

DISCERNMENT

Theology and the Practice of Ministry

Volume 2 | Issue 1

Article 1

2016

Through the Lens of the Cross: Cruciformity as a Model for Teaching Ministry

Benjamin D. Pickett
benkerbrel@yahoo.com

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.acu.edu/discernment>



Part of the [Biblical Studies Commons](#), [Christianity Commons](#), [Practical Theology Commons](#), and the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License](#).

Recommended Citation

Pickett, Benjamin D. (2016) "Through the Lens of the Cross: Cruciformity as a Model for Teaching Ministry," *Discernment: Theology and the Practice of Ministry*. Vol. 2: Iss. 1, Article 1.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.acu.edu/discernment/vol2/iss1/1>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at Digital Commons @ ACU. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Discernment: Theology and the Practice of Ministry* by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ ACU.

DISCERNMENT

Theology and the Practice of Ministry

Through the Lens of the Cross: Cruciformity as a Model for Teaching Ministry

Benjamin Pickett

Abstract: *As the contemporary church travels deeper into the postmodern era, modern methods of education and catechesis have remained. In this paper, a foundational set of principles drawn from Michael Gorman's analysis of Pauline spirituality—known as "cruciformity"—is examined and presented as a lens to inform and support the teaching ministry in churches. Gorman's thought provides a fresh way to understand the central theme of Paul's correspondence to the first century churches.*

The paper begins with a brief explanation of the current conditions regarding the adult education ministry of churches and then examines Gorman's cruciform patterns of faith, love, power, and hope, in detail. With careful study and reflection on these four narrative patterns of Pauline spirituality, students can understand the gospels and the Pauline corpus in ways consistent with the crucified Christ.

"In Pauline writings," asserts Ruth Haley Barton, "instructions about spiritual formation and transformation are never given to private individuals but are always addressed to individuals in communities of faith."¹ In other words, formation takes place in Christian community. In churches, the spiritual growth and development of believers takes place in the context of corporate gatherings where members worship, learn, and serve.

Contemporary Protestant churches recognize the value of teaching ministry.² Whether through communities of small groups or Sunday

¹ Ruth Haley Barton, Diane J. Chandler, Siang-Yang Tan, Judy TenElshof, and James C. Wilhoit, "Spiritual Formation in the Church," *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 7 2 (2014): 293.

² Pamela Mitchell Legg, "The Work of Christian Education in the Seminary and the Church: Then (1812) and Now (2012)," *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 66 4 (2012): 425.

morning Bible classes, churches invest resources and volunteer hours in the task of faith formation in adults and children. Yet often churches lack sufficient theological resources to support the desired outcomes of their adult teaching ministries and, consequently, the spiritual development of their members.³ I believe that Michael Gorman's analysis of Paul's narrative spirituality of the cross called "cruciformity"⁴ provides a resource to inform the teaching ministry of the church. Cruciformity, with its fundamental narrative structure and commitment to Pauline spirituality, offers principles sufficient to guide the development of Christian character and the desired outcomes for the teaching ministry. In this paper I will explore the tenets of cruciformity and show how, in comparison to existing models for Christian pedagogy in the church context, it provides a much-needed contemporary model—a lens through which churches may view the teaching ministry in fresh ways.⁵

Church and Education

Before we explore cruciformity, we must first take a brief look at the nature of instruction in the church. A recent shift in Christian education has led some to conclude that the long-held model for Christian education known as "developmental theory" is no longer sufficient as a model for Christian education.⁶ Reasons for this shift vary, but one offered by Johnson states that "the formation of Christian character simply does not share the scientific predictability of stage sequence."⁷

³ Ibid., 425-426. Legg argues current education programs in Protestant churches ignore issues of literacy and focus on "Bible stories/content" as they relate to "moral life in the contemporary world . . ." Also see: Barton et al., "Spiritual Formation in the Church," 295. Chandler and others recognize teaching as a key component of spiritual formation ministry.

⁴ Michael J. Gorman, *Cruciformity: Paul's Narrative Spirituality of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 4.

⁵ A complete description of this theology can be found in: Benjamin D. Pickett, "Elder Selection: Engaging the Monterey Church of Christ in a Collaborative Elder Selection Process," DMin Project/Thesis, (Abilene Christian University, 2013). Available at: http://digitalcommons.acu.edu/dmin_theses/20/

⁶ Benjamin D. Espinoza and Beverly Johnson-Miller, "Catechesis, Developmental Theory, and a Fresh Vision for Christian Education," *Christian Education Journal* 11 1 (2014): 9. The authors do not suggest removal of the model outright but instead offer "catechesis . . . as the overarching process for understanding and cultivating Christian formation and life-long spiritual growth." The model suggested in this proposal takes a similar stance.

⁷ Susanne Johnson, *Christian Spiritual Formation in the Church and Classroom*, (Nashville: Abingdon, 1989), 111.

Catechesis is the term used often in Scripture to refer to instruction in the faith and is a derivative of the Greek verb *katecheo*,⁸ which means “to teach.”⁹ In their paper on catechesis and Christian education, Espinoza and Johnson-Miller note that catechesis “assumes a lifelong, intergenerational approach that continues to nourish believers regardless of age level.”¹⁰ This is to say that catechesis and spiritual formation are not limited to children or youth programs but are facets of learning at all stages of life. Shea speaks to the need for this kind of approach in light of the pervasive “adolescent” view of God found in contemporary Christian circles.¹¹

Some scholars acknowledge that while the church understands the need to engage in catechesis, spiritual formation, and the practices that constitute faithful living, the church in North America has not done well in its efforts to educate believers. Jones identifies several reasons for this lack of catechesis in the North American church. Among them are the fact some Protestants took catechesis for granted because members were “growing up in America.” In other words, Jones argues there existed an assumed Christian cultural climate that would necessarily impart Christian belief. Yet today, churches recognize the need for “more extensive catechesis” because “Protestants today seem to be increasingly aware of the need as the dominant culture has become less overtly supportive of religious beliefs, desires, and practices.”¹² Few would suggest that the cultural conditions Jones describes here have improved.

Therefore, the church must be intentional in its efforts to form faith and practice in the lives of its parishioners. The church should identify the goals of the teaching ministry and carefully discern what constitutes the content of Christian pedagogy because the focus of Christian education is not only the acquisition of knowledge, but also the development of Christian character.¹³

⁸ *The Analytical Lexicon to the Greek New Testament*, 1st ed., s.v. “katecheo”

⁹ *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3rd ed., s.v. “catechesis.” See, for example, Gal. 6:6 and Acts 18:25.

¹⁰ Espinoza and Johnson-Miller, 17.

¹¹ John J. Shea, *Finding God Again: Spirituality for Adults* (Oxford: Rowen & Littlefield, 2005), 11. Shea explores the dynamics of faith formation in adults who adhere to an unchanged and adolescent view of God. The value of his work is in the recognition that adults can, and should, mature in faith regardless their age.

¹² L. Gregory Jones, “Beliefs, Desires, Practices, and the Ends of Theological Education,” in *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life*, ed. Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 191.

¹³ Johnson, *Christian*, 111.

Richard Osmer affirms this important distinction. In his examination and exploration of Paul's teachings regarding catechesis in Romans, he identifies three key principles of the teaching ministry in churches that constitute his model for teaching ministry.¹⁴ He argues that the focus of the teaching ministry in congregations, in part, is to help the early Christians "place the events of Christ's redemption in the context of creation and Israel's election as a covenant people." The key here is found in Osmer's insistence that believers identify with the story of Scripture, the story of God's people. He goes on to say that "learning Scripture and tradition are not ends in themselves."¹⁵ In other words, for Christians the purpose of the teaching ministry is to "let the pattern of [God's] redemption shape their lives."¹⁶

What are the qualities, then, that demonstrate the redemptive work of Christ in our lives? The formation of Christian character means there are certain virtues that necessarily constitute Christian behavior. According to Johnson, these qualities, or characteristics, "require education" and make up the substance of Christian character as believers learn to "take part in the world rendered by the Christian Story."¹⁷ As we saw in Osmer, I believe Johnson is correct when she identifies Christian character in the context of the Christian story. She goes on further to comment on the connection between living in the Christian story and Christian character. She writes: "Christian character must arise as a wholehearted way of following a Person and living creatively within the Realm he teaches us to see."¹⁸ Johnson helps us recognize the connection between the admonition to live within the Christian story and the nature of the behavior that affirms one's lived experience within that story. If we indeed are to live in the story, then our behaviors, our motivations, our commitments to Christ take on certain characteristics Johnson describes as Christian character.

So what, then, informs Christian character? For the remainder of this project, I propose Michael Gorman's method for understanding Pauline

¹⁴ Richard R. Osmer, *The Teaching Ministry of Congregations* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 16-17. Specifically, the "teaching ministry a) seeks to help Christians better understand and participate in God's redemption of the world in Christ Jesus, b) seeks to help Christians grow in their relationship with the risen and universal Lord, and c) the teaching ministry orients the members of the Christian community toward God's promised future for creation."

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹⁷ Johnson, *Christian*, 116. The author identifies eight elements of Christian character.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 117.

spirituality as a means to define the content of Christian character. Using the term “cruciformity,” Gorman describes four narrative patterns of spirituality useful for understanding Paul’s commitments for faith and for reflection on the principles of adult education ministry.¹⁹ Specifically, the narrative patterns of cruciform faith, love, power, and hope invite us to consider the constituent elements of Christian character and in doing so articulate a model for Christian education ministry. I will borrow extensively from Gorman’s work on Pauline spirituality and will explore how each of his narrative patterns provides fundamental characteristics important for churches to consider as they think about the content and goals of the teaching ministry.²⁰

Cruciformity

Cruciformity, in a general sense, is defined as the orientation of a person’s walk of faith and the commitments that inform faith around the crucified Christ. In other words, the crucifixion of Jesus Christ is the seminal event through which Christians properly understand the character of God. As such, Christ’s behavior, as representation of the character of God, exhibits certain qualities, often described as virtues, that necessarily inform Christian faith. The value of Gorman’s thought for this discussion is found in the way he frames Paul’s life, teaching, and ministry as a narration “in life and words, the story of God’s self-revelation in Christ.”²¹ Because Christ’s death is paradigmatic to Christian faith, the cross then shapes Christian commitments and attitudes in all circumstances. This is to say the faith commitments actualized in daily choices should be informed by the obedient, self-emptying posture of Christ demonstrated at the cross.

The use of cruciformity brings us back to the importance of Paul’s spirituality for our reflection on what constitutes Christian character. When Gorman’s narrative patterns of cruciform faith, hope, power, and love are utilized as a means to inform a model for teaching ministry, exploration of these patterns naturally yield certain qualities. These qualities constitute their own set of virtues—cruciform virtues. Gorman hesitates to use the language of virtue in his thought on cruciformity; however, there is clearly a connection because, like the virtues, the habits of cruciformity necessarily seek what is good and proper in the interest of others. The appeal to a

¹⁹ Gorman, *Cruciformity*, 5.

²⁰ Cruciform faith, love, power, and hope are terms used by Gorman to describe each of the four narrative patterns and have been adopted for use in this project.

²¹ Gorman, *Cruciformity*, 7.

deeper, more authentic spirituality envisioned by Paul describes certain behaviors informed by an encounter with the crucified Christ. As a consequence, these behaviors, or habits, involve choices that guide Christians regardless of their circumstances. The narrative patterns and the qualities that emerge as a result represent a set of theological virtues central to faith formation and, in their expression, constitute a means for recognition of the presence of mature Christian faith.²²

Gorman's narrative patterns, which I will address in detail below, open up new possibilities for understanding what it means to be authentic followers of Christ and provide an alternative way for churches to think about the principles and goals of adult education ministry. I will explore each of Gorman's narrative patterns—cruciform faith, love, power, and hope—and describe what each pattern entails and show how the qualities and virtues that emerge from each narrative pattern inform Christian character and provide principles for teaching ministry.

Cruciform Faith

The narrative pattern of cruciform faith is the first and the most foundational element necessary for understanding cruciformity and its usefulness for discerning the character traits of a disciple of Jesus Christ. Cruciform faith is fidelity to God informed by the obedient, self-emptying posture of Christ. Concrete expression of cruciform faith is found in the hymn of Philippians 2:6-11. Here Paul's correspondence with the Philippian church provides an example of cruciform faith expressed in terms of obedience. Christ demonstrates his obedience by his willingness to become human. That is, the incarnation demonstrated perfect humility and obedience—he oriented his life to the will of God. Often certain levels of piety define expressions of faithfulness, a particular view of providence, or individualized expressions of spiritual ascent. While these are good practices, they are the result of a faithful posture toward God. A person who demonstrates cruciform faith will express behaviors defined by the virtuous qualities of humility and obedience.

²² The limitations of this project do not permit a full exploration of the ethics of virtue in relation to cruciformity. However, central to an understanding of virtue is the notion of right, or proper, action and right, or proper, motive. Cruciformity speaks to both of these concerns. For more on theological virtues, see Robin W. Lovin, *Christian Ethics: An Essential Guide* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2000), 63-79. Adams explores the pursuit of virtue from a non-theological perspective. Robert M. Adams, *A Theory of Virtue: Excellence in Being for the Good* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2006), 1-31.

How does cruciform faith inform Christian character? Disciples of Jesus exhibiting the qualities of cruciform faith will demonstrate humility and obedience to God by resisting the impulse to compartmentalize or privatize their faith and, instead, will openly display authentic Christian qualities in all circumstances. It is a matter of courage. The tendency in our culture to compartmentalize faith as a separate aspect of life individualizes and limits faith commitment. Instead, Christians should recognize the call of Christ is to “let [their] light shine before others” (Matt. 5:16), reflecting cruciform faith in concrete ways. Consequently, disciples who have made a commitment to Christ will show choices (such as the allocation of personal time, energy, and resources) consistent with the obedient and self-emptying qualities of the crucified Messiah.

Another facet of cruciform faith is an ongoing daily expression of commitment to God through the “faith of” Jesus Christ. This distinction is important because it points to the actions of Christ at the cross as a source that informs the substance of faith.²³ It is important to see Christ’s actions as demonstrative expressions of his own belief. Gorman is right when he says Christ’s death “is synonymous with Christ’s faith”²⁴ because his description of Christ’s death invites Christians to see themselves as a participant in the faith of Christ. The obedience demonstrated at the cross is the substance of what it means to be faithful to God. Thus when Christians share in a common commitment to faithful obedience, they share in the same faith as Christ.²⁵

This facet of cruciform faith should significantly impact the Christian’s understanding of what it means to participate in genuine Christian faith. In the present culture there exist impulses among some in the Christian community that equate economic or social success and influence as evidence of God’s favor.²⁶ To the contrary, Paul’s own

²³ See Gal. 2:16; 2:20 and Rom. 3:22, 26. Gorman is a proponent of the subjective genitive form of *pistis Christou*. Space does not permit a thorough examination of this and other related texts pertinent to the *pistis Christou* debate. For more see David J. Downs, “Faith(fullness) in Christ Jesus in 2 Tim. 3:15,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 131 (2012): 143-60. Also see Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans* (TAB; New York: Doubleday, 1993), 344-46. On a personal note, I believe in all likelihood Paul could have easily intended both objective and subjective genitive meanings of the text.

²⁴ Gorman, *Cruciformity*, 114.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 120. See Gal. 2:19. This text demonstrates this conviction well.

²⁶ I do not wish to deny this as a possibility, only to note that social and economic dispositions presupposed by Paul and the Christian church of the first century elevated suffering and economic difficulty as consistent with authentic faith and, therefore, consistent with the favor and grace of God.

experience and his spirituality make it clear that participation in the faith of Christ, to participate in a cruciform faith, necessarily comes at a cost: adherence to faith in Christ demands a person's time, resources, and even social acceptance for the sake of Christ and his work in the world. Paul experienced the cost through violence and persecution from his religious opponents and from the political forces surrounding him. It meant intentional choices in his profession and its administration that sought to identify with the poorest in his community.²⁷ If conformity to Christ is a conformity to his death (Gal. 2:20), then costly faith, as expressed by suffering in its various forms, is an indicator of a cruciform existence. Faith that comes at a cost includes personal choices, informed by faith, that run counter to social norms. As Gorman notes, "the life of obedient faith, of identifying with the One who died such a death, is a costly one, as Jesus, Paul, and some, if not all, of Paul's communities knew well."²⁸

Cruciform faith begins with the choice to take on the life of Christ as a personal act of commitment before God. It is a choice that invites a life of obedient self-giving and humility toward God and others—just as Christ did. It is a faith that comes at a cost, yet there is grace and joy knowing that such suffering is demonstrative of authentic faith.

Cruciform Love²⁹

Cruciform love is a commitment to others reflective of the same posture of self-sacrifice and others-centeredness as demonstrated by Christ at the cross. Cruciform love consists of choices and behaviors that represent concrete evidence of the presence of the Spirit and a commitment to Christ. Gorman correctly describes the paradoxical nature of cruciform love when he says that "cruciform love does not seek its own advantage or edification; . . . it seeks the good, the advantage, the edification of others."³⁰ In other words, love that is informed by the crucified Christ takes an active and engaging posture directed toward the well-being (both spiritual and physical) of others while consistently renouncing any attempts to bring honor or attention to itself. People who exhibit cruciform love will be consistently self-giving, sacrificial, and status-renouncing in their

²⁷ Paul's profession as a tentmaker is representative of this posture.

²⁸ Gorman, *Cruciformity*, 146.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 155.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 160.

orientation toward others; they will offer love to others for the sake of the other.³¹

The apostle Paul exhibited cruciform love in the context of his ministry by embracing the same self-giving and status-renouncing disposition as Christ. This commitment to a status-renouncing disposition was evidenced by his profession. I agree with Gorman when he makes the case that Paul's profession as a tentmaker was not one of practicality, but a deliberate act of love consistent with his cruciform character. Paul, out of love for Christ and for believers, intentionally worked as a tentmaker in order to demonstrate the authenticity of his commitment to a cruciform existence.³² Cruciform love, then, invites the use of behaviors and choices that place the importance of others—as both an expression of love for God and for other people—above all other things.

How would Gorman's idea of cruciform love inform Christian character? Christians who exhibit cruciform love are living testimonies to an others-centered existence. They are people whose choices and commitments consistently reflect the nature of cruciform love by seeking the best possible outcome for others for their sake—even if doing so comes at a cost—as an authentic expression of Christian faith. In other words, like the people who spend their time in service to the homeless at the cost of greater income or status, or those who use their resources to bless others, Christians who exhibit cruciform love will be people who recognize that love for God and love for others necessarily rejects notions of self-aggrandizement or status as desired dispositions within the body of believers.

The outlets for expression of cruciform love are not limited to these examples. A narrative spirituality informed by cruciform love means the opportunity to take action for the good of others is limited only by the resources of the individual. Cruciform love continues the story of the cross in different times and places as they occur. It is imaginative in the sense that it is proactive and self-initiating. Cruciform love is not limited to certain times of the week or for certain groups. Cruciform love, applied

³¹ Matthias Wenk, "Reconciliation and Renunciation of Status as God's Final Aim for Humanity: New Testament Thoughts on the Church's Mission and Unity," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 19 (2010): 44-58. Wenk argues that status-renunciation promotes unity.

³² Gorman, *Cruciformity*, 183. Such action would have significant implications for the role of ministers and their attitudes concerning compensation and church governance. What would happen if ministers recognized that all facets of their service in the kingdom were shaped in a similar way?

appropriately, seeks the good of all and can manifest itself in any circumstance.

The pattern of cruciform love also emerges in the theme of reconciliation. At the cross, Christ reconciled humanity to God (2 Cor. 5:18-21). Reconciliation is a consistent and needed facet of cruciform love because reconciliation is consistent with God's desire for relationship with creation. This same desire for reconciliation is found in Paul's interaction with the Corinthian church.³³ He extends the love, grace, and forgiveness of God by asking the Corinthians to reconcile themselves to the gospel he preached. Forgiveness was demonstrated by Paul in the way he thought the Corinthian church should treat the person among them who had previously caused offense. The desire for reconciliation, then, involves a spirit of forgiveness in hopes of attaining restoration and wholeness among God's people.

Reconciliation also informs another facet of cruciform love as demonstrated in the lives of Christians who are inclusive. Christians who readily embrace others (beyond social, racial, and gender boundaries) reflect a heart for others created in the image of God as worthy recipients of the love of Christ. They manifest a sacrificial posture that often responds with love in surprising or unexpected ways.

Cruciform Power³⁴

Cruciform power is the capacity, informed by the crucified Christ, to exercise influence over others. Unlike common cultural understandings of power defined by the use of force or positional status to exercise control and authority over others, cruciform power is understood in terms of weakness. It is paradoxical in character—to be weak is to be strong—because in weakness the true power of Christ is displayed fully in terms of vulnerability, suffering, and love (2 Cor. 12). Power understood in this way seeks to influence others through invitation and appeal rather than by the use of force in various forms.

The paradoxical quality of cruciform power is reflected in Paul's ministry by his own experiences of suffering and ongoing challenges of life defined by an others-centered existence.³⁵ Paradigmatic to understanding

³³ See 2 Cor. 6:11-13; 7:2.

³⁴ Gorman, *Cruciformity*, 268.

³⁵ Gorman identifies five different expressions of cruciform power in Paul's apostolic ministry: (1) his personal presence and lack of rhetorical skill, (2) his constant suffering, (3) his "thorn in the flesh" experience (1 Cor. 12), (4) his refusal for financial support and performance of manual labor, and (5) his attitude of humility and meekness.

power in this way is to recognize that Paul understood that “weakness makes Christ’s power present” (2 Cor. 12:8; 4:7-12) and may include “concrete physical pains suffered for the sake of the gospel.”³⁶

How would an understanding of cruciform power inform Christian character? Christians who display cruciform power use invitation and appeal to influence others for the sake of others. They recognize that power is measured by the qualities and standards of a crucified Christ, not those of the current cultural climate. This quality is most on display in the context of church leadership. I realize church leaders possess authority to make leadership decisions; however, the way this authority is exercised must be consistent with the paradoxical nature of power as demonstrated by the crucified Christ (2 Cor. 12).

Paul’s stance on power shaped the way he interacted with the community of faith. He consistently appealed to his own weakness and commitment to Christ as an invitation for believers to listen to him. When given the opportunity to exercise authority, he refrained (Rom. 14, 15; 1 Cor. 8), appealing to their understanding of cruciform faith and love in their treatment of one another. Paul’s refusal to control the community reflected his belief that the church, as the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12), should be defined by the same qualities of self-giving love, humility, and vulnerability as Paul portrayed in his own life informed by the cross. Therefore, the exercise of power in the church must reflect these same qualities. Doing so does not negate the authority for leaders to act, but redefines the reasons they possess the authority to lead in the first place.³⁷

Another way of understanding this point is found in Gorman’s explanation of “status transcendence and reversal,” a way of describing God’s selection of “what is weak in the world” and “what is low and despised in the world” (1 Cor. 1:26-29) as a representation and demonstration of the substance of the power of God.³⁸ Authentic power subverts cultural definitions of power based on the use of force through positional and social rank and replaces these tenets with cruciform postures

³⁶ Gorman, *Cruciformity*, 288.

³⁷ See Hall for a discussion on the nature and exercise of ecclesial power in the larger North American context. He argues convincingly that the church is in a post-Christendom era and suffers from the same understanding of power and control as those who have led the Christian church since the time of Augustine. Douglas Hall, *The Cross in Our Context: Jesus and the Suffering World* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003).

³⁸ Power as status transcendence and reversal, moral transformation, boasting and victory in suffering, and cruciform care for others are four categories Gorman uses to explain Christ’s “downwardly mobile” action at the cross. Gorman, *Cruciformity*, 298-303.

of vulnerability, lowliness, and weakness. Power understood in this way “transcends” cultural conventions by courageously refusing to accept and exercise power in that way.³⁹ This reversal is important to our conversation regarding Christian character because power understood in terms of status transcendence and reversal invites a reconsideration of what the definition and exercise of power mean for governance in a church context (and for leaders in particular). In other words, Gorman is correct when he asks readers to define power as something that “transcends and reverses social status” because the “cross reveals the way God works, not just the way he achieved salvation” for humanity.⁴⁰ Cruciform power is the ongoing exhibition of the same self-emptying, status-renouncing postures consistent with those demonstrated by Christ at the cross, where God’s divine power is demonstrated. Therefore, believers who seek other forms of power and control outside this dynamic misunderstand what it means to be cruciform and misunderstand the nature and use of power in the church context.

How would cruciform power in terms of status transcendence inform Christian character? Cruciform power means Christians (and leaders in particular) possess humility, love, and vulnerability informed by the crucified Christ as they interact with others in the church. For Christian leaders, they will be people who exemplify this quality in the way they make requests of others in the church, of the way they encourage and offer guidance to others, and in the way they exercise leadership on critical matters.

Cruciform Hope

Cruciform hope embraces a view of the world that anticipates Christ’s return and the glorious reconciliation of all things.⁴¹ It is positive and uplifting, while recognizing suffering is both consistent with, and evidence of, a life conformed to Christ. Philippians 2:6-11 is important for understanding cruciform hope because the hymn found in this text concludes with God’s resurrecting and exalting the crucified Christ. Cruciform hope looks to the future confident of God’s presence and of the

³⁹ The ability of church leaders to competently use their spiritual gifts and abilities in service to the church is not diminished by the demands of cruciform power. To the contrary, the trust granted to leadership by the church is enhanced when leaders exercise their authority through invitation and other cruciform postures.

⁴⁰ Gorman, *Cruciformity*, 300.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 304.

certainty of God's promises. It represents the completion, that is, the *telos* of "conformity to the narrative pattern of the Messiah."⁴²

Wrapped into this understanding of cruciform hope is an implicit eschatological consideration. When Christians look at the cross, they do so with the knowledge that the resurrected Christ will return and reconcile all things. This eschatological perspective informs theological commitments about how God works in the world—particularly during instances of suffering. As Paul reminds believers in 1 Corinthians 15, Christ's resurrection is the foundation for the assurance that his followers will be raised as well. To understand properly cruciform hope, people must possess both faith in the resurrected Christ and faith in the promise of God to do the same for believers. The substance of cruciform hope is found in Christ's humiliation and subsequent exaltation. This narrative posture, oriented toward the future, provides courage and strength for a life shaped by the cross.

Cruciform hope may also provide meaning in suffering. I agree with Gorman when he contends that Christian suffering is a basis for a "continuation of the narrative of divine love" and a cause for encouragement knowing "the power of the resurrection operates in the present as the power of cruciformity to the death of Christ, which in turn guarantees a place in the future resurrection."⁴³ Meaning is found in suffering in the sense that the person who must endure suffering can be confident of the presence of God to provide compassion and peace in the midst of the trial. Suffering in the Christian community, though unpleasant and painful, in Gorman's view, may have a positive component in that Christians will heed Paul's exhortation to identify with Christ and "the whole creation of people in pain." I disagree with Gorman to the extent that he believes suffering may be viewed in a positive light. Suffering is painful.⁴⁴ Suffering, however, does not diminish the possibility of Christians, inspired by the encouraging and redemptive presence of God, from "redeeming" the experience and turning it into a means to encourage others. Cruciform hope makes sense of suffering in that it equips the Christian with concrete evidence of both the presence of genuine faith and assurance of resurrection and exaltation in the future. When suffering

⁴² Ibid., 306.

⁴³ Phil. 3:10-11 is central to Gorman's thought on cruciform hope. To participate in Christ's death ensures participation in his resurrection. Therefore, the "future of cruciformity is glory." Gorman, *Cruciformity*, 330-31.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 345. Pain is never pleasant and the notion of harm, purposefully imposed, to shape Christian behavior is a difficult topic beyond the scope of this project.

becomes part of Christian existence, cruciform hope “means the very thing (suffering) that suggests that glory is distant, is in fact, the proof of its proximity.”⁴⁵

How would cruciform hope inform Christian character? Christians who exhibit cruciform hope possess a spirit of joy regardless of the circumstances. They are quick to suffer with others and invest themselves in the lives of others who are in need of compassion and mercy. They display an attitude inspired by faith in the reality of a resurrected Christ and the promises of the God who raised him. Cruciform hope empowers believers to be courageous under the threat of persecution and will encourage them to be exemplars of faithfulness and compassion when those challenges arise.

Cruciform hope for daily living also involves a “rejection of imperial eschatology.” In this simple but critical distinction, believers are reminded that it is God, not the state, who is the source of salvation. It is the recognition that believers possess “an alternative hope through loyalty to God” rather than empire.⁴⁶ There exists a temptation and expectation in some Christian circles that an appropriate use of Christian influence should be exercised through the power of the state.⁴⁷ Christ rejected this notion (Mark 10:35-37) and so should his followers. The use of the state as a means to advance the gospel is an appeal to theocracy reminiscent of the bygone days of Christendom. To place hope for advancement of the kingdom in the coercive influence of government is to misunderstand what it means to have faith in the crucified Christ because it appeals to the forces of power and coercion as acceptable methods to address important social concerns.

Conclusion

The cruciform postures of faith, love, hope, and power, provide a model for Christian education by identifying the content of Christian character. As a resource to inform the adult education ministry, Gorman’s thought provides direction and spiritual loci for members to engage on a regular basis. While there are many practices that form faith in the life of the church, the teaching ministry partners with these to provide a means to

⁴⁵ Ibid., 346.

⁴⁶ Ibid. This point challenges nationalism in all its forms.

⁴⁷ Ryan P. Burge and Paul A. Djupe, “Truly Inclusive or Uniformly Liberal? An Analysis of the Politics of the Emerging Church,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 53 3 (2014): 636. In their analysis of the emergent church movement, Burge and Djupe acknowledge the conventional truth of the desire for North American evangelicals to seek converts through political means.

identify the elements of mature Christians. The patterns of spirituality provide resources that constitute Christian character and then, in turn, inform decisions for the teaching ministry of the church such as curriculum choice, identification of important themes for application in each person's daily existence, and the encouragement and support of the spiritual disciplines (such as prayer and Bible study).

From a practical perspective, a program of study that involved the principles of cruciformity would be best implemented within the adult education or small group programs of the local church. A suggested course of study would begin with an introduction to cruciformity and its four narrative patterns and then engage in a select set of New Testament texts where students engaged the texts in light of the tenets of cruciformity. Given most teaching formats in churches function on a weekly basis, a program of this kind would most likely require a one-year commitment.⁴⁸

Another approach for the integration of cruciformity in the life of the church would be to introduce the material to church leaders in the context of a seminar or retreat setting. The narrative patterns of cruciformity are conducive to a systematic approach for reflection and exploration and the retreat setting provides an opportunity for meaningful and specific dialogue. Engaging leaders in the principles of cruciformity, along with prayer and reflection, presents a foundation for contextualizing the material in a way that best suits their particular context. More importantly, a retreat setting invites leaders to explore cruciformity as a means for the sake of their own spiritual growth. Cruciformity, at its core, is a *spirituality*, a way of living out the Christian faith, reflective of the crucified and risen Christ.

Incorporation of cruciformity as a model for education necessarily engages the congregation in a spiritual discussion concerning what constitutes mature faith. These conversations, and the practices that accompany these ideas, will bless the church as it seeks to grow into the image of the crucified Christ.

⁴⁸ A suggested approach would be as follows: (1) four-six weeks on cruciformity, (2) ten weeks each on the gospels of Luke and John, and (3) twenty-four weeks on the Pauline letters of I & II Corinthians, the prison letters (i.e, Philippians, Colossians, and Galatians), and Philemon.

Benjamin D. Pickett was born in Garland, TX. Ben received his Bachelor of Science degree from Texas A&M University in 1992 and earned his Master of Arts in Religion (2006) and Doctor of Ministry (2013) degrees from Abilene Christian University. He is currently engaging in additional graduate work at Fordham University.

Ben currently serves as the discipleship minister for the Highland Church of Christ in Abilene, TX, after several years working in a similar role in Lubbock, TX. His primary areas of ministry interest include spirituality, spiritual formation, and community outreach. Ben enjoys teaching and is currently working as an adjunct instructor in the department of Bible, Missions, and Ministry at Abilene Christian University.