernican revolution’ as described by Nygren is not
based upon that which humanity prefers, but upon that which is “foolishness” to those who rely on human reason
(1 Cor. 1:23).

159 Gavin d’Costa, “Preface,” in *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of
over-ride and subordinate the religious claims of all traditions into the singularity of Western
humanist Enlightenment thought. Michael von Brück seriously raises this question:

Until recently Europe and America exploited other cultures in terms of their material as
well as human resources. Is interreligious dialogue a means to exploit non-European and
non-American cultures in a spiritual way insofar as their religious traditions are being
made “available” to us?\(^{160}\)

Heim punctuates the point:

Pluralistic theologies have struggled conscientiously to avoid imposing explicit Christian
categories on other religions. But it seems obvious that they have enthusiastically made
normative, in the negative as it were, modern Western views on true religion. They have
taken the simple existence of multiple religious traditions with utter seriousness as a fact.
But the philosophies, the theologies, the views of history, the social thought of these
other traditions and their societies are hardly taken seriously at all. They are not even
considered as the sources of alternative fundamental categories for approaching religious
diversity itself, alternative to those of modern Western critical philosophy,
understandings of historical process, and standards for justice.\(^{161}\)

In the end, the effect is the same: there is a subordination, implied or stated, of positions,
identities, propositions and practices other than one’s own. While the religious right proceeds
deductively from assertions of certainty, and therefore seeks to “convert” or subordinate all other
positions, pluralism is based upon the primacy of “mystery,” and therefore doubt. Pluralist
assertions therefore proceed reductively, subsuming other positions in terms of what “cannot be
known.”\(^{162}\) Whether we refer to the exclusion of the religious right, or the absorption of
pluralism, the posture is not one of the crucified God. It is \textit{eros}, not \textit{agape}.

It is also \textit{eros} with an entirely too optimistic view of human nature. The Christian
religious right seems to say, “Once we have legislated Christian family values, the world will be
a better place.” The toxic theology of rage seems to say, “Once the races are properly separated
and white males dominate, there will be peace as God intended” (as if that were the case during
centuries of patriarchy, invasion and colonization). The pluralists hope that everyone will learn

\(^{160}\) von Brück, “Identifying Constructively Our Interreligious Moment,” 40.
to understand our common history, our common issues of survival and global responsibility, the common experience of ‘faith’ even when the object of faith is understood very differently. Each position, in its own very different way, glorifies humanity as if in some way self-saving. One cannot help but remember Anselm’s wry warning to his imaginary Boso, who questioned why God does not simply will the redemption of sinful humanity: *Nondum considerasti quanti ponderts sit peccatum* (“You have not yet considered the great weight of sin”).163

In the case of pluralism. there is an especially tragic shading to this insufficiency. Pluralism is a methodology that has evolved as a means of refuting the exclusivity of Christian imperialism and missionism. and thus the imposition of suffering by cultural genocide. the destruction of creation by human exploitation. and human sacrifice to the idolatry of multinational corporate capitalism. In doing so. pluralists such as Knitter begin with social analysis. and do so masterfully. Most rely on ‘tradition and experience’ as normative sources for doing theology. which is certainly the case with both Smith and Knitter. In Knitter’s case. scripture (and therefore what is conveyed by it) is subsumed within the tradition of the church. which to Knitter might normatively mean the Magesterium of the Roman Catholic Church.164

Smith’s treatment of scripture was vastly different. To Smith. the community of faith determines scripture.165 It is. therefore. subsumed into the general category of ‘symbol’, into which meaning is ‘poured.’ In this way. he was able to refer sympathetically to Marcion as someone who saw the “new Christian movement” as “sufficiently different . . . that it need not conform to previous dispensations in the matter of scriptures.”166 Smith. like Knitter. seems unaware of the chilling suspicion with which post-Holocaust Judaism regards such reduction of

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164 Knitter. *Jesus and the Other Names*. 27.
166 Ibid.. 54.
scripture by Christians. This is especially true of the reduction known as ‘Marcionism’, which effectively de-Judaizes Christianity and Jesus.¹⁶⁷

. . . severance from the Old Testament has always thrown the church into some form of ethical chaos, dangerous to itself and others.³

[Paul] indeed opposes the ever-approaching Marcionite danger, the severing not only of the Old and New Testaments, but that of creation and salvation, of Creator and Saviour, for he sees how near men are, Kierkegaard says of the Gnosis, “to identifying creation with the Fall,” and he knows that a victory for Marcion can lead to the destruction of Christianity . . .³

Christian faith is biblical and Hebraic, or it is nothing at all.³

In inter-religious dialogue, some Jews are extremely concerned that Christians maintain a material connection with Jesus’ Judaism through the Tanakh. They seem to understand Christian sin far better than Christians. When Christians forget the bleeding Jew, they seem to say, Jews start to bleed.

Pluralists (here we must take Knitter as indicative of the project) maintain that it is precisely at this point, the point of christology, that Christians must be willing to let go of the specific and unique salvific act of God in Christ.

Yet some non-Christians with religious commitment recognize that it is at this point of commitment that the Christian is changed—and for the better. Franz Rosenzweig expressed this observation with admirable economy:

. . . the Christian is by nature or at least by birth—a pagan; the Jew, however, is a Jew.

Thus the way of the Christian must be a way of self-externalization [Selbstentäusserung], of self-renunciation; he must always take leave of himself, must forfeit himself in order to become a Christian.¹⁶⁸


³ J. Louis Martyn, on Leo Baeck; ¹⁴⁹, Leo Baeck.

³ 258, Franz Rosenzweig.

Pinchas Lapide put it even more bluntly when responding to an audience question during a public exchange with Jürgen Moltmann:

If [Jesus] had shown himself as the Resurrected One, not only to the 530 Jewish witnesses but to the entire population, all Jews would have become followers of Jesus. To me this would have had only one imaginable consequence: the church, baptism, the forgiveness of sins, the cross, everything which today is Christian would have remained an inner-Jewish institution, and you, my dear friend, would today still be offering horsemeat to Wotan on the Godesberg.  

“Christology is at the heart of Christian faith, worship, and life,” declared Monika Hellwig. “The claim for Jesus as incarnate Word and savior is not only an ontological claim but a functional one.”  

The emphasis on soteriology without Christ acknowledges no centre but the self. yet if God has “indeed done what the gospel affirms” then salvation is no longer the issue; the issue is ethics, and how one should act in grateful acknowledgement of what God has done.

In this sense, then, pluralism is correct. One must remember pluralism’s Kantian roots, and recognize that there is an ethical imperative at play within the various formulations of

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169 Lapide and Moltmann. *Jewish Monotheism and Christian Trinitarian Thought*, 68.
171 Lochhead. 80.
173 Ibid. [Moltmann]. 152.
pluralism. But the result is a Christian ethic similar to Smith’s theology of the cross sans cross. The only basis is survival. But whose survival? The wisdom of the world says that only the strong survive. But the cross of the resurrection stands in protest against all suffering.

This is precisely the point at which the tragedy of pluralism is most visible. Without acknowledging the unique power of Christ, those who subsume Jesus into the politics of power don’t even have to listen. They reject, a priori, any formulation that is not Christ-centered.

Further, those who are seekers and inquirers end up encountering confident Christianity only in forms that speak loudest: the dominant, the powerful, and the right wing. Their choice, if made between toxic forms of Christian expression and the gentle ambiguity of pluralism, is between the distortion of Christendom, and abandoning Christianity altogether. One might never engage with forms of biblically based theology operating independently of the artificial typology of pluralism, inclusivism and exclusivism. Feminist hermeneutics, liberation theologies, the riches of classical theology, and even orthodox doctrine are lost to the one who mistakenly identifies Christian theology in terms of the limited polarities of the religious right, and pluralism.

But theologia crucis provides the essential starting point for a critical theology of religion that maintains the discipline of uniquely Christian faith and calls into question the presumptions of the religious right, and of toxic forms of religion hiding behind the pretence of non-religion. Theologia crucis is christocentric, but in such a way as to simultaneously reveal God in the world, human sinfulness, and human destiny. It is transforming, not affirming. The cross always exhorts the one who is claimed by Christ to serve someone who is suffering, even if it means opposing someone who claims Christ. It is God’s pathos, God’s way to us: it is the anthropotropical initiative of God that invites, insists upon and welcomes a grateful response. It is a critical relationship that insists upon personal, costly relationship. It is God’s abiding presence in the foolish vulnerability of suffering beckoning each person to true human life.

175 Hunsinger, Disruptive Grace, 36-37: “... neither the depth and seriousness of God’s love nor the depth and seriousness of human sin can be known for what they are apart from the cross.”
CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The theology of the cross as a basis for a critical theology of religion must bear the marks of the definition found on p.2 of this thesis. It must depend upon the scriptural account of God’s self-revelation in the incarnation of Jesus Christ, whose suffering, death and resurrection saves us from the need to seek corporeal or eternal security by works or the acquisition of power over others. It must affirm that what happens in this world is important, since it is the sphere in which salvation takes place, by virtue of that singular act of God, and through no effort of our own.

“We are beggars,” wrote Luther. “that is true.” It is equally true that any other claim to salvation by human design is one of usurpation and self-glorification, having neither need nor place for Jesus Christ as saviour. The critical, indeed self-critical, responsibilities of theologia crucis are amply applicable to any religious enterprise claiming to be ‘Christian.’

It is my hope that the treatment of pluralist theologies in this thesis can be recognized as respectful and as expressing the concerns of a critical admirer. The fruit of pluralism has included a laudable ethical imperative for acting in the world as though all religions are at least potentially salvific. The public statement of this possibility has done much to open the minds of many people, Christian and non-Christian alike. It has been noted, however, that there is within this approach the same internal inconsistency that plagues some forms of inclusivism. Even more so than inclusivism, the philosophy of pluralism maintains a theologiae gloriae of religion that, while much different in emphasis, resembles the glorification of the self that is inherent within the theology of glory promulgated by the religious right. That similarity is found in the assertion that some form of human work—whether worship by some broad definition, or adherence to the principles and propositions of a particular polity—is the medium of salvation. Both assert a form of what has been classically known as ‘synteresis’: the innate ability of the human creature to
affect salvation. In both instances, salvation is seen as a worldly phenomenon 'according to the flesh' and not as the work of God in the world, *incarnate* ('in the flesh').

All of which would be mere erudition, and simply interesting, if the outcome were other than that by giving up the centrality and *Heilsbedeutung* of Christ, current approaches may oppose toxic Christianity, but only as a matter of opinion. The actual force of argument to ethical action is lost in the effort to be 'reasonable.' That force of argument is quite simply Jesus Christ and *him crucified*. The field is lost precisely at the point of God's incarnation in Christ, which sufficiently reveals the nature of God, human actuality, and human destiny. By giving up the incarnation, all aspects of atonement are also lost. ¹ There is, therefore, a loss of the essential Christian ethic that no matter the conspiracies or reason of the world, God's self-sacrifice has made all other forms of sacrifice unnecessary and unwanted. However we might fail to realize it, the primary impetus of Christian ethics derives from this doctrine: in the world of God's keeping, there are no acceptable casualties and no acceptable collateral damage, for "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son . . . not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him." (Jn. 3:16-17) The world is quite simply the place in which, and for which, Christ died. Yet having given up the materiality of the incarnation, the ability to see and respond to sin and are rendered as an unmerited argument by toxic manifestations of religious plurality in the current context. And without sin, there is no need of God's grace.

Soteriocentricity becomes an inessential starting point, a rhetorical device at best, and the humble solidarity of *simul iustus et peccator*, by which a Christian may universally regard her or his neighbour, is lost. As Barth said:

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¹ Hunsinger, *Disruptive Grace*, 2: "Christian ethics as we know it today often seems to proceed as if the atoning work of Christ were of little or no relevance to its deliberations on human affairs."
The only cogent argument in the face of religiosity that inflicts suffering even as it calls itself by Christ’s name is one that asserts the authority of Christ in the face of modern secularity and religious plurality. But it must do so for, and not over or against, those for whom Christ died. I described five criteria that such an argument must bear, saying that such a theology must be:

i) faithful to the Gospel, centred in and founded upon the Cross of the risen Christ;

ii) as broadly coherent as possible within the Church, yet inherently self-critical, therefore providing a critique of religious superiority and triumphalism;

iii) resistant to the assumption that ‘religion’ is a priori positive, and would therefore enable a vision of the negative and demonic in ‘religion,’ particularly in Christian religion;

iv) helpful in preventing complicity with oppressive practices;

v) able to encourage an open and appreciative attitude of people of other religions.³

By ‘rediscovering’ the terms of reference for Luther’s *theologia crucis*, we rediscover the starting point for a critical theology of religion that fits these criteria. With reference to (i) and (ii), while there is no universal agreement as to the appropriateness of *theologia crucis*, it is ecumenically recognized. When understood in terms of the nascent categories of Heschel’s *pathos* of God as a form of anthropotropic discourse, it can be seen to be coherent not only with the writings of Paul and the Gospels, but also with the traditions of Jewish faith that are inherently self-critical. As to (iii), *theologia crucis* is founded upon the necessity of God’s initiative and intervention: as such, it possesses an operant and ubiquitous doctrine of human sin that predicates every encounter. The *a priori* regarding ‘religion’ is, therefore, not in the least

² CDIV.2, 9.
³ Re. p.19.
positive; knowing the inadequacy of one’s own citizenship within the Christian community to affect salvation, the theologian of the cross knows that there are no ‘paths to God.’ She does know, however, that the imposition of suffering is never an option for the Christian.

Finally, knowing oneself to be united with all human creatures simul iustus et peccator, a theology of the cross encourages a positive and solicitous regard to the neighbour no matter what their religion, knowing the neighbour to be one for whom Christ has died.

There were at least two occasions where Martin Luther failed to meet these criteria. The first was with regard to the Jews, and the second to his complicity during the Peasants’ Revolt of 1524. Both these instances, however, precisely illustrate the cogency of the theologia crucis. In the first instance, Luther regarded Judaism as being so much like Christianity that it fell directly under the shadow of the cross. Like the prophet he was, he lashed out most vehemently against what he thought was a ‘revelation of religion’ that failed to respond to Christ on the cross. The only outcome that Luther could perceive was that Jews must become ‘more Christian,’ that is to say, more like him. In the second instance, Luther’s own terror of civil disintegration and his distaste over having his work used in such a way overtook him. In both instances, Luther started with presuppositions other than that of the crucified God and the suffering thus revealed as the place of faith’s calling. Instead, he built upon the presumption of Christ’s victory over sin and is thus condemned by his own theologia crucis. That Luther erred, however, does not in and of itself impugn theologia crucis, and had he held fast to his own findings the outcomes in both cases might have been much different. Such is still the case.

If, for instance, the mission of the Church in Canada had responded to the suffering need of our neighbours instead of indulging in the theologia gloriae of white Anglo-Saxon Protestantism, our involvement in the Indian residential school system might have been quite
different. So, too, could there be greater clarification for Christian involvement in the neo-conservative politics and neo-liberal economics today that find support among the Christian religious right. That clarification can be aided by applying eight terms of reference for a *theologia crucis* (by no means exhaustive) that might help the Christian in a discerning encounter with any and all manifestations of religion. These are found on pages 212-218, and may be summarized more briefly in the following points, which maintain:

i) God’s initiative in all matters of salvation;

ii) God’s self-revelation in the suffering of Jesus Christ;

iii) a denial of human claims to personal power and authority;

iv) opposition of power over others;

v) a rejection of religion as *a priori* positive;

vi) a history in continuity with the faith of Israel;

vii) “universal intent”;

viii) the knowledge that ‘religion’ is not restricted to that which declares itself.

With reference to the fifth term of reference, I contend that a *theologia crucis* encourages an open and appreciative attitude toward people of other religions. Knowing that every person is both justified and saved at the same time is a profoundly liberating insight, which allows personal human contact without a sense of superiority or contempt. It is no less so with regard to contact with the religious ‘other,’ and his or her form of worship. A *theologia crucis* that encourages us to see ourselves as no less flawed than our neighbour, especially with regard to religious practice, is a theology of religion that frees us from the egocentric need for certainty in matters of salvation. It provides the confidence to engage with curiosity rather than reject out of ignorance. Further, knowing that Christianity is no less ‘unbelief’ than any other religion, and
toxic religiosity hides behind seemingly innocuous practices. the Christian is compelled by faith
to examine every human invention of devotion, including the economic and political, according
to that which is revealed in the cross of the risen Christ.

At the very least, a *theologia crucis* of religion provides a faith basis that might be
disputed among those who understand Christian religion as occupying a position of preference
and privilege, but it cannot be ignored. A *theologia crucis* of religion bears upon such claims
with prophetic and withering scrutiny, accepting the possibility of derision and even defeat, but
knowing with Luther that . . .

> [if] we perish then Christ the Almighty Ruler of the world himself must suffer with us.
> Even if this cause were to collapse, I would rather perish with Christ than rule with
> Caesar.  

The unity that so many seek among the religions of the world is not found within their
efficacy, but rather within their ineffectacious dependency upon God whom we encounter in the
suffering of a bleeding Jew at the hands of those who would dominate by political, military, and
religious means. Included within that fragility are those endeavours of human aspiration that do
not claim to be ‘religious,’ but which clearly make claims to devotion: race supremacy,
economic stratification and utility, and global corporate capitalism, to name only a few. They too
make soteriological claims. To discern any religious enterprise as participating in the life of God,
or as demonically false and misleading, is an exhausting but essentially life-giving task of
Christian faith that is fraught with pitfalls. Yet it is a discernment basic to faithful living, and is
available to those who try, however they may stumble or fall, to follow Jesus Christ. That
discernment is begun most effectively from within the shadow of the cross of the risen Christ,
where God’s suffering with humanity and within creation reveals God, human failing, and
human destiny according to God’s gracious hope for us.

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4 *LW* 43, 172.
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