And Then There Were Three

Colleagues,

A fortnight ago in ThTh (#2) I bubbled about the two Seminex grads, Marcus Lohrmann and Robert Rimbo, who had just been elected to episcopal office in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America. Robin Morgan, our Sabbatheology editor, added a good word from Article 28 of the Augsburg Confession to accompany them on their episcopal callings.

Some responses have wondered whether so-and-so, now already serving as an ELCA bishop, were not also a Seminex grad. I checked them all out and none of them were. From what I've heard the names suggested were indeed, as AC 28 says, "bishops according to the Gospel." But then came a note from Jim Friedrich in Saratoga CA with the news that a third one of "ours," Murray D. Finck (Seminex '75), had also just been chosen for episcopacy. Murray is bishop-elect of the ELCA's Pacifica Synod [=southern California and Hawaii]. People in the know say that Murray's election makes him the eleventh of the ELCA's 65 synod bishops who once called the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod home. Hmmm!

In subsequent cyber-exchange I heard from Murray himself. He told me what he did when he learned that he was one of the three remaining candidates at the Pacifica Synod assembly, and thus had to respond to fifteen minutes of Q & A when the next session resumed 2 hours later. So what does he do? Pray, think, reflect, of course, read a little from Romans, and pull out his Book of Concord to re-read some parts of the Augsburg Confession. What a guy!

If he were asked to articulate his theology, he decided to do so in several ways, one of which was the "wheel and hub and spokes"

[see note below] which he's used ever since our seminary class in the Lutheran Confessions 25 years ago. It turned out that the questions from the floor didn't ask any of the final three to be very theological [aw pshaw!] but the two hours of reflection sent him to the podium with inner peace and readiness. He spoke his piece, "the people voted, and the rest is history." And then there were three.

The "wheel and hub and spokes" that Murray mentions refer to a blackboard drawing from seminary days imaging Aug. Conf. theology. Each of Augsburg's 28 articles "articulates" the Gospel, the picture says, like 28 spokes coming out from the Good News hub of an old wagon wheel. Christology, justification, ecclesiology—even the doctrine of the Trinity (AC 1) or the doctrine of Original Sin (AC 2), articulate something about the Good News, that "doctrine of the Gospel" that is the hub of the wheel. The same is so with AC 5 on ministry according to the Gospel and AC 28 on bishops according to the Gospel, and all the rest. So it's hub and spokes for the shape of AC theology.

Then finally comes the rim around the outside edge. That rim is not a doctrine, but a hermeneutic principle for handling doctrine. In the AC that hermeneutical rim is the proper distinction between God's law and God's Gospel. For what purpose? For the purpose that the rim serves on the wagon wheel, viz., to keep each spoke properly anchored in the hub and to prevent it from flying off into non-gospel space and thus wrecking the whole wheel.

Peace & Joy!
Ed Schroeder

P.S. Next Thursday, d.v., I intend to do a bit of retrospective stuff on Seminex itself. That very term may be a mystery word for some of you receiving ThTh. "Seminex" was shorthand for

Concordia SEMinary IN EXile, the alma mater of the three bishops-elect mentioned above. This summer marks the 25th anniversary of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod's 1973 Convention in New Orleans. That convention triggered a chain of events that culminated in February 1974 in Seminex. Finck, Lorhmann and Rimbo were there when it all happened. Don't be surprised if their eventual bishop's style bears marks of that birthplace. Some Seminex alums, I've heard, are planning a get-together next year to commemorate the event. I hope they succeed in making it happen.