

Properly Distinguishing Between The Theology Of The Cross And The Theology Of Glory In The Church's Appeal For Money

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Introduction

“What? Say that again.” That was this essayist’s reaction when he received the assignment to write the essay you are now reading. Perhaps you had a similar reaction when you heard the topic announced. The title does not easily roll off the tongue. The topic, however, is a good one. It will challenge us to look again at the way we go about one part of our work as servants of Christ.

But do we need yet another paper about money? There have been several papers given at our South Central District conferences in the last five years dealing with some facet of the stewardship of money or raising money in the church. And there were probably many others given in the years before that. Why take up the question again? Aren’t the Scriptural instructions of regular, proportionate, and joyful giving sufficient for all our talk about money in the church? Those questions lead us to see the reason for the lengthy theme of this essay. The pastor who proposed this essay desires that we focus very carefully on one aspect of how we practice the theology of stewardship and how we apply it to the work of the church.

This essay will focus on how we put the biblical theology of the cross, as described by Martin Luther, into our practice of making appeals for money in the church. On the synodical level, the district level, and in the local congregation we make appeals for money. Are our appeals for money Scriptural? Are our appeals for money in keeping with the Scriptural “theology of the cross” as identified by Martin Luther? Does the way in which we make an appeal for money come out of that same theology? Must the intended use of the money for which we make an appeal also rest on the theology of the cross?

Definitions

“It depends on what your definition of ‘is,’ is.” From John Calvin to Bill Clinton it has been necessary to define words carefully. Before we can properly distinguish between the theology of the cross and the theology of glory in the church’s appeal for money we must define those two theologies. We must also define “church” and even “appeals for money” in order to bring what we discuss in this essay into the area of practical application.

Defining “church” is fairly easy for W.E.L.S. Lutherans. “A group of believers gathered around the Means of Grace”¹ would seem to be a sufficient definition in keeping with our Doctrine of Church and Ministry. So in this essay we will include the local congregation’s appeal for money as well as those of the district and synod and even church organizations since they are all “church.” For this paper we will define an appeal for money as any direct or indirect request for financial assistance beyond regular, ongoing instruction in biblical stewardship.

The Theology of the Cross vs. The Theology of Glory

Obviously the heart of this paper rests on the definition of the theology of the cross and the theology of glory. The better we are able to distinguish between the two the better we will be able to properly distinguish between them in the church’s appeal for money.

Scripture

Where do we find the theology of the cross in Scripture? From Genesis 3:15 to John 3:16, from the “In the beginning” of Genesis to the “Amen” of Revelation, God’s work of salvation is seen as a theology of the cross. The Apostle Paul wrote about the theology of the cross in his letter to the Corinthians.

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God ... For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God ... He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him ... For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. (1 Corinthians 1:18-28, 2:2)

Paul added this thought in Galatians 6:14, “May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.” God came to the world through the cross and the world can only come to God through that same cross. The life of the believer is lived through, under, and for the cross. To this the Apostle directed his readers in Galatians 2:20, “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” And in his letter to the Philippians 1:21 we read, “For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.” The theology of the cross was not invented or formulated by Martin Luther. He saw it as it is [sic] and he saw it where it is—the theology of Scripture.

Luther

How did Martin Luther explain and apply the Scriptural theology of the cross? We first turn to the Heidelberg Disputation, 1518. Theses 19-24 are the most commented on of all the theses and are usually the centerpiece of any discussion on the theology of the cross.

That person does not deserve to be called a theologian who looks upon the invisible things of God as though they were clearly perceptible in those things that have actually happened. That person deserves to be called a theologian, however, who comprehends the visible and manifest things of God through suffering and the cross. A theology of glory calls evil good and good evil. A theology of the cross calls the thing what it actually is. That wisdom which perceives the invisible things of God by thinking in terms of works completely puffs up, blinds, and hardens. The law works the wrath of God, kills, curses, accuses, judges, and damns everything that is not in Christ. Yet that wisdom is not of itself evil, nor is the law to be evaded; but without the theology of the cross man misuses the best in the worst manner.ⁱⁱ

As is often the case with profound statements, the mind struggles to absorb and apply all the observations of Dr. Luther concerning the theology of the cross in contrast with the theology of glory. But we see some broad strokes immediately appear. The great and glorious things about God are found in the cross. The greatest things God has done can only be seen through suffering and the cross. The great things God does in and through believers are worked in and through the cross.

Luther further clarified his theology of the cross in his *Explanation of the Disputation Concerning the Value of Indulgences*, 1518.

From this you can see how, ever since the scholastic theology—the deceiving theology (for that is the meaning of the word in Greek)—began, the theology of the cross has been abrogated, and everything has been completely turned upside down. A theologian of the cross (that is, one who speaks of the crucified and hidden God) teaches that punishments, crosses, and death are the most precious treasury of all and the most sacred relics which the Lord of this theology himself has consecrated and blessed, not alone by the touch of his most holy flesh, but also by the embrace of his exceedingly holy and divine will, and he has left these relics here to be kissed, sought after, and embraced. Indeed fortunate and blessed is he who is considered by God to be so worthy that these treasures of Christ should be given to him.ⁱⁱⁱ

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 worthy of love.^{iv}

Luther saw the theology of the cross as the only correct way to view God and the only way to correctly view the life of the believer. God came to the cross for man. God comes to man through the cross and man in turn comes to God through the cross.

Further Explanation

It is beyond the scope of this paper to do a thorough study of Luther's theology of the cross. Yet without any further explanation it might be difficult to immediately apply this theology to the church's appeal for money and contrast it with the theology of glory. If we look at what others have discovered concerning the subject of Luther's theology of the cross it may help lead us into the central question of this essay.

James G. Kiecker in an essay printed in the summer 1995 edition of the *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* focused on the development of Luther's theology of the cross. He points us to the first time Luther described his theology of the cross in writing.

As far as I can tell, Luther uses the phrase "theology of the cross" for the first time in his Lectures on Hebrews (1517-1518). Commenting on Hebrews 12:11, Luther draws the contrast between discipline as an alien work of God—God sending pain—and a proper work of God—the pain is for our benefit. "Here we find the Theology of the Cross," says Luther, because the fruit of righteousness is "hidden" by pain, just as salvation is "hidden" by the cross.^v

We see two parts of Luther's Theology of the Cross brought out. God's work among believers is hidden in the cross they carry, and God's work of salvation is hidden in the cross of his Son.

Toward the end of his essay Kiecker points out the fact that knowing this theology of the cross has very practical application for us today.

It is also possible to apply Luther's insight to the church today. By God's grace we have faith, and our good works are the fruit of this faith. But when our strenuous activities in the ministry become the focus of our attention—when we glory in what our faith has produced rather than focusing on Christ's work on the cross and glorying in that—then the theologian of glory is very much alive.

Furthermore, the God who created the heavens and the earth has certainly done great things among us. But when we focus on such great works of God—when we glory in a smoothly running synodical organization, a superb educational system, a successful local building project rather than focusing on God's greatest work done through Christ on the cross and glorying in that—then everything has been turned upside-down. The cross has been squeezed out, and we are left with a false theology of glory.^{vi}

With that quote we can begin to see the point of application in the discussion before us. The theologian of glory is very much alive in some of the church's appeals for money. When the focus of the church is on its work and what the faith of its members produces instead of on the cross of Christ, the theology of glory threatens to remove the church from its foundation.

Perhaps the most comprehensive work to date on Luther's theology of the cross was written by Walther von Loewenich. A few quotes from his book *Luther's Theology of the Cross* may also assist us in learning how to properly distinguish between the theology of glory and the theology of the cross in the church's appeal for money. Loewenich describes the centrality of the theology of the cross in Luther's thinking as follows:

For Luther the cross is not only the subject of theology; it is the distinctive mark of all theology. It has its place not only in the doctrine of the vicarious atonement, but it constitutes an integrating element for all Christian knowledge. The theology of the cross is not a chapter in theology but a specific kind of theology. The cross of Christ is significant here not only for the question concerning redemption and the certainty of salvation, but it is the center that provides perspective for all theological statements. Hence, it belongs to the doctrine of God in the same way as it belongs to the doctrine of the work of Christ.^{vii}

After an overview of Luther's theology of the cross Loewenich then describes five aspects of it. They help clarify and broaden our understanding of how Luther viewed this theology.

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.^{viii}

A Summary of the Theology of the Cross

Properly distinguishing between the theology of glory and the theology of the cross is a lot like properly distinguishing between Law and Gospel. It seems so simple and yet in practice it can be very difficult. Although what has been presented so far may be too brief and perhaps an overly simple look at Luther's theology of the cross, we must begin to connect that theology with the topic at hand—the church's appeal for money. Without additional discussion about the finer points of the theology of the cross can we agree that it is always the cross which illuminates all chapters of theology? The deepest nature of God's revelation is hidden in the cross. From

the believer's perspective he comes to God through the cross. His life is under the cross. His purpose in life is to point to the cross. With those basic points understood we can begin to grasp the theology of the cross as revealed in Scripture and embraced by Martin Luther.

Appeals for Money

Before we proceed in our discussion we first need to answer a very big question. Are appeals for money by the church biblical? If it isn't God-pleasing to make appeals for money we could end this essay right here. From the evidence of Scripture we can say that there is nothing inherently wrong with the church making appeals for money. We can point to examples in the Old Testament where the Lord made appeals to his people for money. The building of the Tabernacle, the building of the Temple, the second building of the Temple, are examples of appeals to God's people for money. However, these appeals for money must be put in their context. These were appeals made to God's people to give special offerings in addition to what they gave to the Lord in a regular, proportionate, and joyful way. In other words, teaching Biblical stewardship must be the primary goal of the church concerning money. Making appeals for money must be secondary.

The most notable appeal for money in the New Testament is recorded in 2 Corinthians 8:6-17. We turn there for guidance before we reach the central question of this essay. Look closely at how Paul makes this appeal for money from the Corinthians.

So we urged Titus, since he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part. But just as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us—see that you also excel in this grace of giving. I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich. And here is my advice about what is best for you in this matter: Last year you were the first not only to give but also to have the desire to do so. Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means. For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have. Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. Then there will be equality, as it is written: "He who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little did not have too little." I thank God, who put into the heart of Titus the same concern I have for you. For Titus not only welcomed our appeal, but he is coming to you with much enthusiasm and on his own initiative. (NIV)

We see how the theology of the cross came out in Paul's appeal for money among the church at Corinth. The motive to give came from the cross of Christ. God revealed the riches of his love through the cross. The resources to give also came to the Corinthians through the cross as they took up their cross and followed Christ.

Properly Distinguishing Between the Two Theologies

With a basic understanding of the theology of the cross, an agreement on a definition of "church," and the support of Scripture for appeals for money, we are ready to examine the topic at hand. We will first consider the manner in which appeals for money are made in the church in light of the theology of the cross. This will include the motivation presented for giving and the plan to solicit the giving. Then we will also look at the goal of the church's appeal for money in light of the theology of the cross.

Making the Appeal

Perhaps the most practical way to begin the task of distinguishing between the theology of glory and the theology of the cross in the church's appeal for money is to look at a broad sampling of the ways the church typically makes appeals for money.

"The Every-Member Visit" – appeal

This is an appeal for money taken directly to the individuals of the church. The theology of the cross tells us to take the cross of Christ to the members through worship, Bible class, and every-member visits. The cross will crucify the old Adam who resists God's total claim on the believer. The cross will build up the new man to give generously. When the theology of glory is brought out in every member visits the focus is on external things not on the hiddenness of God in the cross or the fact that the believer's life is hidden in the cross with God. The appeal of glory instead seeks to bring the need for the offering, the monetary goal of the offering, or how much has already been given, to the members. Certainly an appeal for money can be brought to God's people in a personal way but if the focus of the visit is only on money, what it can do or how much it is needed, the theology of glory will overshadow the theology of the cross.

"The Value of Furnishing Information" – appeal

This appeal for money may seem innocent enough. "Let's just tell the members what it takes to run the church and they will get the picture." The theology of the cross doesn't care about how much money it takes to keep the church afloat. The most important information to share in any appeal for money is the foolishness of the cross. "You do the math" appeals can glory in what faith "should" produce but leave out the cross. If the information that the church shares in such an appeal is nothing more than a monetary yardstick, improper motivation may move the members to give.

"The Unified Budget" – appeal

"We are running short in the general fund. Let's make sure we keep our books in the black." How is this appeal filled with the theology of glory? It looks no further than the exterior well-being of a church. Keeping a positive balance in the checking account is no proper reason for giving. The theology of the cross would speak to the Old Adam who is sluggish in his response to God's love. The cross will lead the church to look at its mission and purpose. Maybe the budget is falling behind because the work of the church has been side-tracked away from the cross.

"The Every-One-For-Something" – appeal

In this appeal it may be easier to properly distinguish between the theology of glory and the theology of the cross than in other appeals. Pumping up givers with a "get on the band wagon" appeal leaves behind the individual call of the cross and the life of the individual under the cross. To give because "everyone else is giving" finds its glory in what man can do and not in what God has done.

"A Goal Setting" – appeal

Realistic. Specific. Attainable. In the secular world those words are connected with the philosophy of setting goals. When goal setting is connected to the church's appeal for money the goal can quickly become a manifestation of the theology of glory. A member's reason for giving can become the goal instead of the cross. If the church gives just to reach what the church thinks is realistic, specific, and attainable where has the only reason for giving gone? Then the theology of glory wins again.

"Thankoffering" – appeal

How could making an appeal to give thanks possibly be connected with the theology of glory? In his book *The Stewardship Call*, Waldo J. Werning said this about the thankoffering appeal for money.

Gratitude can be easily misunderstood, and it can be used as an easy exhortation. “Be grateful!” can be a wrongful moralistic exhortation. Gratitude is also a grace from God and is to be sought from Him, for it cannot be worked up in ourselves by our own power. Gratitude is not a motivation; gratitude is a response and response takes form in specific acts. Gratitude is a fruit, not a root. In a sense gratitude is not a keynote of stewardship, and it can easily become a general moral consciousness of responsibility. The motive is God’s love for man, not man’s love for God. Man’s love for God comes after God’s love has moved man to love.^{ix}

Obviously the love of God is seen most clearly in the cross. When God chose to reveal his love he concealed it in the cross. The theology of the cross focusing on that love will produce a response of thankfulness in a believer. But an appeal to “be thankful” can easily begin to focus on the glory of man and what he can do in response to God’s love.

“The Lord Needs It” or “Your Church Needs You” – appeal

The God who said, “I have no need of a bull from your stall or of goats from your pens, for every animal of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills,” (Psalm 50:9-10) does not need our offerings. To make an appeal of this kind once again puts the focus on man’s glory. Every person can find fulfillment in being needed. The theology of the cross shows the giver his or her need for God. The suffering Savior is the one who has met the needs of mankind. Seeing how hopeless, helpless, and useless we are without the cross shows us our need for God. We then respond to God’s invitation to share that truth with others.

Other Appeals

Waldo J. Werning brings out some additional ways that the church has made appeals for money in his book on stewardship. His observations may be useful in our efforts to learn to properly distinguish between the theology of the cross and the theology of glory in the church’s appeal for money.

Examples of false motives that violate the covenant plan in Christian stewardship and giving may be found among the following:

1. An appeal to a sense of duty. “You belong to the church, so it’s your duty to support it,” the canvasser may argue. In a sense it is the Christian’s duty, but that is not a motive to which we appeal. The Christian’s real reason for giving can be found in the nature and terms of the covenant with God.
2. An appeal to pride. “You can’t give more to church than the poor widow down the street?” asks the canvasser. “First Church has never missed its benevolence and mission budget. If we don’t get more generous gifts in December, we will miss it for the first time.” This reason for raising sufficient mission offerings wrongfully appeals to the member’s pride.
3. An appeal to personal loyalty to the minister, personal taste for a church building, or for certain traditional church activities. These are often based on sympathy for a particular personality or a favorite activity. When leaders try to cash in on the popularity of their pastor or some project to gain their ends, they have perverted the Gospel motive.
4. An appeal to give more generously because “we have never had it so good.” When such a reason is pressed upon people, it will backfire in the end and often result in stunted stewardship activity. If leaders remind people of their full bank accounts during prosperity

(as motive to give more), then in lean years leaders will be reminded by members of their empty bank accounts. To say “The land is fat” as a general appeal is not quite fair because there are always some in the group who find themselves “financially thin”—thus the appeal points to some irrelevant facts and away from spiritual truths.

5. An appeal to the need of the Christian to give. Neither the need of the Christian to give nor the need of the congregation to receive support is a fundamental Christian motive for giving. This need does exist as a result of our being Christians, but it dare never be stressed as a motive.
6. An appeal to fear. Fearful pleas such as, “This is your last chance,” or “This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity” are not expressive of proper motivation for graceful giving. Too many Christians give generously only when they are moved by some powerful appeal to relieve a case of immediate need or to meet an emergency. Why should a high-pressure, emotional appeal be required to move men to do that which should be their normal course of action? Giving should not be regulated by sentiment and impulse but by principles of Scripture and grace.”^x

This essayist cringed in shame when he read these appeals described by Waldo J. Werning. Not only has he heard them made in his congregation he has personally made some of them. The theology of glory can creep undetected into our appeals for money unless we are vigilant in our watchfulness. When we make an appeal we must ask if it come from the foolishness of the cross or from our wisdom? Do our appeals for money center on the fact that God hung on a cross for man and that He calls man to carry a cross or do they focus on what believers can do and what financial resources can accomplish?

In *Supply-Side Stewardship* Waldo J. Werning dedicated an entire section to appeals for giving for the needs of the church at large. We see how easily the church’s appeals for money on the synodical, or district level, can also fall short of the theology of the cross and deeply into the theology of glory.

What is the problem when churches major in marketing and sociological principles to raise large amounts of money? The wisdom of the world is confused with the wisdom of God. Often Law and Gospel motivation are mixed. Moralizing is cloaked in Gospel terminology. Pressure, which sometimes is offensive, is placed on some members to produce.

Various techniques are to be questioned. A variety of sales techniques appeal to the pride of the natural man so that he will be moved to action. He is given the hint that he should not ride out this successful effort. Success is equated with man-made principles and goals. To guarantee success big fund-raising drives employ sociological policies, analyze statistics, and graph individual responses. On the basis of these standards, projected results are calculated, and the methodology and messages are proposed. Thus we may be told that one dollar given by the “big” givers will generate seven dollars from all the others. Biblically speaking, human appeals only generate human actions, not divine power to give fully from God’s supply house.

Various church bodies and congregations have claimed success when large sums of money were raised. Too often they do not seem to notice the failure to gain gifts from a large percentage of the people. Sometimes as high as 60% to 70% do not give. When only a minority participate and spiritual growth is minimal, success is questionable.

It is true that quite often people contribute to a cause in direct relationship to the manner in which they are asked. But when we teach them biblical principles, they give much more year by year, not just sporadically when they are asked. The asking of specific sums is important for the unregenerate man, for he finds such logic and organization appealing to him. He enjoys knowing that he is an important part of a campaign. Unregenerate man will also participate as he is inspired by a knowledge of how the program is progressing and whether it will be successful. Such techniques are the way of the LAW, which undermines the Scriptural principles of giving. There is the need of the member to give and to make a commitment, but that is to be gained by a message of grace, not the compulsion of needs.

Does the Christian servant really require a “needs presentation” in order to respond to a program which should have been handled by the ongoing first-fruits gifts of the people year by year?

Churches need to shy away from behavioristic methods which tell us that people give better when they know they are giving to extraordinary needs, that success is assured when they know what they are to give in a campaign, and when they are asked in a specific manner.^{xi}

When appealing for money replaces the teaching of Biblical stewardship, the applying of Law and Gospel in sermons and Bible class, and providing spiritual growth, the church is waist deep in the theology of glory. With a little reflection on how easily the theology of glory can overwhelm our appeals for money we see how important it is that we always properly distinguish between the theology of the cross and the theology of glory.

Motivation

But then how is it even possible to make an appeal for money that is not tainted with the theology of glory? Some might say that it is easy to be critical of every appeal the church makes for money. But it is close to impossible to come up with any better alternatives. As is true of so much of what the Christian does, motivation is vitally important in the area of giving. How does the church compel Christians to give? What motivation do we offer when we make appeals for money. The *Stewardship Handbook* published by the W.E.L.S. in the early 1970s said this, “Christian stewardship can find its Source only in the cross of Christ. The nature of Christian stewardship is determined by God’s plan of salvation in Christ and by His way of bringing salvation to us through Christ.”^{xii} The writers felt it important enough to dedicate one whole chapter on proper motivation in making appeals for money. The theology of the cross came through loud and clear. They went on to say, “We must never forget that without Christ crucified there is no true stewardship life. For without Christ crucified there is no spiritual life to live. Without Christ crucified there is no spiritual possession to administer.”^{xiii} The focus of all appeals for money must start with the cross and Christ crucified.

But how do we present the theology of the cross as the motivation for a person to respond to an appeal for money? In his book *God’s Way to Joyful and Abundant Giving*, Carl W. Berner makes the connection between the believer and the cross by using a familiar hymn.

It’s never hard to get Christian people to rejoice when you start singing the first stanza:

Drawn to the cross, which you have blessed
With healing gifts for souls distressed,
To find in you my life, my rest,
Christ crucified, I come.

Oh, yes! All of us love to come to the cross and be assured that Christ has taken away all our sin, that He brings us pardon, peace, grace, and strength, and all the blessings which reconciliation with God implies. Maybe we get so wrapped up in the singing of the first stanza that we never really look at the last stanza of the hymn, which reminds us that the cross also brings us “labor in the Lord.”

And then for work to do for Thee,
Which shall so sweet a service be
That angels well might envy me,
Christ crucified, I come.

Many of us fail to sing the two stanzas with equal fervor and devotion. But the love of the cross and the work of the cross cannot be separated. In the same moment when the offense of the cross stopped the heart of a Pharisee by the name of Saul, the new Paul asks, “Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?” And thereafter he was determined not to know anything among men save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.^{xiv}

The theology of the cross presents the cross of Christ which serves as its own motivator for giving. The cross changes the heart so that work under the cross and for the cross is the believer’s highest joy.

We look to another book by Waldo J. Werning, *Supply-Side Stewardship*, for help in using the cross as the only motivator for giving.

Two choices face us for our motivations, objectives, goals, methods, and strategies in our church work and in our personal lives: a maintenance-survival approach or a supply-side approach, the traditional or the Scriptural.

The maintenance model is anxious about budgets, needs, and institutional goals, while faith is often transformed into duty and oppressive obligations. As one layman told us, this makes the church a pressure cooker with psychological and emotional mechanisms to integrate members into the system more than into the body of Christ. Thus we depend more on man’s supply house than on God’s supply house, making stewardship more a matter between man and the institution than between man and God.

Our proposal is to destroy the maintenance mentality and model. In its place we build a program called Supply-Side Stewardship. Then the Word is the central force of stewardship. That Word offers God’s supply of love and mercy, which is unbelievable and fantastic! He supplies power for victory over sin, the devil, and the world. The greatness and goodness of the Triune God is not always properly understood, so we often fail to tap the necessary supply to perform the stewardship and mission tasks assigned to us. This happens because of over dependence on human strength and resources while God’s generous bounty is not fully utilized. The result is that there are few true servants, in the Scriptural sense, and that the church lacks a support system for all those in need of special help. In the meantime such churches are struggling with their pygmy budgets and are facing endless deficits.^{xv}

One can see in Werning’s comments how the theology of glory infects much of what the church does in the area of finances. Yes, even in the W.E.L.S. this is true. When we focus on what money can do instead of what God has done we have failed in our stewardship efforts. If we become consumed by our work for God instead of God’s work for us, the cross has been pushed aside by our appeals for money.

Goals

There is another facet of the church's appeal for money that we need to consider in light of the theology of the cross. What is the goal of the appeal? At first that may seem like a silly question. The goal of every appeal for money is to get money, isn't it? Raising money is all the theology of glory hopes to accomplish. Raising believers to see more fully the power and wisdom of God in the cross is the objective of any appeal proceeding out of the theology of the cross. Professor David Valleskey of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary shared these comments with the essayist when he was asked about the topic we are now considering.

In my mind, one of the critical issues has to do with the purpose of stewardship programs, planned giving, etc. Is the major purpose to raise people? Or is the purpose to raise money? If the purpose is simply to raise money, then the Law alone might serve well. That's a "theology of glory" approach. Look for external results, success. "More," "bigger," "better" are the kinds of words associated with the theology of glory.

If on the other hand, the purpose is to raise people—to help them grow in their life of sanctification—then the progression will be: law (to reveal sin), gospel (to assure of forgiveness), law (as a guide for grateful Christians), and the gospel (as that which motivates and empowers). The goal is not "success" as defined by the world. The goal is to help Christians along in their daily life of putting to death the flesh by contrition and repentance, of claiming the free and full forgiveness of their Savior, and of offering their whole selves (including their money) as a thankoffering back to their God in response to God's mercy.

To properly distinguish between the theology of the cross and the theology of glory in the church's appeal for money we must not only look at the way the appeal is made and the motivation given along with the appeal, but also the goal of the appeal. If the main objective of an appeal for money is to raise money, pay off debts, and "do more," the church has left the cross for the glory of what it can see and do.

In his book *The Stewardship Call*, Waldo Werning makes this observation about the goal of any appeal for money.

The stewardship message, communicating relevant words about sin and grace, should encourage all members to place the big offering on the Lord's altar: the truly repentant heart. For some it may be more important at the moment that they first repent of wicked words that come from their mouths, and of the lovelessness in their hearts, and of the little "hates" in their lives, and then repent of budget shortages in their church. Psalm 51 should be kept fresh in our minds every day and in every stewardship task. Every time we talk improvement, we must also talk repentance.^{xvi}

When the theologian of the cross makes an appeal for money he looks at what God wants for his people through the cross and under the cross. That becomes the goal of his appeal. "Seeing" results that can "do great things" in the church must never be presented as a motivation for giving. That is the theology of glory.

Application

As many of you may know the congregation that this essayist serves is in the middle of a building project. Buildings are necessary but they are costly. How will a self-supporting congregation of 100 communicants pay for a facility that costs almost \$400,000? The answer seems to be a stewardship drive. Following the theology

of glory we could approach this appeal for money in a number of ways. “Every dollar you give now will be worth ten over the life of the mortgage!” “Your church needs you!” “We need everyone.” “Give thanks for the new building by bringing an offering.” “God has been good to us, let’s respond to his love.” Some have said it would be best to call our stewardship drive a “debt reduction” drive and leave it at that. That proposal seemed to be safer than the others.

Any of those methods could be heavily weighted in the direction of the theology of glory. Giving because each dollar is worth more now than in the life of a loan is not giving motivated by the cross. The needs of the church or the need for every member to carry his or her “fair share” is the theology of glory, not to mention a horrible mingling of Law and Gospel. A thankoffering for the new building would be fine as long as it doesn’t become a “be thankful” appeal for money. Even a stewardship program as innocent as debt reduction can lead Christians away from the cross to the altar of man’s glory. “Look at what this little group did without the help of the District Mission Board,” may become the refrain. If all the church wants to do is get rid of the debt so it can take it easy in the area of stewardship or take pride in what has been done human glory has been elevated above the cross. The theology of glory has blocked the theology of the cross. Perhaps a reversal of thinking in our appeals for money is necessary. Let’s forget about the money! Let’s make an appeal for better worship attendance, Bible study, Sunday school, and evangelism work as we crucify the sinful flesh under the cross. Let’s glory in what the cross has done in our lives and watch the financial needs be fully supplied. Some might say that is naive thinking. Perhaps it is. But is it any more foolish than the message of the cross?

Conclusion

It is difficult to bring an essay like this to a conclusion. How can we arrive at any basic points of agreement concerning the church’s appeals for money? At best we can only talk in the broadest of terms. Perhaps the essayist took a “shoot first and ask questions later approach” to the church’s appeals for money—trying to shoot holes in all of them. That was not his intention. But when we look at the theology of the cross and at our appeals for money we see how careful we must be to do what is right and pleasing to God in this area of the church’s ministry.

In this essayist’s homiletics class at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, the professor regularly challenged his students to ask the question, “Is this sermon a Lutheran sermon or could it be preached at any Christian church, or even a synagogue without raising any eyebrows?” With that question the professor was pointing a group of seminarians to the distinctiveness of being a Lutheran Christian. As Lutheran Christians we have a unique approach to everything we believe and do. That approach is the Scriptural theology of the cross. God’s greatness is hidden in the cross and the life of the believer is hidden under the cross. To properly distinguish between the theology of the cross and the theology of glory in our appeals for money we must ask the question of every appeal, “Is this a Lutheran appeal for money or could it be made by other Christian churches and even other non-profit organizations without raising any eyebrows?”

When any appeal for money is made beyond that of teaching biblical stewardship the church must carefully consider it in light of the theology of the cross. Will this appeal draw church members closer to the cross? Does the appeal come from the cross, through the cross, and is it for the cross? Are the givers motivated to give by what they can see or by what God has hidden in the cross? When it comes to appeals for money we pray for the wisdom of Luther to call the thing what it actually is.

Endnotes

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- ⁱ *This We Believe*. Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1980, 17-21.
- ⁱⁱ *Luther's Works*. Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press and Fortress Press, and St. Louis: Concordia. Vol. 31, pg. 225.
- ⁱⁱⁱ *Luther's Works*. Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press and Fortress Press, and St. Louis: Concordia. Vol. 31, pg. 225f.
- ^{iv} *Luther's Works*. Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press and Fortress Press, and St. Louis: Concordia. Vol. 31, pg. 227.
- ^v Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly - Volume 92 / Number 3 / Summer 1995, pg. 182.
- ^{vi} Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly - Volume 92 / Number 3 / Summer 1995, pg. 188.
- ^{vii} Loewenich, Walther. *Luther's Theology of the Cross*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1976, 17-18.
- ^{viii} Loewenich: *Ibid.*, 22.
- ^{ix} Werning, Waldo J. *The Stewardship Call*. St.Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1965, 49.
- ^x Werning, Waldo J. *The Stewardship Call*. St.Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1965, 44.
- ^{xi} Werning Waldo, J. *Supply-Side Stewardship- A Call to Biblical Priorities*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1986, 88ff.
- ^{xii} *Stewardship Workbook - A Manual for Stewardship Development in the Local Congregation*. Milwaukee: WELS Stewardship Office, 1971, 8.
- ^{xiii} *Ibid.*, 9.
- ^{xiv} Berner, Carl W. *God's Way to Joyful and Abundant Giving*. Lake Mills, Iowa: Graphic Publishing Co. Inc., 1978, 37.
- ^{xv} Werning Waldo, J. *Supply-Side Stewardship- A Call to Biblical Priorities*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1986, 24.
- ^{xvi} Werning, Waldo J. *The Stewardship Call*. St.Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1965, 30.