

silence of eternity, then either God is not here or God is present but hidden within the suffering of human existence. The gospel of the Cosmic Crucified Jesus claims that God is present, though seemingly hidden, even in the depths of the most tragic suffering and death. The crucified Jesus was raised from the dead. God's promise is that no matter how deep one descends into the hell of human existence, God is still there: "There is nothing that can separate us from the [hidden] love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8)."

God lets himself be pushed out of the world onto the cross. He is weak and powerless in the world, and that is precisely the way, the only way, in which he is with us and helps us. Matthew 8:17 ("This was to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah, 'He took our infirmities and bore our diseases.'") makes it quite clear that Christ helps us, not by virtue of his omnipotence, but by his weakness and suffering.<sup>92</sup>

## 3

## THE WAY OF THE CROSS: THE COSMIC CRUCIFIED AND COSTLY MISSIONARY DISCIPLESHIP

The Christian community is brought into existence by God incarnate in Jesus Christ the Cosmic Crucified. It is God, that one who creates and permeates a universe of billions of galaxies, that one who in poetic terms throws stars across the heavens, who incredibly and passionately enters human existence and serves, suffers, agonizes, and is vulnerable unto death. That costly love is the forgiveness of our sins and the possibility of our life in communion with God. God in the Cosmic Crucified also entered into combat here on behalf of new messianic life in the arriving kingdom of God. The lost/damned are found; the poor are given hope; the sick are healed; the rich, powerful and religiously complacent are challenged. This messianic combat is waged with the power of vulnerable love, seemingly defeated but ultimately victorious as the crucified is raised and sits at the right hand of God. Now sin, Satan and death are conquered. The crucified is Christus Victor. God in Christ struggles for life, suffers unto death, and is raised that the cosmos might have life. That is the heart of our mission message.

Because this is the heart of it all, there is often a hesitancy within the Christian community to affirm that the church as the body of Christ in mission is also called to participate in God's struggle and God's suffering, as well as participating in Christ's gifts of forgiveness and resurrection. That, however, is a reality that permeates the biblical witness. A mark of the church is that while it lives within the victory over sin, death and the devil, it is called to costly missionary discipleship to be a serving, sacrificing, suffering church in order that the gospel of the Cosmic Crucified might encircle the globe and permeate every dimension of human life and history. This chapter explores the significance of this missiology of the cross for the life-style of the bearer of the gospel who proclaims the lordship of the crucified Jesus. The chapter begins by describing Christian discipleship in mission as being conformed to the Cosmic Crucified. Both the New Testament and the Lutheran tradition are used to show the legitimacy, relevance and power of a missionary form of life that is conformed to Christ.

<sup>92</sup>Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (London: Collins-S.C.M. Press, 1953), 122. (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1971, new enlarged edition), 360-361.

This chapter explores discipleship as conformity with God incarnate in Christ in the light of the three dimensions of the cross of Christ described in the previous chapter. This missiology of the cross makes it impossible for the Christian community to separate the mission message from mission deeds. The question is not debatable, as it was in Jesus' message and in his life!

1. Discipleship in mission as God's call to passionate involvement in human brokenness and suffering (the second dimension noted chapter 2, D).
2. Discipleship in mission as God's call to participate in the messianic struggle for life in the midst of death (the third dimension noted in chapter 2, E).
3. Discipleship as God's call to vulnerability in mission (the first dimension noted in chapter 2, D).

#### A. Discipleship in Mission as Conformity to the Cosmic Crucified

One of the most powerful ways that the New Testament speaks of Jesus' call to missionary discipleship is to call the Christian community to conformity with the being and mission of God as it is incarnate in the being and the mission of the Cosmic Crucified. Walter Altmann writes, "We are free from the necessity to imitate Christ [the impossibility of Christian perfectionism] because his work is fundamental, unrepeatable and complete. But for the same reason we are free [from concern to establish our relationship to God] for new liberating actions [participation in messianic kingdom activities], in *conformation with the cross of Christ* and in accordance with what our imagination and discernment show us to be works of love" (emphasis added).<sup>93</sup>

Discipleship in mission is life in conformation with the cross of Christ. Jesus calls his disciples to take up their cross and follow him (Mk 8:35ff). Jesus promises that the disciples as bearers of the Good News to all nations (Mk 13:10) will be hated and persecuted because of bearing Jesus' name (Mk 13:9-13). Furthermore, in persecution they are blessed by God. "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Mt 5:11-12).

In Philippians, Paul asserts that he desires, within the mission of the body of Christ, to share in Christ's sufferings (Phil 3:10ff). In 2 Corinthians he writes: "For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh" (2 Cor 4:11). In sharing in Christ's sufferings, Paul believes that "I am completing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions [the continuing suffering-with-us God] for the sake of his body, that is, the church" (Col 1:24). Paul states that participation in the suffering of Christ is an introduction to being glorified with Christ (Rom 8:17). Similar themes are found in 1 Peter 2:18-25 and 2 Timothy 2:12-13. In addressing a persecuted and suffering church, Peter wrote, "For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps" (1 Pt 2:21). Conformity with the Cosmic Crucified is costly suffering discipleship that is blessed by God and the privileged possibility of present joy and future glory.

The biblical witness broadens "conformity with the cross" to the whole life of Jesus beginning with the Cosmic Christ's condescension in the incarnation and including Christ's forgiving, self-giving love and humble servanthood. Paul calls the Philippian Christians to be conformed to the mind of Christ:

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave . . . and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross. (Phil 2:5-11)

The life and mission of the body of Christ is called to a discipleship conformed to this God-formed and cruciform ministry of humble servanthood that participates in God's vulnerability even to death.

The biblical tradition is rich in servant images, calling and mandating mission in conformity with the Cosmic Crucified. In John, Jesus says, "So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet" (Jn 13:14). Paul, in calling for generosity for the saints in Jerusalem asserts, "For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich" (2 Cor 8:9). In Galatians, Paul writes, "Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law [the way] of Christ" (Gal 6:2).

All of these calls to be conformed with the Cosmic Crucified are ultimately calls to be conformed to the love of God revealed and incarnate in Jesus Christ. Love one another as I have loved you (Jn 13:34, 15:12). "We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another" (1 Jn 3:16, 4:7-10). This love conformed to Jesus Christ forgives unconditionally (Col 3:13) and loves indiscriminately as God does—even unto the enemy (Mt 5:43-48; Lk 6:32-36). John Howard Yoder in *The Politics of Jesus* has provided an excellent discussion of Christian discipleship as being conformed to Christ in a chapter entitled "The Disciple of Christ and the Way of Jesus."<sup>94</sup>

As noted earlier, Altmann believes that the Lutheran tradition has forgotten "the necessity of following Jesus Christ in his path, of joining Jesus Christ in his kenosis, his emptying out."<sup>95</sup> Many Lutherans are concerned that calls to discipleship might be just one more sinful human attempt to justify oneself in the presence of God. This is particularly true if discipleship is understood as a form of humanly attainable sanctification—a process whereby one makes progress in a life of holiness.<sup>96</sup>

Discipleship, as God's call to conformity to Jesus Christ, has nothing to do with "attaining sanctification" or "self-justification." It is discipleship that experiences being overwhelmed by the awesomeness of God's self-giving, unconditional, costly love, that hears with joy Christ's promise of forgiveness, and rejoices in the privilege that the Cosmic Crucified makes possible in the call, "Come, follow me!"

Authentic discipleship recognizes that there is a tragic gap between the call to conformity with Jesus Christ as God's kingdom way in the world and one's own stumbling efforts to follow in the way of Christ. Therefore, Paul's declaration in Romans 6:1-4 that in Baptism we have died to sin is recognized by Luther in the Small Catechism as a daily drowning of the "old" sinful person in order that the "new" person conformed to Jesus Christ might daily arise to "walk in newness of life."

What does such baptizing with water signify?

<sup>94</sup>Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 115ff.

<sup>95</sup>Altmann, *Luther and Liberation: A Latin American Perspective*, 24-25.

<sup>96</sup>For a discussion relating to this concern in contemporary Lutheran circles, see the 1987 Winter issue of *Word and World* entitled "Justification and Justice." Twenty-nine theologians from all of the Americas debated concerning the relationship between the gospel and discipleship committed to justice.

Answer:

It signifies that the old Adam in us, together with all sins and evil lusts, should be drowned by daily sorrow and repentance and be put to death, and that the new man should come forth daily and rise up, cleansed and righteous, to live forever in God's presence.<sup>97</sup>

Martin Luther's famous document *The Freedom of a Christian* spells out the relationship between gospel and cruciform discipleship in two seeming paradoxical propositions:

1. A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none.
2. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.

Under the first proposition, Luther states that ultimately and solely the Christian's life and future with God is an absolute unconditional gift of God in Jesus Christ. "One thing, and only one thing, is necessary for Christian life, righteousness, and freedom. That one thing is the most holy Word of God, the gospel of Christ."<sup>98</sup> Good works cannot contribute anything to this gift, but, on the contrary, they may be injurious if the Christian believes that one is justified by them.<sup>99</sup>

Luther then turns to the second proposition that the Christian is a "perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all." That is conformity to the servanthood of Christ. Luther can even speak of being Christ to the neighbor.

In describing this servanthood, Luther recognizes a continual struggle between the old and the new. The new person in Christ is obedient to God "out of spontaneous love in obedience to God and considers nothing except the approval of God, whom he would most scrupulously obey in all things."<sup>100</sup> However, this new person must struggle with the old within, which is not necessarily willing to die. Therefore, there is the daily dying and rising to be in conformity with the Cosmic Crucified. "So the Christian who is consecrated by his faith does good works, but the works do not make him holier or more Christian, for that is the work of faith alone

<sup>97</sup>Small Catechism in *The Book of Concord*, 349.

<sup>98</sup>Lull, *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, 597.

<sup>99</sup>Lull, *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, 610.

<sup>100</sup>Lull, *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, 611.

[Trusting receptivity to God's unconditional costly grace].<sup>101</sup> It is this faith which is active in love (Gal 5:6) and is called to conformity with Christ's servanthood. Luther writes in *The Freedom of the Christian*:

Although the Christian is thus free from all works, he ought in this liberty to empty himself, take upon himself the form of a servant, be made in the likeness of men, be found in human form, and to serve, help, and in every way deal with his neighbor as he sees that God through Christ has dealt and still deals with him. This he should do freely, having regard for nothing but divine approval.<sup>102</sup>

Hence, as our heavenly Father has in Christ freely come to our aid, we also ought freely to help our neighbor through our body and its works, and each one should become as it were a Christ to the other that we may be Christs to one another and Christ may be the same in all, that is, that we may be truly Christians.<sup>103</sup>

Gerhard Forde writing in *Christian Dogmatics*, Volume 2, concludes his discussion of the Christian life with these striking words:

The Christian vision leads into the world, to suffering for and with others in the expectation of God's will being done on earth as it is in heaven. The aim is not to gain one's own holiness or to bring in the kingdom by force or tyranny, but to care for God's creatures and God's creation. "The creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God." (Rom 8:19)<sup>104</sup>

One of the most powerful statements about cruciform life and mission is found in Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *Letters and Papers From Prison*:

To be a Christian does not mean to be religious in a particular way, to cultivate some particular form of asceticism (as a sinner, penitent

<sup>101</sup> Lull, *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, 612.

<sup>102</sup> Lull, *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, 618.

<sup>103</sup> Lull, *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, 619-620.

<sup>104</sup> Gerhard Forde, "Eleventh Locus, Christian Life, Justification Today," in *Christian Dogmatics*, vol. 2, ed. by Carl Braaten and Robert Jenson (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 468.

or a saint), but to be a man. It is not some religious act which makes a Christian what he is, but participation in the suffering of God in the life of the world.<sup>105</sup>

The biblical tradition as well as the Lutheran tradition, compels us to rethink both: 1) the cruciform nature of the gospel of the Cosmic Crucified; and 2) the cruciform nature of the ministry of those participating in the mission of God incarnate in the Cosmic Crucified. One must ask in the words of Walter Altmann why the Lutheran church in particular has forgotten "the necessity of following Jesus Christ in his path, of joining Jesus Christ in his kenosis, his emptying out."<sup>106</sup>

In the following sections, several implications for "missionary discipleship conformed to the Cosmic Crucified" are outlined. Each section on discipleship in mission relates to a previous section describing the mission of God incarnate in the Cosmic Crucified.

#### B. Discipleship in Mission and God's Call to Passionate Involvement in Human Suffering

The continuing suffering-with-us-God incarnate in Jesus has radical implications for the church's mission (chapter 2, D). If solidarity with human brokenness and pain defines one dimension of God's mission, then being conformed to Jesus Christ and participation in the mission of God will mean sharing in the brokenness and pain of the human community. In the thoughts of Matthew 25 and Exodus 3, there are afflictions to be seen, cries to be heard, and sufferings to be known. Discipleship is being captured by God in Jesus Christ, who moves into our lives, turning us inside out and upside down in order that we might with the Cosmic Crucified be swept into the world to share the depths of human pain and brokenness. "As the Father has sent me, so I send you" (Jn 20:21).

The mission of the body of Christ is marked by participation in human lives rather than indifference to and distance from human lives. Participation rather than indifference and distance is to mark every dimension of the life and mission of discipleship. In recent years, Christian ministry in the U.S.A. has been marked by a deep concern for counseling. Prophetic spokespersons in the field of pastoral counseling have called the

<sup>105</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 1953 edition, 123.

<sup>106</sup> Altmann, *Altmann and Theologian: A Faith American Perspective* 74-75.

church into the depths of human suffering. Behind the masks of social convention human lives are lived out in isolation, irresponsibility, guilt and failure as well as other forms of pain. If the mission of the body of Christ is to be conformed to Jesus Christ, it will follow Jesus into the inner depths of human existence. Within every human life there are afflictions to be seen, cries to be heard and suffering to be known. Good parents know this in their children; caring spouses know it in their loved ones; disciples of Christ are called to know it in each other and in the lives of those met in the world. The suffering-with-us God calls the Christian community into the depths of human lives—to be a suffering-with-us people.

The world is marked not only by inner pain but also incredible physical suffering, both corporate and individual. Statistics are so overwhelming that they become seemingly irrelevant to our daily lives. Nine hundred million persons malnourished, 40,000 children dying daily from inadequate diets and health care, 16 million refugees, 40 million Africans at the edge of existence because of recent drought, over 2 billion people without adequate water. Millions of those people live within Muslim and Buddhist communities. Thirteen countries with Muslim majorities of over 75% (seven with majorities over 90%) and with a total population of 500 million people have an average annual per capita income of less than \$500 (1990 *Encyclopedia Britannica*). The lives of most of those millions are lived out beyond the horizons of our consciousness. However, the Cosmic Christ shatters the parochialness of our lives and calls us into solidarity with the world's suffering. There are afflictions to be seen, cries to be heard and suffering to be known.

Authentic Christian witness to the good news of the Cosmic Crucified takes place as disciples participate in the pain of the world. Within the pain (in contrast to distance) and in solidarity with suffering (in contrast to indifference) the Christian community proclaims in word and deed the saving power of the gospel.

The Lutheran community, as noted by Walter Altmann, has often neglected the call of God to the cruciform mission of the body of Christ—that is, the mission conformed to the Cosmic Crucified. We often have not heard the radical call of the Cosmic Crucified to discipleship, to follow Jesus into the depths of human existence. Recognizing this fact, the ELCA in its DGM statement of *Commitments for Mission in the 1990s* states:

We are committed to witness to Jesus Christ in both word and deed. We will preach the gospel and in Jesus' name we will seek to

alleviate suffering and empower the weak and advocate for righteousness, justice and peace. We will work with the entire global community for justice, peace and the renewal of all creation. (Commitment 6)

### C. Discipleship in Mission and God's Call to Participate in the Messianic Struggle for Life in the Midst of Death

The messianic cosmic struggle still permeates human life and history (chapter 2, E). The coming kingdom of God inaugurated in Jesus and for which we continue to pray ("Your kingdom come; your will be done on earth as in heaven") continues to be engaged in struggle with the demonic powers of darkness. As in Jesus' day, religious traditions dead to the living God continue to enslave human lives; the poor and oppressed continue to be exploited by the world's rich and powerful; the weak and diseased, like Lazarus at the rich man's door, are often neglected and relegated to the periphery of life, where their presence will not disturb.

Contemporary missionary discipleship is openness to God's call to participation in the continuing messianic mission of the body of Christ. The powers of darkness are to be met, combat to be entered, demons overcome, battles lost and battles won. The cross indicates that more often than not compassion, self-giving love, and the vulnerability of servanthood will be dominated and even crushed by the powers of evil and destruction. However, the resurrection of the Cosmic Crucified is God's promise to the disciples of Jesus that ultimately the future belongs to the God of our Lord Jesus Christ. This hope, which transcends both optimism and pessimism, is the driving power of the mission of the body of Christ.

But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labor is not in vain. (1 Cor 15:57-58)

#### 1. *The Continuing Prophetic Voice*

Discipleship within the messianic struggle is marked by the continuing prophetic voice of the body of Christ. It is the Spirit-empowered voice (Rom 12:6, 1 Cor 12:10) that witnesses to Jesus Christ (Mk 13:11, Acts 1:8)

and in Jesus' name challenges the values and norms; that is, the principles and powers of the twentieth and twenty-first century. It is this prophetic voice in words and actions that makes the body of Christ the salt and light of the world. In Jesus' words, if this prophetic voice, which speaks an alien word in the world, loses its saltiness, then it has lost its value (Mt 5:13). Likewise, an alien word of light in a world of darkness must be lifted up to give light to the whole house (Mt 5:14). The Cosmic Crucified continually challenges the body of Christ to be about its alien prophetic mission, challenging the powers of darkness.<sup>107</sup>

In the last century, Søren Kierkegaard, the Danish religious thinker, made a devastating attack upon the church of Denmark because of its inability to speak God's alien word of truth within Christendom, which had lost God's truth and lived in its own darkness. Kierkegaard charged that the church had lost its prophetic voice because they had lost their conformity with the prophetic crucified Christ, who had spoken God's prophetic alien truth and suffered death for it.

According to Kierkegaard, the Christ who said, "Follow me," was the Christ in his humiliation, not the Christ in his glory. Thus, the Christian must become contemporary with the Christ who was despised and hated for speaking God's alien prophetic truth. Only after sharing in the humiliation and suffering of Christ can the Christian share in his exaltation.<sup>108</sup>

Wherever people and messianic life are crushed, wherever love is absent, justice perverted, the good betrayed, religion distorted, and the beautiful disgraced, there the alien prophetic voice of the Cosmic Crucified must be enabled to speak. God's prophetic alien word must be heard, Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand. People are to be challenged to repentance in Jesus' name. For the sake of their own life and for the sake of the lives they ignore and destroy, they are called to repentance and participation in the messianic kingdom. To those who repent, who allow their lives to be turned around and upside down, the Cosmic Crucified promises your sins are forgiven; go in peace. To the recipients of that costly gift, the Cosmic Crucified says, take up your cross and follow me, as aliens in a foreign land.

<sup>107</sup> Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon in *Resident Aliens* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1989), develop a Christian ethic around the theme that Christians live as aliens in contemporary culture.

<sup>108</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *Training in Christianity*, translated with introductory notes by Walter Lowrie (London: Oxford University Press, 1941), 40, 58, 173.

## 2. *The Contemporary Damned and Marginalized*

Every generation and century has its particular marginalized who are consigned to live outside the circle of the chosen and righteous. In Jesus' day, there were "sinners" whose lives were not lived in conformity with what Marcus Borg terms the politics of holiness. There were also other marginalized: the poor, the oppressed, women, and gentiles, whom Jesus, challenging his contemporaries, incorporated within the circle of the compassion of God.

Mission conformed to Jesus Christ continues to mean crossing boundaries that exclude in order that all may fully participate in the new creation of the inaugurated messianic reign. Those boundaries vary from one culture or nation to another. In India there are the Dalits who are consigned to live outside of the Hindu caste system; in Japan there are the Burakamin who traditionally carried out the "unclean" work of society; in Latin America there are the landless farmers who have been driven from the source of their existence; in the U.S.A., Europe and South Africa, there are racial groups whose skin color denies them full participation in the cultural and economic privileges of society. The list of marginalized local and global peoples is endless and presents the followers of Jesus with continual challenges to follow the Cosmic Crucified across all boundaries with the self-giving inclusive vulnerability of the mind of Christ.

One of the most critical and universal boundaries of the 20th century is the boundary between male and female. The Christian church confronts this boundary on every continent both in the world and in the church itself, as well as in Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu and other religious communities.

Human culture for thousands of years and yet today exploits women and limits the potential of women in participating within the mission of the body of Christ. It is tragic that a number of persons within our Lutheran tradition have not been faithful to Jesus Christ, who radically challenged the sexism of his day by teaching women, touching "unclean women," sharing with women companions who later stood faithfully at the cross, and making Mary the first witness to the resurrection. The early church molded by the ministry of Jesus was a radically new community in which there was not Jew nor Greek, free nor slave, male nor female.<sup>109</sup>

Discipleship to Jesus compels us into solidarity with women. One dimension of this solidarity is sensitivity to our God language. Sensitivity to God language is important in tapping the tremendous gifts of women for

<sup>109</sup> Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 100.

the mission of Christ. As long as male language is the primary (almost sole) way of speaking of God, people will (and do) conclude that feminine descriptions of God are not appropriate or less adequate in addressing or describing God. This in turn will imply for many that male humans are superior to female humans, having more gifts and potential as participants in the life and mission of the body of Christ. From my own reading, personal counseling and conversations with both women and men, I know this to be true for countless women. I know many women who, like many persons of color, struggle to remain within the church in spite of the fact that the church's male and white cultural language for God, the male chauvinism of many clergy, and the male prejudices prevalent within the Christian and missionary community make that almost intolerable.

In order to affirm that all women in the church are full participants, I believe the church should be sensitive in its use of God language and it should be supporting women as they search the Scriptures for feminine descriptions of God (there are many).<sup>110</sup> Balancing our God language affirms the God-given value of women and empowers the church for witness in the world.

There is another and even more important reason for the use of feminine symbols for God in our particular culture so often marked by domination, arrogance, aggressiveness, militarism and violence. Those characteristics, which often mark our culture, even our churches and theological discussions, are very often designated as male characteristics. Therefore, in our culture to say "God he" implicitly portrays to many people and particularly women a God who is aggressive and dominating if not militant and violent. In contrast, a missiology of the cross states that God is ultimately known in Jesus the Cosmic Crucified, in self-giving love, sacrificial service and vulnerability. These characteristics in our culture are often designated as female. Therefore, "God she" may be needed in our culture to speak God's alien word of truth and to witness to God who is incarnate in Jesus and vulnerable to death. I believe that this may be what is most frightening, particularly to males in our church who may be more deeply formed by our culture than cruciformed by the Cosmic Crucified.

Struggling with this issue as disciples of Jesus may be one of the most important things we do as we engage with Muslims and Buddhists around the globe. It is the Cosmic Crucified who compels the Christian community of disciples to see beyond the present destructive cultural walls

and boundaries between male and female and to envision a new creation in which there is neither male or female. Such a vision challenges not only Christians but Muslims, Buddhists, and the world.

We are committed to developing a global mission program in which persons of every ethnic background, both women and men, are called and empowered to participate fully in the mission of Jesus Christ. (Commitment 8 in *Commitments for Mission in the 1990s*)

### 3. *The Messianic Mission: The Restoration of the Totality of Creation*

Jesus' prophetic, messianic mission was rooted in Israel's faith in God, who created the cosmos and called Israel into a mission of salvation. God is the creator of the heavens and the earth. All of life is God's creative handiwork and is under God's providential care. Jesus saw himself of the field clothed beautifully and birds of the air fed bountifully by the hands of God (Mt 6:25ff). This same God was at work in Israel's history and spoke through prophetic voices. As promised by the prophets, God was now doing a new thing within creation. God's kingdom/reign was approaching, and all that had been distorted and destroyed by human indifference and disobedience to God would be reclaimed and restored. Jesus sent a message to John saying that the promises of God's new creation envisioned by Isaiah (Is 29:18-19; 35:5-6; 61:1) were being fulfilled:

The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised and the poor have good news brought to them. (Mt 11:5; Lk 7:22)

Biblical thought does not dichotomize life between the physical and spiritual in terms of matter and mind. Rather, life is unified by the creative Word and Spirit of God. God speaks and the cosmos exists (Genesis 1). God breathes and matter lives (Genesis 1-2). The Holy Spirit empowers Jesus, and he proclaims repentance and the kingdom's coming, does good, and heals all those oppressed of the devil (Acts 10:34-38).

We have emphasized that the gospel is centered in the proclamation of what God has already done in the life, death and resurrection of the Cosmic Crucified. This message is borne and preached by those conformed to the messianic mission of Jesus Christ and rooted in the reality of God, who is creator of heaven and earth. Therefore, the mission of the body of Christ has always been and will always be a mission of word and deed that is passionately concerned about the whole person, the whole community, the restoration of the whole creation.

It is within this context that the church as body of Jesus Christ becomes deeply involved in the totality of human brokenness. The hungry are to be fed, and food is shipped to northern Ethiopia, southern Sudan, Somalia, Mozambique, where millions of lives are at the edge of starvation. The poor are enabled to develop their own resources so that they may feed themselves, their own families and communities. The oppressed are supported in order that the chains of racism may be broken and all humanity may be free. With and within it all, the gospel of the Cosmic Crucified is always preached in order that all, even the dying and destitute, may live within the incredible costly love and promised victory of God.

It is this struggle to restore the whole of creation that still often leads to contemporary clashes between the kingdom of God and the powers of darkness. Servants are not above their masters. The disciples of Jesus will also meet demonic opposition and be set on trial before priests and kings (Mk 13:9-13).

Churches of the twentieth century clearly have borne the marks of the crucified Jesus. To be baptized or to baptize has meant imprisonment in Nepal. In Nigeria churches have been burned. Churches speaking for human rights in Central and South America have paid an incredible bloody price for their faithful prophetic ministry. Christians who witnessed to the gospel in Eastern Europe forfeited their educational and vocational future. For centuries the Coptic Church of Egypt has lived under Islamic law and rule, which has always discriminated against the minority Christian presence and at times has actually persecuted the Christian community. The Coptic Church understands itself as a martyr church. Prophetic voices within our own land and our own churches have been ignored, attacked, or socially silenced. The mark of Jesus' cross placed upon the Christian community indicates the costly struggle between the kingdom of God and the realm of darkness. It indicates the Christian community's ongoing participation in this cosmic conflict.

In El Salvador a small Lutheran church struggles against incredible odds. Persecution, oppression, imprisonment, and death have been daily realities. Terror touches life. But within the pain there is faith, hope, and love. There is the joy of Christian worship where the risen Christ is announced as Lord and where grace is proclaimed as final. There is also love that goes to work in human rights offices, trauma centers, agricultural development, and orphanages. These, too, are glimpses of the messianic kingdom, promises of things to come (Eph 1:4-5). Tears will be wiped away, and the people of God will cry a final "Amen" (Revelation 21).

Carl Braaten in *The Apostolic Imperative* writes:

The cross has all too often been cloistered within the Sunday piety of the church, rather than being the dynamic of the everyday soldiers of the cross fighting for justice within the economic, social, and political situations of life.

Although there are other humanitarian groups at work to alleviate suffering and degradation, poverty and hunger, the church will want to be second to none in doing everything within its power to lift the burdens of the million who starve, the races that are humiliated the nations that are held captive, [and] the classes that are deprived of full equality, etc.<sup>111</sup>

Braaten goes on to say that the unique aspect of the church's mission is evangelism, and because no one else will do that, the church must make certain that it does.

It is the messianic restoration of the totality of creation which leads to DGM's Commitment 6:

We are committed to witness to Jesus Christ in both word and deed. We will preach the gospel and in Jesus' name we will seek to alleviate suffering and empower the weak and advocate for righteousness, justice and peace. We will work with the entire global community for justice, peace and the renewal of all creation.

#### D. Costly Discipleship and God's Call to Vulnerability in Mission

God in Christ crucified limits God's messianic, transforming power within history to the power of love which draws and persuades (chapter 2, E.4). This assertion is rooted in what God has revealed in the messianic-kingdom mission of the crucified and risen Jesus. Participation in the mission of God's kingdom is participation in God's promised future, which is already present in Jesus Christ.<sup>112</sup> That future of God present in the

<sup>111</sup>Braaten, *The Apostolic Imperative*, 75.

<sup>112</sup>For a discussion of mission as rooted in the presence of God's future in Christ, see: Carl Braaten's, *The Flaming Center*, chapter 7, 20-23.

Cosmic Crucified appears as vulnerable within history. This means that God has not and will not call forth any authoritarian force to protect or enforce God's ultimate messianic mission within history.

[My servant] will not cry or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. (Is 42:2-3)

This is precisely how the New Testament portrays the mission of the crucified Jesus: prophetic words of grace, challenge and repentance; acts of healing of the sick and exorcism for the captives; banquets with the stigmatized and ostracized; and advocacy for the poor and marginalized. Divine, costly and vulnerable love are present like leaven in a loaf, seeds planted in the ground. The Kingdom of God is present but not recognizable unless one has eyes to see and ears to hear.

Participation in the messianic mission of God that actualizes God's future must be conformed to this cruciform, vulnerable, self-giving love manifest in Jesus the Cosmic Crucified. "As the Father has sent me, so I send you" (Jn 20:19-23). Wesley Ariarajah stated that religious pluralism demands that Christian witness be given in the spirit of one who has truly experienced the humility, the vulnerability and the self-giving that are at the center of Christ's own witness.<sup>113</sup> This study of the biblical faith affirms that the Cosmic Crucified mandates that there is no other way in which any witness to God revealed in the Cosmic Crucified might authentically be given.

This assertion is rooted in the conviction of Jesus Christ's finality and the absolute normativeness of God's incarnation in the Cosmic Crucified. As persons grasped by the finality of Jesus Christ, we are told that there is no other way. "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me" (Mk 8:34).

However, in listening to Jesus we are immediately confronted by the absurdity and inadequacy of the church's participation in the cruciform mission of God. The history of the Christian church is replete with examples when the Christian community harassed non-Christians or cooperated with military and social-economic forces to crush the so-called pagan world. From Constantine, who in 312 B.C. placed the sign of the crucified on battle banners; to the Christian Crusades, which fought numerous battles with the Muslim world to retake the "holy city" for Christian worship; to Charlemagne and St. Olaf who baptized thousands at

the point of the sword; to Ferdinand and Isabella, who threw the Muslim Moors and Jews off the Spanish peninsula; to Columbus and his followers, who on behalf of Europe's leading royal family and the Roman Pope decimated peoples and cultures in the name of the Crucified; to British warships that opened up China's seaports to opium trade and Western missionaries; to twentieth century America where many Christians find it impossible to witness to Jesus Christ without grafting the Christian message to this nation's concerns about national security—there has existed an overwhelmingly strong element within the Christian community that has refused conformity with the Cosmic Crucified. It has preferred a theology of glory and a love affair with a triumphant Christendom.

In contrast, there has also been within the Christian community a multitude of Christian witnesses whose message and mission has been conformed to the Cosmic Crucified. They have called people to repentance and proclaimed the atoning suffering of God and the agonizing, saving death of the Cosmic Crucified. They have, like Jesus, walked humbly among nations, learning and listening to peoples of every clime and culture. They have healed the sick, made the blind to see and enabled the crippled to walk. They have fed the hungry, clothed the naked and visited the imprisoned. They have advocated for the poor and marginalized. They have done all of these motivated and empowered by God's self-giving, vulnerable, costly love, which has captured their lives by the power of the Holy Spirit. They have gone as participants in God's mission into unknown places and times armed only by the power of the Spirit of God, who has chosen to be vulnerable among us. In participating in the vulnerability of that mission, many have sacrificed their lives and in so doing have participated in Christ's vulnerability unto death. Christ's vulnerability as Lord is our vulnerability as the disciples of the Cosmic Crucified.

The biblical call to conformity with the vulnerability of the Cosmic Crucified raises powerful questions concerning Christian participation in the social and political structures of society. This discussion has particular relevance to our conversations with Muslims, who firmly believe that the power of political structures can or should be used to impose God's will upon the life of the state, and with Buddhists, who have a long tradition of pacifism and non-violence.

### E. Costly Discipleship and Participation in the World of Social and Political Structures

Participation in the messianic mission of the kingdom of God calls for conformity with the self-giving vulnerability of the Cosmic Crucified. Any mission witness to Jesus Christ is molded by the suffering servanthood of Jesus. Does this biblical affirmation preclude Christian participation in political power that imposes by force law and order upon a society?

In earlier discussions concerning the missiological statements of the ELCA/DGM, questions have been raised as to the relationship between this model for mission and the Christian life in society. For example, does this model for mission imply a Christian pacifism for all of life as argued by John Yoder? He concludes his volume, *The Politics of Jesus*, with this statement:

A social style characterized by the creation of a new community and the rejection of violence of any kind is the theme of the New Testament proclamation from beginning to end, from right to left. The cross of Christ is the model of Christian social efficacy, the power of God for those who believe.<sup>114</sup>

John Yoder reflects an ancient Christian tradition of nonviolence rooted in Jesus' own cruciform ministry. George Forell quotes the early Christian theologian Tertullian (d. 220 A.D.) who argued that Christians could not serve in the imperial army.

In this context Tertullian addresses the question of Christian service in the military. His answer is eloquent and direct: "There is no agreement between the divine and the human sacrament (sacramentum was the military oath of allegiance), the standard of Christ and the standard of the devil, the camp of light and the camp of darkness. One soul cannot belong to two lords—God and Caesar." Noting that on the night of his betrayal Jesus admonished Peter not to defend him with a sword, Tertullian concludes, "The Lord . . . , in disarming Peter, unbelted every soldier!"<sup>115</sup>

This pacifist position reemerged during the time of the Reformation in the nonviolent anabaptist movement of Menno Simons. John Yoder eloquently represents this tradition.

Following the rise of Constantine to imperial power, the Christian community became more and more identified with the Empire. Forell notes Canon II of the Council of Arles (314 A.D.) "that threatens excommunication to a Christian soldier who throws down his weapons even in times of peace."<sup>116</sup> After Constantine, there emerged a political philosophy and practice that often fused and confused the life and work of church and state in what has been designated Christendom.

Martin Luther in seeking reformation for the church struggled to clarify the roles and relationships between church and state within Christendom. He observed the Roman church functioning like a political institution and attempting to play a political and military role within the Empire. He also observed the Holy Roman Empire interfering and attempting to control the life of the church. As Luther worked to clarify the roles of each to understand the Christian's responsibilities in the world, he spoke of God acting in love through two kingdoms or two ways of reigning in the world.

On the one hand there was the kingdom of God's right hand. Through this reign, which is the power of the gospel, God calls to repentance, proclaims the gospel, and brings forth in the Christian community works of compassion for the neighbor. Complementing the kingdom of the right hand is the kingdom of God's left hand, the law. This work of God is necessary because of sin and rebellion in the world, which are destructive of human life and community. Through God's reign of law with the left hand, God in love holds evil in check and works toward justice. In this kingdom of the left hand, God uses the force of social-political structures, in particular, the "power of the sword."

Luther was convinced that if all persons were true Christians, there would be no need for political structures because all people would spontaneously love their neighbor and walk in the will of God (the Ten Commandments). This would create a society that would be directed for the best advantage for the community. However, this is not the case.

Because society is marked by sin, evil, and forces destructive of life, political structures using force are needed "to preserve peace, punish sin, and restrain the wicked."<sup>117</sup> The Christian "submits most willingly to the rule of the sword, pays his taxes, honors those in authority, serves, helps

<sup>114</sup>Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 250.

<sup>115</sup>George Forell, *History of Christian Ethics*, vol 1 (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing, 1979),

<sup>116</sup>Forell, *History of Christian Ethics*, vol 1, 60.

<sup>117</sup>Lull, *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, *Transmitted and . . .*

and does all he can to assist the governing authority that it may continue to function and be held in honor and fear.<sup>118</sup> Furthermore, the Christian should participate in government in order "that the essential governmental authority may not be despised and become enfeebled or perish. For the world cannot and dare not dispense with it."<sup>119</sup> The Christian does this out of love for the sake of the neighbor and others.

Luther recognized that life was incredibly complex. Jesus had said, love your enemies, turn the other cheek, give away your coat, be willing to suffer personal injustice; and Luther believed Christians were called to do this in personal life. However, the Christian, according to love, should not accept injustice for the neighbor. Love may demand justice for the neighbor's sake.

This illustrates one aspect of Luther's two kingdom thought. God in love rules through the gospel in the hearts of people. The same God in love rules the human community through social and political structures for the well-being of the community. Christians participate in both of these activities of God. The two must always be seen in relationship and interacting.<sup>120</sup> In other words, Luther believed God to be extremely well coordinated and ambidextrous.

This Lutheran perspective has been severely criticized because there has been a tendency for Lutherans to say that the church takes responsibility for the gospel and the state takes responsibility for law and order. This has often resulted in the church silently acquiescing to political oppression and injustice.

Carl Braaten in *The Flaming Center* writes, "Our belief is that Lutherans must be willing to take the lead in criticizing this doctrine of two kingdoms, perhaps above all others, because the Lutheran record in applying it on the boundary of church and state stinks with the rotting flesh of human beings in jail and concentration camps."<sup>121</sup> Braaten goes on to a more dialectical treatment of this doctrine, saying yes and no to certain of its elements.<sup>122</sup>

<sup>118</sup>Lull, *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, 668.

<sup>119</sup>Lull, *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, 669.

<sup>120</sup>Lull, *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Works*, 670.

<sup>121</sup>Braaten, *The Flaming Center*, 58.

<sup>122</sup>Braaten, *The Flaming Center*, 58-62.

Walter Altmann argues that at his best Luther saw the need for the necessary relationship between the two kingdoms. Altmann recognizes that Luther appeared at times to be subservient to the political authorities, especially the German princes who became protectors and benefactors of the Protestant revolt against Rome. However, Altmann asserts that Luther was a harsh social critic of these powers and illustrates this through Luther's interpretation of Psalm 82:2-4. He writes:

In his introduction Luther shows how the princes, after having been liberated from the pope's tutelage through the Reformation's proclamation of the gospel, now want to be liberated from the gospel itself in order to, in their turn, be the dominators and even put themselves above God. They want to shut the mouths of the preachers who criticize them, accusing the preachers of being "revolutionaries" and "agitators." But the gospel is revolutionary, and it is part of the preacher's task to denounce that which is evil.<sup>123</sup>

Altmann then summarizes Luther's prophetic message to the princes found in Psalm 82. Luther "distinguishes three tasks: first, to guarantee the free preaching of the gospel, precisely critical and prophetic preaching; second, to defend justice and the rights of the weak and abandoned; and finally, to guarantee the order, peace, and protection of the poor."<sup>124</sup>

Luther was a radical in international politics, advocating a German revolt against the powers of Rome and the Emperor. On the other hand, he proved to be a conservative medieval, advocate of law and order in local politics, advocating suppression of the revolting peasants by the princes of the land. Luther was particularly perturbed by the fact that the peasant revolt was being carried out in the name Jesus Christ.

Menno Simons and Martin Luther represent two basic approaches to living out the Christian life within society. Menno Simons believed that conformity to the Cosmic Christ means that the Christian may not participate in violent imposition of law or the will of God upon people and nations. Christ always calls Christians to transcend violence in their prophetic words and actions intended to establish and preserve justice and peace within the community.

<sup>123</sup>Walter Altmann, "Interpreting the Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms," *Word and World*, Winter 1987, 54-55.

<sup>124</sup>Altmann, "Interpreting the Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms," 55.

Luther, on the other hand, believed that God and the world of sin and evil required that God work through both gospel and law. God calls Christians to participate in a variety of ways in God's work in the world. Preaching of the gospel and works of charity or compassion, the work of God's right hand are always carried out within the context of the vulnerability of love. However, for Luther the preservation of justice for others and peace for the nation often require that love sacrifice vulnerability in order to be effective in preserving life within a suffering, broken world.

There is never a question as to how Jesus Christ is to be presented in a world that does not know Christ. There is no question as to how those who preach the Cosmic Crucified are to bear that message into a world of religious pluralism. The message is to be molded by the cross. The message is Jesus crucified, who is love vulnerable unto death and who is to be borne by Christian witnesses vulnerable until death. The message is to be in words and actions that proclaim and manifest the gracious unconditional love of God. The gospel will be preached, the hungry will be fed, the sick healed and justice advocated in Jesus name.

However, when the new Christian community emerges, the question is raised, "What is their responsibility within their own world?" Will their lives always be molded by love vulnerable to death, or does God call the Christian community to full participation in political structures that could not survive unless the invulnerability of force is applied? There have always been Christians who have insisted that those called by Christ are called to live in Christ's new future messianic age, which in Christ is already present within the old age dominated by conflict, rebellion and hate. They believe that Christians are called to live with and in Christ in vulnerability to death as signs and promises of God's promised future.

Other Christians, including most Lutherans, have argued that as we live between the times, we are in Christ called to participate in the future through gospel-life; however, the powers of the old and present age that threaten human existence must be limited and controlled in order to sustain human community. Christians therefore are paradoxically called to be signs of God's gospel promise and participants in God's work of the law, preserving life in the present age threatened by the evil of social chaos.<sup>125</sup>

There are other approaches to Christian responsibility in the world. Many Christians have been willing to simply use the power of the state or the militant power of social revolutionary groups to attempt to impose the

kingdom of Christ on society. One thinks of the monarchs Constantine and St. Olaf as well as Müntzer and militant Christian Marxist revolutionaries. This continues to be a major discussion within the Christian community, and it is also a major discussion in the dialogue between major religious traditions. Islam is very straightforward in insisting that Allah wills that the Muslim community actively work to impose the law of Allah (*Sharia*) upon society.

I once spoke to a group of seminary students about Christian witness within the Muslim world. I had focused on the necessity of a ministry carried out in conformity to the Cosmic Crucified. During the discussion period a Nigerian professor asked how I thought the Christian community in Nigeria should respond in the midst of the recent tension and clashes between Muslims and Christians in northern Nigeria. He said our people are tired of being told "to turn the other cheek, because we have already done that more than once." He raises a crucial question about Christian responsibility in a nation which is approximately evenly divided between the two faiths and also constitutionally mandated to preserve religious plurality. Do Christians rally their military and political forces and launch a defense against Muslim militants? Do Christians molded by the Cosmic Crucified continue to witness in a love that is vulnerable to death? Do Christians call upon all responsible citizens to uphold the constitutional guarantees of religious freedom and actively participate in the military and police power that may or may not preserve those constitutional rights?

For the Nigerian Christian churches it is a crucial debate; and unless Nigeria is an exception to Christian history, Christians will come to a variety of conclusions. Some will advocate that disciples of the Cosmic Crucified should live out Christlike nonviolence and as such be signs of the future. They may struggle for human rights, but they will be militant pacifists. Others will call for Christian responsibility under constitutional law. That may mean active participation in politics, the police and the military. There will also be others who in the name of the Crucified will exploit the frustration and traditional ethnic rivalries present in Nigeria, harnessing the prejudice and hatred of centuries, in order to fight a war of vengeance for the sake of a future Christian majority state. I believe that one can think with "the mind of Christ" about the first two alternatives. The third is clearly a denial of the lordship of the Cosmic Crucified.

<sup>125</sup> Putting Luther's two kingdom thought into biblical kingdom of God terms; that is, "the present age" and "the new or coming age" can be of assistance. I thank Graydon Saylor of Chicago Theological Seminary for discussions which have been of assistance in this area.