Jaroslav Pelikan and Roland Bainton—Just before Christmas

Colleagues,

> D.v., on December 17, next Wednesday, Jaroslav Jan Pelikan will celebrate his 80th birthday. One of the super-whiz-kids to grow up in the Missouri Synod—in its "Slovak District"—Pelikan is now a member of the Russian-rooted "Orthodox Church in America." That move to Orthodoxy was really no surprise. He always was a Slavophile. I know. He was my teacher at three different schools, Valparaiso University, Concordia Seminary and (for a summer school course) the Lutheran Seminary in Maywood, Illinois. Those were the years 1948-55. [A generation later he was daughter Gail's teacher when she was at Yale University.]When "Jary," as I too was invited to call him, made his official move into Russian orthodoxy not too long ago, he told Bob Bertram, classmate and buddy from all the way back to prep school days at Ft. Wayne, Indiana: "Bob, I thought it was about time that I became 'de jure' what I already was 'de facto.'"

Even so, a bunch of us, Jary's students from the days when he was our Lutheran guru, were planning to gather at Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut, next week to honor our mentor. He was cheered by the prospect and we were working out the details when he received another invitation. To wit, the Russian Orthodox Metropolitan in Moscow summoned Jary to Mother Russia for his 4-score birthday party. Additional perk was that Jary would thus also be present for the launching on that date of the Russian edition of his 5-volume magnum opus on the "The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine." Slavophilia won; Lutheran nostalgia couldn't hold a candle.

Perhaps an even more "magnum" work, from his earlier Lutheran

years, is the 55-volume American edition of Luther's Works. Jary edited this mega-long-term-project along with Helmut Lehmann, translated many of the volumes himself and wrote the companion volume with its classic chapter on Luther's hermeneutics. I can still hear him in the classroom rattling off the axiom of some German professor that "Manchmal hat Luther die Schrift furchtbar, aber doch fruchtbar, missverstanden." [Sometimes Luther misunderstood the scriptures frightfully, but yet fruitfully.]

Segue from Pelikan to Bainton

Last week Marie and I took from the shelf, as we regularly do in Advent, our ancient copy of Roland Bainton's "The Martin Luther Christmas Book." Inside was scribbled that I'd bought it at the Valpo bookstore in 1948, the year it was printed. That was my sophomore year, fall semester, which was also my first encounter with Jary. It was in a history course called "Renaissance and Reformation." He had this fresh-from-the-farm boy reading the wildest stuff. He introduced us to Roland Bainton and recommended that we buy Bainton's gem as a Christmas present. I did, and handed it off to my parents so they could wrap it up and give it back to me for Christmas.

Most of my exposure to Jary at Valparaiso University was in classes in philosophy. I scrubbed pre-med after my first college year and started aiming at the seminary. Valpo had no pre-sem program so I opted for a philosophy major. Jary taught in both the history and philosophy departments. At VU in those days real theology was being done in the philosophy department, not the religion dept. Teaching philosophy along with Jary were Bob Bertram and Dick Luecke. Hotshots all, still in their twenties, all recent seminary graduates of Concordia Seminary, all doing their doctorates at the Univ. of Chicago and moonlighting at Valpo to keep the wolf from the door. [Though at Valpo salaries

that too took some philosophizing, I bet.] It was probably these three profs—as now in my own anecdotage I do my retrospective—who "converted" me to theology. It could simply have been hero-worship: I wanted to be like them! So I had to head to the seminary.

When I showed up at Concordia Seminary in 1950, Jary, now a full 26 years old, had just joined the faculty there. So once more he was my teacher. We sem students—all men, of course, in Missouri—were not always respectful even to super teachers as Jary was. But Jary wasn't too far away from his own student days at that place in the early forties. He knew how to cope. I remember one occasion when the bell had rung to end the class period and Jary was still in the middle of a paragraph. We started to shuffle and get up from our seats. Quote Jary: "Gentleman [we were always called that, tho the evidence was sparse], please wait a moment. I have a few more pearls to cast."

Jary was active in the "culture-hour" enrichment items at "the sem" at that time. He took a bunch of us through Dante's "Divine Comedy" one semester. And, of course, Slavic stuff, like Dostoyevsky's "Crime and Punishment" another time. Last January (brrr!) Marie and I stood at Dostoyevsky's grave in St. Petersburg. I remembered Jary—and Sonja too, the Christ-figure prostitute (sic!) in that classic of sin and redemption.

[I've often wondered if Dostoyevsky ever read Luther. His Sonja has been my example for making plausible ML's teasing thesis: "If it were possible to commit adultery in faith, it would not be sin." So I wonder: did Fyodor know Martin? Possibly even this thesis from a set Luther wrote for an academic debate? Jary's probably the only one who would know.]

Enough already. Who says nostalgia ain't what it used to be?

Whether or not Jary ever sees this, I know there is a multitude who join me in gratitude to the Mangered Messiah for Jaroslav Jan Pelikan. May our Lord sustain him “ad multos annos.”

Now—finally—to Bainton.

> *Herewith some excerpts from The Martin Luther Christmas Book, tr. and arr. by Roland H. Bainton. Philadelphia, Muhlenberg Press, c1948, 76pp.—This is for us the hardest point, not so much to believe that He is the son of the Virgin and God himself, as to believe that this Son of God is ours.*
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> *—The birth of Christ was timed to coincide with the Emperor’s census because God wanted to teach us the duty of obedience even to a heathen government. [Furchtbar, aber fruchtbar?]*
>
> *—Joseph had thought, “When we get to Bethlehem, we shall be among relatives and can borrow everything.” A fine idea that was!*
>
> *—What could Mary possibly have used as diapers? Some garment she could spare, perhaps her veil— certainly not Joseph’s breeches. For they are a relic on display at the cathedral in Aachen.*
>
> *—Look upon the Baby Jesus. Divinity may terrify us. Inexpressible majesty will crush us. That is why Christ took on our humanity, save for sin, that he should not terrify us but rather that with love and favor he should console and confirm.*
>
> *—To me there is no greater consolation given to us than this, that Christ became a human child, a babe, playing in the lap and at the breasts of his most gracious mother. Who is there whom this sight would not comfort? Now is overcome the power of sin, death, hell, conscience, and guilt, if you come to this*

gurgling Babe and believe that he is come, not to judge you, but to save.

And then creme-de-la-creme on the book's last page Bainton gives us his own Christmas present, his translation of Luther's Christmas carol "Vom Himmel Hoch," From Heaven High:

Angel:
>From heaven high I come to earth. I bring you tidings of great mirth.
This mirth is such a wondrous thing that I must tell you all and sing.A little child for you this morn has from a chosen maid been born,
A little child so tender, sweet, that you should skip upon your feet.

He is the Christ, our God indeed, who saves you all in every need.
He will himself your Saviour be. From all wrong doing make you free.

He brings you every one to bliss. The heavenly Father sees to this.
You shall be here with us on high. Here shall you live and never die.

Look now, you children, at the sign, a manger cradle far from fine.
A tiny baby you will see. Upholder of the world is he.

Children:
How glad we'll be if it is so! With all the shepherds let us go
To see what God for us has done in sending us his own dear Son.

Look, look, my heart, and let me peek. Whom in the manger do you seek?

Who is that lovely little one? The Baby Jesus, God's own Son.

Be welcome, Lord; be now our guest. By you poor sinners have been blessed.
In nakedness and cold you lie. How can I thank you – how can I?

O Lord, who made and molded all, how did you come to be so small
That you should lie upon dry grass, the fodder of the ox and ass?

And if the world were twice as wide, with gold and precious jewels inside,
Still such a cradle would not do to hold a babe as great as you.

The velvet and the silken ruff, for these the hay is good enough.
Here lies a prince and Lord of all, a king within an ass's stall.

You wanted so to make me know that you had let all great things go.
You had a palace in the sky; you left it there for such as I.

O dear Lord Jesus, for your head now will I make the softest bed.
The chamber where this bed shall be is in my heart, inside of me.

I can play the whole day long. I'll dance and sing for you a song,
A soft and soothing lullaby, so sweet that you will never cry.

All:
To God who sent his only Son be glory, laud, and honor done.
Let all the choir of heaven rejoice, the new ring in with heart

and voice.

Yours in just that Peace & Joy!
Ed Schroeder

P.S. CROSSINGS IN SINGAPORE Marie and I have just accepted an invitation, brokered by the ELCA, to assist the Lutheran Church in Singapore with their "Continuing Education for Pastors" beginning in February 2004. We don't know what all that means. We're just at the beginning. We understand that it could be for several months. Details are still being worked out, but we've said yes. .PARTNERING As we've done before, we're extending the tincup to you folks on the listserve asking for assistance. The big-ticket purchases are airfare and a laptop (we have none)—preferably with Powerpoint, or its Mac equivalent. That's somewhere in the neighborhood of 5 or 6K U.S. dollars. The LCS will provide housing and we can cover our daily expenses.

So we invite you to partner with us on these big ticket items—and if you accept the invitation—to send a check to Crossings, Box 7011, Chesterfield MO 63006-7011. Mark it "Crossings in Singapore." Such gifts are tax-deductible in the USA.