

“Proclamation and Dialogue”  
Kääriäinen Jukka

Contemporary missiology has been concerned to dialectically relate gospel proclamation and interreligious dialogue. While traditionally gospel proclamation has aimed at explicit conversion, genuine dialogue today must remain open, not merely to sharing deepest convictions, but also to the possibility of transformation and real change. This paper offers one resource from the classic Lutheran tradition, a theology of the cross centered on the hiddenness of God (*deus absconditus*), as an illuminating, fruitful category for facilitating such dialogue.

Natural human experience remains frustratingly ambiguous. Therefore, we do not quite know how to interpret experiences of suffering. This paper will contend that the most important similarities concerning human religious experience are best described, not by categories of being (ontology) or existence (anthropology), but rather in nuanced, theological terms as the paradoxical relationship between sin and grace, law and gospel, human brokenness and divine healing. Luther’s theology of the cross offers God’s paradoxical absence and presence, hiddenness and revelation, as missiologically fruitful categories for relating proclamation and dialogue. This paper will elaborate three convictions: 1) Nobody’s daily religious experience is one of primarily “grace.” 2) To ground dialogue on how various religions articulate their experiences of grace ignores vast areas of “negative” religious experience. 3) The grace of God in Christ is not simply an unexpected experience of diffuse “goodness;” rather, it is a surprising promise of mercy, offering hope against all evidence to the contrary. Such an approach offers a distinctively Christian contribution to dialogue with wide-ranging experiential, spiritual, and theological applications.