

# Theology of the Cross

Colleagues,

On the last day of this month, the Eve of the big celebration All Saints Day on Nov. 1, Lutherans celebrate Reformation Day. The day recalls Luther's "going public"—482 years ago—with his 95 Theses critiquing congregational practice of the sacrament of penance in the medieval church. If Luther's action actually constituted the opening shot of the Reformation, it's well to note that it was issues of pastoral theology that were the trip wire. Bons mots among the 95 theses are such as these: Jesus' own word about penance (repentance) makes it an everyday component of Christian life. The true treasure of the church is the Gospel, not at all the extra merits accumulated by the saints. Penance is no commercial transaction with God in order to minimize pain or suffering. It is rather following Christ in faith while carrying one's own cross. Just to be shouting "the cross, the cross" is no guarantee that a pastor is promoting the "theology of the cross."

In this summer 1998 a bombshell, not unrelated to the above, dropped in the midst of Lutherans in the USA. It was a "Survey of [USA] Lutheran Beliefs and Practices," carried out under the eye of the top research analysts from the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Lutheran Brotherhood, one of the two mega fraternal insurance groups among US Lutherans, sponsored the research and published the results. In introducing the document the LB editors "forewarn [us] that some of the responses to our survey questions are disturbing." "Disturbing" is a tame word. "Horrendous" was the first one that came to my mind, and then a more reflective "sobering."

Last November 4600 four-page questionnaires went out to Lutheran

households across the country from all US Lutheran groupings. After 4 weeks half of them had come back. Here's the results:

1. 48% said "People can only be justified before God by loving others."
2. 60% agreed with the statement "The main purpose of the gospel is God's rules for right living."
3. 67% said yes to the statement: "Although there are many religions in the world, most of them lead to the same God."
4. 56% affirmed that "God is satisfied if a person lives the best life one can."
5. 44% would not say yes to the statement: "Property (house, automobile, money, etc.) belongs to God and we only hold it in trust for God."
6. 41% disagreed with the notion that children enter the world as sinners.
7. 28% couldn't say yes to the statement "God is one divine essence but three persons."

So, as Luther says in the Small Catechism over and over again: What does this mean? Here are some possible answers:

1. It means legalism is alive and well in American Lutheranism. But why should that surprise us, since Luther's own theology of "simul justus et peccator" [Christians are righteous and sinners at the same time] says "old Adam" (= a legalist) is alive and at work in every baptized Christian? Yet it does come as a jolt when so many Lutherans publicly confess it as their considered belief, and not as the demon they too need to wrestle with daily.
2. It signals how US Lutherans have been feeding on the Pelagianism of America's cultural religion, with its "innocent babies, trying harder, and doing the best you

can.” It also points toward the pervasiveness among Lutherans of America’s “religion in general” where all people of good will & moral fiber are OK with God regardless of their religious affiliation—or disaffiliation.

3. Although 77% said “It is important for me to be a member of a Lutheran church,” you wonder what the term “Lutheran” meant for these folks, since justification by faith was a minority opinion among the respondents. The same goes for what the term “Christian” meant to these Lutherans when two-thirds of them thought that “most religions in the world lead to the same God.”
4. These results are revealing data to set alongside the international Lutheran event of the summer, the formal adoption of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification by Lutherans and Roman Catholics. Rome’s official response to the Joint Declaration, a subject of earlier ThTh essays, asked whether works and merit didn’t still factor in for a sinner’s justification. Half of the Lutherans in the LB survey said the same thing. Even as some of us Lutherans may twitch, there’s almost a “joint declaration” here too. One slight difference between the focus on works in the late Medieval church and that of these Lutheran Pelagians is that the Medieval variety still wanted to keep faith in the mix. Faith AND works was their motto. Thus the Reformers designated them semi-Pelagians. The folks in the LB survey however seem not to bother with the faith component at all. They opt for Pelagianism “straight,” with no faith-additives at all.
5. Whatever else the LB survey reveals, it shows that Lutheranism in the USA is a mission field. As Pogo once said back in the fifties: “We have met the enemy and he is us.” Regardless of formal agreements on justification at the official ecumenical level, back home the Lutheran

“church militant”—as one wag put it—shows symptoms of being the “church malignant.” There’s widespread infection from “another Gospel,” which is, of course, no Gospel at all. The “world religion” that has invaded us is patent Pelagianism with its American capitalist twist that property I have acquired is rightfully “mine,” not goods on loan from the Creator. Episcopal oversight, mission strategies, pastoral praxis, all need to focus here.

6. “The time has come for judgment to begin with the household of God.” So said Saint Peter in his first epistle (4:17). Could this be the message US Lutherans need to hear? Peter’s Greek word for judgment is “krima.” The crime, the incrimination, he pinpoints is “not obeying, not listening to, the Gospel.” Yet he is upbeat for those who do listen to that Gospel. Such Gospel-listeners do indeed survive the judgment, and he concludes by encouraging us to “entrust ourselves to a faithful Creator, while continuing to do good.” That’s a good word for Lutherans to hear as we attend to the “in house” reformation we need when we celebrate on the Eve of All Saints this year. The place to post this year’s Reformation Manifesto is on our own church door.

Peace & Joy!

Ed Schroeder

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## Two for Eternity

Colleagues,

This week in the church year brought us St. Michael and All

Angels. So today's ThTh offering has some links with that festive day. It is a pair of meditations, "Two for Eternity." The first one's from Robin Morgan, the second one from me. Peace & Joy!  
Ed

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## #1

*I love eternity  
A symphony of dreams  
Whispered madly in sleep  
Shadowed by life*

The other day I found these words on the side of our refrigerator. The front of our refrigerator is the keeper of day-to-day details of life at our house – school schedules, pizza delivery phone numbers, cartoons about Internet use or teenaged drivers. But the side has been reserved for our set of magnetic poetry and so while I waited by the back door to let the dogs in, I found these words.

It wouldn't take much effort to discover who put them together, but I find it pleasant to think that they just appeared, like handwriting on the wall. Of course these words don't much resemble the words on that wall from long ago ("You have been weighed in the balance and have been found wanting"). These words are words of hope.

Do you allow yourself to "indulge" in such hope very often? In this officially optimist society of ours with the yellow happy face as our official symbol, I do find expressions of materialistic optimism, especially when talking to salespeople. But hope? Christians know better than to give in to advertising

slogans or nationalistic pride, but somehow we have equated hope with this shallow optimism and as such, have ejected it from our vocabularies.

If we're honest though, don't we occasionally sneak thoughts about eternity? Maybe only when we're gazing out the office window or in that hazy time just before we fall asleep, but they keep coming back, tantalizing us, making our hearts beat just a bit faster. We don't talk about them in public of course. We're supposed to be mature enough to do what we do for the sake of the Gospel, we don't need a carrot at the end of a stick to do our duty.

Yet the writer of Hebrews tells us that "Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding the shame and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God." For the sake of the joy! There was no joy in the suffering, the humiliation of the cross. The joy was in what the cross accomplished for us, what Jesus had to look forward to seated next to throne.

The joy of the Lord is what gives us the strength to do what we're called to do. Hope through joy is not about sitting on our fannies waiting for pie in the sky. Hope is what makes us able to carry our crosses today even when all around us seems to be falling apart. Hope gives us the courage to say to our weary and cynical world, "Jesus is Lord" and then live lives that express God's reality on earth...now. Hope endures.

So, indulge yourself. Think about the City made of pure gold, clear as glass. Think about the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb. Think about the tree of life that bears twelve kinds of fruit, whose leaves are for the healing of the nations. Think

about this new Jerusalem where nothing accursed will be found any more.

And if someone asks you the reason for the hope that is in you, you'll know who to tell them about. The One who endured the cross for the sake of the joy set before him, the One who gave his life so that we can live with Him for all eternity, the One who calls us to serve the world because of the joy set before us. Go ahead, try it. But be careful – hope is contagious.

Robin J. Morgan

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## #2

At the graveside, August 26, 1998.

Milton Richter in memoriam

Our Bethel Pastor Yancey has already mentioned the two worlds in which Milton lived—the Jewish and the Christian. Born and raised in the Jewish community here in St. Louis and then marrying Alice and getting mixed up with us Lutheran Christians. That combination (mixed up or a good mix?) is signalled in his name: Richter, the German word for the 7th book of the Hebrew Scriptures—Shophetim in the original. Judges is the English title. Milt would have fit right in with those Shophetim, each of them unique—some strange, some wonderful, some both—each like nobody else on earth. And then his first name, Milton, the great poet theologian of the Christian tradition.

I want to take the letters of his first name, **M-I-L-T-O-N**, as my outline for this meditation here at his graveside.

**M is for Mensch.** Milt was a Mensch in the full Yiddish meaning of that word—a genuine, an authentic, human being. A Mensch is a

human being as God intended. An image of God, one mirroring God to those of us who interacted with him, a great guy, sent into our lives by God.

**I is for Impish.** Milton was impish. Regularly there was that smile (or was it a smirk?) on his face. Regularly at the Sunday liturgy at Bethel Lutheran Church Milton and Alice would be a pew or two behind me. When it came time for the Passing of the Peace, he would usually get out of the pew before I did and come up to mine. We'd clasp each other's hand and offer God's peace to each other—often in Hebrew: Shalom aleka. And more often than not, that impish smile would come over his face and he'd say: "I've got one for you." And at the Kaffeeklatsch later in the undercroft he'd tell me his latest joke. Which leads to "L."

**L is for laughter.** Milton could laugh. Could he ever. Those jokes we exchanged—I'd occasionally have one for him too—were occasions for uproarious laughter. Even when they were the sort that ought not really be told in church—not even in the basement. During the week we'd each then pass around the new one we'd gotten from the other and then report on this at our next exchange the following Sunday. Milton the Mensch was a man of laughter.

**T is for Two Traditions—Jewish and Christian.** They met in Milt just as the two parts of the capital letter T do. Sometimes it was the Jewish vertical line supporting the Christian horizontal one. Other times it was the Christian vertical supporting the Jewish horizontal. In Milton they were both together as they were for the first Jewish followers of Rabbi Jesus. And that leads me to the last two letters, the O and N.

**O is for the One God of the Jewish Shema.** "Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is One. And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your



might.” That was Milt’s confession, and in his case he linked this core Hebrew confession to the letter N.

**N is for the Nazarene, the Jewish Jesus.** Milt was a Mensch who was also hooked on Jesus, whom we Christians call the veritable son of that One God of the Shema. Only once in our tete-a-tetes did Milt ever tell me about his Jesus-connection, namely, that he’d asked to be baptized 11 yrs ago just as our previous pastor, also his dear friend, Al Buls, moved into retirement. But he swore me to secrecy until his death. Typically Milt, he didn’t give me much detail, and was not so pious that he couldn’t add a quip or two while talking about it. Important was: he linked the Shema with Jesus—like the two parts of the letter “T”—one supporting the other.

**Conclusion:** If Milt should at this very moment impishly push open the lid of this casket before us, we’d not be surprised to hear him laughing and to see him make the letter “T” with his two hands. His life was that double witness. And if he were to speak once more, he’d encourage us to stay focused on that “T” for the rest of our own lives. Loving the One God of the Shema in communion with the one Jesus. Milt lived on that combination. His life tells us that we can too.

Edward H. Schroeder

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**LOSING OUR VIRTUE. WHY THE  
CHURCH MUST RECOVER ITS MORAL**

# VISION

In 1973 therapy guru Karl Menninger made headlines in the U.S. needling his fellow practitioners in psychiatry with a book titled: *WHATEVER BECAME OF SIN?* Already then “sin” was gone from psychiatric vocabulary and fast slipping away in US common culture as well. Now 25 years later David Wells poses the same question to his fellow Evangelicals in America, although you might not initially hear that in the book’s title. But when Wells speaks of losing our “virtue” and recovering “moral vision,” that is what he’s talking about.

Our common American culture, now “post modern” with no meta-story of any sort to hold things together any more has no receiving set, no computer screen, with which to register, let alone comprehend, what is meant by virtue or moral vision. Put simply, values have replaced virtue, and my values are good (enough) for me just as yours are for you. But that either mine or yours has some referent to a larger reality, a “bigger” story, than just each of our own—maybe even to God? That makes no sense in the culture of daily life in these United States. The same is true of the word “moral,” which signals that some things are right and some things wrong, because, well, because they just are! For that too you need an overarching bigger umbrella of meaning and conviction—in a word, God. The initial role that God fulfills in our inhabited world after the Fall—ala Genesis 3—is that of critic. When God’s evaluative “no” is addressed to anything about us, that’s what sin is. But God’s not on the screen in today’s culture, and surely not as critical evaluator. Therefore no wonder that sin has disappeared too.

Although Wells is masterful in reviewing and analyzing the wealth of up-to-date cultural analysis—200-plus titles listed in the bibliography—available today, his addressee is American

Evangelical Christianity, and his jeremiad is that it too in large measure has appropriated that sin-less, virtue-less, no-moral-vision culture, and willy nilly is promoting it with its own (alleged) Christian version. Those are strong words, but they come from one who is an Evangelical insider. Wells is the Andrew Mutch Distinguished Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in Massachusetts. This volume is the third in a series to jolt Evangelicals back to their agenda vis-a-vis the counter religion that permeates America. In the tradition of classical systematic theology Wells' first volume was a Prolegomena [NO PLACE FOR TRUTH], the second about God [GOD IN THE WASTELAND], and this third one about Sin and Redemption.

I was surprised to see that Luther was Wells' most cited source for articulating what sin is: our chronic refusal to acknowledge God as critic and 'fess up to his criticism, and a concomitant self-incurvature drawing on resources of the self to do things "my way." After having appropriated Luther for portraying sin, it came as no surprise that Wells proposed the "theology of the cross" as the good news that takes sin away.

Wells makes a compelling case to illustrate the Evangelical sellout to America's sin-less culture. Correlative with sin's "real absence," of course, is any real need for the "real presence" of a theology of the cross either. He analyzes the hymnody of "seeker service" worship and finds that God's serious critique of anyone at all is soft-pedalled to keep the service "seeker-friendly." The Good News that fits such shallow diagnosis is, of course, "What a friend we have in Jesus."

Then there's sociologist Marsha Witten's 1993 study, a "structured discourse analysis" of 47 sermons from Presbyterian and Southern Baptist pulpits on the text of the Prodigal Son and his grumpy older brother. Her book's title gives it away: ALL IS

FORGIVEN: THE SECULAR MESSAGE IN AMERICAN PROTESTANTISM. "Most disconcerting . . . is the unselfconscious way in which it [i.e., minimizing sin] was accomplished, and hence the bargain of having biblical truth on modern terms was held out with utter sincerity. . . . A common ploy was to resort to therapeutic language. In so doing the sermons position the listeners . . . as vicarious clients in a mass session of Rogerian therapy, as the talk displays a style of therapeutic warmth, acceptance, and tolerance. . . . Pity in a therapeutic world, takes the place which judgment does in a moral world. . . . We can hear the story from a distance and in a way that asks that we make few or no judgments about ourselves."

If Jesus intended us to hear that both of these sons were sinners, one a crass hell-raiser, the other a subtle secret legalist, but both in rebellion against their father, it's not in these sermons. "Here, in this stream of modern spirituality, the self is understood in terms of psychology. The self is unhappy, not so much because of sin, as a lack of realization, or an inability to adjust to the social environment. So conversion in these sermons was presented as incorporating God into the self so that the self could have more meaningful relations with others. . . . The biblical teaching about sin is thus domesticated to accommodate secular notions about the self."

Wells gets even feistier. He takes on two of the Evangelical Goliaths of our day: Schuller and his Crystal Cathedral theology and the mega-church theology of "market-driven churches like Willow Creek." First Schuller. "Behind his Christian parroting of Disneyland . . . stands a message that is thoroughly American and ubiquitous in the culture. It is a message, not about sin, but self-esteem. . . . Sin, Schuller discovered, is really nothing more than poor self-image and salvation is its reversal." And after that discovery "the language of sin was

quickly banished from the Crystal Cathedral, as were all penitential prayers, and in their place came the therapeutic language. Many of the Psalms could therefore not be read in public, because they are unhappily forthright about sin and God's judgment upon it."

Then the market-driven mega-churches. Wells proposes that "these churches have become like hermit crabs, which walk around concealed within a shell. Hidden beneath the outer shell—the corporate style that disguises the churchly business that is supposed to be going on, the mall-like atmosphere in which faith is bought and sold like any other commodity, the relaxed, country club atmosphere—is the little animal who supposedly is really evangelical. As it moves from rock pool to rock pool, all we can see are the little legs—the most minimal doctrinal substance—that protrude from under the shell. Is this substance enough to sustain people amidst life's fierce trials? Is it enough to preserve biblical identity in these churches in the decades ahead? . . . Can the Church view people as consumers without inevitably forgetting that they are sinners? Can the Church promote the Gospel as a product and not forget that those who buy it must repent? Can the Church market itself and not forget that it does not belong to itself but to Christ? Can the Church pursue success in the marketplace and not lose its biblical foundations?" Wells has even more such questions and at the end of them all he says (sadly): "I think not."

When the Israelites moved into Canaan, their faith in Yahweh was under constant assault from Baalization. Not that the outsiders tried to insinuate it into the Israelites' theology. Culture and the "cultus" it brings with it are much more subtle, so subtle that the Israelites themselves appropriated it eagerly, seemingly oblivious to the fact that it was an "other" gospel. Wells sees Evangelical Christianity and American culture engaged in this same dance. For the Evangelical church it is a dance of

death. His alternative is “mere words,” but both words: God’s word of critique, even for our frazzled selves participating in the cultus of our culture, and then the theology of the cross, the veritable balm in Gilead to heal the sin-sick self. Is there any other option, Christian option, in such a time as this—for any community of Christians calling themselves evangelical? I think not.

Edward H. Schroeder

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## **Moving our Congregations from Maintenance to Mission**

Colleagues,

Last week Thursday, Sept. 10, Robert Bertram made the following presentation to the St. Louis area “Lutheran Professional Church Worker Conference.” I thought you’d like to see it. If you’ve been reading earlier ThTh items, you’ll know Bob from the stuff I’ve sent out about Crossings and about Seminex. Should you wish to review some of those earlier ThTh offerings, check the Crossings Webpage: [www.crossings.org](http://www.crossings.org)

Peace & Joy!

Ed

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## **BERTRAM'S LECTURE:**

### **Moving our Congregations "from Maintenance to Mission":**

### **Is the Jerusalem Congregation at Pentecost (Acts 2) a Model?**

Answer: Could be, but only if we see that "model" congregation for what it was – and was not. In short, which way was it "moving?" Was it moving into obsolescence? Yes, in some ways it was. Was it also, conversely, moving from the old to the new? Yes, that too. Then which was which? As we try to answer that question about moving from old to new – notice, not from old to young but from old to new – we may get some clue about "moving congregations 'from maintenance to mission'."

1. There are some features of the Jerusalem congregation, even in its Pentecost heyday, which seemed to age fast, shrivel and die.
  - a. E.g., originally all the believers "were together and had all things in common . . ." (2:44-45; also 4:31, 34-37) But before long we hear that John Mark's mother had her own home. (12:12) Eventually Paul had to gather a collection for "the poor saints in Jerusalem." (Ro. 15:25,26)
  - b. E.g., on Pentecost what attracted outsiders was the believers' speaking in tongues. (2:1-13) But soon that too came under suspicion and censure, except maybe as a bait-and-switch device for luring in outsiders. (1 Co. 12-14; 14:23-24)
  - c. E.g., right after Pentecost the believers still enjoyed "the goodwill of all the people" and probably owed much of their missionary success to just such public popularity. (2:47) But almost immediately goodwill soured into public resentment,

arrests, even executions. Then conversions had to happen in spite of the congregation's status in the community. (4:4)

- d. E.g., on Pentecost Peter could still confine his preaching to an audience only of Jews – international Jews, yes, but still only Jews. (2:14,22) We all know how soon that ethno-religious exclusivism had to be repudiated and be replaced by the mission to Gentiles if there were to be any church at all. (Ac. 15)
- e. True, it is thematic for Luke's history that "the word of the Lord grew" (19:20; 12:24) and therefore the church grew with it. But that same church, even this very young Pentecostal church at Jerusalem in some of its most youthful features, simultaneously "grew" toward obsolescence, became moribund and passed away.
- f. I don't enumerate these negatives in a spirit of Schadenfreude [glee at someone else's misfortune] but only to warn against a subtle legalism in some current "church growth" circles, namely, touting the youthful innovations of the early church (notably the Pentecostal church of Jerusalem), especially innovations in its young "programs," then compiling these into a checklist of ten or twelve "things to do," like commandments. As if: "Do this and thou shalt live." Live? What some of the best of these youthful innovations did was die, and quite early.

2. In the sort of "church growth" discussions I'm describing, what often goes unasked is this: granting the Jerusalem congregation's programmatic innovations (classes with the apostles, fellowshiping, shared possessions, daily trips to the Temple, staggering numbers), none of which are listed until the end of Acts 2, how about the lion's



share of the chapter – forty verses’ worth! – which \_precede\_ these achievements? In other words, how did the congregation \_get\_ to these results in the first place? Answer: not by tackling the checklist head-on but by a very roundabout route, exasperatingly indirect and in ways which virtually defy human planning and predicting. Let me count the ways, at least three – one of them in monologue, the other two in the discussion which follows.

- a. The entire Pentecost Event – that is, whatever made it “Pentecost” – came about solely at the initiative of the Holy Spirit. The congregation, so far as I can tell, had nothing to do with bringing that about. True, “they were all together in one place,” something they probably would have done anyway. And although the Holy Spirit seems never to appear unless there’s an audience, there’s nothing to suggest that She felt at all obliged to attend this particular gathering. (v.2) If She did, why did She wait so long – at least several centuries since Joel? Nothing is said about the congregation’s even \_praying\_ for the Spirit. And yes, Peter \_preaches\_ about the Spirit’s coming, but only after the fact, as a way of explaining what had already happened. Then the only explanation he has, at least the only one which involves any human involvement, is that a long time ago the people had been \_promised\_ the Spirit. Moreover, this Holying Spirit does not only indwell individuals – that, too – but creates a kind of out-in-the-open meteorological storm, a magnetic field, \_from\_ which the individuals are empowered. This wrap-around \_Kraftfeld\_, this “power surround” is not evoked or manipulated by any human initiative, charismatic or pietistic, or by some regimen of “spirituality.” At least not in Acts 2.

About the most you can say the congregation was “doing” was waiting on the promise, meanwhile going about their usual business.

So completely is this Pentecostal Spirit not at the bidding of the congregation that they don’t even make so bold as to address Her, and barely talk \_about\_ Her, certainly not with the brashness I’ve adopted in the pronouns I’ve used. Judging from Peter’s sermon, this Spirit comes at the bidding only of the other two members of the Trinity, as a kind of graduation gift from the Father to the Son upon the latter’s recent resurrection. Then does this “modesty” of the Holy Spirit, Her remoteness from congregational management, reduce Her to just a “bit player” in the trinitarian drama? Hardly. I’d think of Her more like Robertson Davies’ \_The Fifth Business\_.

For discussion as time permits:

- b. The only way anyone at Jerusalem could be “Pentecosted” into newness was a way which the congregation could hardly program, certainly not guarantee, namely, have whoever comes to church “repent for the forgiveness of sins.” (Lk. 24:47; Ac. 2:38) Without that two-step from old to new, as the Lutheran Confessions keep repeating, nothing happens, no matter how many newcomers show up. But how to insure its happening?
- c. A third way – and in my reading of Acts 2 the most important way – a congregation moves “from maintenance to mission” yet with almost no chance for congregational supervision is this: for the congregation to attract newcomers it depends most on its contacts not inside the church but outside the

church. There outsiders encounter, “each in her own language, the mighty works of God” – from the believers abroad in the world. The congregation cannot program those encounters out there though it might debrief them and reinforce them, the way a football huddle does between plays. Nevertheless, as the church learned increasingly after Pentecost, the congregation’s real mission is exactly out there, beyond the congregation, out on the scrimmage line. The church is only in order to the Kingdom.

RWB

LPCWC, 9/10/98

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## The Historic Episcopate Question?

On August 8 John Rosenberg, regular receiver of ThTh, wrote me the following:

*Say, are you planning on doing anything in Thursday Theology about the “historic episcopate” question? Perhaps you’ve written about this and I missed it. At any rate, I need some enlightenment on what YOU think is at stake in that discussion. What brought the matter to mind for me was your response to Cassidy’s misunderstanding that JBFA was one doctrine among many rather than a hermeneutic. I’m having trouble seeing how the hermeneutic applies to the historic episcopate and its relationship to the “rule of faith,” etc. I seem to recall from*

*church history classes that at one time (3rd century?) the “rule of faith” as expressed in the creed(s), the canon, and the historic episcopate were all considered guarantors of orthodoxy. If we Lutherans are both evangelical AND catholic, why wouldn’t the historic episcopate be a useful sign of unity with the rest of the church? What about those parts of Lutheranism (like the Church of Sweden) that already are part of it? Have they betrayed their Lutheran birthright for a mess of adiaphora? Perhaps I’m just dense but I have a sense that many other colleagues are also confused about this.*

Now back from a week and a half “out east” (Bowling Green OH, Washington DC, Princeton NJ and Bethlehem PA) I can speak to John’s inquiry “from experience.” I’ve witnessed two bishops being put into office, both of them students of mine from days gone by. Two Saturdays ago (Aug. 29) I was present for Marcus Lohrmann’s installation as ELCA bishop of the Northwest Ohio Synod.

On the following Saturday (Sept. 5) Marie and I were guests in the home of the new Episcopal bishop of Bethlehem PA, Paul Marshall. Paul was graduated from Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, in 1973, the year before Seminex happened. But in his first call he too fell victim to Missouri Synod inquisitors and eventually found refuge in the Episcopal church. Paul was “ordained,” not just installed, to the office of bishop two years ago. Since a professional video crew recorded the event for posterity, we viewed it on our Saturday evening with them in “virtual” reality. With these two exposures I’m clearly an expert on episcopacy. So I’ll now address John’s inquiry.

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Dear John,

My personal druthers are to avoid the issue of the historic episcopate [HE] altogether. But if good guys like you bring it up, then I'll try to say something.

1. JBFA [justification by faith alone] laid alongside HE suggests that no HE ever guaranteed JBFA anywhere in the church's past or present history. E.g., it is today's Roman Church through its spokesman Cassidy with its alleged HE that finds JBFA unacceptable. [See ThTh #10-12] So what sort of "guarantor of orthodoxy" is HE today, or was it in the 16th century, or in the 15 before that? If we Augsburg Catholics define orthodoxy as the "fresh preaching of the Good News and the sacraments administered congruent with that Good News," how would you ever "guarantee" that this is happening anywhere that Christians gather?
2. The expression "evangelical and catholic" has become a shibboleth these days methinks. Who wouldn't want to claim both for his/her own teaching on gospel and church? But what do folks mean when they lay claim to that pair of terms? Our Augsburg tradition says: Anyone's claim for each of those terms needs to be measured by the one criterion, JBFA. Anyone's claim to being evangelical and catholic needs to be tested by the criterion to learn what they mean substantively with each of the two terms and how that impacts/commends the Gospel.
3. My own conviction at present is that HE is an unprovable historical claim. I don't want to call it a "historical fiction," but that sometimes comes to mind. Even RC scholars, as I hear them, say that the early history of the church at Rome, including Peter's alleged work there, is too fuzzy to document (beyond a reasonable doubt) anything like the HE. Is this just another instance of the emperor having no clothes, but claiming to look super

spiffy? Church relations—along with ecclesiology and ministry—shouldn't be built on sand, or legends, or probabilities. We need better foundations—and we have them.

4. I don't think the church of Sweden has betrayed its birthright. [But then you never know with those Swedes, or those Norskies—as we learned in Seminex!] Methinks the Lutherans in Sweden are just continuing with what they received when the Reformation happened. But I've got no close links to Lutherans in Sweden itself. So it might be another story. And given the drought-like situation I keep hearing about in the parishes in Sweden, even their HE hasn't helped grass-roots church life as far as I can tell.
5. You ask about HE as “sign of unity.” What does that mean? Or how does it work? Unity is itself a disputed point in church history & theology. Just what is it? One might say: the conflict about church unity is what the reformation was all about. Is church unity “us and them” agreeing with each other and being friendly, or is church unity “sinners getting united to Christ and thus with each other and then staying that way?” “For the true unity of the church [i.e., for getting sinners united to Christ] it is enough that the Gospel be preached (uncluttered by legalisms) and the sacraments be done according to that Gospel.” So said some folks at Augsburg long ago. Their critics (who revelled in the clout they had from their HE) said this was heresy. So what does HE do for the church's unity if that unity really is what the Augsburgers said it was?
6. The canon of scripture and the creedal “rule(s) of faith” are also unable to guarantee unity or orthodoxy. Except for Christ and the Spirit, there is no such thing as “guarantor of orthodoxy,” is there, John? Whoever it was that coined the phrase “ecclesia semper reformanda” (the

church is always needing reformation) was saying the same thing. Example: Paul had just recently been in Galatia and given them (we trust) the orthodox Gospel. He no sooner heads on to new territory and the Galatians get hornswoggled by “another” Gospel. What does Paul do? He does not invoke any “guarantor of orthodoxy,” which would almost “have to be” something legal, but says, in effect: OK, you foolish Galatians, back to square one. Let’s start with the genuine Gospel all over again.

7. “Episcopoi” as overseers—even in the NT usages of that term—are misread, I think, when we link them to what the word “bishop” has become in today’s church, also in our ELCA. Nowadays it regularly signals a “legal” (I’m not saying legalistic) magisterium of some sort, an “authority over” congregations, doctrine, pastors, policies, finances, etc. Thus it’s already suspect ala JBFA hermeneutics. Why? Because the law, whether canon law, even God’s law—by definition—can never “guarantee” the Gospel.
8. Some missiologists today say: NT episcopoi were not magisterial at all, no “legal” overseers of any sort. Rather in NT times the episcopos was the mission director, the mission developer, the “overseer” of outreach, of the church’s evangelism and mission operations. Nobody was “in charge” of groups of existing congregations. Early church structure was not vertical—us and those above or below us in the organization chart. Instead it was lateral: us and the mission we’re doing here in our territory alongside of “them” and the mission they are fostering in their neighborhood. The episcopoi were the hustlers, the makers and shakers, in this lateral expansion operation.
9. This perspective on episcopos goes along with the “new look” that missiologists have uncovered for the word “apostolic,” also as it surfaces in the Nicene Creed. One,

holy, catholic, and apostolic, as Bob Scudieri has shown, originally meant one, holy, catholic and missionary. The ancients understood it that way. “Apostello” literally means “I send you out.” So apostolic means missionary, and apostolic succession is missionary continuity, not the passing on of magisterial management.

10. Every one of those four Nicene Creed adjectives for the church needs to be Gospel-grounded, normed by the JBFA dipstick. “One” is the Christ-connection that comes from JBFA. “Holy” is the OK-ness of forgiven sinners via JBFA. “Catholic” is the world-wide validity that JBFA has from this time forth and forevermore. “Missionary” is the motion that JBFA engenders to concretize the three previous terms.
11. So both terms, apostolic and episcopal, signal that the church is constitutionally a missionary enterprise, always sent and sending out. Isn’t this a better angle on what the “historic episcopate” and “apostolic succession” are all about? I think so. Both of those terms are about the Gospel, and finally about what it means to be a “bishop according to the Gospel,” as Melanchthon says in Augsburg Confession 28.

Peace & Joy!

Ed Schroeder

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## Moving Our Congregations “From



# Maintenance to Mission": Is the Jerusalem Congregation at Pentecost (Acts 2) a Model?

Robert W. Bertram

[Address at an LPCWC (Lutheran Professional Church Workers Conference) September 10, 1998 in St. Louis, MO.]

Answer: 'Could be, but only if we see that "model" congregation for what it was – and was not. In short, which way was it "moving?" Was it moving into obsolescence? Yes, in some ways it was. Was it also, conversely, moving from the old to the new? Yes, that too. Then which was which? As we try to answer that question about moving from old to new – notice, not from old to young but from old to new- we may get some clue about "moving congregations 'from maintenance to mission'."

1. There are some features of the Jerusalem congregation, even in its Pentecost heyday, which seemed to age fast, shrivel and die.

a) E.g., originally all the believers "were together and had all things in common, ..." (2:44-45; also 4:31, 34-37) But before long we hear that John Mark's mother had her own home. (12:12) Eventually Paul had to gather a collection for "the poor saints in Jerusalem." (Ro. 15:25,26)

b) E.g., on Pentecost what attracted outsiders was the believers' speaking in tongues. (2:1 -13) But soon that too came under suspicion and censure, except maybe as a bait-and-switch device for luring in outsiders. (1 Co 12-14; 14:23,24)

c) E. g., right after Pentecost the believers still enjoyed “the goodwill of all the people” and probably owed much of their missionary success to just such public popularity. (2:47) But almost immediately goodwill soured into public resentment, arrests, even executions. Then conversions had to happen in spite of the congregation’s status in the community (4:4).

d) E.g., on Pentecost Peter could still confine his preaching to an audience only of Jews- international Jews, yes, but still only Jews. (2:14,22) We all know how soon that ethno-religious exclusivism had to be repudiated and be replaced by the mission to Gentiles if there were to be any church at all. (Ac. 15)

e) True, it is thematic for Luke’s history that “the word of the Lord grew” (19:20; 12:24) and therefore the church grew with it. But that same church, even this very young Pentecostal church at Jerusalem in some of its most youthful features, simultaneously “grew” toward obsolescence, became moribund and passed away.

f) I don’t enumerate these negatives in a spirit of *Schadenfreude* but only to warn against a subtle legalism in some current “church growth” circles, namely, touting the youthful innovations of the early church (notably the Pentecostal church of Jerusalem), especially innovations in its young “programs,” then compiling these into a checklist of ten or twelve “things to do,” like commandments. As if: “Do this and thou shalt live.” Live? What some of the best of these youthful innovations did was die, and quite early.

2) In the sort of “church growth” discussions I’m describing, what often goes unasked is this: granting the Jerusalem congregation’s programmatic innovations (classes with the

apostles, fellowshiping, shared possessions, daily trips to the Temple, staggering numbers), none of which are listed until the end of Acts 2, how about the lion's share of the chapter – forty verses' worth! – which precede these achievements? In other words, how did the congregation get to these results in the first place? Answer not by tackling the checklist head-on but by a very roundabout route, exasperatingly indirect and in ways which virtually defy human planning and predicting. Let me count the ways, at least three – one of them in monologue, the other two in the discussion which follows.

a) The entire Pentecost Event – that is, whatever made it “Pentecost” – came about solely at the initiative of the Holy Spirit. The congregation, so far as I can tell, had nothing to do with bringing that about. True, “they were altogether in one place,” something they probably would have done anyway. And although the Holy Spirit seems never to appear unless there's an audience, there's nothing to suggest that She felt at all obliged to attend this particular gathering. (v. 2) If She did, why did She wait so long – at least several centuries since Joel? Nothing is said about the congregation's even praying for the Spirit. And yes, Peter preaches about the Spirit's coming, but only after the fact, as a way of explaining what had already happened. Then the only explanation he has, at least the only one which involves any human involvement, is that a long time ago the people had been promised the Spirit.

Moreover, this Holying Spirit does not only indwell individuals – that, too – but creates a kind of out-in-the-open meteorological storm, a magnetic field, from which the individuals are empowered. This wrap-around *Kraftfeld*, this “power surround” is not evoked or manipulated by any human initiative, charismatic or pietistic, or by some regimen of “spirituality.” At least not in Acts 2. About the most you can

say the congregation was “doing” was waiting on the promise, meanwhile going about their usual business.

So completely is this Pentecostal Spirit not at the bidding of the congregation that they don’t even make so bold as to address Her, and barely talk about Her, certainly not with the brashness I’ve adopted in the pronouns I’ve used. Judging from Peter’s sermon, this Spirit comes at the bidding only of the other two members of the Trinity, as a kind of graduation gift from the Father to the Son upon the latter’s recent resurrection. Then does this “modesty” of the Holy Spirit, Her remoteness from congregational management, reduce Her to just a “bit player” in the trinitarian drama? Hardly. I’d think of Her more like Robertson Davies’ The Fifth Business.

For discussion as time permits:

b) The only way anyone at Jerusalem could be “Pentecosted” into newness was a way which the congregation could hardly program, certainly not guarantee, namely, have whoever comes to church “repent for the forgiveness of sins.” (Lk. 24:47; Ac. 2:38) Without that two-step from old to new, as the Lutheran Confessions keep repeating, nothing happens, no matter how many newcomers show up. But how to insure its happening?

c) A third way – and in my reading of Acts 2 the most important way – a congregation moves “from maintenance to mission” yet with almost no chance for congregational supervision is this: for the congregation to attract newcomers it depends most on its contacts not inside the church but outside the church. There outsiders encounter, “each in her own language, the mighty works of God” – from the believers abroad in the world. The congregation cannot program those encounters out there though it might debrief s them and

reenforce them, the way a football huddle does between plays. Nevertheless, as the church learned increasingly after Pentecost, the congregation's real mission is exactly out there, beyond the congregation, out on the scrimmage line. The church is only in order to the Kingdom.

Robert W. Bertram

LPCWC, 9/10/98

[MovingCongregations \(PDF\)](#)

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## True Repentance and President Clinton's Confession?

Dear Thursday Theology folks,

This week I've asked Dr. Robert Schultz to do a piece for us in regard to the latest presidential crisis. Al Jabs, one of our Crossings board members, wrote to some of us asking about the issues of confession and repentance in relation to this current situation and Dr. Schultz graciously accepted my invitation to reply to Al's questions.

Enjoy!

Robin

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**DOES THE CHURCH'S UNDERSTANDING OF TRUE**

# REPENTANCE

## EQUIP IT TO ADVISE THE NATION ON RESPONDING TO PRESIDENT CLINTON'S CONFESSION?

### PROLOGUE

President Clinton's admission of inappropriate behavior in his relationship with Monica Lewinsky has encouraged efforts to revive what would once have been called the Constantinian alliance between church and state but in a democracy is more properly called an alliance between church and society. Proponents of such a revival rejoice that politicians and those in control of the media actually agree that some legal behavior is morally wrong and to be condemned. Even better, secular forces are actually calling on the president to engage in a kind of public act of apology, a secular act of public contrition and repentance in the hope of receiving forgiveness from a graciously understanding public. Even the New York Times ponders whether the president has really apologized, demonstrated true repentance of the kind that permits forgiveness. When the chips are down, many "evangelical" theologians conclude that this demonstrates that the USA is more Christian than we thought. Some "evangelical" theologians have rushed to clarify the standards of "true repentance" and to specify what the president still needs to do if he really wants to qualify for forgiveness.

Two weeks after the event, such hopes seem less frequent, but the residue of the discussion of repentance remains and has stimulated many Christians to think about the nature of repentance. Some have proposed marketing golden "A's" to wear as pendants or lapel-pins (there seems to be a large market). Others have shared e-mails proposing that we advise how Christians ought to deal with this. Some like Stephen L. Carter

(a law professor at Yale and the author of "Civility: Manners, Morals, and the Etiquette of Democracy") wrote an op-ed piece "A Chance to Reset our Own Moral Course," New York Times, Sunday, August 23, 1998, Section 4, p. 15. Large sections of this piece present assertions about the nature of Christian repentance.

I have no reason to quarrel with Carter's hope that our nation will reset its moral course. I even agree that our society must clarify its moral standards. I too would like to see it begin with our politicians. I personally wish that every ballot choice included the category "none of the above" and that campaign addresses were made under oath. If Carter were describing a definition of a necessary social process, I might even be willing to settle for it as inadequate but as the limit of the politically possible. I refer to Carter only because I question his definition of "true" or "Christian" repentance:

- The President, as an evangelical Christian, surely understands that the premise of forgiveness is true repentance.
- True repentance begins with a forthright and nonaccusatory admission of wrongdoing.
- True repentance requires a determination to turn and walk the path of good.
- Still, the President's predicament might be a godsend....sometimes getting caught is the only way to learn the lesson....He will never have a better opportunity to seek the spiritual solace of true repentance.

The danger in Carter's piece is twofold:

1. Most importantly, by claiming to offer advice to the nation on the basis of Christian repentance as he describes it, he misinforms his reader about Christian repentance.
2. Less importantly, he makes people like me who think we

ought to decide what to do about Clinton on the basis of its effect on the next election conclude that we are not Christians. Maybe not, but I think that Republicans have more to gain from forgiving Clinton in order to keep him in office.

As Lutherans, we have confessional precedence for the discussion of repentance:

*"Now we must compare the false repentance of the sophists with true repentance so that both may be understood" (Smalcald Articles III, III, 9; BC, ed. Tappert, p. 304).*

Carter becomes an ally of the sophists when he offers his definition of repentance as "true repentance." To clarify this assertion and to discourage the imitation of Carter, I offer the following theses for discussion:

## **THESES FOR DISCUSSION**

1. It is useful to distinguish repentance under the law from repentance under the gospel, repentance in the system LAW from repentance in the system GOSPEL. I find it useful to define each of these systems in terms of INPUT (who should repent) THROUGHPUT (how does repentance happen), and OUTPUT (what do repentant people look like to themselves and to others). This helps me identify the issues in making this distinction. As I pursue this task, I hope that the reader will note a series of corresponding differences in each part of the process and a comparable disparity of emphasis on each part of the process as well as of the whole process. In my opinion, Carter describes repentance under the law. In that sense, it may be called "true repentance." However, Carter does not describe Christian repentance as he seems to claim when he speaks



of “true repentance.”

## **REPENTANCE UNDER THE LAW**

2. Carter describes repentance as a social act. Society uses repentance under the law in order to manage the behavior of its members, including the setting and enforcing of social moral standards, confession of violations, and varying forms of punitive responses intended to change future behavior. In this system, the shaming process of public confession and forgiveness is an alternative to other forms of punishment. Different societies have tested various responses to misbehavior. At different times and places, wide varieties of behaviors have been rewarded with death, mutilation, imprisonment, public disgrace, and/or forgiveness. Sometimes society has simply ignored the misbehavior. Various inappropriate behaviors require different levels of confession, apology, and humiliation.
3. The purpose social repentance is always to prevent future misbehavior on the part of the violator and discouragement of similar misbehavior by others who have not committed or not yet been found out in similar transgressions.

## **INPUT**

4. One enters the system of repentance under the law as the subject of repentance only by violating a social standard and by becoming known either through “being caught” and convicted (in a court of law or of public opinion) or being compelled to confess on his/her own initiative as a result of internalizing the social system.
5. As President Carter learned, when he confessed to adultery in his heart, it is not possible to enter the system of repentance under the law and to become the subject of confession in repentance under the law by simply thinking about or even desiring an immoral action. That is one of

the many trivia that the law is not concerned about. The primary function of deterrence is to make potential violators afraid of being caught up in the system of punishment.

6. Society is concerned only about actual violations of previously defined standards or standards defined in response to actions which it has not previously condemned but has now determined to prevent in the future (for example, the Nuerenberg trials and the redefinition of "crimes against humanity" during the current trials of war criminals at The Hague).
7. In any nation, there are not only national standards of behavior but many standards of behavior set and enforced by a variety of subgroups. The church as a social institution is one of these social subgroups and itself includes a variety of its own subgroups.
8. Society encourages the variety of moral standards and uses it to permit behaviors by some subgroups which would become intolerable if accepted in and practiced by the whole society by forbidding them to the members of other subgroups. Consider, for example, the different values placed on citizens' lying to the government and police and the government and police lying to citizens, on the church's need for financial sacrifice by pastors and the concurrent emphasis on the financial need of the church's executives. It is not only the political community that needs to reconsider its moral course. I remember a discussion with more than one bishop present in which it was suggested that a moral level of financial compensation for a pastor was the average income of the congregation. The discussion of this standard was ended abruptly when someone suggested that the bishop's salary should be the average salary of the pastors' salaries. All societies allow moral perquisites to those who are in power. Only

the rich raise their children to behave according to the moral standards of the rich, only the powerful to behave as powerful people. Sometimes one member of a group is expected to incorporate a group's public standard in order to detract attention from the behavior of other members of the group.

9. The standards governing the admission of various subgroups to the system of repentance and/or forgiveness under the law, the conditions under which behavior is forgiven or punished, and the varying levels of punishment are determined by economic and political factors. The setting of standards of behavior by society is a serious matter and properly takes political and economic realities, including mass disobedience and revolution, into account. For example, legislation determining taxes is only fair, just, or consistent by accident.

## **THROUGHPUT**

10. Anything that works or is merely claimed to work has been tried. The shaming and humiliation of public exposure and confession; forgiveness; being shunned socially and excommunicated ecclesiastically, fear of hell, hope of heaven, mutilation, castration, sterilization, tarring-and-feathering, removing the roof the offender's house, exile, fine, imprisonment, torture, execution; brainwashing, moral reeducation, etc. Society's reluctance to define its moral standards is paralleled by uncertainty about the relative value of retribution and rehabilitation, about the balance of fitting the punishment to the crime and to the criminal. Since nothing works very well, there is hardly any limit to creative imagination.
11. What Stephen J. Carter calls "true repentance" describes society's freedom to ignore behavior or to choose to

forgive it if the miscreant meets a standard of contrition. As Carter says: "True repentance requires a determination to turn and walk the path of good." If society determines that the necessary level of determination is not present or strong enough, it will probably attempt to stimulate it by punishment or social sanctions. The church as a social institution often demands a higher level both of shame over the past and determination to improve in the future than secular society does.

12. However, if society finds the penitent to have exhibited the appropriate level of shame and humiliation and if the inappropriate behavior is common enough so that many fear that it could happen to them, society will probably choose to forgive without any transformation process. This is not the forgiveness of the gospel. This social forgiveness consists of the decision not to punish on condition that the behavior not be repeated, at the very least, that it not again become public but remain private. It is expected that one not violate the social standard by revealing one's own behavior or exposing the behavior of someone else. No one wants Ken Starr spending forty million dollars on their biography; no one wants the president to defend himself by exposing behaviors of members of Congress. For many, the crime is either not confessing what could no longer be concealed or publicizing what should remain private.

## **OUTPUT**

13. The quality of output is measured by recidivism. Are those who have passed through the system caught committing new crimes and once again qualified as input to the system (required to reenter the system)? In this system, repentance and forgiveness is most effective when there is

never again behavior to repent of.

14. From this perspective, the death penalty when actually administered is the most effective throughput. It may, however, be the least valuable in terms of deterrence.
15. When I was young, I worked the night shift in a very stressful environment. My sole companion was a man recently released after spending thirty years in a military prison because he had killed his sergeant in World War I. Since he was in charge, I was safe for many reasons.

## **REPENTANCE UNDER THE GOSPEL**

16. Repentance under the gospel is quite different from repentance under the law. The purpose is not to create more right behavior (although that is sometimes a byproduct) by changing people who do what is wrong into people who do what is right, but by changing people who do not fear, love, and trust in God into people of faith. The quality required of input is quite different, as are the transformation process, and the desired changes in the output.

## **INPUT**

17. Everyone, even the most righteous person, qualifies as input for this system. The question as to whether one has done what is right or wrong is irrelevant. We are all qualified by reason of what the Book of Concord calls "original sin," that is, we do not fear, love, and trust in God (Smalcald Articles, III, III, 10; Tappert, Book of Concord, p. 305). Actual sins, transgressions of the law, identify us as good quality input; so do good works. No investigative work is necessary. It is enough to be a sinner. It is a good sign when someone no longer keeps score by classifying some works as good, others as bad.

18. Nor is any specific level or kind of sorrow or apology necessary. Fearing, loving, trusting something else more than God qualifies us all. If we are concerned about our misdeeds, it does not matter if that concern is motivated by love of the good or fear of punishment. If we are not concerned about our misdeeds and relatively confident in our own righteousness, we are especially in need of repentance. The quality of input is measured in terms of relationship to God rather than of behavior. The Book of Concord emphasizes this difference over against the penitential practice of those it calls "sophists." These sophists were concerned about the quality of contrition. Later Lutheran pietists would make the same shift and require "true" contrition or "true" sorrow for sin, an emotional qualification like that required of the real sorrow and shame required by society for a real apology.

## **THROUGHPUT**

19. Throughput aims at changing the person rather than the behavior. Original sin – not fearing, loving, and trusting in God – is replaced not by a comprehensive pattern of righteous behavior (or good works) but by faith. This faith is trust in God. The process is not time-limited but on-going. The whole life of the Christian is to be a life of repentance. The work of the Spirit is apparent only in the conflict between original sin and faith and this conflict ends only in death. The process is always life-long. Death is not the end but only the transition to a new (as yet unknown) stage of the process.
20. Society's forgiveness responds to the sensed level of intensity of shame and of the intention to amend. Many found Clinton's admission of guilt an inadequate foundation for forgiveness. A greater depth of personal shame, of personal abasement, and of certainty that he

would not only not do it again, but was so changed that he would never have done it (for some, "it" would be a sexual involvement, for others, "it" would be denying having done it). Forgiveness depends on differentiation. In contrast, God's forgiveness rests on God's identification with us as sinners. on God's concern for our need, and on God's concern to change us in ways that we probably wouldn't agree to if we were asked to sign a statement of informed consent. I can function as a minister of forgiveness only as I know myself to be capable of whatever actual or original sin is forgiven.

## **OUTPUT**

21. Output under the gospel is not measured by the absence of original sin. On the contrary, the Christian remains totally a sinner; original sin does not diminish but is rather now accompanied by faith. The presence of the transformation process is measured by the simultaneous total presence of both, by the inner conflict in which the Christian is totally involved on both sides (simul totus iustus et peccator). This means that faith is not identified by the absence of original sin, but rather by life in conflict with it. All that we can hope to identify is the presence of the conflict. Terrors of conscience and anxiety as well as spiritual indifference, agnosticism, certainty are all disturbing symptoms in pastoral care and need to be more carefully evaluated than overt misbehavior.

## **SUMMARY: COMPARE AND CONTRAST**

22. Little more needs to be said. Having compared the two systems and their corresponding processes, significant differences in in-, through-, and out-put have appeared.

## PASTORAL REFLECTION

23. It is a common pastoral difficulty that we would like to see more convincing results than the conflict between original sin and faith. Many of the pastors with whom I speak tell me that they wish they could identify even one person or one social system in which they have generated measurable irreversible change. Society's system of repentance under the law becomes an attractive greener pasture in which to minister.
24. I must confess that I too fall victim to that desire. In one form or another it appears to be the metabolic state of Lutheran theology. Pietism is theoretically so attractive; its promise of something more than the conflict between original sin and faith, some transcendent emotional, doctrinal, moral, or rational position. I have found no antidote except for active participation as a subject of pastoral care and not merely a minister. We are fortunate to live in a church in which pastors love to share the holy communion of the bread and wine with one another. We are less blessed to live in a church in which pastors do not seek pastoral care, do not trust one another to provide this care, and are pastored by bishops who are sometimes too busy to exercise their pastoral office. Undoubtedly, such pastoral care, the mutual conversation of the brethren, would sometimes be inept, sometimes destructive, sometimes liberating. It has often been the Holy Spirit's school of experience in which pastors can learn what pastoral ministry is all about and not about. As our people know, the art of distinguishing law and gospel is always a process of pastoral ministry, of always trying and never fully succeeding, a never-ending lesson taught by the Holy Spirit in the school of experience. The pastor best experiences the conflict between original sin and faith in ministry in the



difficulty of distinguishing law and gospel in the constantly changing, never repeated context of pastoral encounter both as subject of ministry and as minister.

25. The theologians gathered at Smalcald in February, 1537 to review and edit Luther's preparatory draft of the Smalcald articles seem to have already experienced the same kind of difficulty as do pastors today. Perhaps they needed to generate measurable changes in people's behavior that would convince their princes they were being effective. In any case, apparently with Luther's active participation, they made a significant addition to the draft:

*It is therefore necessary to know and to teach that when holy people, aside from the fact they still possess and feel original sin and daily repent and strive against it, fall into open sin (as David fell into adultery, murder, and blasphemy), faith and the Spirit have departed from them. This is so because the Holy Spirit does not permit sin to rule and gain the upper hand in such a way that sin is committed, but the Holy Spirit represses and restrains it so that it does not do what it wishes. If sin does what it wishes, the Holy Spirit and faith are not present, for St. John [1 John 3:9 and 5:18] says, "No one born of God commits sin; he cannot sin." Yet it is also true, as the same St. John [1 John 1:8] writes, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." (Smalcald Articles, III, III, 43-45).*

The authors of the Smalcald Articles asserted that they had a way to conclusively prove that some people who had once been involved in repentance were no longer repenting. These were people who committed "public" sins. In these people, the conflict had ended prematurely and the Holy Spirit had left. Some sins were compatible with the

ongoing conflict between the flesh and the spirit (Smalcald Articles, III, III, 42) but “public” sins, such as those committed by David, murder, adultery, and blasphemy are incompatible with repentance and demonstrate that the Holy Spirit has left (III, III, 43-45). This brief catalog of sins describes most of the sins that can be “public” in a agrarian society and would require substantial additions in a capitalist context. I think that the addition of this paragraph is an unfortunate attempt to make a decision in theory that can be made – whether rightly or wrongly – only in the pastoral administration of the office of the keys. As a result, the discussion of repentance concludes with unresolved dithering around the question of whether and how people who true-ly repent can be described as sinners.

26. Before the confessors at Smalcald attempted the preceding theoretical decision in which I think they transgressed the boundary between theological theory and pastoral care, they affirmed what was once the last sentence of the draft. It remains as a warning to all of us who think we understand more than we really do, including present company:

*This is something about which the pope, the theologians, the jurists, and all people understand nothing. It is a teaching from heaven, revealed in the gospel, and yet it is called a heresy by godless saints. (Smalcald Articles, III, III, 41).*

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# Seminex Remembered – Faculty Reductions/Closing Shop

ThTh 14 concluded: “That’s two of the four [sc. name change and internal governance] episodes where I think we strayed from our exilic calling. Next time, d.v., faculty reductions and closing shop in St. Louis.”

## FACULTY REDUCTIONS

Seminex began classes on Feb. 20, 1974 with something like 450 students and 45 faculty, a 10 to 1 ratio. The May commencement that year depleted the student numbers by one-third. Finding new students was a priority agenda item. In the “old days” back at Concordia Seminary student recruitment was no big deal. New ones came automatically—through the pipeline.

The Missouri Synod’s educational system for pastoral training—a half dozen junior colleges regionally spread throughout the USA, whose graduates then moved on to a two-year “senior college” in Ft. Wayne, Indiana—had always brought 150-plus new seminarians each autumn to the St. Louis seminary with little or no effort on the part of the seminary. But when we became Seminex, and thus “unkosher” for students in Missouri’s educational system, that pipeline was turned off, and we had to scramble on our own. Initially a fair number of the senior college graduates, ignoring the synod’s sanctions, did come our way, but their numbers diminished fast in subsequent years.

We all became recruiters in some fashion, and some new students came our way on their own, both those with Missouri roots and those without. One example of the latter was Harriete Baggett, Roman Catholic wife and mother (maybe even grandmother), deeply involved in social ministry in the St. Louis archdiocese. The

local RC seminary was closed to her, of course, so Harriet signed on with us. Why? "So I can get my M.Div. degree," she said, "and be ready for ordination when the rules change in Rome." You can imagine what leaven such Harrietes added to classroom give-and-take.

But even with the addition of many blessed outsiders, after three commencements (74, '75, '76) our numerical decline demanded attention. Also demanding attention was a decline in financial support. But what sort of attention? What was the demand to be read from the numbers?

The Seminex board read these numbers to be demanding staff reduction, and so did many of our faculty and students. The board asked us to assess the "optimum and minimum teaching and administrative faculty, executive staff and supportive staff by which the work of the school could be carried on," and to do so with two scenarios in mind: if student body numbers stayed around 300, and also if they should drop to 250. Both student and faculty member classes heard them saying: "there must be reductions. You decide how much and who goes." A few of us challenged the "must" in the board's directive. If the N.T. image of exiles heading for a homeland up ahead somewhere really was the truth about us, how could we ever say to anyone: time for you to leave the pilgrimage now and head out on your own? If it was "only" money, and "only" shrinking student body statistics, wouldn't lowering our salaries and branching out for other teaching venues be another option in keeping with the image of a pilgrim band? Tossing some of the marchers overboard can't possibly be grounded in the gospel, can it?

Here I think Tietjen's theology of institutions willy-nilly carried the day. Although he fought to keep the number of those set adrift to a very few, the board finally overruled him and authorized pink slips for 12 staffers. That constituted one-

third of the faculty. At its regular spring meeting a day before the 1977 commencement it terminated 7 colleagues and put 5 "on waivers." Apparently the board thought we understood this as one possible outcome. We did not. Though the board's decision was made just hours before the commencement and its attendant hoopla, the news was not publicized until after diplomas were granted. The effect was shattering to everyone in the community. The shock generated such expressions as "the May massacre," "Seminex's suicide." Expressed in Tietjen's own retrospective words: "doing to ourselves what all the forces marshalled against us had not been able to do to us: close Seminex." (Memoirs 281)

How did it happen? Although the board initiated the process and called the final shots, we really did do it to ourselves. Before long we no longer challenged the "must" in the board's view of reductions. We set aside our exile-model for this issue, and saw it as a problem of arithmetic: too many staffers, not enough students, not enough funds. No one disputed that the Lord had marvelously brought us thus far, and could surely be trusted to provide, but we nevertheless proceeded as though on this one we had to take our fate into our own hands. It still seems insane to me that we even went one step farther to apply triage to ourselves, categorizing ourselves—A, B and C—according to our judgment of each person's value for Seminex. If you are all pilgrims in Christ's exilic parade how can you even do that? Could be that Grandma Schmidt who sweeps the classrooms is Christ's key agent for our pilgrimage. But we did divide ourselves, like Caesar's Gaul, into three parts. Category A were those staffers absolutely necessary; category B were those one-step down from that—very important but not absolutely necessary; category C were those "who would be counseled & helped to find ministry elsewhere."

When it was all over, 7 wound up in category C and 5 in category

B. The board's action made it official. Tietjen's job was to inform each of these twelve later in the day when the commencement festivities were over. A president's job is not a happy one. And "there was no joy in Mudville" as word of this "strike out" spread to the rest of the Seminex community. Worse than that, it was chaos. Students had already gone home, so only the faculty was around to deal with the uproar. At subsequent meetings the board heard our protest against their perceived draconian measures. They did decide to offer contracts to the five staffers in category B. But since, as they said, we had offered them no "new mathematics and new wisdom" to alter the fate of the 7 category C colleagues, that action stood fast. It was our own failure. We failed to transmit to the board the "wisdom" of exilic theology so they could see the non-sense, even un-faith, of jettisoning fellow pilgrims. So that left only the mathematics, and those numbers couldn't be fudged.

I said above that Tietjen's view of institutions—and therewith his version of two-kingdoms theology—carried the day. The board must have had the same perspective, although I have no documentation to verify that. Expressed in the words of one board member: "sometimes you just have to do what is shitty to be faithful in your God-given calling." Tietjen's own epilog to this trauma in his Memoirs is more sophisticated, but the perspective is the same. The "institution that is essential for the church's ministry is also inimical to it. That was a hard lesson for an organizational person like me to learn. Institution is not neutral but is predisposed to evil. Each institution is pervaded by the principalities and powers against which Christians wrestle. Institution is a part of what it means to be human, and it participates in the fallenness of our human condition. Institution dehumanizes, perpetrates injustice, and opposes God even when it is in the best of human hands, even when it is in the hands of Christians. . . . At Seminex,

preserving the institution required that we tell some of our faculty and staff that they could no longer work with us in the community they had helped create. Institution requires the compromise of integrity.”

I think this pessimism about institutions is one that is often ascribed to Luther in American theology. But really its roots lie in Ernst Troeltsch’s (mis)reading of Luther’s two kingdom paradigm. That view of Luther’s 2KP gained a following in America, I suspect, via the Niebuhr brothers, who had learned it from Troeltsch. Tietjen may have picked it up from the Niebuhr heritage at Union Seminary in New York while doing his doctorate there. But it was also present in the neo-orthodoxy that many of us “Missouri” seminarians inhaled in the 1950s when we started reading “forbidden books” on our own and found them such a refreshing alternative to our own Franz Pieper heritage in systematic theology.

No one who had ever read Luther’s treatise “On Secular Authority” could designate institutions as such necessary evils, and still claim Luther’s support. Luther says it is Anabaptist, not his theology, to label institutions as “predisposed to evil” and “pervaded by the principalities and powers.” His claim is that institutions are God’s good creations, not demonic at all. In that treatise his aim is to show the crown prince (soon to be ruler of Saxony) that God is gifting him with an institution the exact opposite of one that “dehumanizes, perpetrates injustice, and opposes God.” Luther even makes bold to say that the Christian prince is one who can indeed make it happen so that the institution humanizes, perpetuates justice, and serves God.

But this theological perspective was a minority voice, as I’ve said in earlier installments, in Seminex. Though students found it winsome by virtue of their classroom exposure, only a handful of faculty moved from Troeltsch-Niebuhr to the real Luther on

this one. And whether it ever got presented to the board I don't know. When they told us that they'd heard "no new wisdom" from us to alter their decisions about staff reductions, I imagine we were getting their answer. This two-kingdom theology and Scripture's own exilic theology did not commend itself to them as the need of the hour.

This self-inflicted wound to the Seminex community has no happy end, as far as I can see. Of course, it is "practical" to sever seven staffers when mathematics dominates the paradigm. But Gospel-grounding offers a variety of different options. Even good "left-hand" kingdom praxis has other possibilities. The departure of our seven colleagues was "required," it was said, to preserve Seminex as an institution. It can also be seen as an ironic big nail in our institutional coffin, whose lid came down 6 years later when we closed shop in St. Louis.

## **CLOSING THE SHOP IN 1983**

Institutional pessimism continued. At the same time as the board was coping with the aftermath of the staff reductions in 77-78, they authorized (ordered?) us to revise our internal governance. Here the MBO model (management by objectives) described in ThTh 14, moved in and replaced our 2KP "regula" for life together, another measure to preserve our institution that put another nail into the coffin. The theology of the Letter to the Hebrews became even more relevant, for like those ancient Christians we were on the verge of burn-out on our exilic pilgrimage. But we grabbed for coping mechanisms from the landscape through which we were marching. We didn't hear much good news coming from the voice of the Author and Finisher up ahead of us on the trail.

For some the prospect of the church merger coming over the horizon, which eventually became the ELCA, looked like the homeland where our journey was to end. Thus Seminex's merging with other existing seminaries in other church bodies, the ALC



and LCA, looked like ecumenical heaven. After our history of Missouri separatism you can understand that it did look celestial—even with our institutional pessimism still around. Many of us faculty were tired, just plain tired, of having to do so many other things to keep Seminex afloat besides doing our teaching. So to have our calling restored to being “just” profs must surely be the oasis at the end of the line, right?

The process was long and complicated and replete with institutional politics of every sort. For one reason we were a plum ripe for picking with a constituency that contributed upwards of a million dollars each year to keep us going. Who wouldn't want to “merge” with us? You can read the tale of the zig-zag negotiations with ALC and LCA seminaries and bureaucrats in Tietjen's Memoirs. It is a narrative with strange analogs to Tietjen's own years on the ramparts within the Missouri Synod.

I was privy to none of the inside stuff, and as the merger-mania unfolded a few of us 2KP folks pushed for an alternative. That was in some way to take Seminex into the new merged church intact as a fully operational seminary, but different in many ways from the standard institutions that all the others were—owning no real estate, receiving no subsidy from church headquarters, functioning internally and externally on this exilic theology, etc. But we were probably deceiving ourselves and not seeing that Seminex, despite its many “strange and wonderful” features, had pretty well become a “normal” institutional seminary on its own. Nevertheless the issue was debated internally beginning already in 1979. In one preliminary vote four of the faculty member class and a large percentage of the student member class voted against the merger in favor of an alternative that would continue an intact seminary to be offered to the new church. But the handwriting was on the wall. In May 1983 we graduated our last class. Faculty were deployed (that was our technical term) to three new venues “ABC,” the LCA and

ALC seminaries in Austin (Texas), Berkeley (California) and Chicago and took up their duties there for the fall term. We'd already forgotten the grim meaning those 3 letters had had in the days of our near suicide. A handful of the faculty didn't deploy for different reasons. I was one who stayed in St. Louis to pursue Crossings. Seminex students—those not tied down in St. Louis—also moved in the ABC directions to continue their education.

Seminex in St. Louis was history. Did it end with a bang or a whimper—to use St. Louis-born T.S. Eliot's alternatives? Probably neither. The final ceremonies were a mixture of joy and sorrow, the latter especially for our feisty St. Louis supporting constituency. And for many among the faculty another sound was heard—a sigh of relief.

Peace & Joy!  
Ed Schroeder

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## Seminex Remembered — Four Crucial Votes

**ANNOUNCEMENT #1.** *Mark your calendars for June 24-25, 1999. St. Louis area Seminex grads are convoking a 25th anniversary gathering here where it all started in 1974. Spread the word around. The planners say that details will soon be forthcoming. They need help for the current addresses of Seminexers in today's diaspora. Such info sent to me I'll pass on to them.* **ANNOUNCEMENT #2.** *The Lutheran World Federation [LWF] is sponsoring a consultation in Wittenberg (yes, Germany) from*

*Oct. 27-31 on “Justification in the World’s Contexts.” It is addressed to “younger theologians, both male and female, in the world’s Lutheran churches and invites participation in an interdisciplinary and intercultural dialogue.” That means I’m too old, but some of y’all ought to be there. See the LWF web page [www.lutheranworld.org](http://www.lutheranworld.org) for details.*

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## **Seminex Remembered, Sixth Installment.**

ThTh 13’s last paragraph said: “Seminex had a tri-partite corporate governance structure. There were three classes of members: Faculty, students, and the board (representing our supporting constituency). When two of those three agreed on something it became policy.” [One respondent corrected my memory: it was not “two out of three” who had to agree on policy, but all three of the three.] That paragraph concluded: “The student member class of the Seminex corporation also deliberated and voted on all major Seminex decisions. I remember that at least on one of those 4 crucial issues, the majority of students voted with us on the ‘losing’ side in the faculty member class vote.”

What were those four issues?

- One was changing our name.
- A second was changing our internal governance model.
- A third was not renewing the contracts of seven colleagues.
- A fourth was the decision to leave St. Louis.

### **1. NAME CHANGE**

The initial legal name of the Seminex venture was “Joint Project

for Theological Education" [JPTE]. It was an entity put together during the hectic month between Tietjen's suspension on Jan. 20, 1974 and the sacking of the entire faculty majority at high noon on Feb. 18, the deadline (sic!) for us to accept Martin Scharlemann, our major accuser, as acting president of Concordia Seminary and then continue business as usual. JPTE consisted of three, and then four, partners. Initially it was St. Louis University, Eden Seminary, and us soon-to-be exiled Concordians, a coalition hammered out by John Damm, our academic dean at Concordia, during that month-long interval. Shortly after we resumed classes at the SLU and Eden campuses, the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago [LSTC] became JPTE's fourth partner, giving us a formal connection to a Lutheran seminary, which then granted the degrees to our graduates at the May commencement .

But "Seminex" was not our official name. Instead it was everybody's shorthand, right from the start, for "Concordia Seminary in Exile." Also right from the start came our logo, the chopped-off stump with a new branch sprouting from the base, Prof. Bob Werberig's gift to us all. But even Concordia Seminary in Exile didn't become our legal corporate name until June 21, a few weeks after that first commencement. Before long the Missouri Synod and Concordia Seminary itself began to make noises about their proprietary claim to the name Concordia Seminary, and if we did not cease and desist, the civil courts would compel us to do so. Our legal counsel said they didn't have a case for such name ownership. When after an initial relenting of their dunning they pressured us again, we decided to find a new name and stay out of court.

But that decision was not at all unanimous. Being hauled into court to testify for our faith and actions sounded very Biblical to many of us. Missouri Synod's president Preus had succeeded in never allowing us to take the public "witness-stand" within the

synod as he pursued his program against us. What irony if now Missouri's case against us would "finally" put us on the witness stand, but now in Caesar's court. Wasn't that exactly what the Lutheran confessions meant with their terms "tempus confessionis, status confessionis," a time for confessing, a (witness) stand for confessing? Rather than following common sense and stay out of court, wasn't this of a piece with our exilic calling? Of course, the outcome was unpredictable, but what else is new? Isn't this exactly what Jesus meant in the Gospels with his words about apocalyptic times: Christians being put on the witness stand "before magistrates?" And what would we then say if it came to pass? Not to worry, he counsels (ala Luke 22): "Settle it therefore in your minds, not to meditate beforehand how to answer; for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict." We pushed this perspective, but for some colleagues such a direct connection between these words of Jesus and our own situation sounded biblicistic. They were not convinced.

So "being reasonable" prevailed over this alternate counsel. We finally opted for "Christ Seminary – Seminex" and stayed out of court. I still wonder what the "Christ" word in that name signalled in terms of the crunch situation in which we chose it.

## **2. INTERNAL GOVERNANCE**

During those early months in exile "ad-hoc-ery" characterized our operational style. Example: We had no president. Tietjen was still captive to the long-drawn-out process required by the Missouri Synod's Handbook (canon law) to verify and finalize the seminary board's charges and action against him. In that scenario one delay followed another, often a macabre mixture of humor and the horrendous. E.g., the action against Tietjen, according to "the book," needed to be ratified by his district

president. But which was his district? The one he came from, the (non-geographical) English district, where he still held membership and chaired a committee, or the one in which the seminary was located, the Missouri district? Harold Hecht, president of the former, was solidly John's supporter. Herman Scherer, president of the latter, was also a member of the seminary board that had suspended Tietjen. Our adversaries had finessed a bylaw change at the synod's New Orleans convention (1973) which was interpreted to give the Missouri district's president jurisdiction in the case. But propriety dictated, said President Scherer, that in view of his prior involvement he should absent himself from further stages in the process. So a vice-president of the Missouri district reviewed the case, had long discussions with Tietjen, and finally declared him "kosher." That was significant, since this veep was known as a solid conservative, and his "surprising" verdict discombobulated the steam roller that was finally supposed to "take care of Tietjen." But of course in the end it did.

Tietjen was still living at the president's home and on salary at Concordia Seminary as this process dragged on. The final act of severance came on 12 October 1974. He didn't immediately move over to Seminex, however, since by then we had a constitution and bylaws for due process in such matters. But it was a foregone conclusion. John became our president on January 31, 1975, a full year after his suspension at Concordia. The board affirmed that this was not a new call, but their invitation for him to "continue the exercise of the call" that brought him to Concordia Seminary 6 years earlier and now to do so "in the office of the president of Concordia Seminary in Exile."

Seminex was birthed and already into its third (or was it fourth?) academic quarter before John was finally "released" from his Babylonian captivity to join the rest of us. During our first year we had a communal president, a junta, consisting of

the Faculty Advisory Committee from pre-exile days, with Academic Dean John Damm designated our CEO. "Major policy decisions were made by the whole community, faculty and students consulting together in a kind of town meeting. Radical democracy was the rule during the first months of Seminex. Students and faculty spent as much time on issues of governance as on education." [Tietjen's words in "Memoirs in Exile," 221]

But with Tietjen not directly involved in our deliberations during Seminex's entire first year, important pieces of our common life were set in place without his active leadership. Most important in that regard was our document for internal governance, brainstormed by Bob Bertram, "processed" by all of us as Tietjen describes above. Complex, yes it was, but no more complex than its theological blueprint, a Lutheran two-kingdoms paradigm [2KP] crafted for a Seminex that was both a churchy, yea Lutheran, community and a "left-hand" regime in the world of academe. It was another instance of Christian simultaneity, implementing God's right hand and left hand work, both at the same time. This governance model never got to be known as well as other aspects of our common life did. In retrospect some of us called it Seminex's "best-kept secret." But it didn't last long.

Tietjen initially supported the governance paradigm and commended it to the board in his early days in the president's chair. But the board found it too strange, too novel, vis-a-vis known patterns of good management and did not adopt it. Little wonder. Where had they ever encountered a 2KP management model in the "real" worlds that they came from? Eventually Tietjen too found it cumbersome since "the process made it almost impossible to engage in holistic planning for the future," he said. His own model of leadership "was not authoritarian dictation, but consensus building. Nevertheless leaders had to be given the freedom to lead."

Our 2KP didn't do that for John. At root was two differing views of the 2KP, I think. John occasionally articulated his own picture of the 2KP. "The internal conflict at Seminex," he says (Memoirs 282) led him "to understand clearly the paradox of institutions—all institutions including ecclesiastical ones. The paradox is this: Institution is essential for the church's ministry, and at the same time institution is inimical to the church's ministry." By definition, he said more than once, institutions carry the mark of the beast.

In systematic theology classes students were hearing a different perspective. Namely, both God's left hand and right hand work in the world proceeds through institutions. But there are two different kinds of institutions, two different kinds of palpable structures. Each kind of institution takes its genius from what's initially in God's two respective hands, God's law of equity and God's gospel of promise. Gospel-grounded institutions are not "inimical to the church's ministry." They are the foundation of it. Institutions grounded in God's other hand, God's law of equity, can be and readily are serviceable for institutions of the other hand.

Bertram formulated a show-and-tell scenario to illustrate this. His acronym was the Latin word DEXTRA, adjective for the "right" hand. Bob would hold out his two hands, fingers closed, palms touching, before the class. Then came the spiel: The two kinds of institutions are D for different. One is left, one is right. They are E for equivalent. Five fingers and a palm that match the other five and palm. Then came X, Christ and his Cross from the right hand that penetrates, shall we say "crosses," (right hand fingers moving through left hand fingers) the left hand and starts to overturn it. Then comes T. Initially the left hand—now beneath the right—"trusses" (supports) the right hand. Slowly the right hand "replaces" (=R) the left, and finally A "antiquates" it as an item of the old eon that passes away.



Seminex's first internal governance model incarnated this 2KP. But it too passed away.

In the middle years of Seminex's decade, 1974-83, our "regula" for life together was weaned away from its 2KP into the "management by objectives" [MBO] model—we called it "goal-setting"—which was all the rage in the business world of the middle seventies. Our board even authorized a \$10,000 expenditure to engage an "outside, neutral, and objective consultant to facilitate the process of the review of the nature, mission and governance" of Seminex. Those words "outside, neutral, and objective" were the tolling bell for the 2KP in our corporate life. Mobley-Luciani Associates came in to help us get on with goal-setting. They were "pure Athens," and had no antennae for what our sort of "Jerusalem" was all about. Those of us committed to notions of exile (ala the Letter to the Hebrews), of a 2KP for structuring common life, of organizational structures necessitating shared responsibility and shared accountability, where "the decision-makers are the consequence-takers" and vice versa, failed to convince the Athenians. In retrospect, we shouldn't have been surprised, we hadn't done very well with our own faculty colleagues either. With students we did a bit better, but not enough to keep MBO from nudging the 2KP into oblivion.

That's two of the four episodes where I think we strayed from our exilic calling. Next time, d.v., faculty reductions and closing shop in St. Louis.

Peace & Joy!  
Ed Schroeder

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# Seminex Remembered – The Theology Department

ThTh #9 concluded: “The consequences of these two focal points [Historical critical method (HCM) in the Biblical departments and the Law-Gospel hermeneutic (LGH) in systematics] for the ellipse of Seminex’s theology is a topic I’ll try to address next time.” Well, this “next” time is now four weeks later. And in these intervening weeks another of the saints of that era, Herman Neunaber, an LCMS district president deposed for his support of Seminex, has been laid to rest.

Twenty-five years ago another funeral changed our history—for a little while, at least. Concordia Seminary Professor Arthur Carl Piepkorn, my former teacher and then colleague in the systematics department, died on December 13, 1973 while waiting in the barber shop for a haircut. His funeral was Dec. 17. On that very day the seminary’s Board of Control was scheduled to meet and “finally” carry through on their earlier decision to remove John Tietjen from the presidency of the sem. That suspension resolution had already passed at a special meeting in August, right after the LCMS’s New Orleans convention.

The convention had given Synod President Preus a 6 to 5 majority on the seminary board, and at the August meeting that majority voted to suspend Tietjen. But the resolution was not implemented at that meeting because someone blew the whistle about due process in the whole business and the possibility of a civil suit against the board. In the subsequent monthly board meetings during the fall something always happened to postpone implementation. Given Piepkorn’s demise and the crowd that flew in for the funeral (one attendee said we were really burying the Missouri Synod) the board cancelled their meeting and postponed

John's dismissal to the next meeting on Jan. 20, 1974.

With Piepkorn gone, the systematics department at the seminary was 4 and 4. Four of our colleagues, Richard Klann, Robert Preus, Ralph Bohlmann and Lorenz Wunderlich, constituted 80% of the "faculty minority," the 5 loyalists who supported Preus in his cleansing program at the sem. The cleansing was not for them, of course, but for the rest of us in the "faculty majority." That included the other half of our department, Bob Bertram, Herb Bouman, Erv Lueker, and me. When Seminex happened the four of us became its systematics department. With 90% of the Concordia students joining us in exile, our department was badly understaffed for all that we were called to do. Before long Herb Bouman retired and that left three of us. In shifting and juggling our teaching, the courses in the Lutheran confessions became our Introduction to Theology vehicle, and Bob and I concentrated there. Lueker concentrated on other parts of the department's curriculum. Dogmatics and ethics were shared among all three of us. Each of us offered an elective every now and then both to exploit the resources of our own experience ["Theology of Confessing"] and to keep in touch with what was happening in our discipline elsewhere in the world:

- theology and the social sciences,
- third world theologies,
- theology and the arts.

A lot of good theology—some more, some less systematic—got done in the internal discussions (sometimes debates) as we charted our community's course for the 10 years we existed in St. Louis.

It may be a bit presumptuous to speak of two foci to the theology of Seminex. For besides HCM and LGH, there was a vibrant liturgical theology being taught and then practiced in our daily worship. Ditto for catechesis, preaching and pastoral care. And, of course, there were the Seminex sub-cultures, some

of which I'm sure I never heard about. The ones I did know about included the expanding number of gays and lesbians who came to Seminex, as well as the growing number of women students who enrolled. Both groups challenged the mindsets we'd brought along from "old Missouri" that pastors were men only and of course heteros only. Doubtless Seminex's dean and president were aware of more subcultures, as for example when they went to bat for one of our students down at the city jail. Seems he'd had the chutzpah to grow his marijuana on the window sill of his apartment in full view of passersby. One day the police passed by and noticed his garden. We all learned about that sub-culture in the morning newspaper.

Although Seminex was quasi-officially committed to HCM in Biblical studies, the same was not true for the LGH we were pursuing in systematics. That was true already while we were still at Concordia. Partly responsible for that could have been the three (yes, 3) styles of Lutheran confessional theology represented by the department. The four systematics profs who were loyal to Synod President Preus did their confessional theology with the theologians of Lutheran Orthodoxy as their key to the confessions. ["Orthodoxy" is the name given to German Lutheran theology in the century following the death of Luther.] Bertram and I used Luther's own theology as our key to the confessions. Piepkorn took a third option, what I would call a "canonist" approach to the confessions. For him the confessions collected in The Book of Concord constituted the canon for Lutheran theology. Whatever the Lutheran confessions said on a given topic was what Lutheran theology was. Where the confessions were silent, a variety of options were possible. He relished tweaking Bertram and me by saying that the LGH was "one," but not "the," confessions' proposal for how to read the scriptures.

With Piepkorn's death shortly before Seminex happened, and with

all the Orthodoxy-oriented systematicians staying at Concordia, only one of those three came into Seminex. So for us LGH was the posture not only for studying the confessions but for systematic theology as a whole. See the citation from Bertram back in ThTh9 "What is systematic theology?" Seminex's president and deans had been shaped more by Piepkorn's perspective—beginning with their own student days at Concordia—than by the other two. Orthodoxy's option was, to be sure, nobody's choice. Bob and I sometimes were labelled as "Elertians" with our LGH and thus seen as not ecumenical enough within the world of Lutheranism. "There are other equally valid Lutheran theologies that we're not getting from Bob and Ed" was the complaint. One year our LGH "narrowness" provoked a student initiative to "get different Lutheran voices into the systematics department." The students pressing for this had already chosen their candidate from a good teacher they'd had at the Ft. Wayne Sr. College. Our department—all three of us—officially went on record approving the idea, even the pre-selected candidate, but finances had the last word, and it never happened.

One of the students leading that movement, now a respected international theologian himself, still wonders if systematic theology at Seminex didn't really support the American religious establishment, and that what Bob and I have been doing since then, e.g., in Crossings, is but more of the same. Who knows? Among the Seminex faculty Bob was respected as a different-from-Piepkorn confessionalist, but he never made many converts in my judgment. I myself was the systematician from the farm, an image I doubtless fostered, and given my feisty ways, never very diplomatic, I too made no faculty converts. But with students Bertram and I did make a difference—Bob with the egg-heads and I with the students from Prairietown and Peoria.

My evidence for this is that Bob and I (and a couple of colleagues who sometimes voted with us) were the losers on every

crucial vote [4 specific ones in Seminex's 10 years, by my count] taken in the faculty where the theological basis for our actions was at stake. These were times, I still think, when the NT image of exile, that Doc Caemmerer had shown us, was up for grabs. At those times Seminex's ellipse with its two foci tilted toward becoming "2 Seminexes." Not one-after-the-other, as some folks thought when comparing Seminex at the beginning (1974) and Seminex farther down the road, but two side-by-side—from the outset—as the two midpoints of our theological ellipse tugged with each other.

The people representing these "2 Seminexes" in my scenario were

- A. the administrators—all of them, curiously enough, alums of the LCMS Bronxville NY prep school, and (therefore?) high-church, urbane, savvy, cultured Easterners—plus the exegetes on the faculty (and their student following) and
- B. the systematics dept. (and its student following). Because Bob and I were eventually 2/3 of the entire systematics department staff, our LGH confessional theology touched (some said "was inflicted" on) most all students.

Seminex had a tri-partite corporate governance structure. There were three classes of members: Faculty, students, and the board (representing our supporting constituency). When two of those three agreed on something it became policy. So the "student member class" of the Seminex corp. also deliberated and voted on all major Seminex decisions. I remember that at least on one of those 4 crucial issues, the majority of students voted with us on the "losing" side in the faculty.

Next time I intend to revisit those four crucial votes.

Peace & Joy  
Ed Schroeder