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This is clear: He who does not know Christ does not know God hidden in suffering. Therefore he prefers works to suffering, glory to the cross, strength to weakness, wisdom to folly and, in general, good to evil. These are the people whom the apostle calls enemies of the cross of Christ (Phil. 3:18), for they hate the cross and suffering and love works and the glory of works. Martin Luther, Heidelberg Disputation, 21. ¹

LUTHERAN/CHARISMATIC TENSIONS IN THE LIGHT OF AN IMPLICIT THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS IN ACTS

E. Mark Koenker

Among the many questions generated by charismatic renewal of the past ten years has been the charge, often leveled by Lutherans, that charismatics tend to espouse and operate with a theology of glory. Accordingly, they are accused of emphasizing spiritual gifts such as tongues and healing as all-pervasive and even constitutive of a Spirit-led Christian life. The centrality of the Gospel together with the power and sufficiency of the means of grace are seen as minimalized or ignored altogether.² Appeal to Baptism in the Spirit and the gifts that follow only serves to reinforce the suspicion that the charismatic has abandoned not only a sacramental understanding of baptism but from a Lutheran perspective, the concomitant daily baptismal death with Christ to sin. Luther's famous *simul justus et peccator* tension in the Christian life is not taken seriously. The realities of weakness, suffering, and conflict in the faith-life are brushed aside. In a word, a theology of the cross is absent or not taken seriously.³

Many Lutheran charismatics take open issue with such charges.⁴ Others counsel Lutheran charismatics to "live under the cross" as they attempt to relate their experience within a Lutheran context.⁵ They suggest that for a Lutheran a tension ought to exist, for charismatic and non-charismatic alike, between theology of the cross and

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1. *Luther's Works*, American Edition, Vol. 31, p. 53.
 2. Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, "The Charismatic Movement and Lutheran Theology," Commission on Theology and Church Relations (January, 1972), p. 33.
 3. Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, "The Lutheran Church and the Charismatic Movement: Guidelines for Congregations and Pastors," Commission on Theology and Church Relations (April, 1977), pp. 5-9.
 4. Theodore Jungkuntz, "Secular Theology, Charismatic Renewal and Luther's Theology of the Cross," *Concordia Theological Monthly*, 42 (January, 1971):23.
 5. Larry Christenson, *The Charismatic Renewal Among Lutherans* (Bethany Fellowship Inc., 1976), p. 127.

theology of glory, the “already, but not yet” character of Christian faith and life.

While one may acknowledge the necessity of a certain experiential tension in the life of all Christians, this does not resolve the theological tensions experienced by charismatic and non-charismatic Lutherans as they attempt to relate to one another. In some respects the issue is confessional at root. This is reflected in the Missouri Synod’s Commission on Theology and Church Relations Report on the charismatic movement.

We should not and cannot pass judgment on the Holy Spirit’s presence, operations, and gifts on the basis of our feelings, how and when we perceive it in our hearts. On the contrary, because the Holy Spirit’s activity often is hidden, and happens under cover of great weakness, we should be certain, because of and on the basis of his promise, that the word which is heard and preached is an office and work of the Holy Spirit, whereby he assuredly is potent and active in our hearts (2 Cor. 2:14ff.). *Solid Declaration, Formula of Concord, II, 56.*⁶

The report goes on to discuss at length the following theological concerns:

- A. Spiritual gifts are not to be considered means of grace.
- B. God has not promised to reveal His will to us directly and immediately (without means), as for example through visions and dreams . . . The biblical teaching of the external word as the instrument of the Holy Spirit . . .
- C. Special signs and wonders are not indispensable guarantees that the Spirit of God dwells within an individual.
- D. Faith in Christ does not necessarily eliminate illness and affliction from the life of a Christian.
- E. Christian certainty is not based on feeling but on the objective promises of the Gospel.
- F. “Baptism with the Spirit” is not a basis for church fellowship.
- G. The gift of the Holy Spirit does not necessarily include extraordinary spiritual gifts.⁷

When set against the following Heidelberg disputations of Luther the issue theologically between Lutherans and charismatics clearly becomes one of theology of the cross.

Heidelberg Disputation 19: That person does not deserve to be called a theologian who looks upon the invisible things of God as though they were clearly perceptible in those things which have actually happened (Romans 1:20).

Heidelberg Disputation 20: He deserves to be called a theologian, however, who comprehends the visible and manifest things of God seen through suffering and the cross.

Heidelberg Disputation 21: A theologian of glory calls evil good and good evil. A theologian of the cross calls the thing what it actually is.⁸

That the issue is theological and not one of accent or emphasis suggests fundamentally different scriptural approaches not merely to interpretation, but to sources as well. Classical Lutheran theology has always been built on Pauline material and thus

6. Quoted in LC-MS, “The Lutheran Church and the Charismatic Movement,” pp. 3-4.

7. *Ibid.*, pp. 5-9.

8. *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 31, pp. 52-53.

echoes that portion of Scripture which most clearly develops a theology of the cross. The charismatic movement, on the other hand, in following classical Pentecostalism's heavy focus on Acts, reflects the Lukan tendency not to develop clearly a theology of the cross. If, as Larry Christenson suggests, "It is here (i.e., Acts) that we can recognize both the value of the charismatic contribution and the areas where exegetical and theological correction are needed,"⁹ then an examination of Acts for an implicit theology of the cross might be illuminating for our Lutheran-charismatic problem.

THE STEPHEN MATERIAL AS THE KEY

Biblical scholars have observed the tendency in Luke-Acts to have a less fully developed theology of the cross than the other Gospel writers, not to mention Paul. In commenting on Acts 2:23, they point out that "Luke has nothing corresponding to the Pauline doctrine of the *skandalon tou staurou* and cite Luke 24.26f., 44ff.; Acts 3.18, 13.27 and 26.23 as confirmation."¹⁰ As one commentator explains,

For Luke and his community this *skandalon* of the Cross is overcome by the fact that God's own will, as revealed in the Scriptures, is fulfilled therein. "Thus human freedom" (*aneilate*, did slay) "and divine necessity" (*ekdaton*, delivered up) "here go hand in hand; the simplest and probably the oldest way of reconciling oneself to the paradoxical fate of the Messiah."¹¹

Indeed, the whole of Lukan theology in Acts reflects a subordinationist Christology.¹² The direction and control of God is emphasized in the events surrounding Jesus' life, death, resurrection and ascension, no less than in the growth of the Church as the Spirit guides it. But if there is not an *explicit* accent on the cross, one wonders if there might not be an *implicit* theology of the cross in his story of the apostles.

Perhaps the clearest expression of an implicit theology of the cross in Acts is the Stephen narrative. Up to this point in Acts the new era of the Spirit and Christian mission, inaugurated at Pentecost, had met with relatively grand success and minimal resistance. While confusing some, the revelation and reception of the Spirit at Pentecost clearly bestowed the power Jesus had promised his followers before his ascension (Acts 1.8). Peter's bold witness that day was proof the Spirit had arrived as some 3,000 were added to the apostles number (Acts 2.14-42). As indicated in the first progress report or summary, harmony reigned, wonders were performed, and the Church grew daily (Acts 2.43-47). The healing of the man lame from birth by Peter and John hints at things to come in the hostility it evoked from outside the community (Acts 3.1-4.31), but in summary (Acts 4.32-35), great grace (*charis tou megale*, 4.33) accompanied the witness with great power (*dynamei megale*, 4.33) that characterized community life.

The Ananias and Sapphira narrative (Acts 5.1-11) only serves to confirm that the consistent growth of the community was being accompanied by direct intervention of God on its behalf. As Luke's third progress report indicates (Acts 5.12-16), miracles

9. Christenson, p. 41.

10. Ernst Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971), p. 180.

11. *Ibid.*

12. *Ibid.*, pp. 91-92

abounded more than ever. Even when brought before the council, the apostles were preserved (Acts 5.12-42). Gamaliel's intervention resulted only in a beating and the apostles left "rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonour for the name" (Acts 5.41). At precisely this point, Luke introduces his reader to the first apostle to suffer death.

The Stephen narrative is significant for Luke's development of a theology of the cross not so much as an isolated parallel to Jesus' own experience of death,¹³ but as the introduction of this whole thematic or theology to the remainder of his narration. That the Stephen narrative is clearly pivotal to understanding Luke's literary structure is obvious. But it is that more than structurally. Up until this point the Christian community proclaimed the crucified but lived apart from the cross and its implications. Then Stephen was arrested, tried, and stoned. Here for the first time the cross came not only to figure prominently in the life of discipleship but to characterize it in many respects.¹⁴ That this is so is seen immediately in what follows the Stephen story. "The martyrdom of Stephen was the spark that ignited 'a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem' which, instead of crushing the church, spread it."¹⁵ Implicitly we find here Luke's theology of the cross in Acts; not simply that Stephen dies, but from this point forward the cross is always a reality (actual or potential) to be reckoned with in the life of the Christian.¹⁶ An examination of Stephen's defense speech confirms this observation.

That Luke devotes as much attention to Stephen's speech as he does is one sign that he intends its contents to be integrally related to Stephen's death, not only occasioning it but interpreting it as well. Interpreters have long commented on the failure of the speech to answer the charges against Stephen.¹⁷ But, as Smith points out, its real importance lies in the answers it gives Christians regarding the working of God.

Stephen's speech is important precisely because it is far more than a harangue against his judges or a personal apology . . . With great pathos Stephen sketched an awful tragedy. His opponents gloried in their ancestry, their inheritance, their law, their temple, and were certain that they glorified God. They had indeed a glorious past . . . but they made the mistake . . . of living in the past and orienting themselves to the past . . . That facing backwards was directly contrary to the dynamic of their glorious history and blinded them to the new deed of God in Jesus.¹⁸

God's great actions of the past and Israel's response as outlined by Stephen now interpret not only Jesus' death, but Stephen's own death and the present realities in the life of the Church. Historically, Luke may here be depicting his own community experience with Jewish persecution and rejection.¹⁹ More important, however, are

13. Henry J. Cadbury, *The Making of Luke-Acts* (London: S.P.C.K., 1968), p. 231. Cadbury notes the interchange and transfer of passion details from Luke to Acts.

14. See especially Acts 14.22; also Acts 9.16 of Paul.

15. Robert H. Smith, *Concordia Commentary: Acts* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1970), p. 133.

16. Helmut Flender, *St. Luke: Theologian of Redemptive History* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), p. 129. Flender argues the opposite of this view.

17. See Haenchen, pp. 286-290 for summary discussion of issues involved and solutions proposed.

18. Smith, pp. 115-116.

19. Haenchen, pp. 289-290.

the theological dimensions of the speech which point to an implicit theology of the cross. These are highlighted by Smith.

Stephen pointed to Abraham, Joseph, and Moses. Several themes recur: They suffered rejection from men, but God was with them; law and temple and Holy Land are great, but God appeared to the patriarchs or spoke to them in various places beyond the land and the temple. They did not get and hold what God promised, but never did they cease looking forward in hope. They left the security of the familiar and exchanged it for the uncertainty of the unknown. In faith they faced away from the past toward the future. God was always moving ahead of them, and they followed after.²⁰

These basic themes of the Stephen speech constitute what any Lutheran would regard as a theology of the cross.²¹

If it is correct to read an implicit theology of the cross in Luke's Stephen narrative and speech, both in the sense that Stephen's death points to the importance of the cross subsequently in Acts and in the sense that his speech explicates something of how Christians are to understand the activity of God, then the insights acquired here need to be tested elsewhere in Acts. The following areas, while not developed, suggest themselves for further investigation of an implicit theology of the cross in Acts.

OTHER POTENTIAL INDICATIONS

As mentioned above, Luke intends to draw both a causal and theological connection between Stephen's martyrdom and the expansion of the Church. In using the phrase "and on that day a great persecution arose" (Luke 8.1), Luke stops short of actually attributing circumstances to the Spirit's instrumentality. At the same time, in referring the reader back to Acts 1.8 by the geographic references in the same verse, he inextricably links these same circumstances to the Spirit's activity. Is this evidence of an implicit theology of the cross at work in Acts? Certainly Luke avoids attributing evil or persecution directly to God. At the same time, however, he seems fully aware of a mysterious purpose or intentionality at work throughout human history.²² While the whole of Acts reflects this doublemindedness of Luke, the clearest expressions of it are found in those passages where he deals with Jesus' death and resurrection.

Perhaps it is Luke the historian that best explains his soteriology when he turns to Jesus' death. Whether he uses the basic formula "men killed . . . God raised" or some variation (Acts 2.23-24, 32, 36; 3.10, 15; 4.10-11, 27-28; 5.30-31; 10.39-40; 13.29-30, 33-37; 17.31; 26.8) in talking of the crucifixion, Luke clearly wants to distinguish human involvement from the divine. The frequency of his use of *dei* reveals

20. Smith, p. 116.

21. Note particularly the correspondence with Jungkuntz who characterizes a theology of the cross as that theology that is:

1. dependent on the revealed, promissory Word of God anchored in the historical Christ;
2. apprehended by faith (that is, it stresses pure receptivity), which is Spirit-worked through the Christ-event in Word and sacrament;
3. given visible expression through love (*agape*) and obedient suffering which result from faith

participation in Christ.

22. Flender, pp. 157-159.

his inclination toward divine necessity (18 occurrences in Luke; 24 in Acts); this is in sharp contrast to the other Gospel writers (8 occurrences in Matthew; 6 in Mark; 10 in John). The necessity of the Passion is centrally important.²³ But redemptive history has its focal point for Luke finally in the resurrection. The phrase *hon ho theos anestesēn* (*egeiran*) (Acts 2.32; 3.15; 4.10; 5.30; 10.40; 13.30, 33ff.; 17.31) is a favourite of Luke, especially when linked to references of Jesus “hanging on a tree” (Acts 5.30; 10.39; and 13.29). The cursed and forsaken death of Jesus (according to Deut. 21.23) is a scandal reversed only by God’s action in resurrection.²⁴ A theology of the cross is implied in this reversal and in the necessity behind the Passion.

An overall survey of the narratives in Acts concerning the missionary activity of Paul reveals a man full of the Spirit but hardly thereby unaffected by the cross and its implications. An examination of Acts 9.16 confirms that Luke does in fact know a theology of the cross and even writes explicitly of it particularly in relation to Paul (Acts 20.23; 13.50), although not in Pauline terms. Flender notes the close association between suffering and election in the life of Paul, a sort of “climatic parallelism” with the “eschatological sufferings” of Jesus himself.²⁵

Especially significant for a perspective on theology of the cross in Acts is the exhortation of Acts 14.22 “that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.” Perhaps there is some connection with the fact that Luke is the only Gospel writer to use *paraklesis* (Luke 2.25; 6.24; Acts 4.36; 9.31; 13.15; 15.31). John alone uses *parakletos*. Apart from translating the name of Barnabas (4.36), the other three references in Acts begin with the first summary or progress report (9.31) following Stephen’s death and the persecution that followed. Is the church now spread to Judea, Galilee, and Samaria possibly in need of this “comfort of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 9.31) precisely because it has experienced persecution in arriving where it is at? Is there an implicit theology of the cross at work in Acts at this point?

Finally, Luke is the only Gospel writer to use the term “the promise” *epangelia* (Luke 24.49; Acts 1.4; 2.33, 39; 7.17; 13.23, 32; 23.21; and 26.6). Obviously the use of this term is closely tied to the presence and work of the Holy Spirit. Are there connections to an implicit theology of the cross as well when Luke relates this promise to God’s activity in Jesus?

CONCLUSION: THE WAY

How does this relate to Lutheran tendencies to criticize charismatics for a nominal or non-existent theology of the cross? Based on the charismatics’ own favourite point of departure theologically, Acts itself does seem to present, if not consistently developed explicit theology of the cross, at least an implicit one. Luke seems particularly aware of the reality of the cross, as much in the life of the Christian community as in the life of Jesus. Indeed, it is his Gospel alone that identifies cross-bearing (Luke 9.23) as a “daily” occurrence in the life of the disciple.

Perhaps the manner in which Luke keeps the cross implicit or always just below the surface in Acts is instructive for us today. Could it be that he offers charismatics a view

23. Hans Conzelmann, *The Theology of St. Luke* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960), p. 153.

24. Smith, pp. 102-103.

25. Flender, pp. 131-132.

of Spirit life that always knows the cross at one time or another (Acts 14.22)? Could it also be that he is telling Lutherans that while the cross of Christ is and always will be a dimension of Christian experience, the Father's gift of the Spirit finally is the focal point through which we perceive that cross and are empowered to bear it in actual life experience?

If Luke offers a theology of the cross in Acts, it is well integrated with his theology of glory. Such an integrated perspective on charismatic gifts and the reality of the cross is what Christians need so much today. When Luke speaks of Christianity as "the Way" (Acts 9.2; 19.9, 23; 22.4; 24.14, 22)²⁶ he talks of discipleship.²⁷ It involves both gifts and the cross.

Christian growth refers to the growth of the Spirit's work in our lives. The Spirit grows and moves forward. We die and move backwards, Christ lives, we die. That's Christian growth.

To live under the cross means to despair of one's own power and effort, and at the same time to trust mightily in the power of God. This is true in regard to receiving forgiveness of sins. It is true in the manifestation of spiritual gifts. It is true in the exercise of love. It characterizes the Christian life from beginning to end. Charismatic renewal is a new pilgrimage to Calvary.²⁸

26. Haenchen, p. 320.

27. Conzelmann, pp. 233-234.

28. Christenson, p. 128.