

Why Jesus?

Colleagues.

After this 2-paragraph personal prolegomena, the real theology follows.

[Journal entry for Aug. 12, 1999]

Yesterday's solar eclipse is followed (so tells us BBC's "World Service") by today's 50th anniv. of the Geneva Conventions for conducting decent wars. I wonder about a connection. To wit, the eclipse (even total?) of what glowed in Geneva a half century ago. But then did those conventions even during that time ever really restrain anybody? They sure didn't earlier this year in the NATO-Milosovic war, being ignored by both sides of that on-going Apocalypse Now. No evidence of their impact either here in Indonesia. We've got three ethno-religious local mini-wars reported on daily in the Indonesian Observer – Aceh, E.Timor and Ambon. BBC and CNN also expand on the world's war coverage we get, with their "show and tell" daily of more of the same in several African countries. And that doesn't yet get to the Lone Ranger one-man wars we hear about in our own native land.

The alleged "last total solar eclipse of the millennium" betokens other eclipses, not only the Geneva Convention. That's probably just the tip of the iceberg. Current Asian and African history signals the eclipse [total?] of global significance for many "important" things that come from the West.

Years ago Maynard Dorow and I were taking Won Sang Ji, president of the Korean Lutheran Church, to the airport in St. Louis. He told us to expect that the 21st century would be the Century of Asia. I think he's right. But that's not necessarily Good News. Just as the European millennium we're still in has been a very mixed bag.]

Main Topic

Conversation with the Managing Editor of ORBIS Books.

Currents in Theology and Mission, "our" Seminex journal from ancient days, is still going strong after a quarter century under the editorship of Ralph Klein. In the June 1999 issue Ralph printed my article: "Pluralism's Question to Christian Missions: Why Jesus at All?" Some folks in the American Society of Missiology [ASM] suggested that there was a book hiding in that essay. They urged me to send it to Bill Burrows, managing editor of Orbis Books, a friend I also know from ASM connections. That I did just before we left St. Louis end of June. Last month Bill replied with a detailed analysis and his critique and counsel. I don't have his permission to pass on his letter, but I think you can hear what he was telling me from my e-mail back to him. See what you think.

Peace & Joy!

Ed Schroeder

August 4, 1999

Dear Bill,

Your air mail letter of 29 June re: my Why Jesus? article (and a possible book therefrom) did get here to Bali. For which much thanks. On that letterhead's bottom line was your email address. So this response should make it across the Pacific and across the USA faster.

I can see why you carry the title you do at Orbis—and why it is deserved. Very probing, your analysis. Makes me think. Especially when you say: "found myself resonating but then detecting a flat note." Great metaphor, that flat note. But.... I'm still going to try to make a case for what sounds like a

flat note to you, and wonder out loud if it's your ear or my note that needs help. Since I don't have your ear here to examine, I'll go to the note, and its alleged flatness.

If I read you right, that flat note you divine is the (ugh!) extrinsicality in my proposed answer to the Why Jesus question. Your words: "Repairing R-3 [= Crossings language for primal relationship #3, our root relationship with God] in your proposal still comes out seeming to be extrinsic justification by imputation." "Does not make sense to the person with no sense of the relationship with God. . . [so it] sounds like the old news you speak of in the earlier part of the article." "Does not get existential and reveal to persons that the salvation offered in Jesus offers them the deepest salvation to issues they feel intrinsically." "I fear that ...you're... polishing off Lutheran doctrine without completely meeting the modern neo-pagan, New Ager, or would-be Buddhist, Hindu, or Muslim where they're at."

I get the message. Yet you do encourage: "If you can find a way...we would love to publish the book." You allow as how you're "not sure anyone can do it," but still for us "to do better than classic 'transaction' christologies and soteriologies – Catholic and Lutheran – have done."

Well, that's a challenge. So here goes:

1. (Background) We got kicked out of the Missouri Synod 25 years ago (Semtex and all that) because we were challenging the "transaction, extrinsic" salvation theology that had become the trademark of Missouri's brand of 17th century ff. Lutheran orthodoxy, and proposing an alternative. The media at that time—both secular and even (sadly) churchly – reported it out as a hassle about verbal inspiration and the historical critical method. Not so. It was not the exegetes that created the "theology of

Seminex," although they were in the limelight for catching the flak. It was usn's in Systematic Theology who were re-writing Missouri's substantive tradition—and doing it with something akin to you RC's rediscovery of what was Good and New about the 16th century reformation. And our re-write did not sound like Good News to the powers that be. Au contraire "the people [in the desert, a la last Sunday's Gospel, hungry and thirsty] heard us gladly." So in that Why Jesus? article I'm trying to speak to the missiological crowd (or whomever) to see if this is Good News in wider circles. Even so, I may not have done it [yet] in this article, but my conscious intent is precisely the "existential and intrinsic" interface you (and I too) are calling for.

2. How extrinsic is relational reality? Don't we all acknowledge – you too, I betcha – that in [Ich und Du] relationships (R-1, R-2, R-3 in my article's paradigm) an "extrinsic" change in one of the relational partners [I used to love you, but I don't anymore. Or I used to hate you but I've changed.] makes all the difference in the world—intrinsic, existential—for the other partner. Since relational reality is such yoked reality, that sort of extrinsic change becomes very internal to my person when it gets tossed in my direction by the other.
3. Two NT metaphors (mostly in Paul, I s'pose) for salvation are adoption of an orphan and manumission of a slave. In both cases the action is totally extrinsic to the adoptee and the liberated slave – legal episodes in both cases before some magistrate – with the beneficiary saying/doing nothing, and possibly even unaware of the legal action. But in both cases the person's life is changed exponentially. So how extrinsic is such extrinsicality really? For the receiver it's totally existential. It changes her life. Getting hired, getting fired, getting

arrested, getting out of jail free—are all extrinsic. They too are mostly done with words from an other one.

4. The “modern neo-pagan, New Ager, or would-be Buddhist, Hindu, or Muslim where they’re at” whom you posit as the test cases which my proposal has to meet, are also people who live by words, Big Words that they’ve heard from someone somewhere. Either words of affirmation or condemnation. E.g., last week’s day-trader back in Atlanta we heard about over here. What extrinsic words – just from his computer screen – were pounding into his ears? So what’s the “flat note” about telling today’s post-moderns the Gospel’s meta-narrative? Humans live by words. If it’s not the “word that proceeds from the mouth of God,” it’ll be other words. The Hindu-Buddhist-animist-ancestral glue in Bali today is rooted in words that interpret people’s daily life. Balinese Christians tell us that the Jesus story gave them different words for making sense of their experience. Words that were indeed Good, and indeed brand New.
5. Granted re-wording that Good News for the sated and “been there, done that, heard it before” folks in our European culture should come afresh in a winsome way, etc. But isn’t the competition that the Gospel faces at root “other words, other Gospels” inundating us all in this communications explosion era? The plethora of today’s other kerygmas are finally extrinsic words that their purveyors urge us to believe, to interiorize and then live our lives accordingly.
6. Apropos post-modern, I think it could be readily documented that most folks (outside of the academy for sure—and maybe even within it) are as much pre-Enlightenment as they are supposedly post-modern. I’m in a pre-pre-pre-Enlightenment world here in Bali. The very folks, the locals, who cater to the mobs of tourists

during the day and who can think and act western in their computer-driven daily work, don their liturgical finery, build their offering baskets, hoist them on heads and parade with them to the “ceremonies” at the village temples at dusk. E.g., on our way home from a bit of touristica today, we were stopped cold in our minivan right after sunset twice (once for half an hour) by such community-wide processions that simply took over the streets. “Let the tourists trying to get to their hotel dinner appts be damned. The spirits of the mountains, of the sea, of the rice fields need attention, and our relationship with them is numero uno priority.” It’s bizarre and blatant here, and still jolts me after 5 weeks. But is the Wall Street ritual much different? Or those test case persons you are conjuring? But I digress.

7. “We need to do better than classic ‘transaction’ (a Wall Street term, right?) christologies & soteriologies,” you say. I’m making a plug for better “transactionism” in my pitch, not for pitching transaction (surely an “in” word today) theology. Humans live relationally. Relationships are nothing, if they are not transactional. Ergo, better transactional theology and proclamation therefrom.
8. Thems my sentiments. If you insist on “Being from Missouri,” (which I technically am) then I guess “you’ve got to be showed.” This is my first overture in that direction.

Pax et Gaudium!

Ed

Remembering Mr. Makoto Mizuno

Colleagues,

Background –

In the run up to Seminex's 25th anniversary gathering (St. Louis, June 1999) we learned of the death of Makoto Mizuno, director of another seminary in exile, this one in Japan.

These folks called themselves "Aoyama Seminex" to signal their linkage with us after they were deposed from Aoyama Gakuin, a university of the Methodist Church, in Tokyo. We St. Louisians first heard about them in the 1980s, and shortly thereafter a contingent of St. Louis Seminexers, ten in all, made a pilgrimage to their Seminex in Tokyo. We were hosted by Makoto, his wife and the Aoyama exilic community of teachers and students. None of us will ever forget those encounters. As you read what follows, you'll see why.

Makoto died in the last days of 1997, but that news didn't get to St. Louis until early in 1999. In our worship at Seminex XXV we remembered Makoto along with others from our own Seminex community who are now R.I.P. For that remembering Makoto's wife, Mrs. Kiyoko Mizuno, and his life-long co-confessor, Hiroo Sekita, sent us the two items appended below.

Peace & Joy!

Ed Schroeder

"Blessed Last Days, Indeed."

Recorded by Kiyoko Mizuno.

Since my husband Makoto's fatal disease had been found, two and a half months have passed already. As his disease made an unbelievably rapid progress and time seemed to pass so fast, our family could not come up with the things that occurred one after another. Now, let me tell you the whole process of his disease tracing back in memory.

On October 6th, Makoto complained of a slight stomach pain. He went to a hospital to take a stomach-checkup. The doctor prescribed stomach pills for five days for him. He took them as prescribed, but still the pain didn't settle down. So again he went to the hospital and this time he had his stomach examined in CAT scanner. And the focus was found out. The result of the CAT examination showed that it was too tough to treat. Cancer had grown on his stomach and had already spread to the liver and the lungs as well. Makoto told me that he had asked his doctor to tell him the truth. He said, "My brother died of a progressive cancer ten years ago. And I am not afraid to know the truth. So please inform me of every fact as it is." The doctor's answer was that if his cancer had been only in the stomach, they could have extracted it on operation. But since it had spread to the other parts, he had better go to the cancer specialists.

On October 30th we went to our hospital to see his latest X-ray photograph. We had undergone an annual medical checkup for nearly ten years. And the latest X-ray photo that had been taken six months ago showed nothing wrong with his stomach. This fact proved that during these six months Makoto's cancer had grown and spread at an exceptional speed.

On October 31st Makoto visited National Cancer Center Hospital with a letter of introduction. Judging from his past data, the hospital diagnosed his disease as progressive stomach cancer,

the metastasis of multiple liver cancer and the spread of lung cancer. And Makoto was informed that even if he could live longer, his remaining days would be not more than three months long. Also his doctor told him that surgery operation was worse than impossible, radiotherapy was also impossible and the only therapy left for him was chemotherapy.

Thinking of the volume of his work, he concluded that three months were too short for him to put an end to his work. So he made a plan to undergo chemotherapy and decided to enter the hospital and to submit to anti-cancer drug therapy. He had a talk with his doctor about chemotherapy. And he frankly informed Makoto of the impossibility of complete cure even by means of it. Yet the doctor explained that if it worked well, he could live together with his cancer and possibly could live longer than expected. Today's chemotherapy didn't produce such strong aftereffects that he could not spend a normal daily life. For ten days before he went into the hospital, Makoto was very busy to fulfill his promises and to finish his last lectures at Seiwa University, and also he was engaged in these and those miscellaneous things.

He was hospitalized on Nov. 11th. The close medical examinations waited for him and they continued for seven days. Then anti-cancer drug intravenous drip infusion started. After a course of the treatment he didn't make a complete recovery from the side effects of the drug for more than three weeks. Nevertheless, on Dec. 1, as was scheduled, he came back from the hospital to recuperate at home.

For two weeks from Dec. 1 to 15, Makoto seemed very happy and relaxed freed from hospital life. Having visitors almost every day and receiving get-well cards and letters from friends and acquaintances he must have been so greatly encouraged. Being alone, he tried to make the best effort to keep his condition

better by listening to music. He called it "image therapy." On the other hand, he complained that he couldn't control his dreams. He looked so healthy outwardly but in internals, cancer was keeping on spreading rapidly wider and deeper. Dec. 16th Makoto was rehospitalized to go through the second round treatment (so he used to call it). The first round treatment hadn't effectively worked, against their expectation.

On this round, he was scheduled to return home on December 26th due to the hospital's year-end and New Year vacation. But after having a talk with his doctor about his condition, he canceled his schedule. Until about Dec. 24th he only just could walk around by himself with his portable instillator. But from the 25th he became a bedridden patient.

On Christmas day, Rev. Hiroshi Oomiya of our church came and visited us at our hospital for giving bedside Holy Communion. At that time our second daughter hadn't confessed her faith yet. Rev. Oomiya offered her this opportunity to confess her faith and she consented to it. So it was the first but the last opportunity for us to receive the Holy Communion with our whole family.

All Makoto could do was just lying still in his bed but his face was shining so bright with joy. And I used to feel the depth of the thought of our God afresh. Now we were able to have the most beautiful time we ever had in our whole lives.

On Dec. 26th my husband's condition suddenly became worse and worse as if a stone was tumbling down the cliff. His consciousness began growing dim a little. He was transferred to a private room. From that night, our daughters and I began to stay with him at his sickroom. After our last visitors left, Makoto lifted the upper part of his body out of bed, all by himself. Then he turned his face toward us and said with very

clear voice, “Blessed last days, indeed (Tot emo yoiowar dattane).” And after a short pause, he said, “Goodbye (Sayou nara).” This was his last word uttered by him here on earth. About 24 hours later his spirit returned to Heaven.

With many thanks, Kiyoko Mizuno
1998. Jan. 20

Memorial Address for the late Makoto Mizuno by Ex-Professor of Aoyama Gakuin University, Hiroo Sekita

As David lamented Saul and Jonathan with a “Song of Bow,” I can’t but sing the same song: “Fallen, fallen are the men of war, and their armour left on the field.” (2 Samuel 1:27)

Being born the same year in 1928, our friendship began when he entered The Aoyama Gakuin University Theology Department in 1952 and it continued until the day of our retirement in 1997. It lasted for 45 years. Our closer tie practically started when we entered the newly-built Aoyama University YMCA Students Dorm in the same year. We began to live under the same roof. At the dorm we had an annual thanksgiving party for our dorm mother, Mrs. Hinohara, who devotedly looked after us – we used to call her “dear Mom” – in Christmas season. Mizuno Kei (brother Mizuno in Christ) had never missed the party. But last year he was not there. The dorm was a small one that only had a capacity of less than ten. (Though so small it was, so far as I know, out of fifty-two graduates from the dorm, sixteen of them took holy orders, eight took professorships.) It was Mizuno Kei who invited Rev. Oomura and the teachers of his mother church for having worship service at the dorm. And also, he wished our dorm to be a house to witness to the Gospel. And he took the

initiative in having a meeting for the local children. It was about that time when we were told of his engagement to Miss Kiyoko Hiraiwa, now Mrs. Mizuno. How envious we were of him.

In 1963, when the Christian Education Major Course was set up in the Department of Theology, the then head professor, Dr. Jun'ichi Asano, entreated Mizuno to take its position. Understanding the situation, he resigned his position as director of Christian education at Toyo Eiwa Girls' School. He came back to Aoyama Gakuin as one of our colleagues.

It was when he had returned from his two-year study in the States and had been expected to start his real activities for the Course that our University got involved in the campus dispute. And it caused a crack between the Board of Trustees and the Theological Department.

In 1977, the Department with the Doctoral Course was driven to the corner and finally, it was forced into abolishment against our will. It was the most regrettable result for the Faculty. As a matter of course, it must have given an unspeakable shock to Mizuno Kei who assumed full responsibility for the Christian Education Major Course. It was primarily expected to bear the role of Christian education directors' training school in The United Christian Church in Japan. However, even amid the vortex of the campus dispute, he stood firm and was never disturbed. Pursuing the whole process of the struggle from a Christian educational point of view, he threw himself into the teach-ins between the Faculty and the students. It is still well remembered by a lot of us that he thoroughly filled the truly worthy but thankless role: he was sympathetic to those students who were in anxiety by losing their ways and wandering around; meanwhile, he was groping for the new aims of a university founded on Christian faith. He painstakingly collected a heap of data and materials concerned with the dispute at the time. They

are now kept in Mizuno's residence. He used to tell me that it must have been his life work to arrange and compile the data on the history of the abolition of the Theological Department and the discussion materials on the problems around the present state of Christian university and what its education should be. But it was left unrealized.

Mizuno's idea for Christian education had a crystal clear standpoint to view things from the weak's situation. It seemed to me that this viewpoint had become remarkable from 1967 when he participated in the World Christian Education Convention held at Nairobi. Since then, taking the third world into his view, his theory on education was beginning to get deeper. Since that year, he opened his relationships with the Christian Council of Asia, the Northeast and the Southeast Asian Theological Education Federations and other organizations and continued to keep them. He also took care of the Nepal study tour four times, visited Korea then under the dictatorial regime and Taiwan again and again. There he deepened his association with a number of workers concerned with Christian education who had been laboring for justice and peace. He also started the fellowship with the theologians and their coworkers of Saint Louis Lutheran Church whose organization was called "Seminary in Exile." They exiled from their Seminary on account of the differences of the ideals on their theological education. Mizuno Kei named his theological education activities after the abolishment of the Department as "Aoyama Seminex" after the suggestion of his colleague, Prof. Theodor Kitchin, who used to be a missionary. They continued to have mutual interchange programs, and it was he who every time played the leading role on Japanese side.

It seemed to me that his theological education that struggled in search for the ecumenical truths and the close collaboration with his coworkers on Christian education formed the body of his theology of education.

If I dare to summarize his educational theory, it would be “the education of communion / sharing and liberation.” When we bring communion and sharing into our nations, races, schools and families, man can be liberated as the whole man. It seems this viewpoint made the keynote of his theory. And his was never a lip theory or an empty thought but it was the one that was thoroughly put into practice in his way of living, namely, it was his life-style itself. The open Christian education seminar held in his house and lasting for 13 years well illustrated this fact. And also it was reflected all through in his serial articles produced from the seminar. Moreover, those who communicated with him best testified to it. His passion for education had budded out far back in the day when he had set up a weekly church school in Asagaya Church and it had been more and more growing up in him through the experiences in the campus dispute, in his fellowship with the churches in the third world and the poor, oppressed people in that world.

As his given name Makoto (means sincerity) signifies, he used to make sincerest efforts toward any person, accepting them and keeping on holding communion with them. Through this interrelational human process, people could come to full growth with each other. This was the way he was strongly confident in. He had a nickname as “Dai-butu san,” The Buddha. Someone named it after the similar image of them. About him there always was a warm atmosphere and he grew up his communion without rushing but surely. His personality itself was the education of communion and liberation.

After the abolishment, only Mizuno and I remained in Aoyama. Both of us “lived through the wintertime together” – so one of our graduates at the time properly wrote it – warming our friendship and encouraging each other. But now he is no longer here with me.

When he almost came to his latter end and was transferred to a private room, he raised his upper-half of his body up. And then he left his last word to Mrs. Mizuno, "Blessed last days, indeed, had we?" How deep was his thought to his family and his own life; it was far beyond our imagination. He was a man of a thoroughly warm and gentle heart, and he was a thoroughgoing educator.

In the Alumni Association of Aoyama Gakuin University bulletin, he wrote an article on the last days of Moses, entitled "Just About to Cross Over the Jordan River." He wrote: "Clearing the servile spirit which was ingrained in Israelites under a long period of slavery and to establish a new ideal Israel initiated by a new generation with faith and responsibility, it would have needed a sufficient length of years to interchange the generations. For that reason, Moses himself wasn't permitted to enter into the promised land. So he entrusted all affairs after his death to Joshua. Then Moses went up from the lowlands of Moab to Mount Nebo, to the top of Pisgah. Viewing the land of the ancestors, he died in the land of Moab."

Though our Mizuno's fervent aspiration to restore the tradition of the theological education in Aoyama Gakuin University and its assignments had been left unfinished, the successors have been promised. His life, though ended unfinished, was the life that was dedicated to God the Lord and was being used by Him to the last moment. His life was to the glory of God as Moses' was.

The "Prayer for Peace" of Saint Francis of Assisi is the most appropriate example which describes his whole life:

*Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace.
When there is hatred, let me sow love;
When there is injury, pardon;
When there is doubt, faith;*

*When there is despair, hope;
When there is darkness, light;
And when there is sadness, joy.
Oh, Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be
consoled as to console;
To be understood as to understand;
To be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive;
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.*

May our Lord's abundant consolation be on each one of the bereaved. Professor and our dear brother Makoto Mizuno, thank you very much for all.

[Texts translated by Prof. Hiroo Sekita's assistant, Toshiaki Okazaki.]

Mid-summer items on Law and Gospel

Colleagues,

Mid-summer items on Law and Gospel– Item #1.

From Tom Droege, retired ELCA pastor in Atlanta, Georgia, comes this report of something I don't get to see at my current venue. Many of you on this listserve probably don't either. So I send it on to you FYI and FYE: for your information and for your enjoyment.

Dear Ed,

I can't resist sending you a few excerpts from Martin E. Marty's last M.E.M.O in the Christian Century, entitled Law without Gospel. He's commenting on permission to post the Ten Commandments in public buildings, including schools. He says, "Who worries about Lutheran consciences, or the distortion of Lutheran teaching that is implied by inscribing the image of the commandments on the classroom wall?" After briefly describing the distinction between law and gospel, he quotes the Lutheran Confessions. First the Apology (=Defense) of the Augsburg Confession (1531): "The law always accuses us and thus always shows us an angry God," and then the Smalcald Articles [S.A.](1537): The law is "the thunderbolt by means of which God with one blow destroys both open sinners and false saints."

Should we go along with the House bill and give children the law without the gospel? S.A.: "Some, who hate the law because it forbids what they desire to do and commands what they are unwilling to do, are made worse thereby..." "Others become blind and presumptuous, imagining that they can and do keep the law by their own powers...Hypocrites and false saints are produced in this way." and "Where the law exercises its office alone, without the addition of the Gospel, there is only death and hell..."Marty's comment: "By posting the Ten Commandments without also posting the gospel of Jesus Christ, the government is . . . accusing children, showing them an angry God, a destroyer, and, if they have normal desires but no gospel, they will be made worse, blind, presumptuous, hypocritical, false, accused, bound for death and hell. Of course, we Lutherans may be wrong about law and gospel. But we do, or should, or did have rights of conscience to persist in our error."

Just wanted you to know that Lutheran theology is alive and well

in the states, whatever its fate may be in Bali.

Tom Droege

Item #2

Last Saturday here in Bali Marie and I had our weekly Bali cultural exposure event—a cremation. This is one of the “musts” for tourists. [Which we protest NOT to be, since we’re “working” here and are staying a whole three months.] And there were lots of “them” there. But the deceased’s friends and relatives (not mourners, since a cremation is a happy occasion) far outnumbered us gawkers and camera buffs. Each little clutch of us on-lookers, under the interpretative care of the hustler who had recruited us, learned as much about what we witnessed as the guide was able to put into English. Ours had considerable difficulty.

It was a four-hour sequence, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Starting at the home where grandma had died, with several gamelan orchestras playing in different parts of the family compound, the procession eventually formed. The food offerings surrounding the casket in the family sanctuary were then hoisted onto the heads of dozens of women. Grandma too was brought from her place out into the street and elevated into the top story of a 20-foot funeral pagoda, black-clad men doing the work and two of them finally climbing to the top to stand alongside the corpse. The whole pagoda itself was already lashed to a 20×20 bamboo timbered platform. When the body was secured at the top and the two sentinals in place up there, the entire structure was hoisted onto the shoulders of 40 (?) men and the journey began. Leading the procession were a gamelan orchestra, then the offering-bearers, then two obviously special women in sedan chairs on the shoulders of men (“doctors of death,” is what we

thought our guide called them), then another contingent of women shaded by a long white runner attached to grandma at the pagoda top, then the pagoda (men at either side with long poles to elevate powerlines that would have snarled the pagoda), then the friends and villagers, hundreds of them, then us outsiders. We must have walked a mile or more down a main street before entering the cemetery where the last rites took place. There was elaborate ritual before ignition, as well as during the long time of the LP-gas assisted flames. During all this several gamelan orchestras played again and a twelve-man dance group mimed grandma's final conflict, we were told, to get her soul free from that cindering body and on to its future.

With our guide's help we understood this teensy bit—and that brings us back (you thought I'd forgotten) to law and gospel. Two pillars for what we witnessed were immortality of the soul and immutability of karma, the law of just deserts: you will receive the next time around the kind of body you deserve from the round you've just finished.

If the soul is immortal, then one component of human existence is immune to the Law of God. One segment of me escapes God's critical evaluation. But, says Biblical theology, souls are just as creaturely as bodies are, and therefore always under the creator's evaluation. So this Christian theology of God's Law is contrary to, yes, even a critique of, the ideology of the soul's immortality. Granted, such immortality has always had its promoters in the church's history. Yet its roots in the western world are in Greece and not in Biblical theology. It might even be that Plato got it from folks further east here in Asia.

As Biblical Law contradicts the soul's immortality, so God's Gospel contradicts (literally: "says no to") karma's immutability. The law's cycle of recompense is breakable – but only in one way that makes a real difference. Christ, so we

claim in the Christian gospel, is the end of the law. Its cycle is broken "for righteousness for those who trust Christ."

So Law/Gospel theology, the theology of the cross, says no to both of these pillars of the liturgy we witnessed last Saturday. In limping fashion we tried to speak to that theme when our Hindu guide asked us about our Christian religion on the topic of death. But what got through to him we don't know.

A couple days later I picked up this topic with Ketut Arka, a Balinese pastor who has become our friend. He granted the accuracy of these Christian alternatives to those two pillars, but it was not clear to me whether he thought this theology had value for Christian conversation with Hindus, nor whether he himself used such theology in his own pastoral work. Ketut is the one who earlier had told us that half of Balinese Christians had left Hinduism because of their encounter with Christ's power, his power to heal and to protect them from the ever-present powers of evil.

At root the power of evil is the power of death, and death has dread even for immortality-believers. Some of what we saw at the cremation signalled that to us. So to have the Gospel give one confidence to fear death no longer must sound like good news indeed. The "need" to posit an immortal soul is always a coping mechanism, very plausible to old Adams and old Eves. And when Christians opt for that in place of the resurrection of the body (which really is in the Creed), they must not yet have heard the "better" Gospel arising from Good Friday and Easter. Or if they once did, they no longer believe it. So right now we're thinking east is east and west and west, but here is one place where the twain do meet. Here's also a place then where Paul's doxology fits: "Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Peace and Joy!
Ed Schroeder

Rebuttal of Poetic Preaching – THTH57&58

Ah, the joys of cyberspace – Ed can instantly critique me
even when he's half a world away!
Enjoy,
Robin

I've read ThTh58, "Poetic Preaching – Part 2," several times and
I wonder–

1. Can a recommendation for "poetic preaching . . . touching the whole person – head, heart, emotions, soul, and body" be grounded in a theology of the cross? Does such preaching even come with NT precedent? St. Paul admits that he was a poor preacher—"klotzy," he'd probably say today—vis-a-vis the rhetoric of the poetic preaching coming from his competition, those "super-apostles" who (almost) swept away the entire Corinthian congregation.
2. When Martin Rafanan, as you quote him, rags on "the more rational Lutheran setting" of proclamation, just whose preaching is he talking about? Shibboleths abound. Also from Lutherans; also about Lutherans. Especially about the alleged rationality of Lutherans. As the smart-aleck kid said to his Mom when she told him starving Chinese

children would be glad to eat his spinach: "Name one."

3. What is there in Maurice Nutts own [RC, surely] working theology that grounds what he taught you? I have some hunches, but I wasn't there. One of those hunches is that his homiletics uses Thomistic Nature/Grace graph-paper when it prints out. Thus, since "grace does not abrogate nature, but instead perfects it," the whole "natural" person needs to be "graced" by good preaching. The more component parts that get graced, the better the preaching is. In our common-sense notion of human persons that includes "head, heart, emotions, soul, and body," of course. Should there be additional items, as well as alternate parts-lists coming from other cultures, they too need to be graced by good preaching. Is that good preaching? If yes, could it be even better than that? Theology of the cross says yes.
4. You promised in ThTh57—a dangerous thing to do, as I've learned in doing cyberspace theologizing—that "next week I plan on talking about how one might go about synthesizing what could be construed as a "settled formula" (the six step Crossings method) and this poetic language I've just discussed." OK. Name one.
5. You allowed as how "I don't have it all figured out yet, [so] if any of you . . . have figured it out, wholly or partially, please send me your ideas and I'll put our collective inspiration together as Thursday Theology #58." Rule of thumb for theological method: "Group grope" can just as often (perhaps more often?) lead to collective desperation as inspiration. Jesus knew that: blind leading the blind, and nowadays in theology, the bland leading the bland.
6. If Martin Rafanans was the best response you got and Marva Dawns the best you found, then the promised synthesis still needs "figuring out." Even good guys like Marva and

Martin may not have Crossings “figured out”—and that’s not finger-pointing—so help for synthesis from them is unlikely. Rafanan knows something about our Crossings stuff, and my hunch is that our Crossings stuff probably has not yet dawned on Dawn. Perhaps it has. But neither of the citations we get from them delivers on what was promised. You don’t have to be Sherlock Holmes to detect that the “Crossings method” is significant by its absence in ThTh58.

7. And so also is cross-theology, I think. Its not patent in either Martins or Marvas contributions. Not that they are against it. They are just not using it for their critiques nor for what they commend.
8. Martins urgings—“caught up in the Spirit . . . experience . . . experience. . . ‘touching people’ and letting them know that you can be touched/loved/challenged... engaging people actively . . . getting into the space/face of the people”—arent necessarily antithetical to Crossings cross-theology, but they do work just as well with glory-theology, I think. And Id say that even if I hadnt bumped into “slain in the Spirit” piety here in Bali these days, about which more later. [Oops, theres a promise for ThTh futures.] “Preaching in the Spirit . . . getting caught up in the Spirit,” language that ThTh 58 commends, needs Gospel-grounding.
9. Crossings is more than a method—and I know you know that—although it is also a method. Crossings is cross-theology, first of all a message, from which comes a method. Not the other way round. And according to John Douglas Hall it is “a thin tradition,” a minority voice in the history of the church. See this coming Sundays Gospel, Matthew 13:31ff for corroboration that it was always so (small and hidden, though genuinely a treasure) from the very beginning.

10. In the Reformation era (as I sought to show in the June 1999 issue of *Currents in Theology & Mission*) the Reformers cross-theology, a minority voice at that time too, was a conscious alternative to the Thomistic nature/grace “glory-theology” regnant in the Latin church then. Whats bad about bad preaching today is bad theology, the bad Gospel—aka no Gospel—that “gets into the space/face of people.”
11. The glory element in glory-theology doesnt have to be pyrotechnical. It doesnt have to be the razzle-dazzle ecstatic slayings which the Vineyard people of Portland, Oregon—44 of them (sic!) invited in by my bishop even—are sowing these last two weeks in the Protestant Christian Church of Bali, thus also among my members.
12. The glory of glory-theology is its alternate Gospel, a Gospel that glories in what people could do if they would just get their act together—at least a little bit—and then gives them the rubrics for getting to such glory. Its never that Jesus is denied, hes just linked to some additional “really important” items. Here in my church these days its the Holy Spirit. Now who in their right mind and claiming to be Christian could deny such linkage! “All youve gotta (sic!) do is” (fill in the blank). From the Vineyard folks here these days the fill-in words are: “Follow these simple steps and then join me in praying for the gift of the Holy Spirit for you.” And their works do follow them.
13. Clearly Rafanan is not promoting glory-theology. Thats not my point. My caveat is that what gets quoted from him doesnt get to the root of whats really wrong—and always has been wrong for the past two millennia—with bad preaching in the church (see Galatia, see Corinth), namely, a bad Gospel.
14. Marvas thoughts on “the postmodern spirit” are culturally

insightful. But does her diagnosis go deep enough—even to the D-2 and especially to the D-3, as we say in Crossings lingo? I wonder how many people (outside of the egghead community) really “believed so firmly in the faulty Enlightenment notion of Progress.” Name one. Perhaps on the surface, but deeper down, Dawn, isn’t it the Enlightenment “do-it-yourself Gospel”—once called Pelagianism—as well as its post-modern versions, that we all even now really “believe so firmly in”? Can it be shown that in “postmodernist spirals of despair” Pelagianism’s self-incurvature has disappeared? I think not. At best the evidence is ambiguous.

15. Cultures have a cultus. That’s the root of culture—not only the word, but the reality it signals. According to cross-theology, we can expect the cultus of any culture after the fall to be a glory-theology. Always. When Marva concludes: “Consequently, the major characteristic of the postmodern condition is the repudiation of any Truth that claims to be absolute or truly true,” I ask her for evidence that the “truth” of Pelagianism has been repudiated. Despite her disclaimer it still shows up in my world as a “Truth that claims to be absolute [and] truly true.”
16. It seemed quite alive when we left postmodernist USA last month. Here in pre-pre-Enlightenment Balinese culture it appears to be what folks so firmly believe in. Granted we were here only three weeks, but you don’t have to be a rocket scientist Those multiple “pres” are to signal the Hindu-Buddhist-animist culture that norms daily life hereabouts with good and evil spirits that demand constant attention.
17. And all of this in the face of the culture of tourism that swallows up this Delaware-sized island. Jets and bungee-jumpers and surfers and sex industry and shops and culture

for sale and money, money, money. All that right alongside of public piety of festivals at the 22,000(sic!) temples here [remember Delaware] and the myriad of votive offerings that appear every morning all over the place amidst the choking city traffic that never abates.

18. An aside. ThTh 58 quotes Dawn: "To those who criticize Christianity because it has been (and sometimes still is) violent and oppressive, we must acknowledge they are right" Seems to me thats a tad over-generalized, at best. Maybe bordering on shibboleth again. On this island Christians are the oppressed 1% minority in a Hindu population of 3 million. Elsewhere in Indonesia, with Islam the national majority, even in places where there are large Christian populations, the "violent and oppressive" stuff comes from the other side. Folks back from the field, (e.g., a 31 yr. missionary from Irian Jaya, Indonesias easternmost province, at last nights prayer meeting) say: "The media report only the tip of the iceberg of the persecution of Christians in Indonesia."
19. The last words of ThTh 58, also from Dawn conclude: "The Christian meta-narrative is the account of a Promising God who always keeps his promises – a Truth clearly seen in the First Testament history of Israel and most clearly seen in the history of Jesus of Nazareth, who died and rose again in fulfillment of God's promises."
20. Tell Marva that were hearing personal narratives built on that very meta-narrative. What makes Christs promise really "Good" and really "New(s)," people are telling us, is power. Christs power does not eradicate the evil spirits, the powers that put curses on you, but thwarts their lethal onslaughts. That makes for freedom, theyve told us. Freedom from fear (which local religion never eliminated, but even fosters), especially fear of death. Its even freedom in facing "true" God as forgiven people.

That sounds like the Crossings matrix at all three levels. Even better, it sounds like an ancient Psalm about walking through the valley of the shadow of death and fearing no evil because, as we heard last night from Irian Jaya, “I am sitting next to Christ.” Somebody’s been preaching good Gospel around here.

We’ll keep you posted as we learn more.

Peace & Joy! Ed Schroeder.

22 July 1999. Bali, Indonesia

Poetic Preaching – part 2

Robin Morgan

Last week I talked about an African-American preaching workshop I attended which had been given by Father Maurice Nutt, who is finishing a doctorate of ministry in preaching at the Aquinas Institute here in St. Louis. I talked about the significance of poetic language in proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ, especially at this juncture in the church’s life, and how traditional African-American preaching has so much to teach the church about touching the whole person – head, heart, emotions, soul, and body.

Building on this theme of the significance of preaching in the church today is an article by Marva Dawn about worship in the January 1997 issue of “CrossAccent,” the Journal of the Association of Lutheran Church Musicians. Dawn talks about the struggle to be church in the postmodern world:

“The postmodern spirit was really inevitable, since modernity

believed so firmly in the faulty Enlightenment notion of Progress. With the rise of science and technology, economics and communications, the modern spirit insisted that everything would get better and better – that we could solve the problems of the world with enough scientific discovery and technological fixes...The failure of 'progress' leads to postmodernist spirals of despair and hopelessness...Most importantly, the failure of the hyped-up promises of science and technology accentuates the loss of truth already inherent in modernist relativizing and in the rejection of authoritative structures or persons with moral authority. Consequently, the major characteristic of the postmodern condition is the repudiation of any Truth that claims to be absolute or truly true."

I don't believe there is a logical/rational way past this postmodern condition of repudiating Truth at this time. Disillusionment with "progress" must run its course. However, I believe we are able to step beyond "postmodern anomie" through a synthesis of theological precision and passionate proclamation.

At a time like this when there is an "obvious loss of any moral consensus or commitment to the common good" it is the depth of the truth in theology of the cross that is vital to effective preaching. Knowing who, what and why we preach cannot be overestimated. As Dawn says,

"The Truth that the Church has to offer to people caught in the postmodern condition must be shared in all its wholeness. To those who criticize Christianity because it has been (and sometimes still is) violent and oppressive, we must acknowledge they are right. Beyond accepting the blame for Christians' failures in history, we must recognize the whole truth that we remain sinful and fallible...[however] I believe Christians can humbly suggest a non-oppressive, all-inclusive story of a

Triune God who creates, redeems, and unifies as manifestations of a perfect love for the whole world. The Christian meta-narrative is the account of a Promising God who always keeps his promises – a Truth clearly seen in the First Testament history of Israel and most clearly seen in the history of Jesus of Nazareth, who died and rose again in fulfillment of God's promises."

To the wholeness of God's message we offer our energy and our passion for the Gospel by preaching "in the Spirit" as it is sometimes called in the African-American context. Martin Rafanan offers us his reflections on this style of proclamation:

"Careful preparation and development of the sermon is only the first stage. Living the sermon and being 'caught up in the Spirit' in proclamation is a part of the process. This is why 'time' is not really a factor in the African American setting... in fact, time as we usually experience it is suspended and one enters into the moment of kairos... it is a blessed experience! There is definitely a synthesis of this style that can be used in the more 'rational' Lutheran setting and it is usually much appreciated. It involves moving into peoples' space with the Gospel... bursting the bubbles people hide within with the Good News... as Maurice says, 'touching people' and letting them know that you can be touched/loved/challenged... engaging people actively. This usually means getting into the space/face of the people, speaking very directly to their need, seeking their active response, challenging them to be a part of the proclamation (being very assertive about this – in love!), bringing humor and personal story-telling that add a depth and commitment of the preacher to exposing/sharing their lives that encourages others to do the same."

Poetic Preaching by Robin Morgan

A couple of weeks ago I was part of a preaching workshop called "Preaching in the African-American Catholic Setting for Non-African Americans." It was taught by Maurice Nutt, an African-American priest finishing up his DMin in preaching at the Aquinas Institute here in St. Louis.

If I were to sum up what I learned in a sentence, it would be that preaching is not primarily a didactic exercise but a transcendent moment when the preacher, the congregation and God are joined together in celebration through the power of the Word of God.

Father Nutt told us that "Thus Saith the Lord" is always the starting point of all good African-American preaching. He said that Exodus and Jesus as liberator are the two pillars of Scripture upon which all African-American preaching rests. Secondly, preaching must be communal. Relationships are the backbone of the African-American community and preaching must also be relational. "Do you love us/can we touch you?" are questions that the congregation will implicitly ask. Third, preaching must be contemplative in the sense that God is everywhere. Though we come together in the church building, prayer and praise to God happen wherever we are, whenever our hearts are moved to speak to God. In the fourth place, preaching must be holistic. Every part of life is touched by God and needs to be addressed in preaching. The preacher must be real and tell it like it is. Finally, preaching culminates in joy. The moment of celebration when God's answer in Jesus to our woes and the

woes of the world becomes evident is the pinnacle of the preaching moment. God triumphs over all and we are freed to live another day for the Lord.

Though I cannot tell you everything that we talked about in the five afternoons we shared together (I heartily recommend taking this class from Father Nutt if you ever get the chance), I would like to offer a few concrete ideas that, I believe, may help expand your preaching horizon regardless of the setting you're in. We explored at length the "how" of preaching as well as the "what/Who." Word play is a vital part of African-American preaching. Break it down, Preacher! Tell me what you want me to hear in a way that grabs my attention, in as many ways as possible that will help me remember all week long what you said on Sunday morning.

During the workshop we played word games with significant words in the text to help loosen up our vocabularies and help us find different ways of getting our point across. Making lists of synonyms, antonyms, drawing a picture of the Scripture passage, making word associations or role playing are all ideas to get the juices flowing and help the preacher begin to appropriate the text for the preaching moment. These ideas are not substitutes for exegetical study or theological reflection, but offer us ways to approach the text inductively, so that we can engage our heads, hearts, souls and emotions. Hopefully, this combination of approaches will open more ways for the Holy Spirit to move in all aspects of our lives and bring the Word to fruition among us.

What I'd like to do now is offer you my initial word associations for preaching this coming Sunday on Matthew 13: 1-9, 18-23. It's Tuesday night as I write this and I haven't done any biblical work on the text yet. I went through the Sabbathology on Saturday for typos, but I haven't really

thought extensively about the theology of the text. However, I have read the passage over several times and the word that really grabbed me was LISTEN. In verse 3 Jesus says, "Listen! A sower went out to sow." Then in verse 9 he finishes the parable with "Let anyone with ears listen!"

So I put listen inside a circle in the middle of a piece of paper and started brainstorming: tell me, hear, catch it, focused, it matters, ears open/mouth shut, what?, teach me, all ears, attentive, preach it, I can't hear you!, repeat it, poised/willing/ready, caring, holding fast.

Then I thought about someone standing at the airport waiting for their lover to return from a long trip. You're all dressed up (oooh, you look fine!) and smell so nice. He (or she) is on the plane that just landed and you're waiting at the gate, watching with outstretched neck, listening for his voice. Nothing else matters, you're completely focused on hearing his voice. It seems as if no else is even in the airport, you only have eyes and ears for him.

Some phrases that add breadth to the idea of listening to the Word: bring the community together, health to the hearers, joy for the sorrowful, peace for the anxious, listen, God is calling (I'm going to use this hymn from "With One Voice" and the new "This Far by Faith" for the hymn of the day).

A couple of phrases that illustrate the opposite of listening: I already know what I need to know, refuse to hear, I don't need you.

I'm sure you can think of many other possibilities, but these offer you some ideas about how you might begin to expand your verbal repertoire and give your hearers phrases to carry with them all week long.

We also talked about repetition, call and response, alliteration – basics of poetic language, which leads me to my final point. I know that the emotive quality of African-American preaching is probably not going to go over big in some congregations. German farmers may not respond positively when you tell them from the pulpit, “Turn to your neighbor and tell her, ‘Listen, God is calling YOU!’” However, the use of poetic language in preaching has a long, honorable and biblical tradition that the African-American church has retained at the core of its being.

Another voice that may be more familiar to many of you and who also talks about the transformative quality of poetic language in preaching is Walter Brueggemann in his book “Finally Comes the Poet.” He says, “there is a casual, indifferent readiness, even in our increasingly secularized society, to grant the main claims of the gospel – not to grant them importance, but to accept them as premises of religious life.” Brueggemann’s remedy for this “prose flattened” gospel is poetic proclamation. “By prose I refer to a world that is organized in settled formulae, so that even pastoral prayers and love letters sound like memos. By poetry, I do not mean rhyme, rhythm, or meter, but language that moves like Bob Gibson’s fast ball, that jumps at the right moment, that breaks open old worlds with surprise, abrasion, and pace...Such preaching is not moral instruction or problem solving or doctrinal clarification. It is not good advice, nor is it romantic caressing, nor is it a soothing good humor. It is, rather, the ready, steady, surprising proposal that the real world in which God invites us to live is not the one made available by the rulers of this age.”

That last sentence, I believe, is the key to the riches of African-American preaching, and which makes it so valuable to Christians everywhere. As Christianity as a whole continues to be marginalized from the center of our society, we need to refine our ability to make the preaching moment a transformative

time. The African-American church has always come to the preaching moment to be transformed by Jesus, to live, if only for awhile, in that REAL WORLD which God continues to create rather than the world made by the rulers of this age.

We can claim Jesus' words in Luke 4: "The spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord."

PS – Next week I plan on talking about how one might go about synthesizing what could be construed as a "settled formula" (the six step Crossings method) and this poetic language I've just discussed. Since I don't have it all figured out yet :), if any of you do have figured it out, wholly or partially, please send me your ideas and I'll put our collective inspiration together as Thursday Theology #58

PSS – Ed and Marie now have an e-mail address in Bali

**An Expanding Theology: Faith
in a World of Connections.
E.J.Dwyer, Newtown NSW, 1993,
xii – 227 pages.**

Here's a book review Ed did during his time in Australia.
Book Review for Lutheran Theological Journal [December 1995.
Vol.29, #3] (Adelaide, S. Australia)

Tony Kelly is an Australian Roman Catholic, a member of the Redemptorist order. In this proposal for an expanding theology, we have his blueprint for making connections between Christian theology and today's discoveries in cosmology and ecology. Those last two "-logies" (cosmo and eco-) still get scant attention from theologians. Au contraire among the eco- and cosmo-scientists. Their own discoveries are nudging them into God-talk—and not unwillingly. So it is high time that theologians join them for the common agenda in a world of connections.

Cosmologists probing our galactic universe and the emergence of life on this tiny, tiny planet are already using the language of mystery, adoration, value, meaning when they talk about their own craft. Whose rhetoric is that really? Eco-scientists, with more grounds for alarm than the cosmologists have, need to talk about the one (and only one) web that encompasses our biosphere, humanity's blindness about living in partnership with creation, the need for wills to be changed, not just minds. Does that sound like theology's stock in trade—creation, sin, bondage of the will or doesn't it? The fields are ripe unto harvest. So Kelly takes us out into those fields and shows us how to swing theology's sickle—not to cut down the other -ologists (for they are not enemies) but how to harvest collaboratively with them. For they are already working as colleagues on the common agenda of the planet: articulating faith in a world of connections.

Kelly is one of today's avant-garde theologians, Neo-thomists of a very specific sort, getting all three of the "-logies" together. To do so you have to know something, and he manifestly

does. His conversation partners come from everywhere—classical to contemporary theology (of course) but also modern scientific research, poetry, metaphysics, to recent research on human sexuality and Becker's classic study of our denial of death. His theological anchormen (sic!) are all Roman Catholics: Teilhard (no surprise), Rahner, Lonergan, Segundo. Feminist authors are in the mix for the ecology sections, and non-Roman men (Macquarrie, Meeks, Moltmann, Polkinghorne, even Lutheran Joseph Sittler) are cherished conversation partners. But the long discussions are with the anchormen (Teilhard et al.) all in their own way drawing on Aquinas' medieval Summa as they push toward a contemporary one—someday.

The motto for the enterprise is not new: *fides quaerens intellectum*, faith seeking understanding. Kelly's fulcrum term is "connections." He traces seven "circles" of connections. Some arise from today's global culture, e.g., the pressure from many sides today [even New Age religion] to "get it together." In other circles he connects the "-logies" in images and language that startles and intrigues. E.g., Incarnation surfaces in "the Word and the worlds of meanings." The Creed's first article leads to "Creation and the Big Bang." Extending the "frame of reference" of the Trinity we have "Ultimate reality as relational." And like Jesus at Cana he saves the best till last: "The eucharistic universe: the Real Presence in the real world."

An Expanding Theology is a text that tingles, a vademecum for dialogue with partners on the cutting edge of science, a tome that teases theologians into new vistas, new connections. In short, a joy to read. Yet for all of that Kelly's expanding theology is less than expansive, yes, sadly shrivelled, at one crucial point: the cross and resurrection of Jesus. Not that they never get mentioned, but this climax of Jesus' Messiahship plays no substantive role whatsoever in the theology Kelly connects with the other two -logies.

The incarnation is all the theology, all the good news, we get—or need—in Kelly's connections. His linchpin for linking the three “-logies” happened at Bethlehem as God crossed the fundamental boundary by enfleshing his Son. Initially it is no great surprise that St. John is his favored evangelist, his canon-within-the-canon. But sadly he never goes beyond the prolog! It's hard to imagine that John could be convinced that the “hour” Jesus moves toward, the “glory” that is the cross, or Jesus' “tetelestai” (“case closed”) at the end mark no significant move beyond “mere” incarnation .

I counted 8 references to Christ's cross and resurrection in the book. Several appear in lists of “the rhetoric of the Christian tradition.” In the five mentionings where Kelly puts a predicate to cross-and-resurrection, the best he can say is that “Incarnation goes to the point of crucifixion [wherein]...the Father is revealed as having no self-disclosure in this world other than...the selfless love of the Cross” (p. 163). Good Friday/Easter reveal (unveil) more vividly than any other uncovering, that God is and always has been selfless love. But nothing new, no action never before done, occurred on that weekend.

Thus when Kelly interprets John's own crux passage, Jesus' own words about “a grain of wheat falling into the earth and dying so that it bears much fruit”(12:24), we hear that “Surrender to, participation in a larger vitality, giving oneself into the ground of the whole mystery, transformation into an ultimate coexistence, are all implied here” (p. 186). Kelly does not hear Jesus in this text announcing what he is about to do for us. Instead he hears Jesus telling us how we can do what he is about to do. “To enter into the ‘chaos’ of dying is to rise to a new level of being. It is to be drawn into the ‘white hole’ of Jesus' resurrection, the whole of creation transformed by the Spirit” (p. 186), a “cosmic process of ‘transubstantiation'” (p.

171).

Kelly's most extensive theology of the cross comes as he speaks of Christian hope vis-a-vis death, "the piercing tragedy at the heart of our existence." "The crucifixion and death of Christ himself" is a "symbol." "In its deepest meaning, it is a theophany: the all-creative mystery reveals itself as compassionate love. In the deadliness of Jesus' death—as failure, isolation, condemnation, torture—transcendent love has become familiar with our problem of evil.

"But not to be defeated by its power. For the death of the crucified embodies the ultimate form of life as self-surrender to its all-inclusive mystery... It is precisely at that point that God is self-revealed as a love stronger than death, as the creative mystery that holds in being and fulfills all the best energies of life. Thus, the transformation of the Risen One [is] the 'white hole' in the world of death" (p. 189). And the last mention at the end (p. 200) "For Christian faith, the ultimate symbol for self-realization in the universe is...the cross and resurrection of Jesus, the death of the ego-self for the sake of a life of full relationality in the Spirit."

Ought we not ask Kelly to "expand" his theology of the cross. For example, bring it up to John's own cosmic theology, seen already in everybody's favorite, John 3:16. The evangelist says that God's love is done in just this way—his son dying "for" the cosmos, lest the cosmos perish and die out on its own. That's not just a symbol. That's an action on God's part that changes the history of the cosmos from death to life.

Many elements in the Reformation era debates surface when Kelly gets a Lutheran reading. Herewith just a few: major concern with "evil," but not with "sin;" God as "an 'Other' creatively, graciously present in every moment" (p.17) but never *lex semper*

accusat; Kelly's overarching axiom of "grace healing, perfecting and elevating nature" vis-a-vis Luther's proposed alternate axiom for theology: the proper distinction between God's Law and Gospel; faith, hope, and love, as "energies...for getting wisdom;" Faith itself as a "Yes to the divine mystery...unconditioned and without reservation," and the Reformation's alternate notion of Faith as trusting Christ." And most reminiscent of Luther and Melanchthon's allergy to scholastic axiom *facere quod in se est*, are Kelly's counsel in the face of a world of threatened species, human perils of extinction, alienation from within, the violence and hatreds that lie close to the human heart. He asks: "What can liberate us, redeem us. . . when the human species is in danger of lapsing into a form of self-hatred?" Answer: "Alienation from our biosphere and ourselves can only be remedied by the more critical self-appropriation of the best in ourselves in terms of art, intelligence, morality and faith" (p. 52).

My best hope would be for Kelly to be appointed to the Lutheran – Roman Catholic dialogue in Australia. Lutherans dialogue members would be challenged and stretched (even expanded?) by the trajectories of his theological assertions. Kelly himself in the give-and-take could fatten up his theology of the cross and reflect on some of its spin-offs in the paragraph above. Some Lutheran theologians are already working out the connections of Reformation theology to the "-logies" of the sciences (e.g., ITEST, the Institute for Theological Encounter with Science and Technology, an international Lutheran-Catholic collegium based in the USA now 25 yrs. old). Imagine such collaborative conversation down under: Kelly not letting go of the incarnation and Lutherans keeping the passion and resurrection narratives front and center while both sets of partners push each other to articulate our Christian faith in a world of connections. Would that be "an expanding theology?" And how!

Edward H. Schroeder
March 11, 1995

TELLING TIME or Whose Millennium Is It Anyway?

Robert Bertram

[Address at the 25th Anniversary of Christ Seminary Seminex, at
Atonement Lutheran Church, June 25, 1999.]

Twenty-five years ago we learned a new phrase from the **Formula of Concord**, “a time for confessing.” (SD X,10) What kind of time is that? What does it teach us about time in general, all time?

1. The Stifled Second Wow

Next year at this time students will be graduating in the Year 2000. Some of you surely will be serving as their commencement speakers or baccalaureate preachers. I can see it now. You will begin your address by greeting them. You will intone, “So you are the Class of 2000.” The moment you say only that much, some precocious child in a back pew, some little sister, will be startled by what you’ve just said. She will lean over and whisper to her father, “Class of 2000 – are there that many graduating tonight”? Her father will shake his head reassuringly, No. “Then why 2000,” the little girl persists. “2000 what?” The father thinks for a moment and then whispers back, “2000 years, 2000 years old.” “Wow,” the child exclaims, “Who is 2000 years old?” The father realizes what he has gotten

himself into, and he whispers back, "Better ask your mother."

If you should turn out to be the mother in question, What would you answer the child? Who is it who is 2000 years old, give or take a few years? Who from among all those who have gone before is so important that you would date your whole life, your whole world, from the time he or she lived? The child's question comes down to this, Whose bi-millennium is it anyway? How would you answer? If you're a seminary graduate you'd probably tell the child more than she wants to know. You'd say that an ancient monk by the name of Dionysius Exiguus once figured out how many years it was since Jesus had been born and that, ever since, people have been counting, "This is year so-and-so A.D., Anno Domini," which means "In the year of the Lord." With that learned answer the little girl's eyes would of course glaze over and she would promptly lose interest.

I suspect that what the mother, not having gone to seminary, will answer will be more to the point. Quite simply she will say, "That's how old Jesus Christ is."

With that answer the child is just about to let out another, a second Wow, just about but not quite. Suddenly she hesitates. She suppresses the Wow. Her expression turns to a frown. Why? More on that in a moment. First, let us interject, if the child had gone through with the next Wow, she would have had good reason, don't you think? After all, two thousand years is a long time. For anyone to live that long – anyone like us, and Jesus is like us – is a pretty ripe old age. Granted, the mother could say what she did, that Jesus Christ is still living after 2000 years, only on faith. For she was not saying that Jesus would have been this old had he lived. No, she says he is still very much alive and counting. She is not saying only that two millennia ago Jesus lived and died. That's true, he did, and that is decisive. But that much anyone

could have said, even the little girl's father. Any non-believer could have said that. The mother, however, is a believer. She takes it as a given that this same Jesus who died was in turn raised from the dead and therefore, ever since, keeps adding years to his life. Isn't that enough for another Wow?

Then why did the girl stifle her Wow? What gave her pause? Why the sudden frown? Listen. She nuzzles up to her mom's ear and, with just a touch of embarrassment asks, "But isn't Jesus just as old as God? Isn't Jesus God, too? Why did he start so late?" Notice, at first the child had been impressed that anyone could be so old, that is, before she realized they were talking about Jesus Christ. But then, once she heard it was he, she was disappointed that he wasn't any older than that. For shouldn't he be, being divine? Granted, for a human being two millennia would be a long time. But for a God, that's an embarrassment. A God who was born only 2000 years ago? Why then first? For a God, that is a pretty late bloomer and, to all appearances, not much of a God at all. What took the wind out of the little girl's sails is the question with which Christians have long been taunted, Where was your Savior (ha, ha) before he was born? And we have to admit: before he was born, he wasn't. Not this Savior. That's enough to choke off a Wow.

Of course Christians, too, know that any proper God, any God who is "from everlasting to everlasting," has no beginning – not only not an end but also not a beginning. I repeat, God has no beginning. But that was not your question, was it? Your question was about Jesus Christ. Does he have a beginning? Well, I can tell you this: he has no ending.

The Christian gospel has that problem safely covered. Jesus Christ doesn't end. He rises again, and he goes on living longer and longer, year after year, "world without end." Some folks mistakenly think that "A.D." means "After Christ." No, there is no "After Christ." He is still very much in circulation. Even as

human he is still alive and present. He is, as G. K. Chesterton called him, “the everlasting man.” See, that takes care of Christ’s “to everlasting.” On that point the little girl could say Wow. And remember, she did. That was her first Wow.

2. The Problem Is the B.C.

But I’m evading your question. You weren’t asking whether Jesus Christ has an ending. You know he doesn’t. What you were asking, little girl, is whether he has a beginning. You know well enough that he is “to everlasting.” The question is, Is he “from everlasting?” I might as well admit it: that is a problem. That is the problem, isn’t it, that brought the girl up short in the first place. For Jesus Christ does have a beginning, a rather recent one at that. As Jesus Christ he does. There was a time when Jesus Christ was not – a time B.C., “Before Christ.” There is no problem with the years A.D., the years since our Lord. The more of those, the better. However, if there is an A.D., there had to be a B.C., before he ever came into being. But then that means he had to start at some Year One, like us – square one. That is definitely ungodlike and, when you think of it, humiliating.

It is true, indispensably true, that before he ever was Jesus Christ, he had already been the divine Word from all eternity. But then why didn’t he leave it at that? Instead, scandal of scandals, doesn’t he go off one day into this far country, into our world, and suddenly become one of us as well – which the day before, he had not been? How prodigal of him. What does that do to his reputation as God, that after all this time, after so much history had flowed over the dam, now first he decides to start this way, quite different from anything he had ever been? A God who is just starting out? An entry-level God? That is an oxymoron. That makes him not like God but like this little girl.

And that makes her uneasy.

Worse yet, not only does this incarnate God get a late start, but just think what a headstart that gave to all those who had gone before him. All those people, those nations, those generations – all of them his mere creatures – now had the jump on him. His problem, we're saying, is not just that he began at a certain time and not before. His bigger problem is all those predecessors who did come before, whom he now has to follow.

Yes, he was late getting here. But what is worse, so many others had gotten here first, ahead of him, putting him at a distinct disadvantage. It is bad enough that the incarnate God has a birthdate but because he does, there was all that B.C. that he had missed out on. Like what? Well, for starters he missed out on the death of his friend Lazarus, as sister Martha scolded him, If you'd been here sooner my brother wouldn't have died. (Jn. 11: 21) But that was merely a delay of a few days, which Jesus was able to minimize. However, it was a lot harder trying to explain why he had not been around when Moses was, or Abraham, let alone Adam and Eve. Predecessors do have advantage. Anciency outranks recency. Our little girl in the back pew understands that. It's because she's so young that she is in the back pew with her parents, and her older brother gets to be up on stage graduating. Yet for God to be so upstaged, because he too was born later, makes him like her, a back-bencher. And that makes her uneasy.

Still worse, all that pre-history that had predated Jesus, all that BC, not only was something he had missed out on but also was something he now had to run to catch up with. How much he had to learn, and always at second hand, from those who already had been there and done that. Not only did he get a late start and the others a headstart, but his was not a fresh start. No baby's is. We all had to begin not just where the world once

began but where it already was by the time we arrived. If God was going to begin as a baby with a birthdate, as he now did, think how inexperienced that suddenly made him and how dependent upon others to teach him: to walk, to chew, to talk (and then in only one or two languages at best.) Maybe he even had to learn theology from John the Baptist. What a dilemma that posed for the evangelist of The Fourth Gospel, who had to admit that, OK, so Jesus did follow the Baptist and maybe even studied under him. But then the evangelist had to explain somehow that, in spite of all this Christ-come-lately, he nevertheless had been "in the beginning" of everything.

Even so, the evangelist did not dare deny that this Jesus Christ, though he was very God of very God, was still very much a descendant and not only of God but of other humans, and not only in what he had to learn from them but in what he had inherited from them, and inherited not only historically but even genetically. The genealogies with which the other evangelists begin their gospels are not fluff. Jesus Christ, for all his originality as humanity's Creator, is just as truly one of its dependents, a chip off of our old block, an apple that has fallen not far from the tree. And in that shocking sense he is not an original but an offspring, a derivative. The Son of God not only entered history, he became a product of history. That puts him right in the back-seat with our little girl. Like her, he too had to have parents and he too had to ask them the same elementary questions she has to. That dependent he was upon his forebears B.C. And that makes the little girl uneasy.

Worst of all, notice, this incarnate God has to do this. He has no choice. He has to accept the past which preceded him and, like all the rest of us he has to let that past set the agenda for who he now is and what he now does. That's the way it is with our kind of time. Once we're born into it, much of what we do from then on – maybe most of what we do – has been decided

for us before we get here. Just by living out our lives we are keeping all sorts of prior commitments, but commitments which we had little to do with making. We are complying with a past which antedated us. Yet don't we have some choice in the matter? Some, yes. Our biggest choice, I suppose, is to reaffirm the choices which have already been made for us, and then to make the most of them: for example, that we were born in the twentieth century, white or black or brown, female or male, gifted in this way or that. But even the new choices we make along the way do in turn control our future. The wedding vows we once made, the once fateful decision to stand with Seminex, the calls we once accepted or declined – all past tense – are the ties that most bind us today. We are governed by what happened beforehand. Look at your pocket Appointment Book. What is that but page after page of IOUs, all incurred previously. Here you've inked in next Tuesday, "7:00 pm, Meet with Caleb's teacher." Not only is there a person to be met but a debt to be met, a debt you incurred beforehand. It must be paid.

So it is with Jesus Christ. He too incurred a beforehand, a B.C., which even before he arrived had already mortgaged his future but which he had to pay. As God, he doesn't have to do anything, I suppose, not even become incarnate. But once he made that choice, he was obligated to "fulfill" dozens of previous promises. Scripture read like his appointment book, and he had to keep moving to meet those appointments on time. He sounds like you and me, with our "have to's," our "must do's." "The Son of Man must (dei) undergo great suffering, and [must] be rejected by the elders . . . , and [must] be killed, and after three days [must] rise again." (Mk. 8:31) So let's get going, he says to his disciples, it's time to head for Jerusalem, because of previous commitments B.C.

What makes our past so binding is just that, it is past. It is done and cannot be undone. You promised Caleb and your spouse

that together you would go to his parent-teacher interview. True, that is still a few days off. It hasn't happened yet. That is what we mean by future: what hasn't happened yet. So, conceivably, you could still bow out – as you did last year. (Caleb has not forgotten that.) But what has happened – and that's what we mean by past – is that you did in fact promise. That you cannot undo. Although that was a month ago, or because it was, there is no way that you can now make the promise unhappen. You cannot unring the bell. The die is cast, because it's past. There is no way to recall it, not by you, not by anyone. Not even by God? Milton may have been right,

But past who can recall, or done undo?
Not God Omnipotent. Nor Fate. (PL 9.926)

Whether or not God can undo the past, truth is, God does not. Time, too, is the Creator's doing, including its irrevocable past, and not even the New Creation pretends the Old Creation never occurred or is not owed its full due.

However, that is exactly the problem with Christ's "B.C." When the Son of God became a human creature, he became a creature also of time. He had to do what his prehistory made him do. Else, like a parent who breaks a promise to a child, he welshes on a debt. And The Past is a very fastidious book-keeper, moreso by far than Caleb, with an infallible memory for deadlines – and deadbeats. For "The Past" read "the Law."

3. The Past Mortgages the Future

This is the way the Law works, chronologically speaking. In any given day most of us have more to do than we have time to do it in. We may wish, as we say, "there were more hours in the day." But there aren't. So instead we borrow additional time from the future. A month ago, probably through no fault of yours, you

were unable to attend Caleb's parent-teacher interview. So you took out a loan against the future. You borrowed next Tuesday evening. You even wrote it down. Caleb and his teacher and your spouse all notarized the loan. But when next Tuesday arrives and the loan comes due, it is no longer a free evening to be spent at your discretion. In a real sense that evening has already been spent a month ago. You will say, This evening I "have" to go to my son's parent-teacher interview. You're right, you have to, because of what you "have" already done. You promised (past tense.) Our past commitments already own most of our tomorrows. We say of prisoners or of the dying that they are living on "borrowed time." But who isn't? For all of us, the future is already time owed, debited time. It has been booked solid. It has all been borrowed long since to hold off creditors yesterday.

See, even the Law can be quite generous in advancing us more time from the future, but only by putting us, its debtors, more and more in arrears to the past. The problem isn't just that "time is too short." Even if it were endless, as for us Christians it is, it would always be borrowed time, waiting not to be spent but to be paid back – back to this or that commitment in the past. We deceive ourselves when we think the problem is with the future, as if there were not enough of that. The usual complaint is, We are running out of time. If only we had another week. If only we could extend the future. That is The Chronic Fallacy, an illusion, at least for Christians. We have all the time in the world and then some: "world without end." Thanks to Jesus' resurrection, we do. But that by itself isn't good enough. What is the good of merely adding more tomorrows if those, too, are already earmarked for payments past due. What we need is not only more future but one which is debt-free, not in hock to the past. No matter how many more tomorrows we have coming to us, they have already been signed over to a

creditor who says, tapping the table, "Sorry, those tomorrows, remember, are what I have coming to me." Who is "me"? Euphemistically we call it The Law. But remember Whose Law it is.

So when the Word became flesh roughly 2000 years ago, he started running on our time. But, we protest with the psalmist, our times are in God's hands. (Ps. 31:15) True. And if that were all, that might be sheer comfort. (It might.) But did God leave well enough alone? No. For what is also true is that, ever since the coming of Christ, our time now is God's time. That is deeply unnerving. For that means that, vice versa, God's times are now also in our hands. And what an intimidating handful he is! Those enormous debts we have on our hands, all those tomorrows we already mortgaged yesterday, are now inherited by Jesus Christ as well. As he takes us debtors on as his past, his B.C. – his Bad Credit! – his future becomes encumbered and impoverished along with ours. Now we have him, too, on our hands. That is doubly daunting. So long as it was just the lot of us, before he assumed us as his B.C., we could plan the future almost glibly. What's one more Tuesday evening promised away! But now that he too bears the consequences of our plans, our responsibility is staggering.

For instance, the Son of God lets his very birthplace be scheduled for him by one of us, Caesar Augustus, in Caesar's appointment book no doubt. If poor Caesar had known, would he still have scheduled the decree that all the world should be taxed? A few years later Pontius Pilate did have some premonition of whose time he held in his hands, and quiveringly he tried washing his hands of the whole affair, in vain. Then there was Judas, to whom Christ said, "Friend, do what you are here to do." "Then they came and laid hands on Jesus." (Mt. 26:50) Yes, "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." (He. 10:31) But is it any less fearful having God

fall into our hands?

We said that God is now running on our time. But it isn't even "our" time. It is our enemy's. The fact is, "our" time runs us. We speak glibly of "managing our time." Surely we can't mean that literally. Who, I ask you, is managing whom? You know as well as I, this time of "ours" can be a tyrant. Time may not be, as Leonard Bernstein claimed, "THE enemy." But it definitely can be inimical, right up there with the other principalities and powers (as I glance nervously at my watch.) By the same token, God the incarnate one is not so much running on our time as he is letting himself be run by the time that runs us. So once again, our worst problem is not that we are running out of time or even that we're not running on time but rather that time is running us – us and Jesus Christ, as one of us. If the question is, Whose time is it, our first pious impulse may be to say, It is "our" past which he took on as his B.C. But even that is not the extent of it. Even he, the Lord, has to concede to his enemy, "This is your hour, and the power of darkness." (Lk. 22:53) Sometimes that causes us to tremble.

No wonder the little girl in the back pew held back her second Wow. The fact that someone like us has been living for 2,000 years, that she did find Wow-worthy – until she learned that that someone is Jesus Christ. Then suddenly a mere two millennia seemed, well, disgraceful, if Christ truly is the Son of God. Suddenly he seemed too much like one of us. The child suppressed any further wow, as who wouldn't. That started us thinking: by coming when he did, Christ inherited a past, our past, as his B.C.; that past laid its heavy hand on his whole ensuing future, demanding its obligations be paid; by our being his B.C., as woefully we are, our unpaid past causes his downfall – time being what it is "under the Law." The appropriate response, as the youngster seemed to sense, is not Wow but Woe. I can understand why her father evaded her question, also why folks

who don't share our faith object to having to date their calendars from the time of Christ. I would, too, and so would you, were it not that we've learned otherwise – as some of us did most pointedly twenty-five years ago, in a “time for confessing.”

4. Time For the Second Wow

I'm betting that the little girl did not give up on the second Wow altogether. She was probably just mulling it over. It is called wonder. We never did reveal how her mother answered her last question. Remember, the child had asked why Jesus Christ, being just as old as God, being God, would still have a birthday like one of us. I'm not sure her mother answered the Why head-on. But I do have it on good authority that what the mother does reply, simply, is this: “Aren't you glad he did?” That is, what if Christ had not had a birthday like one of us? But: “Aren't you glad he did?” That was enough to set the child to mulling or, if you will, wondering. Aristotle said, All philosophy begins in wonder. Whitehead said, And that is how all philosophy ends, in wonder. Lutherans sing, “To this vale of tears he comes, . . . Is not this a wonder?” (TLH 97)

In her wondering, the little girl has lots of company. She is compassed about by a great cloud of wonderers. They are the confessors who have taken the stigma of the Word made flesh, the everlasting God with a birthdate, and they have parlayed that stigma into the diametric opposite: a point of pride, a doxological Wow. For instance, take Dorothy Sayers, that doughty old Anglo-Catholic, pre-feminism feminist. She said, and she meant it as a compliment, “The Christian God is the only God with a date in history.” That makes Dorothy Sayers a Wow-sayer. (Do you believe puns are divinely predestined?) And Martin Luther, who had a penchant for saying things plainly, how did he

put it? He said “the humanity of Christ has not, like the deity, existed from eternity, but according to our calendar Jesus the Son of Mary is 1543 years old this year.” (FC/SD 8:85) Think what the little girls in the sixteenth century must have said, “Only 1543 years old?” For Luther, too, the scandal of the time-bound, debt-bound Son of God had become instead the very wonder of the Good News. Luther did not minimize that this condescension on God’s part was humiliating. For God it definitely is, but for us too. Indeed, it is mortifying. Yet just think how God’s humiliation simultaneously exalts us. Daring to trust that, Luther swallowed hard and joined the Wow-sayers.

Incidentally, the two quotations cited here, one from Dorothy Sayers and the other from Martin Luther, give you all the texts you need for your first theological get-together back home with the Episcopalians in your community, once ELCA finalizes “full communion” with them. Here in Saint Louis we have not waited for that. In anticipation of full communion, we have already been having “full conversation” – we call it “LutEpisc” – annually for the past three years. Next time, at LutEpisc IV, we could talk about our common faith in “the only God with a date in history.” But as Max Beerbohm would say, I digress.

What is it that drives the new Wow-sayers? Answer: it is Christ’s bringing about a New Time, actually a whole new kind of time. It isn’t just that he adopts our Old Time, under the Law, as our co-debtor. By itself, what’s the good of that, unless all you look for in a “God-with-us” theology is a kind of misery-loves-company? That is a misreading of “Immanuel,” if all Christ does is assure us he is here feeling our pain. That still leaves the bills unpaid and our future as indebted to the past as it ever was, except that now we may have a new celebrity sharing our insolvency, and maybe an endless resurrection in which to prolong it. Really, that is just the same old B.C.-kind of time,

only more of it, and now in more respectable company. But the God of Scripture whom we confess does not settle for such old potatoes, being much more pragmatic, more results-oriented, more innovative than that. True, by becoming incarnate, a creature of time, this God does start running on our Old Time and is run by it – all the way into the grave. But by the time he is finished, he has put an end to that kind of time altogether, along with all its pauperizing works and ways. And he has replaced it not only with a new heaven and a new earth but also with a New Aeon – call it a New Time – complete with a new future and a new past. What's more, that is not only his time but ours, too. And already we have been running on it, he and we together, for some 2000 years now.

We said that Christ put an end to the old kind of time, the kind where the past mortgages the future. On his cross he did that, when he paid with his life, paid off all the mortifying IOUs of B.C. "It is finished," the Old Time is. All the perennial sighs of "A mother's work is never finished" and of fathers' "I'm never caught up" came to an end in Christ's consummatum est. There finally we do get caught up. Of course, that Old Time would have come to an end anyway, sooner or later, with or without Christ. For everyone it will, also for you and me. Whether or not we ever catch up, the past will eventually catch up with us. In due time all the obligations of B.C. will finally come due. Then there will be no more extending our payment period into the future. Time's up. But if that is going to happen anyway – The Final Judgment, The Last Analysis, the end of time as we know it – what was the point in Jesus' putting an end to the Old Time when he did, already 2000 years ago? Couldn't he wait? If this dreadful Endtime is still to come, regardless, why rush it?

5. A Switch In Time

Aha, notice the switch. Suddenly we are asking, Why did Christ come so early? Here, all along, we had been asking the opposite, Why did he come so late? Until now our question has been, Why did the incarnate God, by waiting so long to be born, let all that B.C. pile up and drag him down? Now we are asking instead, If Old Time is going to end anyway, all too soon, why did Christ have to come and end it even sooner – ahead of time? Why? Answer: to give us an option. The old option, until Christ the only option, is to wait for The Endtime and take our chances. The new option is not to wait but rather to face The Endtime prematurely and hope to preempt it. One option is to go on living our lives as we have, falling farther and farther behind in our obligations, in hopes that when The Endtime comes we may just have enough credit left to impress The Creditor. The other option is not to go it alone but instead to go through The Endtime with Christ, when he did, ahead of time. One option is to temporize and wish for the best. The other option is to anticipate, risking everything, even blasphemy, going for broke, with only Jesus and his promises to go on. Neither option is without enormous risk. On the one hand, if you try to “save your life you will lose it.” But the other option, Jesus’ way, while it promises to “save your life,” requires first of all that you lose it. Neither option is a no-lose situation. And let’s face it, rationally calculated, Jesus could turn out in The End to be wrong. Either way, you die. But now at least you have options as to how to die: permanently or, as we dare to confess, transitionally.

Old Time, as we have said over and over, operates by having the past mortgage the future. There was a reason for overworking that metaphor, “mortgage,” a christological reason. Etymologically the word means death-pledge. In times past a poor

debtor may have secured a loan by promising to repay it once she had come into her inheritance, that is, once the present owner of the estate – say, her older brother – died and left her his bequest. Her “pledge” (gage) to pay was posited on his “dying” (mors.) It sounds a bit morbid at first, her waiting for him to die, but not if it was he, the brother, who urged her to count on his death and to make her plans in that hope. Isn’t it so with our older Brother, Christ? He made a point of instituting “a new covenant in his blood,” to liquidate our vast indebtedness to the old covenant, where past mortgaged future?

Where the analogy breaks down is that, in our mortgage with Jesus, we the heirs come into his bequest by our dying with him. As our fellow-confessor Bonhoeffer put it, “When Christ calls us, he bids us come and die.” (CoD) There is no denying that that is a breathtaking invitation. In one of Seminex’ advent hymn-sings at Christ Church Cathedral a few years ago, there was this line in the sermon, “If you like bungee-jumping you’ll love Advent” – advent as in adventure. But beyond the risk is the come-on to take the risk, the lure of the promise: here in dying with Christ is where Old Time comes to its end way ahead of schedule. And what else but that have we been doing in our baptisms and every day since?

How to find words to describe this wonder of the New Time, Jesus’ ending of Old Time ahead of time, prior to its own appointed end? The wonder, being so new, defies old language. The best analogies for that wonder, I find, are from the tough slang we hear on the streets and at the edges of polite society. Thus we might say, in the lingo of the boxer, that Jesus beat Endtime to the punch or, like a gun-slinger, he beat Endtime to the draw or, like a wrestler, he got the jump on it, or, like outlaws in a Western, he headed Endtime off at the pass, or, like a reporter, he scooped it. The point in these analogies is not the machismo they exude. That part is directly belied by

Jesus as the Isaianic Suffering Servant, whose preeminent virtue is not bravado, not even bravery, but humility.

However, what these earthy analogies do convey is the element of foiling an adversary with a preemptive strike. And remember in this case who the adversary is: Old Time under the Law. Do you mean the very Law of God? Yes. But doesn't that put God's Son in an adversarial relation with God's, the same God's, own old order? Evidently so. What chutzpah! But why would Jesus risk that? Why? For now the mother's answer to the little girl is enough: But aren't you glad he did? Still, that would require the audacity either of a fool or of a child. Exactly. And as Paul said of Jesus' believers, we too are both of those things: children and fools, for following Jesus. But aren't you glad?

6. Time For Confessing, A Telling Time

In the Christian tradition there has long been a belief about confessors, those believers who have witnessed to the gospel in times of persecution, maybe not all that bravely but (let us hope) humbly, certainly humbled, possibly even humiliated. The belief is, those confessors were not just being mortified in this way or that but rather, already at that time, were being put through The Endtime, The Final Judgment. Way ahead of time, they were, here on earth while they were still alive. They were heading off The Endtime at the pass, long before it comes to pass for everyone else. Accordingly, the confessio they once made – whether before Pilate or the Diet of Augsburg or before the New Orleans convention or an LC-MS church council – already counts as the testimony they would ordinarily not have given until The Last Judgment, when everyone else will be held to account. Confessors and martyrs, by contrast, have already been through that accounting and, in The Endtime, will simply be

asked whether they still stand by their earlier witness. They get no other chance. They have already had that. It is this previous public confession of Christ, once upon a time, to which they will be held by the ultimate Creditor. Woe to them if then they disclaim it or apologize for it or ask to revise it. But Wow for them, the Creditor will say, if they stick by it.

It was in this belief about confessors that Luther preached a funeral sermon in 1532. The deceased was his own duke, Elector John of Saxony, who just two years before had been one of the little band of confessors (all of them laypeople!) who had stood before a hostile emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, probably hat in hand, bowing and scraping, to present their modest Confessio Augustana as they had been ordered to do, only to have it repudiated on the spot as false teaching. Luther's duke had not permitted him to go along to Augsburg because a contract had been put out on his life. But what Luther marvelled about in this prince who went in his stead was not nearly his courage so much as his humility. ("He was obliged to swallow all kinds of bitter broth and venom which the devil had poured out for him.") It was that earlier mortification, not his recent physical demise, which was the elector's "real death," namely, the one he had suffered "two years ago in Augsburg . . . not only for himself but for us all." Nevertheless, "there our beloved elector openly confessed Christ's death and resurrection before the whole

world and he stuck to it, staking his land and people, indeed his own body and life, upon it." This was the same elector whom Luther publicly had criticized for looting the monasteries. But on The Last Day, what is that sin compared with what the elector did at Augsburg? "For here the words of Christ stood sure: 'Every one who acknowledges me before human beings, I also will acknowledge before my Father.'" (LW 51: 237-240)

So Elector John scooped The Endtime way back in The Year of Our

Lord 1530. Half a century later his co-confessors joined him: "In the presence of God and of all Christendom among both our contemporaries and our posterity [that's us] we wish to have testified that the present [confession] . . . is our teaching, belief, and confession in which by God's grace we shall appear with intrepid hearts before the judgment seat of Jesus Christ and for which we shall give an account." (FC/SD 12:40) "With intrepid hearts" they went through The Endtime, the time of final accounting, way ahead of time and dared to get the jump on the very Law of God, in humble trust that it was God who personally had put them up to it. In that "time for confessing," long ago, they died. Such confessing is terminal. But so did Old Time die with them, then already. They, by contrast, will not stay dead, anymore than Christ does. We dare not minimize the awesomeness of such confessing. For it is, shall we say, a "rushing to Judgment," one's own Judgment, rather than waiting for that Judgment to summon us. No Christian wishes to precipitate that time of trial frivolously. That is why we pray, "Save us from the time of trial," just as our Lord prayed in the garden that he be spared the trial of Good Friday. But as Hattie, one of my favorite characters in a nursing home said of Christ, "Look at him now: he's up and around and doing quite well."

The title of this essay, "Telling Time," was meant as a pun. The phrase can be understood in more than one way. I can say of our three-year old granddaughter, "Ursula is learning to tell time." In that case it is she, the subject, who is doing the telling and it is "time," the object, which is being told. But the reverse can also be true. We say, "Time will tell." In this second sense it is time that does the telling and we are the ones who get told. There was a time, twenty-five years ago, when you and I did the telling. It was "a time for confessing" – to the whole world. It was, for us, a mortifying "show and tell

time.” We, whether we sought it or not, had to be the tellers. However, and this is the question, was that confessio of ours, twenty-five years ago, good enough, final enough to admit us when we “with intrepid hearts before the judgment seat of Jesus Christ . . . shall give an account?” Time will tell. We don’t yet know for sure. That future Endtime, for which we like everyone else must wait, will eventually tell whether our onetime confession in 1974 was God’s own. By then, of course, it will be too late for us to change.

The question really is this, and a quite personal question it is: Was our “time for confessing” a quarter of a century ago the telling time in still another, a third sense of “telling,” as when we speak of “the telling blow”? Was that the time which made all the difference, the big moment, the chance of a lifetime given us by God? Was that the time, as we said then, when we had to stand up and be counted, and be counted not just by others but by God? In the words of this week’s gospel, was that the time which we were given so to confess Christ before others as to be confessed by him before the Father? If it was – as with fear and trembling I believe, teach and confess it was – then that was also a time when The Endtime, The Last Analysis, came way ahead of time. That year The Final Future came very early. And we have been living with it ever since, in The New Time.

7. Backing Into the Future

Does this mean that the defining moment to which we look back is our own “time for confessing” in 1974, as if that were the time past when our new future began? Hardly. Indeed, the only thing which makes any “time for confessing” memorable at all is precisely that in that moment when confessors are on trial before God and the world they point, for their defense, away

from themselves to the only sufficing Defense they have, Jesus Christ. Anything short of that is simply not a confession of Christ. If during these anniversary days we are pointing back a mere twenty-five years ago we do so only because then, in that recent past, we had to confess how indefensible we all were (our accusers included) and instead had to pass the buck to a far more remote past, two millennia ago, to the only Defendant anyone (our accusers included) ever has had. It was that past, Christ's cross and resurrection and Pentecostal gift, not our re-telling of it, which this week's second lesson says was "once for all." It was that past which, when we did retell it, our accusers thought was beside the point, an evasion of the issue. It was that past which was the defining historical moment which scooped The Endtime. But because it is that past which is definitive for all time to come, that is likewise what made our saying it over (which is what confessing means) definitive for our own futures as well – and maybe, please God, for some small part of the church's future. In any case, the Message makes the messengers, not vice versa.

But isn't there something wrong here? For to hear us talk you would gather (and you would be right) that our future is still being shaped by the past. But isn't that the mark of Old Time, to which Christ allegedly put an end? Shouldn't Christians rather be looking ahead to the future, not back to the past? Doesn't Jesus himself command us, once we have put our hand to the plow, never to look back? (Lk. 9:62) Doesn't Hebrews urge us to run "the race that is set before us," not behind us? (12:1) Isn't it exactly this forward look which the biblical tradition gave to the American frontier? Isn't it this biblical futurism that makes us Americans all millenarians, whether religious or secular? Didn't Lincoln speak for our whole culture when he said, "Let the past as nothing be"? Then why should Christians be so un-American, so antiquarian, so counter-cultural as to

take their basic cue from 2000 years ago, even if that is the past of Jesus' death and rising?

But oh, what a past that is! That is no longer the past which, under the Law, burdens the future with unmet obligations. That is the alternative past, the new past, when Christ uncoupled the future from all old debts and instead launched a future which is debt-free, a future not of "got-to" but of "get-to." When Emerson says, "Be not the slave of your own past," I can re-interpret his advice much more radically than he ever intended: Yes, not the slave of my own past, but of Christ's. For he came not to destroy the past or to demean it but to liberate and "save" it. He came to save time along with everything else he had created. Once upon a time he did.

But what about the biblical metaphors of running the race or plowing? Obviously you cannot do that looking backward. Yet those pictures do not exhaust the options. For example, picture a person rowing a boat. He too plows ahead but faces to the rear. The future, out ahead, is the open sea, stormy and shrouded in fog. He rows right into it but with his back to it. How can he see where he's going? By fixing his gaze on that landmark from which he came. His destination is visible only in his point of departure.

It's all he's got to go by. It is the cross of Christ, the one and only past which holds his future. The farther out he rows the darker the sea up ahead: "ventures of which we cannot see the ending, paths as yet untrodden, perils unknown." So the louder he calls back to shore, "Lift high the cross." He gets his bearing by lining up that cross, as his base point, with a nearer marker, his baptism, and that in turn with still other markers, his times for confessing. The oarsman is not only the individual Christian. He is the church, a whole boatful, cheering each other on with shouts of Wow, probably led by the cheerleader, the coxswain, the little girl on the back bench.

RWB

Saint Louis

1999 Anno Domini

25th Anniversary of Seminex

469th Anniversary of the Augsburg Confession

[TELLINGTIME \(PDF\)](#)

Faith and Reason in a Post-Secular World

Colleagues,

Three days hence Marie and I, God willing, fly off to Indonesia for my three-month stint as pastor in the English-language Christian congregation in Bali. We hope to have Email access, but at present details are fuzzy. If you need to know, consult ThTh co-host Robin Morgan. She'll know as soon as we know. Should Email fail, here are the snailmail and phone/fax facts: Hotel Dhyana Pura, P.O.Box 1010, Interport Ngurah Rai, Seminyak, Kuta, Bali, Indonesia.

Phone: 62 (=Indonesia) 361 (=Bali) 730-442 (=Hotel) Fax: 62 361 730-463.

Today's "Auf Wiedersehen" piece is another one on faith and science. When we get back, D.v., from the other side of the world in November, I'm slotted to emcee a series on this topic in our local congregation here in St. Louis. That's why I've been snooping around in the genre.

Peace & Joy!

Ed

“Is science uncovering the face of God in our post-secular world?” That is the question Glynn’s going after. His answer is a feisty “Yes!”—and he’s not a crazy, a TV evangelist, or a monkey-trial madman. His gig is science, the heavy egg-head stuff that’s been the prize fruit of the Enlightenment. That Enlightenment science gave us moderns the message—gleeful for some, doleful for others: “Sorry, folks, there is no evidence for God out there.”

But here at the end of the millennium “it ain’t necessarily so.” That song from Porgy and Bess is now being refocused. Sportin’ Life originally sang those words about “the things that you’re liable to read in the Bible.” But in these last days, Glynn says, those words now apply to what in days past we were “liable to read in science.” You know, when Christian kids went to college it was “the things that vexed when we opened our texts” — in biology, psychology, geology, and of course philosophy and lit crit. Says Glynn: T’ain’t necessarily so.

So what’s happened to the “atheist scientists” we all know about, many of whom are still around? [There’s pluralism in their midst too.] Glynn tell us. He’s been there; done that. And now he’s “back” to Christian faith, but he’s not jettisoned his scientific and intellectual smarts to do so. ‘Fact is they’ve pushed him to see the evidence for God in today’s postsecular world. And that evidence is IN the stuff the scientists, using their hard-headed research tools, are telling us they are finding.

But it’s not just Glynn. Quote the dust jacket:

“A startling transformation is taking place in Western scientific and intellectual circles. Recent discoveries in

physics, medicine, psychology, and other fields paint a radically new picture of the universe and humanity's place within it. Central is the dawning realization that the cosmos, far from being a sea of chaos, appears instead to be an intricately tuned mechanism whose every molecule and every physical law seems to have been designed from the very first nanosecond of the big bang toward a single end—the creation of life."In this provocative book, Patrick Glynn lays out the astonishing new evidence that led him away from the atheism he acquired [after a boyhood of Jesuit education] as a student at Harvard and Cambridge. The facts are fascinating: Physicists are discovering an unexplainable order to the universe; medical researchers are reporting extraordinary healing powers of prayer and documenting credible accounts of near-death experiences; and psychologists are finding that religious faith is a powerful elixir "for" [not "against," Dr. Freud!] mental health.

"God: The Evidence demonstrates that faith today is not grounded in ignorance. It is where reason has been leading us all along."

Folks with a Reformation twist to their heritage will see evidence in this book that Glynn is indeed a Roman Catholic who's now returned from that atheistic far country. Any signal of the supernatural that scientists are finding (e.g., the healing value of faith, "any kind of faith," the documented healthy consequences of practicing the "ethics of Jesus") has him turning cartwheels. Well, almost. Granted, what he shows us is not to be pooh-poohed. But it's still a stretch to get from scientists "finding room for God" all the way over to faith in a crucified and risen Messiah.

In Lutheran lingo the stuff Glynn gleans from postsecular

scientists is data about deus absconditus, the hidden God. Not hidden so that there are no signals from this deity. Yes, signals aplenty. But signals that this deity is merciful to sinners? No. Even if the world out there is not “all red in tooth and claw,” the evidence for messages of mercy and rumors of redemption are either non-existent, or at best very ambiguous. If “science is uncovering the Face of God,” there is still a veil over the face’s that’s been detected.

But you can build Christian (=Christ-specific) bridges to those data. Someone way back in Christian history [2 Corinthians 3] once put it this way: “The veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away.” That’s our next agenda.

A Response to Homosexuality and Reformation Theology

Here is Steve Albertin’s response to Ed’s THTH #51 about homosexuality and Ed’s response to Steve’s response.

Enjoy,
Robin

Ed, I never thought I would ever say this but you sound antinomian. First, in your discussion of the orders of creation, you seem to want to bless every “given” that someone has in his experience. Just because something is experienced as a “given” does not mean that it is “good.” I may experience all sorts of impulses as “givens” but that does not necessarily mean that

they are helpful, good or healthy.

You seem to want bless all and every change that takes place in the orders of creation. But should that necessarily be the case? Are all changes necessarily "godly", i.e., a blessing of the creator? Could not some of those changes be of the Evil One or even the judgment of God? It seems that there must be some kind of criteria for judging whether such changes in the orders of creation are a blessing from God . . . or are curses from God; God handing over the world to judgment or are just plain signs that this is a broken world, post-Genesis 3, in which evil is very real?

You cite the principles of preservation and recompense as the operative godly principles of "secular" creation. If God is up to doing something new in the orders of creation and it is taking the shape of homosexuality, then the changes ought to enhance the principles of preservation and recompense. If they don't, then I suspect that such changes are not blessings of God, part of God's continuing creation of the world. The way I see it, the evidence for homosexuality being a gift of creation from God is ambiguous . . . at best.

Something which is significantly absent from so many of the debates about homosexuality is the whole issue of natural law. It seems that any common sense observation of creation recognizes that there are certain dimensions of creation which are pretty stable, if not immutable. I haven't seen any evolutionary change going on recently in the law/ the order . . . of gravity. I suspect that there are also some fundamental constants in human nature and especially in the area of human physiology that are pretty permanent. One is the nature of the human body. It seems that there are certain fundamental aspects of the human body which define what "healthy" sexual behavior is.

Some years ago when my wife was taking a human anatomy and physiology class in college in preparation for nursing school, we got into a conversation about homosexuality. She noted that the human rectum is simply not designed for sexual behavior. It contains some of the most sensitive tissue in the human body. Abuse it and it will bleed like hell. Of course, if homo or heterosexuals choose to abuse their bodies in this way, they had better be willing to suffer the consequences. and they do, cf. AIDS. In contrast, the female vagina contains some of the toughest tissue in the female body. Of course, why should we be surprised? I suspect that the creator designed such tough tissue for the rigors of sexual expression. It seems that homosexual behavior lacks this kind of physiological appropriateness. Homosexual sexual behavior has to resort to other kinds of bodily expressions, none of which can claim the “naturalness” of penile/vaginal sexual expression.

There has been a strange silence concerning this kind of explicit and bodily behavior in so much of the homosexual debate. Could this be some kind of prudery? Are we still so uncomfortable with our bodies? Or . . . maybe a discussion of the very “bodily” nature of human sexuality is avoided because at root we have a gnostic understanding of sexuality? We find it easy to talk about love and romance and feelings in sexuality but downplay the very bodily nature of it.

Of course, fundamental to the “preservative” function of the orders of sexuality is procreation. That function is, of course, lacking in homosexuality. And, in my humble judgment, the diminution of the procreative function in our modern understanding of sexuality has not been all positive. In some cases it has “dehumanized” sexuality.

I also sense that implicit in the homosexual perspective is a diminution of gender differences. In other words, our bodies

which define us as male or female are basically irrelevant. What matters is how those bodies are used sexually. But again, this seems to be a gnostic depreciation of the body.

Our bodies are important as to who we are. And God made those bodies male and female. Implicit in the bodily structure of males and females is a complementarity which finds its fulfillment in heterosexual sex.

Perhaps homosexuality could be seen as a kind of "handicap." (I think Thielecke also talks about it this way in his Ethics of Sex.) I might compare it to the congenital deafness with which our oldest daughter, Katherine, was born. She has always experienced her deafness as a "given" in her life. There are "radicals" (that's my word) in the deaf community today who use the experience of the "givenness" of their deafness to argue that it is not a handicap at all. They are just "differently abled." It is a blessing subject to the same uses and abuses as "hearing." In some deaf schools, ASL is considered the "native" language of the deaf and English is learned only as a second language. I find it hard to see deafness as a blessing when my daughter won't ever be able to appreciate Bach or the Beatles. I will find it hard to consider her deafness a blessing when she gets struck by a car crossing the street because she can't "hear" its approach.

You argue elsewhere that everything that is done in faith is OK. That sounds antinomian to me. And I am not arguing for a calvinist 3rd use of the law. No, I am saying that the Law still functions in the life of the believer as it does for the unbeliever. (Isn't that what the 3rd use of the law is? The first and second use all over again the life of the believer?) Isn't it the first use of the law which provides the structure and orders within which faith must be lived out? Doesn't the first use of the law still provide those structures within which

the principles of God's recompense and preservation are carried out? I don't see how you or anyone else is providing a compelling case for arguing that homosexuality (even if it is a "given") is a blessing from God. How do you know that it couldn't be a curse?

So much of the pro-gay talk in the church seems to be couched in terms of "rights" and self-expression. To me this sounds an awful lot like the old Adam talking. I think the church is right to resist when the argument is cast like this.

I don't see many Lutheran churches these days making homosexuality a big issue. I don't see many of them in the grasp of homophobia. In a sense, I suspect that there is kind of "don't ask, don't tell" policy. When homosexuality does emerge as an issue in parish life, it is handled on a case by case basis subject to the freedom and privacy of pastoral care. Individual congregations have been given the freedom to work out their own responses. I don't know of any Lutherans who are saying that you can't be gay and Christian at the same time. However, when it comes to the church "blessing" homosexual behavior, I think we are being asked to speak a clear word from God when there is no such clarity. Who are we to presume to be able to understand the mind of God and that God is indeed about doing a new wonderful thing in the ongoing management of his creation in the case of homosexuality, when no one has been able to make a compelling case for that? All of the defenses have been on the basis of personal experience. I don't think that is sufficient reason to suddenly claim to know the mind of God and call it a blessing.

When it comes to ordaining people into the ministry, I am always disturbed by those who think it is some kind of "right." "I have a right to become an ordained pastor in the church if I think God has called me." Ordination is not a "right" but a privilege

bestowed by the church when it has discerned a call to ministry. We have all sorts of educational expectations for the ministry today. Given the continuing lack of clarity and downright “mystery” surrounding the “goodness” of homosexuality, I think the church is doing the right thing to be conservative here. Therefore, no non-celibate gay clergy. Such are the imperfect “left-handed” realities of institutional church life. I don’t think excluding non-celibate gays from the clergy roster is calling into question their faith or somehow adding a requirement to the gospel.

I’m interested in your response.

PAX,
Steve Albertin

Steve,
Whew! That’s a big load of hay! You’re not far from the kingdom I’d say, but....

To your paragraphs: Referenced here by the paragraph’s first words REPEATED IN CAPS and then the KEY TERM in CAPS AGAIN

Para: ED, I NEVER THOUGHT...

ANTINOMIAN in BoC lingo is one who says no to the law’s first two (and only) functions. Remember the “USUS” of the law in BoC is not “our” using the law, but God’s using the law.

God uses God’s law;

1. to preserve creation,
2. to reward the right-doers and punish the wrong-doers.

And of course these two are linked in that by virtue of God’s doing #2, #1 also happens. I don’t see how you can say I’m going “anti-” here. I intend it to be the opposite. In my spiel

on this topic I'm trying to pursue these very two: How might be/is God doing #1 and #2 in this whole business?

BLESS

I'm not out to bless every "given." Don't think I even used the term, though it pops up a whole bunch of times in this long piece from you. So it must be a big deal for you. You hear me "blessing" "H", and you know that should not be.

Two things. Blessing is a specific Hebrew term which does not mean "That's OK, or even that's Great." Blessing = "You are in the Right Place [with God] and therefore with others too," so a Hebrew Rabbi told me. So when TEV translates Matt. 5 "Happy is the one...", it couldn't be farther from the meaning of the word bless. If I were to bring this key Biblical term into the mix, I'd proceed something like this: Gays are "blessed"—also in their gayness—when they are "in the Right place with God..."

IMPULSES

Don't think that was my topic either. I was talking about "wiring." Through genetics, and/or social surroundings and/or a zillion early family formative factors, G/Ls wind up with these givens. That's the playing field God gives them to play the game of faith on. In our current cultures—secular and churchly—that's not easy. There is a handicap. But you could just as readily say the culture creates the handicap, as say the H constitutes it. Our culture is but one of many—both many right now and many from history past. There are/have been other people-groups in the world where the culture didn't /doesn't handicap G/Ls.

If you insist on talking "impulse", then impulse is the electric current that flows when the switch gets turned on, but the "wiring system" already sets the pattern of where/how that current will flow.

Para.YOU SEEM TO WANT TO BLESS—changes in the orders of

creation.

The bless business I spoke to above. Sounds to me that here you speak of “Orders of creation” in the way that I claim is wrong for Reformation understanding of the term. To wit: Schoepfungsordnung are not set patterns laid down in Genesis, but the ORDNUNG (gramatically a gerund) ordainings that God continually and with variety keeps on plunking down in our world.

JUDGMENT. BLESS. CURSE.

We are not left without any yardstick for measurement for checking out whether creation-changes are Good news or Bad news in left-hand terms. Once more that yardstick is the law of preservation of life and the law of retribution. Here already I’ll say that it sounds to me as though your (later) use of preservation is [only?] macro-cosmically focused, i.e., sexuality for the continued procreation of people on this planet.

To this two things: 1) two respondents last week allowed as how with the planet blowing apart from too many humans on it, NON-procreation of humans sounds much more preservational than the continued pruduction of babies. Secondly. Preservation needs to be fundamentally focused on the micro-cosm of individual people and samllish human communities. Thus you and Ann have been “preserving/care-taking” each other—also sexually—for many years. And your “preserving” work with you kids—as you well know—was not at all finished when you produced them. That was merely tahe beginning of the (ugh!) beeeeg job of preservation that followed, and has not yet stopped. G/L couples are not exempt from this very same kind of preserving work, as God uses God’s law of preservation in their lives.

BLESS AND CURSE

Just as “bless” does not mean “you’re OK,” so does “curse” mean “go to hell.” Curse means “you’re in the wrong place in your relationship with God, self, and others.

Para: YOU CITE THE PRINCIPLES

Whether G/L people can land do carry out these 2 usus of the creator’s law? Whether they even can? You will have to ask them—Christ-confessing ones, of course? I have posed such questions. I’ve seen it happening in lots of cases. Just as within the Christian community they may ask you: How are you doing on these two in your own life of relationships?

Para: SOMETHING WHICH IS SIGNIFICANTLY ABSENT

NATURAL LAW. Dicey topic. I’m Elertian on this one, ala the Christian Ethos book. Elert critiques the “standard” western notion (also RC) on nat. law. And you give hints that the one you’re working with is the one he critiques. But maybe not. Here are some thoughts: Natural law is an unknown thing in the Bible. Just as “Nature” is unknown in the scriptures. When Lutherans do (if constrained) talk about nat. law, they are constrained to frame the discussion into Usus #1 and #2 lingo.

So also if you want to talk about **HUMAN PHYSIOLOGY** and the tissue facts of anal and vaginal linings. Once more, talk with the G/Ls themselves on this one. I’m told that there are quite a few alternates to anal sex, just as heteros have alternates to the vaginal format.

Para: OF COURSE FUNDAMENTAL TO PRESERVATION

I’ve referred to this above. Right now, seems to me, “Fundamental” to the preservation of the planet is that straights stop having so many babies. And maybe even promote the pattern of G/Ls adopting the millions of unwanted/discarded kids that get thrown away in our time.

Para: I ALSO SENSE...

Term: "GNOSTIC DEPRECIATION".

Not at all obvious to me that homos depreciate bodies anymore than heteros do. Sounds to me that in your (almost) telling G/Ls not to value their homo bodies with all its wiring as it de facto is, YOU are the one using them to be gnostic, to be anti-body, to imagine something else, about themselves.

Para: YOU ARGUE ELSEWHERE...

Term: EVERYTHING DONE IN FAITH IS OK.

I didn't say "OK" (or if I did, I shouldn't have). If "Everything that does not proceed from faith is sin," ala Paul, then the obverse must be true: "Everything done in faith is RIGHTEOUSNESS [non-peccatum]." If that's anti-nomian, then Paul—of all folks—is one such. But that is not anti-nomian, I'd say, in the sense of the technical term used in the FC. At least it's no more anti-nomian than the Gospel itself. Which is "the end of the law for those in Christ Jesus."

Your reference later in this para. to **STRUCTURES AND ORDERS** sounds to me as though it's sliding away from the notion of "ordaining" that I claim is the "echt" Lutheran take on creation. And, of course, there are new ordainings that come with the new creation that do indeed overturn and replace those of the godly given ordainings in the first creation. Elert points to a whole bunch of these (without short-changing the old ones) in chapters 6 to 10 in The Christian Ethos—even using the term "New Ordnungen."

Para: SO MUCH OF THE PRO-GAY TALK...

I'm glad you do not associate me with that, cause that's hardly what I'm promoting. Although sometimes your rhetoric does make me pause for a moment, as though you really do hear me to be a "gay-lib."

Final big para: WHEN IT COMES TO ORDAINING PEOPLE...

Correct. I agree: ordaining into the ministry is not a "right." But the fundamentally ignored fact at the center of the whole ordination "gefuffel" (Aussie term), even on the ordination of straights, is that ordained clergy as we now have them is itself one of those "Creator's ordainings" [=a left-hand phenomenon!] that is itself like all of God's ordainings in creation a sometime thing. It changes as church history changes.

Example: I'm sure it's safe to say that most of Africa's mucho millions of Christians get nourished on word and sacrament without "ordained" clergy. To say nothing of the "historic episcopate." In terms of the (possible) historical mutability of all God's ordainings, even if it could be established that there was an hist. episcopate, that would be like saying Constantine was the one who called the Council of Nicea. Great. But times change. Given what's happened in the churches of the "hist. episc." especially in Europe—the whole continent is now a mission field—it seems clear to me that hist. episc. is passe. Maybe ordained clergy too. Has God not rendered it passe, by generating all sorts of other "ordainings" for getting word and sacrament to people and for promoting mission therewith.

Pax et Gaudium!

Ed