

Andrew Weyermann in memoriam

Colleagues,

Andy Weyermann was my seminary classmate, my seminary roommate, my Seminex teaching colleague, and we both did doctoral work with Helmut Thielicke during his heyday at the University of Hamburg in Germany. Summa: Andy and I were buddies—even though a sophisticated New Yorker and an Illinois farmboy in the same dorm room at Concordia Seminary in the early 1950s often led to situations too humorous to mention. Some of that humor recurred—mixed in with Gospel goodies—when Marie and I visited Andy at home a fortnight before he died. We flew back to Milwaukee a week ago Saturday for his funeral at Capitol Drive Lutheran Church. It was a celebration that Andy had choreographed himself—especially the music—in advance.

There were three tributes to Andy during the liturgy – from Richard Koenig, Paul Thielo, and Andy's son James. Dick Koenig had a prepared manuscript. I have his permission to pass it on to the ThTh readership.

Peace and Joy!

Ed Schroeder

Andrew Michael Weyermann
January 4, 1930 – September 6, 2003

Friends in Christ, especially members of the Weyermann family and Lois, his faithful wife and companion, God's peace.

In the course of negotiating this mysterious yet wondrous journey we call life, we encounter people of all sorts and conditions. Some we know for a long time, others for just a brief while. A few of those along the trail become friends, not merely acquaintances but friends. Such persons are gifts of God and such a person was Andrew Weyermann for me. I have often thanked God for that gift and could speak long and fulsomely about Andy as a kind and patient friend. In these few moments, however, I'd like to share with you some of the things about him that led me not only to love him but admire him.

For most of his career as an ordained Lutheran minister, Andy was a teacher of homiletics, the art and discipline of preaching. Under Andy's tutelage the sermon escaped all moralism, religious cliches, gaseous emoting, pious rambling, or institutional tub-thumping to emerge as an event that effected a real difference in the real lives of real people. And what was it that made him the teacher of preaching and the preacher he was? In a 1978 article he wrote in tribute to Dr. Richard Caemmerer, his mentor and ours as preachers, Andy described preaching as "autozoography." Auto-zoe-graphy. It was a word he coined to denote the source of the preacher's proclamation: our spiritual life (zoe) in distinction from our physical life. Dynamic proclamation of the Gospel, he said, emerges from the region of the preacher's own personal encounter and traffic with God. In making such a statement Andy was in fact talking about none other than himself. He could teach preaching the way he did and communicate the kind of insights that made his publications so popular because he was the person he was.

Andy was a person who inveterately strove against all self-delusion and inauthenticity in a relentless pursuit of truth. This was clearly evident in his ongoing dealings with God. For Andy as a committed-yet postmodern-believer, God was

experienced as both hidden, even absent, and revealed. Again and again he would ask himself and others how we can speak of God's goodness or presence in the face of the suffering of the innocent and the horrific evil that scars the human story. Or how can we flawed and fallible creatures presume to claim God's beneficence in the light of God's critique of our actions even when we are at our best? In short, in his relationship to God, Andy always stood aware of the God of mystery, awe, even terror. But, and this is the wonder of Andy's faith, it was engagement with this God who always confronts human beings as a problem that drove him to Christ, God's own answer to the problem he poses for mortals by suffering for us and with us in the Cross of Christ. There grace and love abound for us. Grace can only be grasped by faith, but that faith is enough to bring life from death, hope from despair, see beyond the darkness and mystery and behold God as Father and Friend. That is what made him the great preacher, great teacher of preachers, and the great colleague he was for all of us who strove to believe with him and work with him in the cause of the Gospel.

Andy Weyermann's rigorous honesty and integrity were qualities which illumined the dark days of the controversy which broke over the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod in the late 60's and early 70's. He harbored no illusions as to the cost that the struggle would entail. Yet, I never witnessed Andy sanctifying his stand or demonizing those who were bent on removing him and his colleagues from the positions to which they had been called. I always thought of him in these days as embodying St. Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 13, 8: "We cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth," the truth of the Gospel of the glory and grace of God.

Along with his commitment to truth, I think no one who knew Andy could fail to perceive his commitment to the radical, even extravagant, practice of love in all areas of life, even the

most commonplace. The frequent references to St. Francis of Assisi, one of the Church's most luminous exemplars of love, in his writings witness to his preoccupation. His compassion for the suffering and the oppressed sprang from the love which dwelt within him and always searched for expression. It was love which fueled his passion for justice in the social and political order, love as the signature of the new order for the world that God has inaugurated in Christ.

I said Andy's faith made him a great preacher, a great teacher of preachers, and a great colleague in the cause of the Gospel. It also made him a great human being. I never ceased to marvel over the breadth and depth of his appreciation for music, for poetry, for film. My visits with him would always end with his handing me one or more CDs or records with a comment like, "Here, Dick, on this one you'll hear how the work should be played." After conversations that probed and analyzed some ecclesiastical or theological problems for hours, the talk could and often did shift to such monumental questions as prospects for the New York Knicks or the Milwaukee Bucks, or which Milwaukee restaurant might be chosen to serve the best in German cuisine.

Andy's humanity was also evident in his home life. He was deeply devoted to his first wife Wilma and suffered great grief when she died. I worried about him at that time and wondered whether he would find his footing in life again. He did, thanks be to God, largely by virtue of the life and love he was given by Lois who was of great help to him as he continued his ministry as a parish pastor and an author. (The guy for all his gifts never did learn how to use the computer—or even the typewriter. He left that up to Lois.) All of his friends know how deeply devoted he was to his children, each one of them singular and different, all of them productive of accomplishments that gave him quiet joy and pride. And it goes

without saying that the love he had for his children extended in like measure to the grandchildren who lightened the darkness even up to his last days.

This was, as our Jewish friends would say, a real Mensch.

In the period following the doctors' final report on his illness, friends and colleagues from all over the country traveled to Milwaukee to say their good-byes, a tribute to him and the love that many had for him. These were beautiful but emotionally wracking occasions, never to be forgotten by us who experienced them. Then to our utter amazement Andy was granted nearly nine months more of life, a wonderful gift in spite of the discomfort and fatigue that he experienced at times in this period. I am glad for the chance to say how much I loved him just before he went into hospice. Had I had the chance, I would have said to him again, as I did last December, and so say now, "Andy, thank you. It's been a privilege to know you, a real privilege." With that I believe I speak for us all.