

The WTC and the Cross

Br. Adam Bonaventure Champman, OP
Student Board, Washington Theological Consortium
Student Prayer Service and Orientation 2013



Why are we here this afternoon?

Because we like to pray together?

Because we like to listen to the Word of God and beautiful music inspired by that word? Because our various deans asked/forced us?

Perhaps all of the above, but since this is a service of the Washington **THEOLOGICAL** Consortium, there must be a **THEOLOGICAL** reason as well. And you may have already discerned it from the readings, prayers, and music.

I. We are here because of what we share: The Cross.

—Whether we believe that grace is *imputed* to us and we are counted righteous *or* that grace is *infused* and we are sanctified by the sacraments, this grace comes from the atoning work of Jesus on the Cross.

—Whether our Sunday services contain acts of remembrance and memorial *or* re-enactments of the Holy Sacrifice, Jesus' body was broken and his blood shed for us on the Cross.

—Whether Mary is the model disciple who listened to God's word *or* the Immaculate and perpetual Virgin Mother of God, we find her pre-eminently faithful at the foot of the Cross.

—Whether we wear it on our belts *or* around our necks, carry it in our pockets *or* in our hearts (or all of the above), it is the Cross that we keep ever near to us.

With Paul “we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.” A stumbling block not only for the Jews of Jesus' time, but also to all non-Christian believers: **Why** would God become man to die? So too, foolishness not only for the pagans of Jesus' time, but also for those unbelievers today: **How** could God become man and die?

But to us, those who are called for a purpose, the Cross is the wisdom and power of God; it was then and is still today. It is possible for us to be here today, gathered together because we gather at the Cross.

II. What we lack: Unity

But at the Cross, all is not sweetness and light, raindrops and lollipops: Jesus' garments are divided up among the soldiers. And so too for us. For while there is one body of Christ on the cross, we are divided as the garments for this body. And this division should be both a *scandalon*, a stumbling block, and foolishness not only to those modern day Jews and Greeks, but most distressingly to us who are followers of the

crucified Christ. For Jesus prayed that we may all be one as he and his heavenly Father are one. And Paul too prayed in a passage just preceding our reading today that all “should be in agreement and there should be no divisions among you, but that you should be united in the same mind and the same purpose.”

And this is also part of why we are here, I hope. For we pray and desire that unity of the Church. And the WTC has a part to play in this; not in some grandiose or global way, but in the small actions and efforts that make up each of our moral lives, slowly converting us to a deeper following of Jesus Christ crucified, and therefore closer brothers and sisters with each other.

III. What the WTC can offer

But how does the WTC aid in this work of reconciliation, our personal work of reunification? Well, in different ways for different people. An important principle of St. Thomas Aquinas is *quid quid recipitur ad modum recipientis recipitur* (“that which is received is received according to the mode of the receiver”).

A recent Thomist commentator offers this version of the principle: “You don’t make a physics or engineering enthusiast sociable by inviting him to a dance party. Instead invite him to a nerd fest, a Star Trek convention perhaps.” That’s solid Thomistic advice. (Incidentally, if you want to do the dance party, mam! DaneH? is the correct Klingon for “Would you like to dance with me?”)

So too with the WTC: on offer this year are a number of different events and venues for to fit your own interests and desires:

—If you are inclined to the academic classroom experience, there are many classes offered through the consortium where you can engage in the thinkers outside your own tradition, be challenged by Christians of another stripe.

—If you are more interested in the social, we have two student run events (generally at pubs!) each year, the first coming up this November Monday before Thanksgiving, where we can get together and converse along with informal talks and discussions.

—If you are an evening lecture aficionado, the consortium offers a variety of special speakers throughout the year on various ecumenical and inter-religious issues, the first coming October 20th with a lecture from Dr. Lisa Schirch concerning peacekeeping from her time in Syria: see the bookmark for more information.

—If you enjoy prayerful time together with different denominations, we have our Christian Unity prayer service in early February and other opportunities throughout the year to join the different Christian communities at prayer. Please feel free to contact any student representative about these possibilities.

—If you like to write as a way of expressing your ecumenical interests, every Spring we award a prize (including a modest monetary contribution – “the laborer is worth his wages”) for the best Ecumenical Essay of the year—more information coming from your student reps.

—And if you really want to share in the cross of bureaucratic suffering—think about becoming a member of the student board. Kidding. It is a good time of fellowship and fraternity. And good preparation for pastoral ministry, I assure you...

And, of course, these options are not mutually exclusive. Participate in as many as you desire.

IV. Why do any of these things?

Why do any of these things given your busy schedules and hectic lives? How does this effect ecumenical relations? Well, in global terms it doesn't. The World Council of Churches is not interested in our pub night this November, nor will Pope Francis be sitting in on our first student board meeting. But any one of these events has the chance, if we are open to it, of changing us, just a little. This can happen in two ways, I think:

1. Deepen our own awareness of our tradition

I didn't know what it really meant to be an American until I lived a few years in England. Distance provides a reflexive clarity to our own most crucial convictions. Maybe a talk on the Catholic mediation of grace through the sacramental economy will strengthen your conviction that the immediacy of grace privileged in the Protestant tradition is central to your following of Christ. What is the deal with all that external ritual stuff?

2. Changing your mind

But this interaction with different traditions may also lead to conversion. To take my English example again, I find it impossible to be satisfied with anything on a scone save clotted cream and jam. Perhaps a class of close theological study will lead you to see fault lines in your own understanding of the faith that are in need of correction or development. What does the immediacy of grace mean if I am a physical and embodied person?

Again, insights may not be earth shattering, but like the mustard seed, which grows into the largest tree, so too can one small insight or experience profoundly effect one's thinking and acting. I am sure we can all think of examples in our lives when this has been the case.

V. The other theological pole: the Resurrection

So the Cross is both the point of unity for us all, and yet reminds us of the divisions that we can become all too complacent and apathetic about. The WTC can offer some personal venues for dealing with this division, and perhaps these small personal transformations can add to something larger. We, at least, have the right to hope for this because there is another theological point of unity around which we gather. For the cross was not the end of the story, but only the beginning. For along with the Cross we also firmly and faithfully believe in the Resurrection.