

What is Safe?

This past weekend someone was raped in her college dorm room only a few doors from our daughter's room. It wasn't date rape, but middle of the night, stranger in the dark rape. It wasn't our daughter, but another young woman who is also just taking her first steps toward adulthood and now has learned that the world can be a brutally unsafe place.

Our first impulse was to rush to campus, get our daughter and bring her home. She must be safe, we must make sure she's safe. But what is safe? In these days of Matthew Shepard, James Byrd and Columbine, what/where is safe?

I think it's partly our middle class sense of entitlement to comfort and security, a fairly recent (post WWII?) phenomenon that magnifies our horror at the violence within and around us. Not in the Midwest, not in a small city, not in us. We long for the good old days when people knew how to act, when America was the way America was supposed to be.

I remember my grandmother's stories about evading highway robbers in their model-T as they also prayed none of the tires which regularly blew would give out when they needed all the speed they could muster to avoid being stopped by the thieves and their valuables taken. And all of this in rural Wisconsin, one of those Midwestern states where, supposedly, nothing ever happens – good or bad.

What is safe? Last week I spent several days at an urban ministry conference and had the privilege of participating in some of the training for Simba Camp – a summer camp for African-American male youth, run by African-American men. Many of the youth who go to this camp have never been safe as middle class folks define safety. Inner city life often doesn't provide an

environment in which trust can develop.

However, after some days of Iowa openness and getting to know each other, these young men and their elders who are living with and caring for them participate in a pain fire. Around a roaring fire and under cover of darkness, these young men who have known so much sorrow and rage and fear are encouraged, in this place where no one will be judged and no one will be rejected, to tell their stories. They tell of the horror that has hung over their young lives and they help each other let it go. Let the pain go into the stick they may be holding and throw it into the fire.

I thought about this experience as I thought about the rape on our daughter's dorm floor and I thought that maybe safe in these days of change and uncertainty in our nation isn't about having the best security system on our house or the finest locks and guard dogs. We sing "A Mighty Fortress is Our God", not a mighty fortress is our house or subdivision or country. Being safe is knowing that even when the violence is all around us and even in us that there is Someone who has hung on the tree of our pain and our horror and our rage and our fear so that we can be free in the depths of our beings, no matter what the circumstances, to live and love and care. Jesus took our judgment on himself. Jesus will never reject us, but rather offers himself as the balm that heals yesterday, today and for all eternity.

The church is called to be leaven in our society at all levels: the moral, social, educational, economic and political. We are called to make a difference in the world. But we must never forget that the hope we can offer is grounded in this One who sits with us by the fire of our pain, the pain we can share with no one else, and whispers in our ear, "You are safe with me forever."

Robin J. Morgan

Reflections on the Mango Tree Church

In the last paragraphs above [Ed's book review from last week] I've been signalling questions that I'd like to talk about with GKPB pastors and leaders. But there's been no real opportunity for that in our time here. I've met four of the (I think) five people at the top of the church's administration, but only for the briefest of conversation. Should that door yet open in our final two weeks here, these are some of the topics on my list.

1. McKenzie's history is a story of success, the story of a Mango Tree Church that seems always to be a winner. Were there no losses, no mistakes, no conflicts, no failures? There is a hint of something happening in 1988, "a period of in-house, tough, tense ecclesiastical brokerage," McKenzie says, but we get no further information other than that when it was over the "church had shed a few leaves and some of its fruit, but it was surviving to face a new day in new ways." You don't have to be a space scientist to know that there is a chapter missing here.
2. We've learned that there is another written history of the GKPB, different from McKenzie's, but we've never seen it. And if we did, we'd need a translator since it's only in Indonesian. How does that retelling go?
3. As far as we have learned there is no doctrinal statement, no confessional document articulating the GKPB's theological commitment. The word Protestant in its name,

as everyone knows, can mean most anything. As one of my teachers said years ago: It can mean "Here I stand." It can also mean "But I can also stand over here as well, and maybe over there too."

4. Just as an outside observer in our second week here, I think I saw the consequences of this lack of confessional criterion. The bishop had invited in a team from The Vineyard of Portland, Oregon USA. He and a few pastors had been in Portland and liked what they saw and heard, so the invitation went out. I attended one of the sessions where the entire Vineyard team, 44 of them, was present, giving their testimony and praying for the spirit's outpouring on the several hundred participants. As the Vineyard folks went down the rows praying for this one and that one standing in the large room now cleared of chairs, a number fell to the floor "slain in the spirit," with corresponding sound effects of barking, crying, shouting, screaming. A few GKPB pastors (bishop included) were on the floor involved in the process, but the vast majority of clergy were at the sidelines clearly skeptical that this was genuinely Christian, let alone Protestant. I only heard bits and snippets of the discussions that ensued when the Vineyard team went home. But a theological manifesto might have helped. It surely is better than the one proposed to me by a Balinese pro-Vineyard pastor: "We will sample whatever we can of Christian options available and then we will decide what is fitting for our Balinese context." Here was a case where some did and some didn't—and they were all Balinese.
5. The image of the mango tree church needs testing. When Jesus uses a tree image in the gospels, he talks about people as trees bearing fruit. He begins by speaking of the fruit (good or bad), but the root of the matter is the roots of that tree, where people are grounded. Jesus

offers to root people in the Gospel that he brings, the Gospel that he is. So the ministry of Jesus (and ours too as his disciples) is to uproot people from the soil in which their lives are planted and re-plant them into the Gospel.

6. Is it possible at all to plant the Gospel into a culture, any culture—Balinese or any other? The Gospel is a message. If you want to talk about “planting” it, then human hearts are the seedbed, not that person’s culture. The ear, says St. Paul, is the organ of faith. Faith comes by hearing, and hearing comes when the Good News is proclaimed. How do cultures “hear,” if they can hear at all? Where are the ears? Whose ears? Which human ears in a culture count when Christian witness tries to get a culture to listen? Are they the Brahmins or the beggars? Jesus gave a clear answer to that.
7. At root is the fact that every culture has a cultus. Cultus is where the term culture comes from. A culture’s cultus is the pattern of worship it urges on its people, the sacrifices and ceremonies addressed to the god(s) at its center. Whether the culture is religious or secular makes little difference. Cultus happens in every culture. Thus the gods of secular America’s current culture are (among others) pleasure, profit, prestige, power. The holy places for liturgies to these deities are Wall Street, Hollywood, the Pentagon, sports arenas. Any talk about inculturating the Gospel must find out what cultus is working in the given culture.
8. I learned recently that one of the GKPB pastors is doing a graduate dissertation relating to this. As I understood it, he’s examining some of the critiques that have been raised about the image of the mango tree church. One that relates here is voiced by Christian converts from Balinese Hinduism, who were driven out, persecuted out, of their

villages because they deserted the old cultus and its contexting culture. Such people, it is said, don't think it's a good idea to context the Gospel in Balinese culture. They can imagine nothing worse, yes, contra-Christian, than to shape their Christian faith and life by that antithetical culture of oppression. For them, it seems, the newness of the Good News is not only a new cultus (worshipping Christ) but a new cultural context for that life as well. That sounds plausible. I hope I can see his thesis when it's finished.

9. On that topic, didn't Jesus say: "New skins for new wine"? Try to put the new wine in the old skins and the skins will burst and the wine be lost. That doesn't mean: Go western. But it surely tempers the inculturation agenda, calling for the same theological precision, the same sort that first century Christians needed vis-a-vis the two cultures that they faced: Jewish and Hellenistic. Since they too got persecuted for being threats to the local culture, they must have been creating a new culture for their new wine—from their new wine.
10. An offhand comment I heard during our first days here was that the mission theology shaping the GKPB was taken more from the work of Karl Rahner, 20th century Roman Catholic star theologian, than it was from the Dutch Reformed theologian Hendrik Kraemer. In H. Richard Niebuhr's classic book of just 50 years ago, *Christ and Culture*, he gives Luther a separate chapter, distinguishing his theology of culture from both the Roman and the Calvinist paradigms. Granted all of these are "western" theologians. But if the GKPB claims the term Protestant in its name, why Rahner? Why not Kraemer—or even Luther?
11. Finally a disturbing statistic. McKenzie says that "by 1970 GKPB church membership was nearly 7000." Last Sunday one pastor told me that the current (1999) membership was

“about 8000.” What does this mean?

Edward H. Schroeder

Guest pastor for English worship

GKPB Legian congregation

September 14, 1999

Book Review – The Mango Tree Church

Dear Folks,

Ed and Marie have left Bali and are on their way to Australia. This week's THTH is Ed's review of this book about the history of the church in Bali and next week will be some of his thoughts about that church after three months in its midst.

Peace,

Robin

Douglas G. McKenzie (in association with bishop I Wayan Mastra)

THE MANGO TREE CHURCH.

THE STORY OF THE PROTESTANT CHRISTIAN CHURCH IN BALI.

Moorooka, Queensland, Australia: Boolarong Press. 1988 (Updated reprint 1997).

Kipling's couplet, "East is East and West is West and never the twain shall meet," is no longer true, says author McKenzie. If nothing else, cyberspace and global economy have rendered it passé here at the end of the 20th century. Bali is a prime example, where international tourism, mostly from the West, has become THE industry of this tiny island (as large as the state of Delaware in the USA). Thousands of tourists arrive each day, and on average each one leaves US\$5K behind upon their departure. The twain are indeed meeting and money is passing from one to the other. And with money comes the money's culture—willy-nilly.

[Romantic Westerners even come here, not just for honeymoons, but to meet the East by having their wedding "in Balinese style." A week ago Saturday one such wedding took place in "my" church in Legian—50 people from both families having flown in from Australia for the event. There is now a "Bali weddings" industry. Item: this very week I was asked to dedicate (with Christian liturgy) the new office of Raja Weddings International, owned and operated by one of the elders in our congregation!]

But is Kipling's quip still valid for the Protestant Christian Church in Bali, officially Gereja Kristen Protestan di Bali [hereafter GKPB]? Well, yes and no. Yes, if you read the minutes of the "watershed" synod of 1974. Here the GKPB made policy decisions NOT to be a "western" European church [shaped by Dutch missionaries], but a "Mango Tree Church," a church of the Gospel planted in Balinese cultural soil, a church of the East, not the West.

Yes, if you look at the architecture of churches built since that GKPB – 74 synod meeting. You see that especially in the now classic building in Blimbingsari, the mother church of the GKPB. It takes Balinese Hindu temple architecture and puts it under the sign of the cross. Or again at the most recent one in Bukit Doa (Hill of Prayer) in Nusa Dua, suburban Denpasar. Here the

government initially offered space for five buildings side by side, one each for the five recognized religions of Indonesia. So there they stand: Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, Catholic and Protestant. Yes, hereabouts the last two are understood to be two different religions. The Protestant building may someday be hard to distinguish from the Hindu temple under construction next door, when that one is finished. The bell tower, donated by German Christians, does inform newcomers that something “other” than Hindu is here.

And yes, the GKPB is “east” when you see and hear the liturgical dance, the visual arts—painting, sculpture, shadow puppets—and the gamelan music that are now at home in the church’s life.

But then there’s the other side, the side where East and West have met—and even merged—in the GKPB. Example: In my English-language congregation the worship tradition I stepped into was straight out of American fundamentalism. [I’m a stranger at times on Sunday mornings, not because what’s going on is Balinese, but Bible-belt.] The same is true of the weekly Wednesday “prayer meetings” we have. And even in the Indonesian-language congregation meeting in the same building, as far as I can tell, the ethos of European pietism (e.g., the songs, the 4-times a year celebration of the Holy Communion, etc.)— the “colonial theology,” as John Titalley called it—shapes congregational faith and life.

And apropos those recent gems of Balinese church architecture, not one of them would have happened without massive infusions of western money—much of it from Australia and Germany. In fact, the Nusa Dua structure, we heard, was actually bank-rolled by the German government, possibly because of its quasi-official status as a cultural artifact initiated by the Indonesian government.

The GKPB also continues to meet the West in funding its widespread ministries in economic development and education in Bali. This in no way minimizes the heroic hard work of GKPB people in these efforts. Even finding such resources signals their Balinese entrepreneurial pragmatism. Yet without this “meeting the west” it’s hard to imagine how the marvel of Balinese church architecture as well as their large-scale economic/educational ventures, could have come to pass. For the GKPB is not a mega church. Its numbers (1999) are modest: 62 congregations, 45 pastors, and 8000 members.

Though “the West” has helped the GKPB put these artifacts in place, they are now embedded in the church’s “eastern” mission strategy. The church buildings seek to invite the Hindu outsider to look inside, to listen to the Christian Gospel as not totally alien to the world of Bali. And the economic and educational services are offered to the populace at large as “what Christ urges us to do,” with no religion test required for the receivers.

So how did this all come about? McKenzie tells the story. The GKPB’s history is not all that long. The first baptisms happened in 1931 (not far from where we’ve been living these three months). That’s not yet 70 years ago. Dutch colonial policy didn’t want Christian missions in Bali, intending, some say, to preserve this island’s unique Hindu-rooted, Buddhist-blended, animist, and ancestor-reverent culture. Mission work among the Chinese here was tolerated, but Balinese Hindus were off limits. And when, no surprise, some Balinese Hindus became Christ’s followers, and the word got back to the authorities, the missionaries were evicted. But the seed was planted, even if it came in a Dutch package, and again—no surprise—it grew.

Bishop Mastra was born in that year of the first baptisms, born into a Hindu family in the village of Sibetan in eastern Bali.

McKenzie chronicles Mastra's own remarkable journey into the Christian church. And when Mastra enters the narrative, the GKPB's history and his own biography become warp and woof of the author's weaving. It's not that there were no others whom Christ used to build his church here. McKenzie tells us who the significant others are, but we don't get to know them well. Granted, there is only One Who is The Cornerstone to the church—also in Bali. Yet Mastra appears without doubt to be the prime architect for the GKPB's foundations built on that stone.

That was especially so at that “watershed synod” at Abianbase in 1972. Freshly returned from the USA with a doctor's degree the year before, “he was welcomed with open arms,” McKenzie writes. He chaired the meeting at the synod and the program he advocated became church policy from that point on.

The synod said that it was “finally time to erase” the culture-denying legacy and westernization left them by the missionaries, time to wipe out the Dutch colonial influence. That meant a sea change in the church's self-image, as well as its imagination. They were no longer to be “a bonsai church, potted in an artificial context,” but a “mango tree church,” the product of the Gospel planted in Balinese cultural soil.

Mastra makes much of the mango tree image. Although the mango tree is highly visible, he explains, it adapts itself in a way that blends in with its rich, green, tropical environment. It provides welcome shade in a hot climate and produces refreshing fruit. He links the mango tree church with “the tree of life” at the end of the Book of Revelations, “yielding its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.” In McKenzie's words “Mastra's matching vision is to see the GKPB become a new spiritual center for the life of the Balinese people. From this spiritual center he sees streams of living water flowing – satisfying streams of God's mercy, love

and grace . . . perpetually bearing fruit to satisfy the deepest hunger of those who search for life's meaning. As the leaves of the scriptural tree were for the healing of the nations, Mastra sees the GKPB as a living sign of God's power to reconcile and to heal." (p.x)

When that vision got to the Watershed Synod, the minutes record the following:

"The GKPB has adopted a NEW POLICY of addressing the issues of Christian mission in Bali.

It resolves to formulate a program for building a cultural and training centre in Den Pasar, called Dhyana Pura (Temple or Place of Meditation) with the following goals:

- a. to seek to proclaim and live the Gospel of Jesus Christ in ways relevant to the Balinese people.*
- b. to help Balinese Christians gain a greater appreciation of their cultural heritage within the context of the faith, and to find new ways of expressing that faith within the culture.*
- c. to stimulate greater use of the Balinese architecture and cultural symbols in expressing the Christian faith within Balinese culture."*

Then came resolutions laying out the church's economic and educational proposals for following such a calling in Bali. Theological undergirding for the whole package was a commitment (using the New Testament Greek words) to martyria (witness), koinonia (fellowship) and diakonia (service). Curious to me is that the "witness" word, as McKenzie reports it, gets linked to the church's "extensive educational system, seeking to produce students of a high calibre, able to progress and obtain tertiary level (=university) degrees."

There is no reference here, no proposed strategy, for mission or evangelism to the people enjoying the shade and the fruit of the mango tree church.

The “fellowship” accent is in-house focusing on “forming its own identity, striving for self-determination in theology, and for building up of the body of Christ.” The commitment to “service” is articulated as “stomach theology,” meeting people’s material needs and the vast enterprise of the church’s development and social ministry agency, the MBM. [=Maha Bhoga Marga, literally, the path to sufficient food]. I twitch when McKenzie articulates the MBM’s “mandate to stress the Christian concept of stewardship,” namely, “the small business management principles outlined in the Biblical book of Nehemiah, a story found to be in complete accord with modern methods.” And even more so when he commends MBM because it “emphasizes biblical principles of prosperity.” He does not pause to ask how such prosperity theology connects to Christ the suffering servant.

From “Tappert” To “TroBoC,” Sola Fide

Robert W. Bertram
Final Reader

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Final Readers for Final Questions

“Final reader?” The title seemed far too eschatological, as if I were to render the last judgment on the Book of Concord’s new translation. Obviously not. Not even editors Wengert and Kolb could do that. But then all the more, how must they wince at my pretentious title, they and their fellow translators, all of whom have been either my colleagues or former students? Here they would have borne the burden and heat of the day, the actual word-by-word translating of the confessional texts, only to have this “final reader” stride in grandly and unsweating at the eleventh hour, brought in by the publisher for a second opinion on all their arduous toil. Translators have been driven to muttering by much less than that.

But my paranoia was quickly disarmed. Throughout the past year these all-day laborers in the vineyard have received my suggestions, some with better humor than others, but always with exemplary sportsmanship, even when one of my criticisms was (as they rightly complained) “rather harsh” – though (as they were nice enough to add) “finally helpful.” What helped, I suppose, was sending the suggestions directly to the editors themselves, and to the publisher only secondarily. There was never any tattling. Indeed, often my suggestions were put as questions, honest questions, for which I in turn got straight answers. More than once the “final reader” was politely demoted to the final learner. There was never any illusion that the “final reader’s” verdicts could not be overridden by the editors. They could and they were. But thank God for that, thought I. In that case I would still retain the freedom, post-publication, to kibbitz about the final product. Wrong again. I discover that by now I am too implicated in the final translation to write a detached, third-party review of it, now that the editors claim “your comments clearly shaped the final draft.” In other words the

“final reader” has now become a hostage as well, his hands and tongue tied by his own complicity in the translating.

Then is the function of “final reader” beyond salvaging? Maybe not. Paul Rorem, the editor of this journal, asks whether we cannot at least say something about “the apparent advances we can expect [from this new translation] over against the Tappert edition?” And right, that much we ought to be able to address without any appearance of favoritism. I have long been a booster of “Tappert” (though my own copy, twice rebound, bristles with marginal corrections) and no less of Tappert’s three fellow translators, Pelikan and Piepkorn and Fischer. Yet I detract nothing from those worthies when I acknowledge that this new edition is superior in one conspicuous respect. It has a historiographical advantage (a new critical apparatus, new historical introductions and, in one instance, a new manuscript source) which at the time of “Tappert” was either not available or not affordable. But on the crucial question of the respective translations themselves, namely, a) their meaningfulness today and b) their fidelity to the original Greek and Latin and German, my advice is more hedged, more Delphic: place your order immediately for the new translation but clutch jealously to your bosom your old copy of “Tappert” as well. After all, don’t you do as much in your Bible classes: read from alternative English translations as a second-best to reading the originals?

By thus addressing you directly, gentle reader, I mean to imply something about the role of “final reader.” Why don’t *you* be the “final reader?.” Who is “*you*”? Realism compels me to admit that the readers of this new translation, as with the readers of “Tappert,” will be mostly seminarians for whom the reading of it is a curricular requirement. Even so, seminarians do constitute a sizable readership, and one which can be quite demanding of any translator. Good. So the first circle of “*you*” is already numerous and by no means uncritical. Plus, if the statistics

hold true as to how many catechumens (ELCA and LC-MS) are still being catechized on Luther's Small Catechism, then most of those same seminarians will someday, as pastors, reread at least that much of this new translation. And so will their fellow (lay) catechists. Fact is, Wengert's fine new translation of the Catechism, already available for some time now, may help to account for that book's current circulation. See how the circle of "final readers" widens and deepens.

Moreover, ELCA's current moves toward closer communion with Reformed, Episcopalians and Roman Catholics, as well as the reactions these moves provoke, are sending folks on all sides back to the *Book of Concord* – if only, like W. C. Fields with the Bible, to look for "loopholes." Let us not fret overmuch about their motives, anymore than Apostle Paul did. (Phil.1:18) One way or another *The Book of Concord* gets read and its new translation is put to the test. Remember, Saint Augustine started reading Scripture with Manichaean and Neo-Platonist ideas in his head, and look what the Spirit did with that, even through a New Testament in Latin translation. Item: I have been working with a doctoral student who began as a Presbyterian, is now a Roman Catholic, whose study of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue has made him a fan of the Augsburg Confession and its Apology. The moral is, "you," the "final readers" of the new translation of *The Book of Concord* won't all be Lutherans, just as they were never intended to be.

Indeed, look for the best "final reading" of these confessions in English to come from readers who, though they may not officially subscribe them, are most haunted by them. So, any retranslation today of these confessions is compassed about by a very curious cloud of "final readers." That puts you and me in rather fast company. And doesn't that in turn require a redefining of what we mean by "final reader," namely, someone who reads this new translation with an eye to *final questions*,

ultimate questions. I mean those questions where the choice of words is virtually inseparable from a choice of theologies. When the stakes are that high, the job of the translator, far from being merely clerical, verges on concerns of confessional integrity. In my agreement with the publisher I asked to be relieved of the more clerical concerns (proofreading, syntax and style) for which Augsburg Fortress has its own experts, although I admit there were some lapses I found irresistible: for instance, when the word “not” was missing from the sentence or when Melanchthon was made to say the “gospel *accuses* [*arguit*.]” So, then, “final readers” for final questions.

Especially in *that* role of “final reader,” you deserve to be forewarned of the momentous questions which await your critical reading of this new translation. In Timothy Wengert’s article elsewhere in this journal he alludes to some of those questions: By faith or through faith? A human God? Estate or social situation? That already should reassure you of the seriousness Wengert and his fellow translators have invested in these large questions, and of the thoughtfulness – not to say the agonizing – of their solutions. Now may I, at the risk of laboring the issue, raise these same questions back up for your own firsthand agony? (I shall limit myself to but one example.) If nothing else, that may give you some appreciation of the way poor Wengert and Kolb and company were badgered this past year by this “final reader”, their well-meaning tormentor. But more than that, now you in turn have the luxury of being badgered as well, in the paragraphs which follow, although mercifully with only a single sample of the dozen or more questions the official translators had to endure from me. Then, once your copy of the new translation arrives in the mail, you may check how your answers compare with those of the canonical edition.

For Short, For Now

Before we move to our sample “final question,” and perversely to heighten suspense, let us delay momentarily for a procedural detail. If the present translation of *The Book of Concord* is called “Tappert” for short, how shall its successor be called? Of course, that choice of nickname will finally be made by the inscrutable oral tradition of seminarians, arrived at, we hope, not in a moment of pique but of affection. We have no right to preempt their ingenuity, especially since no catchy, one-word nickname springs to mind. “KolGert” sounds too contrived, “TimBob” too flip. *Lutheran Quarterly* should sponsor a naming contest. But banned from the outset should be any combination of TappERT and WengERT, like “TapGert.” For that would suggest that the new translation by Wengert and crew is a mere refinement or update of “Tappert.” It is not. While it obviously takes advantage of “Tappert” whenever possible – don’t fix what ain’t broke – the new translation is just that, a fresh Englishing of *The Book of Concord*, *ab initio*.

During this past year I and my three helpers, Pastor Phillip Gustafson and seminarians Susan Schneider and Catherine Lessmann, resorted to a makeshift acronym, “TroBoC” (Translation of Book of Concord.) That was short enough to fit into our pocket Appointment Books for our thrice-weekly meetings. You should know that these three colleagues, all volunteers, took turns reading “Tappert” *viva voce* while I, red pencil in hand, followed along silently with “TroBoc,” flagging where it varied from its predecessor. (Where it did, as often it did, the question was Why? And that of course was where the real work began. For the Why could be settled only by recourse *ad fontes*, with two index fingers laboriously tracing German and Latin originals, shoelaced by the back and forth squinting of a ping-pong spectator, with occasional staring at the ceiling for just

the right English rendition – in other words, a job for one person alone.) But in that initial communal, oral stage, the Gustafson-Schneider-Lessmann trio must have made history, worthy of the *Guinness Book of Records*. When else, if ever, has “Tappert” been read aloud, word for word, from cover to cover in one (almost) continuous performance? As a tribute to that historic accomplishment, also as a parting salute to old “Tappert” and a hailing of its young successor, let me commemorate my three helpers’ marathon reading aloud by referring to the new edition as “TroBoC,” just for the duration of this article. After that I commend it to the seminarians for renaming.

Fide

But as Max Beerbohm would say, I digress. We were about to sample the sort of questions which “final readers” like you should raise about the translation, namely, those questions where the very sense and truth of the faith seem finally to hang by something so fragile, so gossamer, so apparently trivial as just the right vocable or turn of phrase, this English word rather than that – but all for the integrity of the *confessio*. The particular example I have chosen (out of an original dozen or more) by way of illustration is, as I said, one which Wengert’s article already mentioned. It is a question, I can attest, with which he and his colleagues struggled, nagged by my tedious, chapter-and-verse, late-medieval Latin or sixteenth century chancery German nitpicking or, worse, my Law-and-gospel theologizing. Now, dear “final readers,” it is your turn, though I promise to spare you ninety percent of the nits.

And the question is: Shall the English read “*through* faith” or “*by* faith?” Ought we to say that sinners are justified before God altogether *by* faith, independently of the works which faith does? Or just *through* faith? When push comes to shove, I favor –

strongly! – the former, by faith. But not everyone does, not even everyone, I suspect, among “TroBoC’s” translators. But the question is now being put to you.

One sure way to evade the question is to shrug it off with “What difference does it make: through/shmoo, by/shmy?” Almost as dismissive is the shrug, “Obviously sometimes it’s through and sometimes it’s by, depending” Yes, yes, but depending on what? Why, obviously, depending on the original term. If the original reads *DURCH den Glauben* or *PER fidem*, then the English, quite literally, must be “*THROUGH* faith.” Oh, but on the contrary, that is not at all obvious. It is not true that *per* and *durch* must mean “through.” The selfsame terms are just as apt to mean, and just as literally, what we English-speakers understand by “by.” Yet when that is what the original terms mean, “by” and not merely “through,” then that can make a great deal of difference. Theologically it can. And it is imperative that we reflect that difference in the English we use.

Notice, I just said “‘by’ and not *merely* ‘through.’” By downgrading “through” as “merely,” I imply that “through” is the weaker of the two meanings and “by” is the stronger. In English, so it is. And in the theology of justification it is the stronger of the two words, “by”, which is needed to do justice to the radical biblical-confessional claims for faith. When you hear that a sinner is justified *by* her faith you sense immediately that faith must play a determinative role in her being justified. Not so, or less so, if her justification occurs only *through* her faith. For then, more modestly, faith is just the medium, or just her acknowledgement, of a justification wrought by some other, prior, worthier agency –say, by Christ or by grace. Indeed, it is precisely that nervousness which often has driven translators, also Lutheran ones, to retreat to the less ambitious word, “through” – “through faith” – in order to save the “by” exclusively for God’s grace or for Christ. Thus,

the more cautious tradition says, “*by* grace *through* faith.” Else, so the worry goes, faith risks being given the credit due only to God. I do not claim that such a worry is unwarranted but rather that it is misplaced. And to cater to that worry, if only by watering down the preposition, forfeits more than it gains.

There are other contexts, of course, also other theological contexts in which it is quite appropriate to pit “*through*” against “*by*,” but not, I am urging, in our references to faith. We may say that pastors are called “*through*” and not “*by*” a congregation, or are ordained “*through*” and not “*by*” a bishop, so as to safeguard the sole initiative of God. Or when a parishioner raves about some medical breakthrough, “My life was saved *by* it,” we try (without being a wet blanket) to downsize her enthusiasm to “Your life was saved *through* it.” For in that case “*by*,” presumably, would be too strong a word, upstaging the divine prevenience. In that case, yes. But not so in the case of faith. Especially not, when we are translating the Lutheran confessions.

If this were just a lexicographical matter of deciding when *per* or *durch* should be rendered as “*by*,” when as “*through*,” the dilemma might be left at that, an impasse – sometimes the one, sometimes the other; six one way, half a dozen the other – to be left to the theological preferences of the translator. But the confessional authors, like their biblical predecessors, are not nearly that non-directive. For instance, they are just as likely to say, flat out, *propter fidem*, because of faith, thereby ascribing to faith an unmistakably causative role. Really, “*causative*” is too weak and wooden a term, also too impersonal. Faith is seen as personally influential – upon God, that is. Indeed, the confessors elevate to the status of a canon-within-the-canon, to an inner-biblical *Regel*, the verse from Hebrews, “Without faith it is impossible to please God” (11:6) – which, be it noted, is the whole thrill of “*justification*,” namely,

that there is now something *about us* which does in fact quite personally delight God. And it is faith, not “works,” which does just that. We might as well come right out and say it, Faith endears us, us sinners, to God. What could be more “causative,” more consequential than that?

Most pointedly of all, as if to remove all hesitation, the confessors simply make “faith” the subject of the sentence and “justifies” its predicate, *fides iustificat*. “Justifies” is the do-word and “faith” is the doer. True, as we always hasten to explain, faith is not really a doing so much as it is a being done to, a being done for – by the all-doing mercy of God in Christ. Exactly. But then isn’t it all the more magnanimous of this selfsame God to turn right around and return the compliment, by being impressed with (of all things) our faith, by itself such a dependent, “passive” thing?

Still, does God, at least any God with standards, really do that? Isn’t it awfully risky, indeed almost sacrilegious to picture God as paying compliments to us, least of all to our faith, especially in any transaction having to do with our salvation? Isn’t that kind of hyperbolic exalting of faith, if it does appear in the Lutheran confessions, exactly what Barth warned against in us Lutherans, an exaggeration stemming from Luther’s extravagant, flambuoyant temperamentalism? Isn’t it that Lutheran preoccupation with faith which has caused our Reformed brothers and sisters, especially the more conscientiously Calvinist ones, to complain that we never fully made the break with Rome but instead still cling to something in the believers’ pious selves as meritorious?

And haven’t Lutherans in fact confirmed those suspicions, again and again, by a fideism of one ilk or another, a faith in faith itself, whether pietism or existentialism or, most ironically, orthodoxy? However, if we do learn from our own post-Reformation

experience that these fideisms are in fact the dangers that Lutheranism is prone to, ought we then perpetuate such excesses in each new English translation of our confessional symbols? Granted, we may just be stuck with such unalterable bloopers in the original as *propter fidem* or *fides iustificat*. But can't we at least dilute Luther's and Melancthon's enthusiastic *durch/per* from "by" to "through?" Is that too much to ask for the sake of forestalling future "solafideisms"? Don't translators, given their superior hindsight, have an obligation to read back into the original documents those cautions which the confessors themselves were too incautious, too nearsighted to anticipate? My own reply to that is No, not if by altering the original we weaken its primordial apostolic force.

Yes, apostolic. For that is what the confessors understood themselves to be doing, as confessors, namely, echoing, "same-saying," saying over "in our latter times" what the same bold Word had been saying from the beginning in "prophetic and apostolic" times. And hasn't he, this Word, all along been saying exactly this, *sola fide sine operibus legis*, to put it mildly? Nor need we, anymore than the Lutheran confessors did, limit ourselves to the way the Word says "by faith" in just the writings of Paul. *Sola fide* is no Pauline eccentricity, though Paul did have a special gift for relating faith to the idiom of Law, in "justification." You don't have to believe that Paul wrote Hebrews in order to claim Hebrews 11 as your hermeneutical *Regel*, which in the space of that one chapter repeats "by faith" more tirelessly than Paul ever did. Or take this passage, not from Paul but from I John (5:4), "This is the victory which overcomes the world, our *faith*." (I would have expected, more piously, the "victory" to be attributed to, say, "the grace of God" rather than anything of "ours".) And who is it – not Paul, not Hebrews, not John, who but the Word himself – who says, "O woman/O man, great is your faith" or "Your faith has made you

well” or “Your faith has saved you”? Talk about the Word paying us, us sinners, compliments!

Ah, but the compliment is paid to us not as sinners but as *believers*. That is what Jesus compliments, not our sinnerhood, not even our selfhood, not some inherent human worth, but our *faith*. And that is what Paul picks up on with his more “forensic” language of “reckon,” as the NRSV aptly translates it. (Watch how “TroBoC”, which usually follows NRSV, translates it. Aptly?) Both in Romans and in Galatians Paul recurs to Genesis 15, dramatizing how “God reckoned *it* to [Abraham] for righteousness.” What is “it”? Abraham’s faith. Genesis does not say nor does Paul nor does the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, that God simply and arbitrarily pronounces sinners as such, even some sinners, to be righteous when in fact they are not. God’s reckoning has its reasons, its inner-historical, immanently human reason: *propter fidem*.

Still, though it is faith alone which enjoys this “righteousness” as so peculiarly its own, only God can discern the marvel of that, and can say so. Faith indispensably needs The Other, the incarnate Other, to interpret her back to herself. Faith needs God, God in Christ in his church, to perceive the greatness of faith and to tell it so. Never, so far as I know, does the believer herself perceive this marvel introspectively or autobiographically and then exclaim to the mirror, “Oh, self, great is your faith,” “Your faith has saved you.” That is the fallacy of fideism. But the confessors combatted that fallacy not by minimizing faith, not even by deprioritizing faith, but rather by strengthening the believer’s reliance upon the “mass media” of the church, the *media gratiae*, including the “consolation and conversation of the brothers [and sisters]” but especially the public office of proclamation and sacraments. It is there, in these quite open “means of grace,” that God in Christ returns the compliment to believing sinners.

Would that we proclaimers allowed him to do that more freely. Instead, by contrast, it is that wondrous public compliment, not to sinners' humanity but to their faith, which we far too long have crippled with such meager, stilted English as "imputation." I would prefer to say that God "credits" Abraham's faith to him for righteousness? What would you, "final readers," suggest? Be assured that the workers of "TroBoC" gave this matter profound consideration. Wait and see.

Last but not least – on the contrary, last but most – the single strongest argument in favor of translating *durch den Glauben* as "by faith" rather than merely as "through faith" is christological. So it is for *The Book of Concord* and for anyone who subscribes it. Upon hearing Jesus' compliment to believers, "Great is your faith," we must dare to ask the critical counter-question, And what, pray, is so "great" about faith? In a word (in a Word!) what alone is great about it, or saving or well-making or victorious or justifying, is not faith's psychological quality or its biographical "development" or its doctrinal maturity or any other of its "works", but rather and "only," *sola*, the One in whom it trusts. He it is whom faith "has" (sic! *Hat! Habet!*) and, because it is has him, it "has" his righteousness as its very own. The whole sinner has that, partial and puny as her faith may be. We mentioned the confessors' hermeneutical *regula* from Hebrews 11, "Without faith it is impossible to please God." But that was only one of the *regulae*. Another, at least as regulative was this passage from John – notice, from John! – "Apart from me you can do nothing." (15:5) Who is "me?" You know very well who that "me" is. And that, "final reader," is what – rather, who – entitles faith to its "by." Members of the jury, how do you say? The all-day laborers from "TroBoC" and I, their quizzical tag-along, await your verdict – shall I say, by faith.

P.S. Though *Lutheran Quarterly* caters to historians, may I (one

more historian) risk a prediction of the future? Now that Lutherans and Roman Catholics get to pursue the as yet unresolved questions in *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, and once we have gotten through the three splendid questions which Roman Catholics have already asked us Lutherans to address, what then will be the first question we Lutherans will propose for further exploration? Answer, I hope: the “onlyness” of faith. True, that proposal will sound ironic, seeing how few Lutherans, including the most self-consciously confessional ones, have even noticed the *sola fide* until recently, and then from mixed motives. Nevertheless. Re-enter Paul to the Philippians (1:18).

Robert W. Bertram

9/30/99

[TappertTroBoC \(PDF\)](#)

A Balinese Religion Primer with American Commentary

Dear Folks,

Here is a “tourist’s” primer in Balinese religion that Ed and Marie copied from a local English weekly newspaper and a few American thoughts (mostly mine) thereunto.

Peace,

Robin

HINDU DHARMA: An Introduction to Balinese Belief and Worship

Hindu Dharma, the religious belief system of Bali, governs all activities of the daily life of the Balinese. The three basic fundamentals of the Hindu Dharma are Yadnya (ceremony), Tatwa (philosophy), and Susila (moral behavior). These interact to form Balinese culture.

Yadnya: Ceremony

The simplest ceremony, and most often performed, is the Messaiban, the daily presentation of the offerings. Every day in every family, small offerings are prepared from a piece of banana leaf with some rice and other foods. These are placed at every building and shrine in the compound and at places to be blessed. This is the Yadnya for the protection of everyday life. Other ceremonies are performed every five days (Kliwon), every 15 days (Kajeng Kliwon), every 210 days (Piodalan), and every five or ten years. The largest ceremony of all, the complete cleansing of the island – Eka Dasa Rudra – is performed every 100 years and only at Besakih Temple. The last one was held in 1979.

There are five types of ceremonies in Bali, the Panca Yadnya listed below. Panca means “five” and Yadnya means “holy sacrifice with a pure heart.”

1. **Dewa Yadnya:** to the Gods and Goddesses as manifestations of the Supreme Being.
2. **Pitra Yadnya:** to the ancestors who give the people guidance in life and gave them the opportunity to be born.
3. **Manusa Yadnya:** to protect our lives and those of future generations.

4. **Rsi Yadnya:** to the priests who guide us all on our spiritual journey.
5. **Bhuta Yadnya:** to any other beings (visible and invisible) to ensure that there will be harmony and unity in nature.

Panca Srada: Five Beliefs

The Yadnya are performed as part of a system of belief called Panca Srada. Panca means “five” and Srada means “faith” or “belief.” The five fundamental beliefs of Balinese Hindus are:

1. Belief in the Supreme Being
2. Belief in the Atman (soul)
3. Belief in the judgment of Karma Pala, the law of cause and effect
4. Belief in Samsara (reincarnation)
5. Belief in Moksa (unity with God).

Khayangan: Sacred Places

The Khayangan are places where sacred artifacts are kept and are considered holy ground, for the performance of prayers and religious ceremonies. The type and name, as well as the anniversary of each Khayangan, depends on its function as well as the history and legends associated with it. Khayangan include house temples, family temples, merchants' temples, rice field temples, and the three main temples of every desa adat or Balinese town. Every Khayangan is a holy place and it is expected that anyone who enters there should respect and preserve its holiness.

Susila: Moral Behavior

First and foremost, the ceremonies which take place in any village in Bali are for the well being of the people of the community. Each village has its own customs (adat) and regulations which have been passed down from the ancestors and which are determined by Desa (place), Kala (time), and Patra (situation/context).

As a visitor, if you wish to witness or take part in a ceremony, it is important to feel as one with the people of the community and be prepared to cooperate. Some points of conduct should be noted before entering a Pura or Khayangan where a ceremony is taking place. You will usually be welcome if you observe these guidelines. Without observing them, the Balinese believe that your conduct could be harmful to both yourself and the community.

It is essential to remember that a ceremony is an important event in the life of the community, not merely a spectacle laid on for the benefit of visitors. Accordingly, visitors should stay in the background and respect the following rules.

- Don't push people.
- Don't stand in the paths or entrances.
- Don't talk too loudly.
- Don't sit on any part of the buildings of the inner temple.
- Don't wander about when the community is praying, especially not in front of someone praying.
- Don't stand above the holy objects, priests, or anyone else, for that matter.
- Don't use flash when taking pictures.
- You may not enter a Khayangan if you have wounds or are bleeding; have recently lost a relative; or have a child less than four days old.

A Guide to Prayer

These are the eight steps to Balinese prayer with flowers. Sometimes additional prayers are added in the middle of the prayer cycle for important ceremonies.

1. Asana and Pranayama. Light incense and sit quietly to calm yourself, men crosslegged, women kneeling, breathing slowly in a state of harmony. This is preparation for

prayer.

2. Karoshadana. One 'washes' one's face and hands in the smoke of the incense.
3. Atmatatwa. Pray with empty hands to connect to one's own soul.
4. Sryanamastuti. Hold a single flower in the fingertips to pray to the Supreme God who is manifest in the sun.
5. Brahma, Wisnu, Iswara – Tri Murti. Now hold a mixture of different coloured flowers in the fingertips, in prayer to the Trinity God manifestation; Creator, Preserver and Destroyer.
6. Samidaya. Holding three or more flowers, this prayer symbolizes worship of the Supreme God (Sang Hyang Widhi Wasa) and all His other manifestations which people visualize in many forms throughout the world.
7. Shanti. Praying again with empty hands, beseeching peace in ourselves, peace between us, and peace throughout the world. Finish smiling in mindfulness.
8. Nunas Tirta. Wait quietly until the Pemangku (priest*) comes around to you. First raise your hands slightly in a receptive position while he sprinkles Tirta (holy water) over you. Then raise your right hand, supported by the left, and receive Tirta three times to drink, and three times to spread over your hair and face. Then raise your hands slightly again to receive another sprinkling of Tirta. Finally, raise the right hand supported by the left, to receive a few grains of rice. Place some on your forehead, on each of your temples and just below the throat, eat a few and sprinkle some on your head.

Now that you have some background about Balinese religious practices, you can participate in ceremonies and enjoy a meaningful interaction with the community. To learn more, feel free to ask the Balinese volunteers present at temple ceremonies.

From our guide book: "Pemangku, always dressed in white, can come from any caste other than Brahman. They consecrate offerings, make holy water, and preside over temple ceremonies. The most important Pemangku are those attached to the village temples, but there are also Pemangku for irrigation temples, family temples, and others, sometimes up to a dozen or more in a village."

After it was decided that I would write some "theological thoughts" about this tourist guide to Balinese Religion and after I read it without a clue as to what to say, I decided to ask a couple of people in my life to read it and give me their first reactions. One said, "I know this isn't Christian or even PC, but the first thing that springs to mind is that old Pharasaic prayer, "Thank God I'm not like 'them'." The second said, "What a pain in the a- to have to go through all of that to order their lives."

That got me thinking. What do we use to order our lives? I suppose I could spin out a jeremiad about REAL American sacred space. Let's see – I'd say our national Khayangan is Wall Street, banks are our city Khayangan, ATMs are our neighborhood sacred spaces. No doubt Alan Greenspan could be called our high Pemangku and all those "Y2K compliant" stickers on everything now are the result of our Eka Dasa Rudra, the complete cleansing of the island ceremony which happens every hundred years.

Then I could quote Amos: "I hate, I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals I will not look upon. Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an

everflowing stream.”

That still leaves American Christians wondering how to order our lives today. Lots of us have decided to turn back to the “good old days” when Christendom reigned. Being a clergywoman tends to keep one faced into the future because a return to the “good old days” would mean the immediate demise of my ministry and even further back, the demise of my personhood. Not really an option as far as I’m concerned.

It seems to me that the Good News of Jesus Christ in the midst of our disorder is that we are strengthened to faith and witness even when the order is not clear, just as Balinese Christians are strengthened to faith and witness in the midst of such well defined, but decidedly unChristian order. That is part of the wonder of being Christian – that Christ is not bound to any one culture and we are not bound to any one way of ordering our lives. The Good News is as much Good and News in a culture as remote and exotic as St. Louis, MO as it is in Bali.

Changes in Japan Today: Two Christian Perspectives

Today’s Thursday Theology about the state of Christianity in Japan comes to us from two sources:

1. [Richard Leigh](#) lives and works here in St. Louis and is a student at LST (Lutheran School of Theology). He is part of a discussion forum list on the proposition “That They May Be One,” moderated by Charles Miller, who wrote a book by that name and posted it on the Internet. The Japanese

Presbyterian organization's prayer chain posts (one of which is below) began appearing on the list. He became concerned with their struggles and sent this piece on to us so that we might also be aware of some of the changes taking place in Japan.

2. [Robert G. "Bob" Stieber](#) is an ordained minister of the United Church of Christ (USA) and long time friend of the Schroeders who has served in Japan with the Nihon Kirisuto Kyodan (United Church of Christ in Japan) since 1971. He is currently jointly assigned to that denomination's Buraku Liberation Center by the United Church of Christ and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). The Buraku Liberation Center leads the Kyodan's efforts to eliminate discrimination against the //buraku//, a Japanese minority group of some 3 million persons, from the church and the society.

Dear Prayer Partners,

Finally Japanese Diet is about to decide Flag-Anthem legislation today. The government was greatly encouraged by this success, and aiming next major step towards the revival of pre-war nationalism: Yasukuni Shrine nationalization.

1. Yasukuni Shrine Nationalization: Revival of State religion
On August 7th, Cabinet speaker Nonaka said very dangerous statement about YASUKUNI shrine, which was the shrine of Japanese national shintoism during WW2. They desire to realize the "official worship of the Prime Minister" and eventually the emperor himself at Yasukuni shrine. This will be a major step to make the national shintoism as the state religion of Japan. To avoid the criticism, the government this time trying to make the shrine as special institution owned by the government, and to claim to treat

this institution not as the religion but the place to honor and console the spirit of the war-dead for the nation by worshipping.

This time, according to Nonaka, the government pretends that this is "Yasukuni(=pacify the nation) cemetery" and just as the national cemetery of any other nation. The government expect any national guest to pay honor at this "Yasukuni cemetery" in future, to give the strength to the legitimacy of new national shintoism.

Worshipping the dead is quite common in Japan except among Christians, so the government sees it as possible to make as a national religion.

There were several attempts to nationalize the Yasukuni shrine in the past, but had been defeated repeatedly because of the voice of cautions against violation of the Constitutional freedom of faith which prohibits to give special status to any specific(especially national shintoistic) religion.

The Yasukuni shrine people themselves do not want to become non-religious super-religion. But the political parties try to use this shrine as the symbol of revival of the Japanese nationalism.

Yasukuni has been the key to Japanese Nationalism and Emperorism. Because the Japanese Government taught every soldier before WW2 to die for the Emperor, and those dead warriors would be worshipped at Yasukuni. That was the real source of religious power of Japanese soldiers. The soldiers actually believed that they would meet together at the Yasukuni shrine as gods who pacify the world under the sovereignty of the Japanese emperor god. Yasukuni worship as the place for worshipping war dead for the emperor was the practical center of the emperor worship.

2. The Compulsive Requirement of Hinomaru Kimigayo rite: August 2, During the committee meeting in the upper house, Shigenori Yano, in charge of assist Education Bureau in the Ministry of Education, answered, " The teacher, who doesn't obey the order of job (in this case, to refuse to sing Anthem or bow before the flag) as the public servant, must be punished under the local order. And the article 19th of the Constitution (freedom of conscience) does not excuse them." What he said was, the government has authority to rule every teacher and their order is higher than the human right. The ministry of education now officially denies the freedom of conscience. Asahi Newspaper, the leading newsmedia in Japan, reports that the government claims no compulsive requirement of flag and anthem, but through the discussion at the Diet the government has always reserved the requirement of the rite to the teachers. It sounds like no Christian teacher can continue their work without compromising in near future of Japanese public school system.

Also the ministry answered that the teachers will discipline the student when they do not stand for singing Kimigayo or not listening obediently the teachers' instructions, though they may not be punished for singing it. The ministry said that the teacher does not grade the student according to the participation in the rite so far.

3. We will continue to oppose the rite of Hinomaru and Kimigayo because:

1. To praise and bow before the emperor as national Shintoism demanded before WW2 will destroys the nation. We do not participate the idol worship to the nation or the emperor. We seek Japan as the nation of freedom under Christ the true king rather the nation of the emperor.

2. The government forcing schools to participate in the rite of nationalism endangers the freedom of conscience of teachers, students, and parents. We claim the freedom to obey Christ in every sphere of life of Japan.
3. There is no clear repentance to the invasion during the WW2 by the government. The flag and anthem were cruel symbols for the millions in other Asian nations. We claim our repentance to the past cruelty as the nation: the sins of murder, stealing, rape etc.

We claim the right of education of our children is not of the nation, but of each citizen of the nation as the parents. We refuse the nationalistic education imposed by the government through the public school system. We reserve our right to teach our children to refuse such evil enforcement with courage. We make the effort of guarding the freedom of conscience to refuse Hinomaru Kimigayo at the grass root level of each Japanese city and town, even if the legislation passes.

Sincerely in His service,
Shigeru Takiura
Freedom Prayer Chain
Reformed Presbyterian Church Japan Presbytery
Pastor, Okamoto Covenant RPC

Let me make my response with some background material. The current government is a coalition led by the "Liberal Democratic Party." It has been able to get good support from two other parties, both of which have similar conservative (they say "centrist") agendas. One of those parties, "Komeito," is deeply linked to the new-religion "Sokka Gakkai." It is no secret that

the group's leadership would like to be in a position to run Japan. In order for the LDP to get its programs through the Diet, it has enlisted the aid of the Komeito.

This gives the Komeito a lot of clout, which is a cause for concern. The following series of recent legislation, passed because of the existence of the coalition, indicates the trend which produces this concern.

1. Passage of "New Guidelines for Mutual Defense" (not the official title): These are the rules and regulations under which Japan and the US cooperate militarily. The new revision allows Japan to commandeer non-military facilities (airports, ports, hospitals, etc.) in case of "regional emergencies," not specifically defined, and the general opinion is that Japan will turn over such facilities for US military use whenever the US asks. Already, US aircraft and ships have "visited" non-military airports/ports in what is clearly a demonstration of intended future use. The US's responsibility for pushing Japan toward re-militarization in the name of "defense cooperation" is an ongoing concern, and one which I doubt many people in the US are even aware of.
2. Establishment of Hinomaru ("Sun Flag")/Kimigayo ("May the Emperor's Reign Last a Thousand Years" song) as national flag & national anthem: The prayer request uses the term "rite" in relation to these. I think that is a bit misleading. Until now, Japan has not had a legally established flag or anthem. The reason has been strong political opposition, particularly from the Communist and Socialist parties and other small parties and independents. However, the coalition has been able to overcome that by numbers. Both the flag and the song have been used for Japan in international settings (the Olympics) etc., and within Japan for years. Thus this

legislation is, in a sense, only an affirmation of the reality which exists. However, making it official opens up all sorts of "worst scenario" possibilities. This stems from the fact that the flag is the same one which was used as the symbol of Imperial Japan. That means it was a symbol of the Emperor's rule and the Emperor's absolute authority over all the population. Many feel that Japan should take a new flag, as did Germany and Italy, as a symbol of a rejection of Japanese imperialism and repentance for what Imperial Japan did, under that flag, to other countries, particularly Asian countries. Because of the emperor-connection, many also feel that it is not a proper symbol for a democratic nation. The anthem is more clearly emperor-centered/emperor-praising, so the same applies to it, if not more so. In essence, singing it is pledging obedience to the Emperor, which is at the crux of the prayer group's appeal. Until now, it was not legally the anthem, so one could ignore it if one wanted to. While the legislation says only that the flag and anthem are the official flag and anthem, and makes no mention of enforcement, there is little doubt that both social and legal pressure will be brought to bear if the current conservative/reactionary trend continues. This will certainly be true in schools now that the claim that there is no legal basis for the flag and anthem can no longer be made.

3. Passage of legislation allowing "wiretapping" and other electronic surveillance: This was heavily opposed by the non-coalition parties because it raises the specter of pre-World War II secret police suppression of human rights and criticism of government policies, and because the legislation is so fuzzily worded. The telephone company and its union have expressed the desire not to be part of such investigations, so the police will probably be left

to themselves to listen to and record whatever they want. The legislation lacks guarantees of the rights of those who are recorded, as well.

4. Passage of legislation giving each Japanese citizen a registration number: On the surface, this is similar to the Social Security number which we use so much in the US for identification. However, it is to be used for the Residence Register (not Family Register) which each citizen has in her/his place of residence. This will allow anyone to get a register copy at any city office which, theoretically, is handy. However, it will also become the key to a great deal of personal information, probably including that in Family Registers. The legislation does not contain any guarantees of privacy protection to limit leaking of such information.

Aside from these, there was talk of passing legislation specifically aimed at the "Aum Truth" religious sect which was responsible for the Tokyo subway sarin gas attack, kidnappings and murders. The group has lost its recognition as a religious body (losing tax-free and legal status), but it is still active and gaining members. The thought that the national government would pass a law to specifically outlaw a certain religious group is frightening. If the group causes anti-social and/or criminal problems, they ought to be dealt with under existing laws as long as freedom of thought and freedom of belief are guaranteed by the constitution. Thankfully, cooler heads prevailed on this bill and it was not brought to the floor for a vote.

The Yasukuni Shrine issue is covered well in the prayer request. Since the request, there has been more discussion. Since a shrine is a religious place by definition, making it some sort of national organization does not remove its religious nature. There is a national cemetery in Tokyo which could serve the

purpose and which is non-religious, but it is not Yasukuni. It is the whole emperor-centered psychology which makes Yasukuni important and which the conservative forces want to make use of. This would most likely be accompanied by the official introduction of revisionist history pushed by the conservative groups. This includes the claim that the Nanching massacre never took place, that "comfort women" are a fiction of the imagination and that Japan's only interest in Korea and China was to free those countries from foreign domination!

I don't know that nationalization would mean instant "shintoization" of Japan. The Buddhists are strongest numerically and will fight any such move along with Christians and new-religions. However, up to the end of World War II, Yasukuni was said to be "cultural" and "non-religious" and, therefore, not in conflict with any religion. That fact was used to force worship of it by any and all in Japan and Japanese territory. Christians were forced into this, or their churches were closed down. The Hinomaru flag was displayed at the front of the church and worship began with, or was preceded by, bowing in the direction of Tokyo in honor to the emperor. No one wants to go through this again, so this is why Yasukuni, as the first gap in the dike, is such a concern.

On the constitutional revision issue, the present coalition has enough votes to push a revision bill through the diet. It would then have to be ratified by the general public. Since more than half the population has little or no memory of World War II, and since Japan has been in peace since then, the number of people who feel real concern over ending the "peace constitution" decreases daily. The government points to foreign (read US) criticism about Japan's not taking responsibility in "peace keeping" (read Kuwait, Bosnia, etc.) and suggests Japan needs to re-militarize to be a responsible world power. (Does anyone in the US remember militarized Japan and why it now has a "peace

constitution?”) Whether a revision would pass, though, is a real question.

To sum up, I think the prayer request is a reasonable, if perhaps a bit heated, analysis of the possibilities for a worst case scenario. We are all praying that it won't go that far!

Book Review – “Power in the Blood? The Cross in the African-American Experience”

“Power in the Blood? The Cross in the African-American Experience” by JoAnne Marie Terrell (Orbis Books, 1998) is an exposition of the development of a womanist theologian (Terrell herself) through a historical exploration of the meaning of the Cross and the Atonement. Terrell's definition of a womanist theologian is a theologian who is a woman of color. This distinguishes the womanist from the feminist, usually represented as a white, middle to upper middle class woman, and the black theologian who was/is an African American male theologian doing theology from the perspective of the Civil Rights movement of the sixties with a strong androcentric bias.

Terrell cites two main goals of her study:

1. “to survey the works of black theologians and discuss the liberative import they found in the gospel that enabled them to remain both black and Christian”
2. “to discern theological dimensions of theodicy found in the interplay between gender and race.”

She divides the book into five parts. The first part, "The Refiner's Fire," is a comparison of African slavery and Christian martyrdom in the early centuries of the church. Terrell says that "although he [Jesus] was crucified for sedition, to his first interpreters Jesus' death involved his own agency and contributed to their development of a hermeneutic of sacrifice, which is ensconced in the Bible and Christian tradition and which has a historical corollary in an ethic of love – seen as the very heart of Christian morality – in the African American community." Terrell states that martyrdom as it was translated into a hermeneutic of sacrifice in the tradition of the church was used to justify African slavery and used by the Africans to sacralize their suffering and "situate themselves within the cosmic drama as victims-becoming-victors."

The second part, "There is a Fountain", reflects on the sources for theology about the cross in the Black Church and in womanist theology. Terrell explores how the African slaves absorbed Christianity, forced on them by slaveholders and heard in the evangelical fervor of the first and second Great Awakenings, that freed them spiritually and yet also kept them in line in the ante-bellum South. Terrell cites that as the Black Church grew and developed, the paternalism of the slaveholding church was absorbed into the Black Church so that Black women continued to be the oppressed within the oppressed.

The third part, "The Scandal of the Cross," highlights three black theologians (Martin Luther King, Albert B. Cleage Jr. and James H. Cone) who pushed for reconciliation, nationhood and liberation in Black christology. King, through his non-violent protests, helped the African American community move forward through orthodox Christian means. "The pacifism that agape bespoke was the way to confront earthly powers and to mediate the real presence of Christ sacramentally." Cleage, in a less orthodox Christian way, pursued the issue of Nationhood among

Blacks. "Cleage and other nationalists came to question also the spiritual freedom or salvation putatively found in the rhetoric and tenets of evangelical faith that undergirded King and the masses who followed him." Cone carried the theology another step beyond non-violent protests and Marxian economic power. He emphasized the somebodiness of the African American, the ontological liberation that the Christian message offers.

Part four, "Rethinking Sacrifice," focuses on three womanist theologians (Jacquelyn Grant, Kelly Brown Douglas and Delores Williams) who have begun to define womanist christology. Grant's position sets Jesus as "divine co-sufferer" who "was born, lived, struggled and died among the poor [and] was an affirmation that his ultimate victory is theirs to appropriate." Terrell portrays Brown Douglas as a liberationist who dismisses the hermeneutic of sacrifice as it was used to bind the Africans to their slave masters through its individualistic conversion emphasis. Terrell says, "in my and Douglas's liberationist perspective, the cross is not taken up apart from what the rest of the story affirms; namely, that Jesus was God incarnate, who lived, struggled and died in suffering solidarity with society's victims." The last womanist Terrell cites is Delores Williams who "matches the theme of black women's surrogacy to traditional views of the Atonement, which cite Jesus' death as a vicarious sacrifice for the sake of sinful humankind." Williams enumerates the surrogate position black women were forced into during slavery:

1. generators of a steady supply of slaves,
2. gratification of slave master's sexual desires
3. wet nurses for white babies.

She "cites the synoptic gospels as scriptural warrant for fleshing out the content of a ministerial vision, proffered in the life of Jesus, which allows black women to see that their

redemption does not depend upon any form of surrogacy but upon their participation in Jesus' vision."

The last part, "Our Mother's Gardens," looks back on other sources for reflection from black women's experience with an eye to the future of African-American women as Christians. Terrell talks about her own mother's short and tragic life as redemptive as long as she is remembered and the lessons of her life are utilized for the development of the lives of other black women. Terrell also quotes Alice Walker from "The Color Purple" and emphasizes that black women must be willing to look at their lives and the lives of their mothers and grandmothers to learn deep lessons and heal deep wounds. She says, "Building on Abelard's insight that Christ's example teaches and saves us, I believe that anyone's death has salvific significance if we learn continuously from the life that preceded it."

To begin wrestling with Terrell's perspectives and their possible impact on the church, one paragraph from Albert Cleage that she quotes is, I believe, significant: "No actual power was needed to perpetuate the Black man's enslavement. Everything that could be done to liberate the Black man had already been accomplished at Calvary two thousand years ago. The Black man needed to do nothing himself except accept his lot and be washed in the blood of the Lamb and be made white like snow (in preparation for the life to come). So, then, if you are Black you can be poverty-stricken, you can be brutalized, and you can still be saved. Your children can be discriminated against and denied a decent education, and you can still be saved. You can live in a neighborhood from which all decencies of life have been taken and you're still saved. It was this kind of primitive Christianity which Black slaves received from their White slave masters."

The theology in this paragraph points to one of the main issues

Terrell struggles with – the old debate between Anselm and Abelard. If reliance on Jesus as atoning sacrifice somehow leads to or at least allows such egregious injustice as the slave industry in the South to occur, turning to Jesus as exemplar may look like a much more humane/godly theology. If liberation on Calvary, being washed in the blood of the Lamb, saved, regardless of the circumstances, because of what Christ did for us does not eliminate racism, can even be used to justify it, why should we hold onto it?

Nonetheless, I wonder if Jesus as exemplar will offer a truly better alternative. Another quote from Delores Williams that Terrell uses is from the “Reimagining Jesus” workshop at the controversial Reimagining Conference in 1993. In response to the question “What is to be our theory of the Atonement?” Williams replied: “I don’t think we need folks hanging on crosses and blood dripping and weird stuff. I think we really need to see the sustaining, the sustenance images, the faith that we are to have. The fish and loaves, the candles we are to light, that our light will so shine before people so that we can remember that this message that Jesus brought, I think, is about life, and it’s about the only two commandments that Jesus gave; about love.”

Terrell follows this with her own version of this Abelardian perspective: “the cross, in its original sense, embodied a scandal, that something, anything, good could come out of such an event. Seen in this light, Jesus’ sacrificial act was not the objective. Rather, it was the tragic, if foreseeable, result of his confrontation with evil. This bespeaks a view of Jesus and the martyrs as empowered, sacramental, witnesses, not as victims who passively acquiesced to evil.” Jesus confronts evil, but as Terrell develops her argument, the possibility that Jesus is also confronting God’s outrage at human sinfulness is nowhere to be found.

Though Terrell does an admirable job fulfilling her first goal, surveying the work of black theologians, I don't believe she reaches her second goal, discerning theological dimensions of theodicy in the interplay between race and gender. Her implicit assumption that God could never be a problem to us, throws the whole discussion into the realm of the human to human problem without even acknowledging the possibility of a God to human problem. And if there is no God to human problem, then there is really no need for Jesus at all, whether as atoning sacrifice or exemplar. Human examples of people who work for justice and peace abound – certainly there are ones closer to home that take less cultural translation to utilize than Jesus.

As a discipline such as womanist theology is developing, people need room to explore previously unexplored territory; they need room to find their voices. This book by Terrell offers important insights into age-old problems that Christianity has had to address throughout its history. How do we respond when God's greatest gift to humanity, justification by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, is twisted to hold certain people and nations in bondage for the political, economic, and cultural advantage of another group? I know that my pastoral and theological work will continue to be informed by her efforts in this book.

However, I believe that throwing out the promise of the Gospel (through Christ God changes us, makes us new creatures) is not the answer to her questions. We need the strength and courage of having been made new in Christ to do the work of untangling the Gospel from the atrocities with which it has been intertwined so that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is indeed, Good News.

I was at the Reimagining Conference in 1993, heard Delores Williams in the "Reimagining Jesus" workshop and sat with the assembly for the opening service. We were asked to say out loud any name for God that we wanted to use. We were sitting at round

tables of ten and as women began to speak, some near me, some at the central microphone, I realized that nobody I could hear, except me, was saying Jesus. Somehow, the liberty of using taboo terms precluded using the one term that, in my opinion, had brought all of us together in the first place.

Christians will continue to explore who Jesus is and what he means for us. Though I don't agree with Terrell's conclusions, I appreciate having been asked along on part of her journey.

Robin Morgan

A Book Review GRACE AT THE TABLE. ENDING HUNGER IN GOD'S WORLD

Ed and Marie have island-hopped from Bali to central Java for this week, following up on invitations from the president of the Asian Christian Artists Association in Yogyakarta, Judo Poerwowidagdo, and from Nancy Johnson and Steven Haggmark, ELCA exchange professors at the Christian University in Salatiga. He sent me this before they left.

**A Book Review –
GRACE AT THE TABLE. ENDING HUNGER IN GOD'S WORLD.**

**By David Beckmann & Arthur Simon,
New York/Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press. 1999,
iv, 210 pp., paper. \$10.95.**

It's always an honor to review books written by friends – especially dear friends, as both authors are.

Art Simon, grounding father of Bread for the World [hereafter BFW] in 1974, was my St. Louis seminary classmate in the early fifties. He recruited me along with other seminarians way back then to go across the Mississippi into Illinois and campaign for his older brother Paul in his first (and successful) attempt to get elected to the Illinois legislature. And as far as Paul Simon goes, the rest is history. For Art, we could say that BFW is his history. During his years of inner-city pastoring on the Lower East Side of New York, the hunger and poverty in that parish context finally nudged him to gather Christians into an ecumenical citizens' movement against hunger. Under his leadership BFW drew 44 thousand members into its cause.

David Beckmann is also a dear friend beginning back in his student days at Seminex in the seventies. Most recently he crashed with us for the Seminex 25th anniversary reunion earlier this summer. His parting gift was this copy of this book—just off the press—celebrating BFW's 25 years as a Christian political lobby and re-wording its message vis-a-vis world realities today. David took over the helm at BFW in 1991 after working for years with the World Bank on projects around the globe that mirror much of BFW's own reason for existence.

First a word about the winsome format of Art & Dave's production. It's an easy read—even though the data (and they know a lot and show us a lot) are sometimes grim, very grim. E.g., how few seconds have to tick away before another child dies of starvation in our world.

Art Simon and David Beckmann speak with authority. Are there any two people alive today more “in the know” about the hunger/poverty complex in the USA and in the world? I doubt it. Art and Dave are pros, experts, super experts. They’ve been on these ramparts for decades. They know the territory. And they have a way with words, nickel words, to bring us along into the territory. The layout is a catechetical (stolen from Luther?) question and answer format with stories that give the statistics a human face. All told there are 29 major questions grouped under 8 chapter headings. Those 8 are:

- *Hunger in God’s World,*
- *Ending Hunger,*
- *The Overloaded Earth,*
- *A Jobs-Based*
- *Strategy,*
- *Gender and Race,*
- *The Economics of Hunger,*
- *The Politics of Hunger,*
- *Taking Action.*

I read the book here in Indonesia during my 3-month stint as English-language pastor for an international (five continents present on most Sundays) congregation on the island of Bali. Our world here is case-study material for everything the authors are saying—the global economy, democracy and human rights, tourism, too many people, women bearing the brunt, guns and bread, capitalism’s soft underbelly, racism, trade and international investment—to tick off just 10 of the book’s sub-sections. But you don’t need the thunderous echo we hear here to get the message. Dave and Art’s case for Ending Hunger in God’s World is perfectly clear and powerfully compelling. If we hadn’t already been BFW members, we’d have signed up long before we got to the book’s last page.

So stepping out of the reviewer's role for a moment and donning the BFW member's hat, I say: If you are not (yet) conscientized, and/or not one of the 44,000 BFW members, there still is time. The book's title, *Grace at the Table*, is, of course, a pun. To say "grace" at table, as we Christians are wont to do, is to commit ourselves to getting the hungry to a place at the table, for God's grace at the table.

Our family has been BFW members from its beginning. So we're BFW junkies, fans of the movement, fans of David and Art. And yet, and yet . . . the book's theology could be better. Do the realities of a Christian ecumenical movement mandate generic theological foundations that your constituency—all 44,000 of them—will salute? Is that really true? I think not, and thus my disappointment that the authors didn't harvest more of their own evangelical catholic—aka Lutheran—heritage for the BFW cause.

Well, what are the theological foundations for *Grace at the Table*? Chapter 2 "What God Intends" spells them out. They are fundamentally Biblical (no surprise from these two authors) and formulated thus:

"Two main themes run through the Bible concerning hunger. The first is God's providence. The second is our responsibility to take care of the earth and one another. Both themes reflect the will of God that everyone be adequately fed. . . . that all people find a place at the table." Biblical texts, largely from the OT prophets, supplemented with NT corollaries, are the building blocks. The pitch is to ethics, to sanctification: "God wants us to feed the hungry, care for the poor, alleviate the plight of the suffering. So get out and do so."

The logic for persuasion is clear: Since Christians of all persuasions are people committed to God's cause, who take the Bible seriously as God's word, who value the mind of Christ,

therefore we must help the hungry find a place at the table.

Well, isn't that pretty good for specifying theological foundations when Christians address hunger? Not bad as far as it goes, I'd say, but not as good as it could be. The betterment I'd propose links to the fancy word "hermeneutics." The hermeneutical task says: It's not enough simply to make your case from the Bible. The point is HOW you use the Bible, in this case how David and Art use the Bible.

Since they know me, they'll expect me to draw on our common theological heritage. To wit, something Lutheran. And I can almost hear them asking:

"But would your proposed betterment, Ed—more patently [blatantly?] Lutheran, as we expect it to be—would that make our cause less ecumenical, less widespread in its appeal, and thus less useful for promoting the BFW movement across the Christian spectrum?"

Granted, it may, and that is a risk. But you'll never really know until you've tried. And the original Lutheran reformers, as Dave and Art both acknowledge, weren't making a 'Lutheran' pitch at all in the Reformation era. Their claim was that the Biblical theology they were confessing was "core catholic" all the way back to the age of the apostles. They also had the chutzpah to say that their Biblical hermeneutics had a similar pedigree. But more on that below.

Suppose David and Art had been more explicit about their Reformation theology. Then their chapter WHAT GOD INTENDS might begin like this: "Two main themes run through the Bible concerning hunger. One is God's law, the other God's promise. Both words of God urge us to 'end hunger in God's world.'" Examined more closely they constitute God's double strategy for

reaching that goal.

“But these two strategies [themes that run through the Bible] are different. One “makes sense” to all humankind, speaks winsomely to the whole human race, even to folks who have never heard of the Bible or what’s in it, nor of Jesus either. That’s God’s law. In the Bible its building blocks are equity, fairness, common sense, even enlightened self-interest. Its appeal speaks to our whole human race. You can build coalitions across religious boundaries with its resources.

“The second theme, God’s promise, is compelling for those who have bumped into the Christian story, the Christ story. Such people have a second impetus besides God’s law for “ending hunger in God’s world.” God’s second theme does not supplant the first, but supports it, heightens it, offers new resources for sticking to the original agenda. But it also expands that agenda. When pursued to its end God’s promise opens new vistas on new creations, new economics, new politics with, yes, new commandments for ending hunger in God’s world. The New Testament is not called “new” for nothing. There’s novelty aplenty. And the prospects are upbeat.”

I’ll stop here. Long time readers of these postings, many of you also hooked on law/promise hermeneutics, can yourselves add the paragraphs that might follow. If you need help—as one previewer of this review asked for—we could all try something collaborative for a future edition of ThTh. But would such “law and promise” thematizing be ecumenical—ecumenical enough? There’s one way to find out. Here’s one possible scenario: If Art and David’s book gets to a second edition (I hope so) I’d also hope some law/promise thematics could get into chapter two. It is not alien to them, I know. Art & I learned it as sem students from Caemmerer, Pelikan and Piepkorn. In David’s case we taught it to him at Seminex—and he aced the course. So I’m

optimistic. The prospects are upbeat.

Edward H. Schroeder

August 28, 1999

Denpasar, Bali, Indonesia

Tim's questions (and Ed's responses) about Christianity in Bali

Colleagues,

Once before a thoughtful response from nephew Tim Hoyer, ELCA pastor, to these Thursday postings generated another edition of ThTh. Well, its happened again. Read on.

Cheers!

Ed

Tim,

Two postings I have from you, each with enuf questions to exhaust the small handful of answers I have lying around the Bali parsonage these days.

1. You ask: "What is the style of preaching you have heard there?" The answer is that, like you, I'm booked every Sunday, and thus I only hear my own. I do yet want to get to Indonesian language liturgies, but I won't really know what's going on. My (almost) total experience of church

life here is with my English-language crowd where a very un-Balinese American-style fundamentalism shapes the spirituality. How that got to be their ethos is something I'm trying to find out. I got some help at a recent clergy seminar on "Living Together in [Indonesias] Pluralist Society." One speaker pointed to "colonial theology," as the source, namely the Northern European pietism that came with the missionaries, and is still regnant in Indonesia. That makes sense to me. Whether its the whole ball of wax, though, I wonder.

2. You ask whether your wife's experience when she was in Nepal is corroborated here, namely, that the Gospel of "a grace-filled Christ connexion to a God of mercy, [is] something so good that it is hard to believe as true." From what we're learning, its true here too. Hinduism is not a user-friendly religion/way of life. Besides the zillion (seems to us) required sacrifices day in and day out, the ugly terror in the masks of the deities who populate the Balinese dance dramas we view are hardly winsome. And if the mask isn't enough, what these deities do to the human participants on stage is dread-full. The gods are never satisfied. They don't play fair. You really cannot win. "Balance" between the bad ones and the good ones is the most to be hoped for. Evil never gets conquered, so you go for balance—manipulated as best you can in your favor with appropriate ritual actions. Harmony (between the good and evil powers) is another English word we frequently hear from Hindus, but it's not harmony as in music. Sounds to us like this harmony is "balanced" music. Namely, generating enough good noise to restrain, cover over, the bad noise so that you are not destroyed by its deadly decibels.

One of the churchs "drivers" while taking us to a meeting, told us that hearing about a Jesus who loves "bad people"

was what prompted him to switch. To my impious add-on, "bad people like you?" he just laughed. As I've mentioned in other missives, Christ's plain power to counter the destroying demons is a constant comment in Christians' confessions.

3. To my musings about the rituals on Wall Street, you gently protested: "It is not as if we have rituals to the gods before we trade and sell our stock." Well, I wonder. Are you sure? What all was going on when that day-trader back in our homeland (ritually?) sacrificed the "oppressors" in his stock game plan? Im not in-the-know about the technical specs of ritual. Liturgical types would know more. But Wall Street surely abounds in salvation lingo, doesnt it? So can ritual be far behind? Savings and losses. Gaining or getting wiped out. Earnings. Making a killing. And what kind of animals "really" are that bull and that bear that mark the markets yin and yang, its upside and downside? Is the growing wave of Lone Ranger murders becoming a grass-roots ritual for our countrys "Hinduism," sacrifices to silence the Evil Spirits that people sense are killing them? It is a grisly kind of balance, of course, some counter "noise" these Lone Rangers choose "to silence the deadly decibels breaking my eardrums, breaking my heart?" OK, that's to your email of July 30. Now to the one from Aug. 2 with its eleven (11!) question marks. I'll tackle a couple of them.
4. When I tried to do some Christian crossings to the first cremation we witnessed, I focused on two items: immortality of the soul and immutability of karmas law that you get what you deserve. Thereupon you say: "Wait a minute. Doesnt the Gospel too, and not just God's law, says no to immortality of the soul?" Of course, it does. My point was to simplify matters by assigning the "NO"

word to the law—lex semper accusat and all that—to signal that human souls are not death-proof (immune to God's critique) any more than any other segment of a sinner is. Then for balance (oops!) I assigned the "YES" word—Yes, karma can be broken—to the Gospel. Doesn't Paul say somewhere that Christ is God's big Yes to us? Well, then. I wasn't anticipating such analytical readers as you are.

5. Your final set of questions addresses whether Christ's power over the demons and disease points to a D-2 remedy, but doesn't go all the way to the D-3 turf to remedy "our problem with God?" I've thought about that too. When is D-3 a genuine "God-problem?" Seems to me that if the focus is on a sinner's "faith" in the demons, even the terrified faith called fear, then that locates the matter in the human heart, D-2 turf. Whatever we "fear, love, and trust," is what we "hang our hearts on," someone famous once said. So FEAR of the demons is a "hang your heart" reality. All that's the language of D-2. But then again, if the focus is on our demons actually owning us, possessing us as in the recent Gospel pericope of the Canaanite woman's daughter, that sounds like D-3 stuff, doesn't it? Namely, that dear daughter's disconnection from her Creator-owner, and already harvesting the consequences. Is that "hell," or isn't it? And if so, isn't that a D-3 dilemma both for this Canaanite daughter and her mother too?
6. 'Course, the D-2 and D-3 data are difficult to filter out cleanly from the telescoped text of the pericope, since this feisty mother comes on so strong as the gutsiest genuine disciple Christ ever had, and that right from her opening words. She makes a pitch for "mercy," to the "Son of David" [who implements God's Davidic mercy covenant—see 2 Samuel 7—not the Mosaic "other" one] and claims this one as her own "Lord" (=my owner). She's coming out of D-3, but

by the time we meet her, she acts and speaks as though her D-3 is already a “Yes, but...” The God-problem me thinks is not just “Now, let’s get to D-3 where we have to confront God,” but to ask in this text: Is this woman God-abandoned? Does the text point that direction? When she accepts the “dog” designation, isn’t she “same-saying” a D-3 diagnosis? Of course. But at the very moment of her same-saying this diagnosis comes her faiths feisty “But...” “Yes, the diagnosis is all true, but nevertheless I trust that you, Master [‘kyrios,’ same term she used in her opening statement] supply crumbs for just such dogs. So feed me. Are you Davids Son or arent you?”

I’ll stop here. Now that I think about it, Tim, your feisty questions—deep too—hint that this hero of the faith might just be somewhere back there in your own family tree. Im glad I married into your clan.

Peace & Joy!

Uncle Ed

Ketut Lasia—Balinese Christian, Balinese artist

Colleagues,

Christians are 1% of the population of Bali. That’s 30K of 3 million. In that “little flock” we’ve come to know two artists, Ketut Lasia and Nyoman Darsane. These superb craftsmen do their daily work “crossing” Balinese painting and sculpture with the Christian Gospel. One of Lasia’s bas reliefs welcomes

worshippers at “our” church here in Legian. Both have already exhibited in Europe. Friends of ours in Germany know their work. Marie and I have seen their names and photos of their work in IMAGE magazine, the journal of the Asian Christian Artists Association. But they are unknown—as far as we know—in the USA. That’s quite likely also true for many of you elsewhere on the planet who receive this posting. So here’s an introduction—and a pitch!

The INTRODUCTION is Ketut Lasia’s own life story below. The text is my translation from a German book about his work, “Christus auf Bali” [Christ on Bali] expanded a bit from conversations with him in his home here. He’s seen our version and approves.

Now the PITCH. Colleagues of ours in the English-language congregations here are offering Christmas cards featuring the art of Lasia along with two other Bali artists. We’ve seen color proofs and they are stunning. There are four designs:

1. The Flight to Egypt and
2. a Nativity by Lasia himself,
3. the Holy Family in the midst of young children by Ketut’s son Wahyu Lasia, and
4. the Visit of the Wise Men by Josef Darsane, son of Nyoman Darsane mentioned above.

The price is US\$5 for 12 cards—3 each of the 4 designs—with envelopes. Logistics and additional costs for getting them from here to wherever you are still have to be worked out. Should you wish to order some, you can do so, using this email address: <104570.1455@compuserve.com> Start your message: “Hi, Renske” She’s the contact for international distribution. Tell her we spilled the beans.

Now to Ketut Lasia’s story—

“My name is Ketut Lasia. I was born on March 3, 1945 as the

youngest son in a Hindu family in Peliatan, close to Ubud, the village of artists on the island of Bali in Indonesia.

“My parents were no painters. They were simple rice-farmers. Their life’s work consisted in growing rice, the daily food needed for us children. In my childhood I went to primary school, but no further. My parents were too poor to provide for any further education for me and my siblings. As a child I often went to the painters in our village. I watched them for hours and was amazed at the way they could take the images and pictures in their minds and turn them into paintings. I wanted to be a painter too.

“After finishing primary school – I was 12 years old – I worked with my parents on the family farm. I was not happy as a farmer, and I tried to enter other fields, including the police force. But none of my attempts worked out. At age 18 I left the family and moved to the home of a painter in our village. His name was Wayan Turun. I stayed with this master for about 5 years and learned from him how to do Balinese paintings.

“Wayan had many friends who were Christians. When he was together with them, I often sat in the corner doing my painting, and so listened [eavesdropped] as they spoke about the Bible. But I was still too young, understood hardly anything of their conversations, and didn’t join in. Not until later, when I myself had become a Christian, did I grasp that the Christians wanted to convert my teacher.

“When Wayan Turun graduated me from my apprenticeship with him I began to work on my own. Over and over again religious questions kept bothering me. I wrestled with what I had heard from the Christians. I was uncertain and felt that I needed solid ground in my life, some sort of affirmation.

“But, of course, I was a Hindu. In my religion that did not

exist. There was no faith in any rescue or healing for humankind in Hinduism. In my religion the law of Karma ruled. Karma is the belief that every human action produces its own fruits –and there are no exceptions. Grace, mercy, forgiveness were unknown.

“After two or three years – I don’t remember any more exactly – I met a Dutch pastor. His name was Visch and he bought one of my paintings. One day I decided to visit him in Denpasar (25 miles away) to talk with him about my questions and problems. After our conversation he gave me a small pamphlet that had a picture of the “lost son” (Luke 15:11-32) [known in English piety as the ‘prodigal’ son]. Many times I looked at it and discovered that for Christians there is always hope for forgiveness. Although all of us are sinners, we are forgiven. We are not judged according to our actions, when we confess our sins and repent.

“When I comprehended that, I heard for the first time God’s call to me. That was in 1967. I began to get serious about the Christian faith and went to visit Pastor Visch again. In this encounter he gave me a Bible in Indonesian language. He told me to come to him any time if, while I was reading the Bible, something came up that I didn’t understand.

“Of course, there were Biblical stories that gave me trouble. I remember, for example, that the report of Jesus washing his disciples’ feet (John 13) was incomprehensible to me. I saw that as humiliation and couldn’t imagine such a renowned master teacher as Jesus doing such lowly service. In Hinduism such an action is unthinkable. But with time I was able to see that Jesus is giving his disciples an example here. I was able to apply this story to myself and sensed a growing wish that I wanted to follow Jesus.

“Thus one day I went to a Balinese pastor to take catechism instruction. That brought me a lot of trouble. My family and the

village neighbors didn't understand that I wanted to become a Christian. They began to hate me and to exclude me. Before long I was completely isolated. Nevertheless I didn't let their reaction frighten me and I held fast to my intention. I wanted to press on to the truth. Marvelous to me was the fact that I was unable to get angry with these neighbors. I continued to love them, although they despised me. In 1968 I asked for baptism.

"My friends could not understand. They wanted me to join in their gambling games, but I told them as a Christian I was not allowed to gamble. Nor could I join them in the Hindu village temple celebrations.

"Thereafter I asked myself what I as a painter might do to honor God and to proclaim the Gospel. For pastors or teachers that seemed simple: they could preach or tell of the life of Jesus, but what could I as a painter do? I really didn't know how I could place my gift into God's service.

"But then I remembered a word in the Bible. There we hear that all of us have different gifts, and all can be used to honor God's name. That means for me as a painter that I could try to paint Biblical stories, in the same way that I had previously painted Balinese scenes. As I started doing that I discovered how exciting that was. Every day I read something in the Bible, learned the report by heart and then painted individual scenes exactly as I imagined them happening. I transferred Biblical events into the Balinese context, as though Jesus had lived and taught here. The people acting in the Biblical stories I painted as Balinese men and women in the typical Balinese environment. While doing so I retained the Balinese 'ornamental' style of painting that is so normal and natural to the people here. In this way painting became my means for telling of Jesus and proclaiming the Good News.

"This did not all happen without consequences—painful consequences—within my family, within my village. Though my mother loved me to the end, when my father died he was still angry and rejecting. In the face of such opposition I had to leave my village and move to the city. I continue to visit the village, though, and am always friendly even if they reject me. We are told as Christians to love everybody.

"I owned a house in the village but could not sell it. My brother put up a wall around it so that I could not use it. After a while he said, Why don't you just give the house to me? So I did.

"As a Christian painter it is difficult to earn enough money to send my children to school. The Christian church in Bali is very small. Nevertheless, I want to continue painting Biblical stories and serve God in this way. Now with my heart condition I cannot work as long and as hard as I used to. But God will help me, and I trust God to see us through all our difficulties."