

Christian Conversation with an Ex-Marxist

Colleagues,

Eleven years ago today, the day before Luther's birthday, the Berlin Wall came tumbling down. Makes me think of the semester-long stint that Marie and I did thereafter in Lithuania, one of the countries of the former Soviet bloc. We're still in e-mail connection with folks we met there in the city of Klaipeda, one of whom is Alexei. A twenties-something young man Alexei was the one techie we found—possibly in all of Lithuania—who knew how to repair Macintosh laptops. But Alexei is not Lithuanian. He's a Russian, as are many now living in all three Baltic countries (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania), a consequence of Kremlin policy of settling their own in the territories they occupied.

We became good friends, learned of his broken marriage and his affection for his young son, for whom he had shared custody. We had meals together and faith/unfaith talk together. Though raised atheist, Alexei was atheist no longer, he said. He'd had some god-experience, linked, as we understood him, to some miraculous rescue from the jaws of death—maybe more than once. He detested the church, wasn't sure about Jesus, but was sure about God.

We're still in contact with Alexei. He recently sent us an e-photo of son Sasha and himself at the new McDonalds in Klaipeda! We also continue the faith/unfaith conversation—sporadically—via cyberspace. ThTh 126 gives you a sample of that from earlier this fall.

Peace & Joy!

Ed

Dear Alexei,

Some time has passed since we received your last e-mail. In that message you were talking about “heavy stuff,” God, church, faith, and such. I take courage from your last line in that communication, where you say: “I’ll be happy if you would let me know your opinion.” You may no longer remember the many things you said in that previous posting. Then again you may have it saved somewhere. To focus my own response I’ll list some of the things you said.

- 1. One major theme was your critique of church-institutions, no matter what their confessional heritage is. You have experienced them to be the same as other social clubs—united around a particular interest, “a labour union, a women’s organization, or a political party (the best example probably), that serves the needs of the people. When it comes to bookkeeping, secretaries, uniform, ranks, special education, it becomes a monster.”*
- 2. Another item was: atheism. You said: “In Soviet union times, when I was a kid it was like: Atheist = anti-God. In this case I’m not one. But if Atheist = anti-Church, I am one.”*
- 3. Toward the end—after this information about what you do not believe, you come to your own statements about your faith and about God. “I don’t belong to any confession, and I don’t need any in my way of understanding of God. I don’t need a mediator. I could consider You – Marie and Ed and the people like You, I meet from time to time, are the Church for me. Such a people never direct me, they just give me their suggestions (not even advices), so I have an opportunity to recognize the things I need to think about. There are no dogmas in this Church. I’m absolutely sure, this is the Church of God. And I’m also sure, I’m not the only one who thinks in this way.”*

OK, I'll pick up on the "suggestion" term (which you approve of) and add that to your telling us that you'd "be happy if you would let me know your opinion."

1. My opinion is that much of your critique about church organizations is true. Yet I'm convinced that humans were created/destined/evolved to live in community. So it is not impossible to imagine a Robinson Crusoe existence of total solitude, but in real life it's not that way. Communities of some sort are inescapable for us humans. Even marriage and family is already a mini-community. Like all human communities none of them is ever perfect—I don't have to tell you that—and contributing to the imperfection is not just "them," but "me" too. So the bad stuff, the flaws, in all communities have a similar component in me too. If that is so, what to do? Some thoughts—

A. In many (most?) cases we don't choose the communities we are in. I didn't choose to be born in the Schroeder family (of German heritage), didn't choose to be white, didn't choose to be male, didn't choose to be American, didn't choose to be in a capitalist economic system, didn't choose to spend most of my life in the 20th century, didn't even choose to be baptized as a child in the Lutheran religious community. Marriage is one community I did choose to put myself into. And maybe one or two more. But most of the communities that have shaped my life, made me what I am, are communities I didn't choose but that were given to me, even "pushed" upon me.

B. Well, then... If they are inescapable in principle, then you make the best you can of the communities

where you are a member. Where possible you seek to make them better. Sometimes even create new communities that will be better for human welfare than the one(s) presently there. But not getting caught on the utopian notion that "WE" could create the perfect community. For I carry within myself a selfish-ego that doesn't disappear even in the "good" communities I help create to replace old "bad" ones.[Theology note: What I've just mentioned in the last sentence above is what Christians call "sin." "Sin" is not "doing bad stuff to other people." Doing such bad stuff is a SYMPTOM of sin, a consequence of it. Sin itself is the Biblical term for human self-centeredness, which never totally disappears in even the best of people. And it has consequences for my God-connection and for my people-connections. In specific Christian terms: If the "direction of my life" regularly curves back into myself, then that "direction" will not be fully devoted to God, the source of my existence, nor to my fellow humans, the community members I'm destined to serve. These sentences do not explain why this is so. Instead they describe what constantly happens. A friend of mine once said: If you meet someone who doesn't believe in sin (as described here), tell them: "Just have children."]

C. So the same with churchy-communities. Some of us got "born" into such communities. Some of us (you, for example) got born into a non-church community. But since you believe in God, you no longer belong to the old Marxist anti-god Russian community. You propose to continue your life of faith without community, if I understand you correctly. I know that such a point of view is not impossible, but

this much, at least, I'd "suggest": being in a good religious/churchy community is a lot more fun! I've been in religious-community since the early days of my life. But in the 1970s it was no "fun" at all. Finally I was kicked out of that Lutheran church community where I grew up, because I was a "heretic." Well, a number of others were also kicked out at that time. So what happened? We exiles gathered together and formed another churchy community: The Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches. Our group eventually merged with other Lutherans in the USA, and that is our community now. It too is not perfect, there are many things to critique, but it is "more fun" to be inside this community than to be outside of it. In fact, part of the "fun" is that I'm allowed to critique the "bad" stuff in my church and NOT get kicked out. In fact, I even have fellow critics who make up a sub-community in this larger national church community.

D. On the business of "god."

I was helped years ago by reading a few paragraphs by Martin Luther concerning the first of the Ten Commandments. The Biblical text of that commandment (the God of Israel speaking) says: "You shall have no other gods besides me." Luther begins by thinking about the words "have a god." To have a god, he says, is not to believe in a supernatural power, some being "up there" in the stratosphere. No, the place to look for where gods are is inside human hearts. The focus is on "verbs of the heart" to find out who people's gods are. Even if they do, or do not, believe in the existence of a spiritual power, a being "up there" somewhere. These "verbs of the heart" are "fear, love, and trust." What is

your heart, your life at its center, fearing or loving or trusting. That is who your actual god is, no matter what you believe or don't believe about spiritual or supernatural beings. Luther uses the folksy phrase, "whatever you hang your heart on," for this. Whatever you hang your heart on is your real god. And most folks probably have several such gods most of the time. Having gods is a practical daily-life reality; it is not what you think or believe in your head. From our conversations in the past I have a hunch about what some of your gods might be. But I won't mention my guesses until I hear from you what you yourself see that your heart is hanging on. And it is interesting that Luther does not only use "positive" verbs of the heart, "love and trust," but also the negative one, "fear." If/when fear (about anything whatsoever) dominates the human heart, then that "negative-god" is the god my heart is hanging on—even if in terror.

In this sense full-fledged Marxists of the Soviet era, despite their official atheism, were theists. They had gods, things their hearts were hanging on. At least there was one official god, the classless society. And the way many of the leaders actually practiced their Marxism showed that they had other gods as well—the dacha in the forest, along with other things that they "loved and trusted." And there also were the gods they "feared" and consequently sought to eliminate.

If this "suggestion" for a line of thinking interests you, I can send the full text of Luther's thoughts on this to you. You could also find them

in Klaipeda at the library of the seminary where I taught back in 1997. It is Luther's explanation of the first commandment in his Large (not the Small) Catechism.

E. With communities, religious ones too, as I proposed above, it is often wise to change to a better one when you find yourself in a bad one. So it is with the gods we hang our hearts on too. Some are downright destructive—not just of others, but of their devotees as well. And even among the “good” ones, some are better than others. Christians “suggest” that the Jesus story in the Bible points to the best God they’ve encountered so far. The God whom Jesus himself “feared, loved, and trusted” is the God he commends to his followers. Christians are people who follow Jesus in hanging their hearts on the same God. Of course, Jesus is not simply recommending a specific God, as a car salesman who urges you to buy his BMW “because it’s the best.” Jesus himself (his life and work on earth as one of us) is woven into the God he recommends, and eventually when you hang your heart on the God whom Jesus recommends, Jesus too is part of the package. In Christian language: Jesus is the “way” to get to this God.

When first century Christians were asked: “Who is YOUR God?” their answer was: “Whoever it was that sent Jesus and later raised him from the dead, THAT one is our God.” That is the God they hung their hearts on. [So it’s no surprise that Christmas and Easter are at the core of Christian “God-talk” and that Christians celebrate these events.] When Marie and I were with you 3 years ago, we were commending

this God to you. We still do.

Peace & Joy to you, to Sasha, to Sasha's mother too!
Marie & Ed

Palestinian Lutherans in Today's War Zone (Continuation of ThTh #124)

Colleagues:

Half a dozen, maybe more, responses (some of them lengthy pieces) have come my way since last week's posting about Christians Palestinians. I'd like to send them all your way, especially the two coming from Jewish authors who speak out for the Palestinians in their ironic David/Goliath dilemma with Israel, but it's too much. So I've selected two others—one quite short, the other perhaps 3 pages—to pass on as ThTh 125.

Peace & Joy!
Ed Schroeder

I. FIRST ONE is from our friend Munib A. Younan, Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Jordan and Jerusalem [ELCJ].

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ, I send you today this attachment which is self-explanatory.

I believe that it is now time for more prayer and sanity. On behalf of the ELCJ, I do appeal to you to assign Sunday, November 5th, 2000 as Sunday for special prayers , solidarity and support for the Christian witness and mission of the ELCJ and for the children who are living in horror and fear in our country, and also for comprehensive just, lasting peace in the land of the resurrection.

I appeal to you that your churches and respective congregations can act upon my appeal.

Your Brother in Christ,

*Bishop Munib A. Younan
The Lutheran Bishop in Jerusalem*

[It is not completely clear in the email transmission, but I think what follows here is "this attachment" referred to in the bishop's message above. Ed]

Here is the name and address of the US-based "Association of Lutherans of Arab and Middle Eastern Heritage" to which contributions for the work of the ELCJ can be sent, for which also contribution forms will be issued which can be submitted for recognition as tax-deductible contributions by the US IRS. The address:

*Rev. Dr. Bassam. J. Abdallah
Association of Lutherans of Arab and Middle Eastern
Heritage
6705 Hohman Ave.
Hammond, IN 46324*

Rev. Bassem Abdallah has indicated that checks for the ELCJ and its work should be made out to the Evangelical

Lutheran Church in America, earmarked "ELCJ Level II".

II. SECOND ONE comes from Paul Hoffman, rostered ELCA pastor, now retired from a life-long career in overseas ministry—first with the Luth. World Federation in Geneva, then missionary prof in Ethiopia, then a couple other assignments, and for his last 16 years liaison for the Berliner Mission Society with Lutherans in the Middle East. From his twice-a-year trips to Israel/Palestine Paul not only knows everyone in the ELCJ and many local Muslims and Israelis too, but also has a unique understanding on what's going on—as you will see below. Paul and I met as seminary students 50 years ago, he attending the LCA sem in Philadelphia and I the LCMS sem in St. Louis. We've stayed in touch over the half century. Our last longer time together was in 1995 as guest profs in Ethiopia. Most recently Paul and his wife (Lu)Ise were leaders for a group of us on a two week pilgrimage with Palestinian Lutherans at Christmastime 1998. The Hoffmans live in Berlin. Paul's an American citizen, Ise German. Paul is a native of Buffalo, New York, and that's his legal residence.

Date: October 30, 2000

From: Paul E. Hoffman

Topic: On the Election and the Israel/Palestine Issue

Dear Ed and Marie,

I send off my absentee ballot tomorrow and will be voting in New York State for Gore/Lieberman — and for Hilary, too. Of course, I'm not sure about Gore or Lieberman on the Israel/Palestine question. Just as I was not sure about Carter, a Southern Baptist of Evangelical persuasion. On the same question I was pleased about Bush Senior and James Baker, and have been much disappointed

and frustrated by the Clinton/Albright support for Barak at and after Camp David II. (I have been a reluctant and critical supporter of the Oslo/Washington “peace process”).)

Traditionally, prior to the establishment of the State of Israel, Orthodox Jews – both in Israel and the States – were, in the vast majority, anti-Zionists, opposed on theological grounds to the Zionist view of history which demanded discarding a messianic view of the redemption of Israel (the people) by the promised messiah in favor of the idea of “auto-redemption”, i.e. seeing the establishment of a Jewish State in Palestine not as something which the messiah would bring about, but as a political task for Jews to work at, and the fulfillment of the visions of the prophets not as a dream, but as a political goal to be achieved by political – and if necessary military – means. Secular Zionists proclaimed, in other words, “self-redemption” to be brought about by the Zionist movement in collaboration with one or the other of the Great (colonial-imperialist) Powers. Orthodoxy was opposed to the whole idea – on pious, religious grounds. But so were Reform or liberal Jews in America at the time.

At the establishment of the State, Ben Gurion and his secularist-socialist Zionists made every effort – verbally and politically – to bring the Orthodox in Israel and outside Israel, as well as Reform Jews in the US into acceptance of the State. Most Orthodox in America and Israel now saw in the creation of the State of Israel hope of the dawning of the messianic age, just as most Conservative Evangelicals, despite criticism of the ideology and policies of the secular, socialist Jewish state, nevertheless saw the in-gathering of the Jews in

the Land of Promise as the necessary preparation for the Return of Christ and either the establishment of the Thousand-Year Reign or the Battle of Armageddon against the Evil Empire (depending on what kind of a millenialist you were).

After the Six-Day-War of 1967 and the “miraculous” salvation of Israel from the combined enmity of the Arab States and, with that victory, the establishment of Israeli sovereignty over all of Jerusalem and the Temple Mount and all Judea and Samaria, religious support among Orthodox Jews and Conservative Evangelical Christians jumped exponentially. Only a small minority of the Ultra-Orthodox continued to reject all support for Israel on religious-theological grounds (they even explicitly supported Arafat and the PLO – up till now!). Religious Zionism spread among the Orthodox Jews of America. But after the disaster of the invasion of Lebanon, the indiscriminate bombardment of Beirut and the massacres in the Sabra and Shatilla refugee camps in 1982, some Orthodox Jews in Israel and in the US joined the “Peace Now” movement. In other words, I know that there is a variety of political opinion among Orthodox Jews, both in Israel and in the USA, as there is also among Reform and Conservative Jews.

Lieberman’s being an Orthodox Jew does not bother me in regard to the Israel/Palestine question! After all, he is a supporter of the (now defunct) American backed “peace process”. What bothers me is the onesidedness of America’s role in that process. I favor a more even-handed approach which would see complete withdrawal of Israeli forces from the territories occupied in 1967, including the Arab Palestinian communities of East Jerusalem, some sort of internationally guaranteed

political division and shared responsibility for the Old City which would lead to a new Status Quo agreement laying down the rights of Christians, Muslims and Jews in the Old City and the Holy Places in the Land, and the establishment of a Palestinian state with defined boundaries alongside of and recognized by Israel. ETC. (Arab refugees would be allowed to return to Palestine—if not to Israel—and be compensated for properties confiscated by Israel. Indemnity payments would be made to Palestine by Israel. Israeli settlements would be dismantled as such, Jews being given the right to continue to live in the Land as citizens of Palestine or be allowed to be resettled in Israel, whichever they chose. The settlements that remained would be ethnically and religiously mixed and unarmed.)

Perhaps because he is a believing Jew, Lieberman might actually seek to be fair in the Palestine/Israel question. The problem is not Jewishness but nationalism (religious or secular) blinded to the legitimate rights of others (Hamas and Islamic Jihad and Hisbollah being the real problem on the other side, not the PLO.)

What bothers me about a possible Republican administration at the present time is my memory of the Reagan administration, Reagan addressing the Conservative Evangelicals and identifying the then Soviet Union as the “Evil Empire” (and getting resounding applause!). It was Reagan also who redefined the Israeli settlements in the Occupied Territories no longer as “illegal” (according to UN standards of international legitimacy), but merely “impediments to peace” (which did not stop any of the Israeli governments since then from establishing new settlements and expanding those that already existed), financing these in part with American credits aimed at

strengthening Israeli “security” – which sounds legitimate enough, while covering a multitude of political sins.

What bothers me about George W. is his lack of historical and geographical knowledge and seeing the world solely in terms of “American (economic and military) interests” (or do I have this wrong?). I’m afraid that he personally is no match for the American Military-Industrial-Petroleum Complex. And Cheney bothers me even more! Prof. C. Rice (a conservative Black American) who is foreign policy advisor to the Bush campaign gives me some degree of hope regarding Europe and America, but not regarding the Middle East, though her independence of analysis – if she were to become successor to Albright – might well lead, in the end, to a helpful new start toward a more even-handed and genuine peace process, the US pressuring Israel to meet legitimate Palestinian demands and allowing Palestinian recourse to the UN if such legitimate demands are not met .

Meanwhile the situation is getting worse, the uprising, the Second Intifada, the Intifada for the Harem es Sharif, is continuing, the Israeli army is using live ammunition and rubber-coated lethal bullets, rockets and artillery not only against snipers but against Arab Palestinian houses and buildings – also in the Christian towns of Beit Sahour and Beit Jala, where we have Evangelical Lutheran congregations and schools, including TALITHA KUMI.

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem, including Israeli recognition of the legitimacy of Palestinian claims to a just share of everything connected with the Land of Promise. Compromise there must be, but a compromise that

is based on equality and justice and the sharing of the Land and the City, equally recognizing the limits to attempts to bring about, or lay a foundation for, a “redemptive” apocalypse.

I believe a common Jewish, Christian and Muslim “apocalyptic vision” for Jerusalem and the Land is a basis for a secular peace: Symbol for such a peace is the walled-in “Golden Gate” in the eastern wall of the Old City. The 16th century Turkish Sultan and re-builder of the walls of Jerusalem, Suleiman “the Magnificent,” made sure that the Golden Gate for direct access to the Temple Mount (the Harem es Sharif) remained walled-in. For him, Issa the Messiah at his return will be the one to open the Golden Gate. For Christians, we should leave it to Jesus to establish his reign on earth (including building a Third Temple or not), and refuse support for any pre-millennialist political imperialism.

“Christian Zionism” – so rampant in American Evangelicalism – is both an ethical and political catastrophe (you can see that I am an anti-chiliast or “anti-millennialist” – that’s maybe from my Lutheran confessional background). Religious, Orthodox Jews should remember that the rabbis until 1967 – until Israel’s victory in the 1967 war led to the spread of “political enthusiasm” (what Luther called “Schwarmerei”) among them – viewed the stepping on to the Temple Mount anywhere by Jews as a sacrilege – and could leave not only the establishment of a Jewish State, but also Jewish sovereignty over the Temple Mount and the building of a Third Temple, if it be so, to the coming Messiah. Ariel Sharon is not an Orthodox Jew, he’s a right-wing, secular, nationalist Revisionist (like the mentor of Likud, Vladimir Yabotinski). His mounting the Temple area

was assertion of continuing, “eternal” Israeli sovereignty over all of Jerusalem, an attempt to overthrow the partial compromises that Barak was willing to make in regard to Jerusalem.

The serious flaw at Camp David II was evidently the impasse over Jerusalem which was linked to putting on ice implementation of agreements reached thus far.

Common to all three pious, religious attitudes in the past – prior to the rise of redemptionist secular political ideology – was refusal to bring about an apocalypse now. In dialogue with both Jews and Muslims, Palestinians and Israelis, Christians (Americans or otherwise) should point out the political virtue of Israeli Jewish sovereignty over the Jewish Quarter and the Western (“Wailing”) Wall and Muslim Palestinian-Jordanian sovereignty over the Temple Mount.

Since Christ will come indeed without even our prayer – even though we pray “thy kingdom come” – we can leave it to him to open the Golden Gate, build the Third Temple or whatever. The messiah at his coming will redeem Israel, even if Jerusalem and the Land, for the sake of peace, are divided and Israelis and Palestinians, Muslims and Christians and Jews, all are given their rights – within agreed upon limits for each – in the Land of Promise. Such a worldly peace will neither be the Millennium nor the precondition for Christ’s Return, nor will it prevent Christ’s Second Coming. Even after the creation of the State of Israel we look forward to the coming Kingdom, and in the meantime pray for the peace of the city.

Noting the pent-up frustrations of an Arab Palestinian population enduring over 33 years of Israeli occupation

and Israeli need for peace and security, pray for an end to the self-sacrifice and the seeking after political and religious martyrdom by Arab young men, but also to an end to the military slaughter of largely stone-throwing youths by a superior Israeli armed force. Pray that Christians remain in the land to raise a voice for an internationally brokered negotiated Palestinian-Israeli peace. Pray for political acumen and moral vision toward a lasting peace with justice in Palestine/Israel for whoever gets elected to the presidency of the US on November 7th.

Magnificat Advent 4

Luke 1:39-55

A "Crossings" by Robert W. Bertram

[Presented at the Order of Phillipi in Cape Coral, Fl.,
November, 2000.]

In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a city of Judah, and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the voice of your greeting

came to my ears, the babe in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.” And Mary said,

*“My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden.
For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed;
for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is
his name.
And his mercy is on those who fear him from generation to
generation.
He has shown strength with his arm,
he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts,
he has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted
those of low degree;
he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has
sent empty away.
He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy,
as he spoke to our fathers,
to Abraham and to his posterity for ever.”*

Diagnosis: Singing Alone

Initial Diagnosis (External Problem):

Must every text have a “problem,” even when the text is, like Mary’s “Magnificat,” one long, pent-up outcry of victory and jubilation? Good question. On the other hand, if there is in this story a problem at all, that may be it exactly: Mary seems to have had no one with whom she could share her wondrous secret, and not just the secret itself – the bare news – but the utter joy of it, the sheer goodness of the news. Like her kinswoman

Elizabeth, who upon becoming pregnant “hid herself for five months” (v. 24), Mary too must have had to stifle her exuberance as if she were harboring some guilty secret. For she was, after all, “of low estate” and “low degree” and all the moreso for being a woman and pregnant, unmarried to boot, and most shocking of all, pregnant with “the Son of God.” Whom, except for poor old Elizabeth, could she possibly tell?

Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem):

But the worse problem, worse than the external circumstances which silenced Mary’s good news, was the problem which afflicted those in her society who were party to her silencing: “the proud in the imagination of their hearts,” “the mighty [on] their thrones,” “the rich.” They begin to sound like us, don’t they? So the worse problem, worse than Mary’s having to keep her secret to herself, is the problem of us who imagine ourselves too superior to believe her secret, let alone delight in it. Shame on us.

Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem):

Worse still is what finally happens to the silencers: “scattered,” “put down,” “sent empty away” and, on top of that, replaced by the very ones whom they had demeaned and humiliated. Who is it who so turns the tables on “the mighty?” Answer: “He who [truly] is mighty,” “the Lord.” But he does so through (of all people) the Marys, “the hungry,” “the handmaids.” Does Mary gloat over this awesome reversal? I think not. What she does is “fear, though not as “the mighty” do: she fears God. And that only underscores how terrifying the fate of “the mighty” really is.

Prognosis: Sing Alongs

Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution):

The most conspicuous part of The Solution, though not yet the whole of it, is The Baby himself whom Mary was carrying. That is where the whole cosmic upset begins, that “the child to be born of you,” Mary, yourself scarcely older than a child, “will be called holy, the Son of God” (v. 35). It is with the inexpressible marvel of this Incarnation that the entire revolution commences: God’s remembering the promise to Israel, God’s regarding the low estate of this handmaiden, God’s showing mercy precisely on this humble girl who fears him – by, of all things, blessing her with the motherhood of God’s own Son. Everything else which ensues is history: exalting those of low degree, filling the hungry with good things. After that, what’s left except to sing?

Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution):

And for that too, for Mary’s singing, God provides the wherewithal, beginning with the requisite exuberance. “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.” It is clearly a love song, addressed – as any love song must be – directly to the beloved. But to God? Isn’t that being too forward, a bit too intimate? Not after what God has done for her, and she was trusting enough to believe him. Believing makes for singing.

Final Prognosis (External Solution):

Best of all, God provides the ecstatic Mary with what she had so yearned for all along, an audience, someone with whom she could share her bursting Good News. And who could more naturally appreciate Mary’s joy than her kinswoman, Elizabeth, who was

bursting with similar good news of her own? Amidst all the people of the human race these two alone were soul-mates in an extraordinary conspiracy, moreso even than Zechariah and Joseph could be. Even a stodgy old male can envy the two women's giddiness. Even a skeptical historian can imagine why Mary, right in the other woman's presence, would break into such a song. Song to whom? To God, really. So Mary's audience was even bigger than anything she could have hoped for. For, with God in her audience, who has trouble keeping such secrets, Mary's song was bound sooner or later to become common knowledge, a world favorite. When Mary anticipated that "all generations will call me blessed" she – who at first had no one she could tell – could not have guessed who all would be blessing her: even we. And we do, yet not just as her audience but as her sing alongs.

[LUKE1-Magnificat \(PDF\)](#)

Macedonian Call from Palestinian Christians (that you haven't seen on CNN)

Colleagues,

Today's posting is quite lengthy. So I'm sending it in three parts. This is part #1, the first of the three pieces I rec'd yesterday from Kit Kleinhans and Fred Strickert, one-time Seminex students and now theology profs at Wartburg College (ELCA) in Waverly, Iowa. Even in the face of this "apocalypse now,"

Peace & Joy!

Ed

Editor Note: All three parts that Ed refers to have been combined onto this one web page.

Letter from Bishop of Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan [ELCJ] Jerusalem on October 25th, 2000

To All our overseas partners

Subject: Our current situation.

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Salaam and grace to you from a troubled Jerusalem / Palestine in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Through your good persons, I want to greet all your churches/constituencies with Gods blessings. Please do share this letter with them in order that you all together can act upon it.

I herewith would like to update you about the recent occurrences / developments as regards to the difficult crisis we are currently passing through.

1. The recent Arab Leaders Summit came up with moderate decisions for the continuation of the peace process, but, at the same time, warning the Israeli government for its excessive use of force against the Palestinian civilians. In this regard, some practical measures have been taken as regards to the relationship of some Arab states with the State of Israel. These measures, however, might escalate, if the Israeli government continues to escalate the situation. They have also mentioned that peace must have

substance, and must be built on justice. They reiterated the UN-resolutions pertaining to the Israeli Palestinian conflict.

2. In fact, the Israeli government opposed these measures and answered with harsher measures against the Palestinian areas:

- a. The closure is still clamped over the Palestinian areas. The Israeli authorities closed off the Gaza International Airport, and the borders to Jordan and Egypt.
- b. The freedom of movement of people and goods is still restricted between the Palestinian cities. Many kinds of foodstuff are becoming rare on the markets. At the same time, the Israeli authorities are allowing only Israeli products to be sold in the Palestinian market.
- c. The Palestinian industrial and agricultural products are not allowed to be transported anywhere.
- d. Palestinian farmers are not allowed to reach their fields (mostly located in areas B & C which are under full Israeli security sovereignty) in order to pick their olive trees, where we have the best harvest since many years.
- e. In the Bethlehem region, as well as in other Palestinian areas the hotels are totally empty – no tourists and pilgrims. It is worth-mentioning that the Bethlehem region is living mainly from tourism. Factories are also working in a 15% capacity.
- f. Hospitals are lacking medical materials and equipment.
- g. High unemployment is prevailing now.
- h. The Christian schools are depending on tuition fees they cannot collect them at the moment. In consequence, they will not be able to pay the

salaries of the teachers for some months, for example: the ELCJ schools will be in a serious economic situation to pay the salaries of our teachers for the next three months at least. This is very typical for all the Christian schools.

3. During the past days, Israeli army forces shelled with tanks, helicopters and automatic weapons residential areas in the town of Beit Jala, a Christian town, west of Bethlehem from Gilo, an Israeli settlement built on the lands belonging to Beit Jala inhabitants, causing injuries and huge damage in properties. Just yesterday, Israel's Jerusalem Mayor Ehud Olmert stated in the Voice of Israel's morning radio-news journal that the night-time raid was a proportional Israeli response to the Palestinian shooting. It was, according to Olmert, an insufficient response, because only a disproportional Israeli response could reach the aim of silencing the Palestinian uprising.
4. The shelling on Bethlehem area, especially in Beit Jala and Beit Sahour is paralyzing the life of Palestinian Christian towns. It is creating horror and terror in the hearts of the families. Our Church has a boarding section accommodating social cases. We had to transport foodstuff from Jerusalem, so that they can be fed and cared for. In addition, we have to treat the children psychologically. Our fear is that all these undue measures will force the Christians to emigrate due to the lack of vision for the future.
5. It seems that the present Israeli government is becoming more rightist and radical than anybody thought of. Or I can say, it is dealing with the present situation with a military, security perspective rather than a political security perspective. This is a frightful issue that leads our region to undue war, and to a growth of religious and

political extremists, fanaticism and fundamentalism.

6. It seem that in these measures, Israel will be in isolation and the Palestinians under siege. Will then just peace ever be possible in such a formula???
7. This situation is causing psychological traumas that has effects on Palestinian children. During last Sunday school at our Beit Jala congregation, the Sunday school teacher told that children used to break crayons, reflecting their nervousness in class. On Monday, after the shelling of Beit Jala, the children suffered from headaches, diarrhea, dizziness, bed wetting and other disturbed psychological behavior. For this reason we need now to start special psychological treatment for our traumatic children.

We are crying as the Macedonian did: come and help us.

For this reason, I appeal to you:

- To use your good offices to seek protection for us unarmed people. We call for international protection for the Palestinian people.
- To use your offices that all this spiral violence may immediately cease, and that negotiations among the two parties will soon start to find substantial solutions and implementation of the agreement signed and according to the international legitimacy, based on the UN resolutions.
- To intensively pray for the Christian Churches in Jerusalem and their prophetic role for a lasting, comprehensive, just peace and reconciliation in our area.
- To work with the all churches around the world that the rights of the Christian churches in the Holy Land will be secured and legislated in the constitutions of both Palestine and Israel.
- To support the mission of the Church in education, diaconia, dialogue and reconciliation. Our Christian

schools are the haven to mold the Christian Palestinian identity, to teach equitable coexistence with the religions and nations and to promote peace education.

- To do your utmost that neither the church schools, nor its institutions can be stopped or closed for any political situation or financial deficiencies, because the witness and the mission of the Church are very much needed, especially at this stage of history.
- To form a delegation that will come and visit us and be in solidarity with us in such a terrible crisis, that we have never witnessed before.

As the Lutheran bishop in Jerusalem, I appeal to you, as sisters and brothers in Christ: **DO NOT LEAVE US ALONE**. I call upon you to move from writing statements to incarnate your good ideas on the ground. The Christian Church in Jerusalem needs you, your solidarity and immediate actions at this special time for the continuation of God's mission in the land of resurrection.

Please continue to pray for us.

May God bless you and your efforts

Your Brother in Christ,
Bishop Munib A. Younan
The Lutheran Bishop in Jerusalem

Ed,

For wide sharing. Preface is from a Wartburg colleague Fred Strickert, followed by updates from folks in Palestine.

KK

My apologies for the length of this email– It comes from three messages I have received over the weekend as Israel has begun shelling the towns of Beit Sahour and Beit Jala near Bethlehem. Interestingly, these are the two towns with the highest

percentage of Christian population in the West Bank (Beit Jala 70 %, Beit Sahour 83 %—their populations are about 8,000 and 11,000 respectively.) Ironically, both have been centers for peaceful co-existence and peaceful resistance. In the early 19th century, Beit Jala was punished severely for giving refuge to Muslims who refused to take part in a rebellion against the Egyptian Ibrihim Pasha. In 1907, when the Ottoman empire began drafting Christians into its army, many residents emigrated to South America. During the Intifadah, the residents of Beit Sahour became well known for the peaceful demonstrations and non-violent protests and were severely punished by the occupying Israelis.

Now they are all being punished and are beginning to flee. This may well be the beginning of the end of Christianity in the Holy Land. The living stones will be silenced and the ancient churches transformed into cold museums without a trace of humanity.

FS

21 October 2000

Dear Friends, After dropping off folks at the Bethlehem checkpoint last evening, I went home. Within minutes of arriving there my phone rang. On the line was my Presbyterian colleague, who lives on the top floor of a building in Bethlehem with a clear view of Beit Sahour, the village just east of Bethlehem. In amazement, he described the scene from his living room window. He could see flares being shot up over the northern end of Beit Sahour, followed by a series of red dots making a trajectory across the horizon. I could hear the sounds of the explosions over the phone. At one point, he exclaimed, "Oh my God, someone or something just got pounded in

Beit Sahour." Suddenly while he was describing what he was seeing I heard a series of loud booms. I asked Doug if he had heard them, but he hadn't. A few minutes later, I heard them again. Almost instinctively I feared that the tanks which for almost 2 weeks had been facing Beit Jala, the village west of Bethlehem, had finally been used.

I can't begin to explain to you the feeling I had at being on the 'backside' of tanks which are apparently being fired at a village of people, some of whom I love and care about most in this world. An utter sense of helplessness is as close as I can come. I began to call people I know in the village. Everyone confirmed that something seemed to have been fired at Beit Jala, but no one was reported as injured. It was unclear yet whether there was any physical damage. I then called Rev. Alex Awad in Beit Sahour, who described one of the explosions there as sounding as if it was on their roof.

I quickly turned on the television. No report of shelling on either Israeli channels. I turned to the Palestinian channels. Nothing. I called friends who were watching CNN in the USA. Nothing was being reported about anything in the Bethlehem area. I waited for the 10 p.m. English news from Jordan and again nothing. This morning I was eager to hear the 7 am English broadcast of Kol Israel, but again nothing.

I must admit I was beginning to wonder if we were all losing our minds. I began to doubt what I heard and what others saw. How could no one have reported this if it had happened? Was it just a horrible nightmare? Maybe a shelling never took place?

I called Zoughbi Zoughbi at Wi'am, the Palestinian Conflict Resolution Center, to see if I could meet with him this morning to get an assessment of the situation and to find out what needs were existing in the community.

The first topic, though, was the attack the evening before. It was no dream. In fact, Zoughbi told me that one of the homes hit in Beit Sahour belonged to his cousin and her family. There were numerous emergency committees meeting at the center, but I was welcome to come visit. I met Zoughbi and other staff members in his office and listened as they began to describe the damage done in Beit Sahour. The Center was sending a team to view the damage and make calls of support. Zoughbi asked if I would like to join them. I went, but I have to admit I was a bit anxious.

As we drove, though, we didn't go to the north side of Beit Sahour but to the south, across the street from the YMCA Rehabilitation Center. House after house had most or all of their windows blown out. Many of the homes had huge holes in them where bullets or shells had gone through walls. We came to one home and there was a large group of men gathered around something. I asked if I could see. There in front of them was a pile of the remains of the various shells and what looked to me to be small rockets that had hit this house. I picked up one which had a black casing and was about three inches in diameter, about 18 inches long. Another was bright yellow and about one inch in diameter and six inches long. Another looked to be a circuit box, as if it was part of a guidance system. On all of them the specifications were written in English.

As I stood holding the largest one, one of the men quietly said to me, "This is the gift of your government to Palestinian children." "I know," was all I could barely whisper, as I looked from the casing to his face with tears in my eyes. I've never felt so ashamed of being an American as I did in that moment.

As we went to enter the homes, at each door someone greeted us and said, "Please, welcome, come in." We walked through inches

of glass and debris. At one home, in the center of the house, a one-inch diameter hole went through the refrigerator. In an olive wood factory, one rocket had come through the window in the back and had exited the shop at the front. Some people's cooking gas canisters had 2 – 3 inch holes in them. One scene, though, will stay with me for a long time. Under the parent's bedroom window were the cribs of their twins, utterly filled with huge shards of broken glass. In the middle of one remained a baby bottle half-full of milk. A similar pile of spent shell fragments were gathered outside the bedroom door.

Miraculously, no one was killed in Beit Sahour and only about ten people were physically wounded from flying glass and pieces of the shells. Emotionally, though, it's another story. Thousands of dollars of physical damage was done and an incalculable emotional toll was taken. Another American from the Mennonite Central Committee was with us. He and I talked as we walked back to the car about what we were feeling. Neither of us could look the families and people gathered with them in the eye. As Americans we felt embarrassed and ashamed. Person after person asked us, "Why does your Mr. Clinton not see this as disproportionate use of force? Why can't you criticize Israel? What they're doing is wrong. The violence could end tomorrow – just remove the occupation army from around our towns and villages. How do you think of peace when fragments of rockets are laying in your child's bed?"

In the homes we visited, pictures of Jesus, St. George and Mary adorned the walls. In this village, the traditional site of the Shepherd's fields, where the angels first announced, "Do not be afraid. For behold I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people..." and "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to all with whom God is well-pleased," I had to pray that God would work another miracle in this place. That harden hearts would be broken free, that wisdom and compassion

would take hold, that a just peace with security for both peoples would be boldly declared. But, we must look to be God's agents for miracles; we must not only seek them in our prayers but manifest them in our lives. The violence must stop. But without a just solution we'll only postpone another outbreak of resistance.

If we have such faith – if we pray and live for miracles, then maybe the trauma and pain caused by 'the shelling which the never took place,' can begin.

Believing and working for miracles,
Sandra
Rev. Sandra Olewine
United Methodist Liaison – Jerusalem

Date: Sat, 21 Oct 2000

Dear Friends,

This is my second message to you hoping to get some feedback from you on what is happening. I wondered what happened with all my friends.

Last night my home town Beit Jala, less than a mile away from my house, the Israeli army bombed a residential area by tanks from a near by-settlement. My nieces, cousins and aunts were so frightened and bundled in their mother's laps like sheep.

We felt the whole house shaking thinking we ourselves were hit. Children in Beit Sahour, next to Bethlehem were injured from missiles shot at their homes while they were sleeping. A month old twin, were saved just before a missile went through their bedroom window, breaking all the glass over their heads. The mother moved the babies just few seconds before the missile hit their house.

The fear that we are going through is causing trauma's for our children, and even for adults around us. My colleague at the Theatre Abeer, last night collapsed and had a nervous breakdown, from fear.

I cannot describe to you the anger I have towards the USA government and politicians who claim they are human, when they have proved the opposite. The missiles shot in Beit Sahour town showed that they were manufactured in the USA in 1997. Most of these weapons and ammunition was sent to Israel from the USA. I hope that you as people understand what is really happening in my country. In my last e.mail I sent you a statement that showed what is the real cause for all what is happening. If you need to keep up-to-date please look at the sites I include on this page.

I miss you all and I think of you all the time. Please tell your government that they are causing the death of so many children and civilians in Palestine.

Take care and God bless you all.

Lots of love

Marina Barham , Presbyterian Church

Dear Friends,

It has taken me most of the day to feel as if I can sit and write this email due to the stress of last evening. Last night, gun shots were fired from the fields around Beit Jala towards Gilo. Sadly, numerous homes were hit. Two women were reported as treated for shock and I'm sure many children were quite scared. Fortunately, no residents of Gilo were hit by gunfire.

In response to the shooting, the Israeli military decision was not only to fire back with guns, or even with machine guns, but

to also move to heavy artillery. From my home in Beit Safafa, I heard a large amount of machine gun fire in the early evening. About one hour later, attack helicopters came overhead and began to open fire on the village of Beit Jala. The barrage was deafening in my home, as if they were firing from my very rooftop. I sat on the floor of my living room absolutely terrified. Not because of worry about my being hit – they were firing the other direction – but absolutely frantic about what was happening just over the hill. Not long after the barrage stopped, the tanks located just below Gilo (about 1/2 mile from my house) fired two large rounds, rounds so big my house shook. Soon after, the power went out in Bethlehem, Beit Jala and Beit Safafa. For the next 4 hours, a mixture of smaller fire from the tanks and machine guns filled the air off and on. Quiet fell at 00:15 am.

I sat in the dark, madly dialing the phone to check on friends and colleagues, shaking like a leaf. As I talked to friends on the receiving end of the fire, I could hear their children screaming in the background. Folks were describing the flash of light from the helicopters and tanks before hearing the booms.

Today, reports are that Israel is moving to isolate Beit Jala and that more tanks have been moved in, although this is not confirmed. We know that the roads into the village are blocked and folks have been warned to leave their homes. Olive groves between Beit Jala and Gilo are being uprooted. It is has also been reported that Prime Minister Barak has called President Clinton to ask permission to annex part of the West Bank. I hope this is a rumor – for what right do we have to give Israel permission to take Palestinian land?

If we don't find a way to interrupt the cycle of violence, many more will die on both sides. Already the trauma of the violence is severely impacting the children, not to mention the adults.

People are depressed and in some cases, despondent. The toll on the children is gut-wrenching. Nightmares, vomiting, sleeplessness, uncontrollable crying, screaming, catatonia almost in some. Hearts and hopes are broken.

Friends, we must find a way to break the cycle. At this point, political rhetoric from both sides is killing us – literally. I've had numerous conversations with both Palestinians and Israelis today to try to figure out a way to call a 'non-political' ceasefire, maybe setting a 3 – day mourning period for the dead – to honor them. None of us yet know how or if such a thing is possible. But, it is imperative that we here and you there pray and think and act creatively.

But, to break it there must be a real vision for justice and security for both peoples. A simple ceasefire that attempts to take a 'time-out' only to return us to the status quo will not be effective. If we can find a way to work towards a ceasefire and get the international community to work diligently with the two peoples towards a just solution, then maybe the bloodshed and terror will stop.

As I prepare to leave the office now, I have to admit I'm apprehensive. My nerves aren't ready for another night of shelling. I already feel as if I've had 200 cups of coffee. But, then neither are the nerves of the people of Beit Jala and Bethlehem. And I suspect, neither are the nerves of the people in Gilo.

Please don't give up on this situation. For the sake of the children of Palestine and Israel, we must find a path to justice, compassion, freedom and security. It's a difficult task, but in faith, we know all things are possible to those who believe...

Living on hope alone,

Sandra
Rev. Sandra K. Olewine
United Methodist Liaison – Jerusalem

Dr. Fred Strickert
Professor of Religion
Wartburg College

Church Leaders Speak Out Over Middle East Crisis

By Fred Strickert
Wartburg College

Date: Wed, 25 Oct 2000

Leaders of a number of main line churches have spoken out over the last several weeks in response to the Middle East Crisis. In the form of official statements and public letters to the President of the United States, these clergy have used their positions of leadership to express concern over a difficult situation.

The views expressed may well surprise the general public since they are at odds with popular opinion as well as that of a large portion of the news media and many governmental officials. The religious leaders do not claim to speak for all their members. Nor do they claim to represent all of Christianity. Rather theirs is a prophetic voice speaking out on the basis of biblical concerns for justice.

Concern for all victims

We are saddened by the deaths and injuries of so many people,

both Palestinian and Israeli, in clashes prompted largely by the dispute over the future status of Jerusalem, wrote Bishop H. George Anderson of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. With a high respect for human life these statements have been uniform in treating the personal side of the tragedy in an even-handed way. All the victims and their families, Palestinian and Israeli alike, need our prayers, wrote Bernard Cardinal Law for the United Catholic Conference.

Attacks on Religious Symbols

Church leaders have also expressed dismay at the attacks on Religious Symbols in the current crisis. Clifton Kirkpatrick, Stated Clerk of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), points directly to the visit of Israeli Knesset member Ariel Sharon to the Al-Haram al-Shaarif/ Temple Mount as provoking the conflict a concern repeated by other church leaders.

Bernard Cardinal Law notes also how subsequent attacks on religious shrines have escalated on both sides including the Jericho synagogue, the Tomb of Joseph in Nablus, mosques in Tiberias and Jaffa, and a Catholic church in Beit Hanin. Stories treated inconsistently in the press. Because religion has played a special role in the conflict and religious symbols have been under attack and have been used to provoke and incite, religious leaders bear a special obligation to work unceasingly for peace, he says. Likewise, support must be given for those who, in the midst of conflict, stand against violence and for the peace which the Holy Land should symbolize.

Augusta Victoria Hospital

Many of the early concerns centered around the misuse of medical facilities and a seeming disregard for the lives of agents of mercy. On Oct. 3, Bishop H. George Anderson of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America protested the misuse of the Lutheran Augusta Victoria Hospital on the Mount of Olives in East

Jerusalem the area where most of the early demonstrations took place. ELCA representatives happened to be present for a board meeting at the time, which facilitated communication back to the states. Not only were the wounded prohibited from entering the hospital grounds for treatment, but soldiers were using the high position of the hospital grounds to shoot at demonstrators.

Anderson expressed strongest objection to the use of Augusta Victorias Hospital premises by Israeli forces. . . and demand(ed) that Israeli troops not use. . . the property. . . for military activity. Andersons statement coincided with a formal protest delivered to Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak by the Rev. Ishmael Noko, general secretary of the Lutheran World Federation, representing 131 Lutheran Churches worldwide.

Leaders of the Methodist Church likewise have spoken out concerning the role Israeli soldiers have played in impeding the work of medical personnel and in denying access to hospitals for the wounded. They point out that medical rescue teams and ambulances have frequently been fired upon resulting even in the death of three paramedics.

Disproportionate Retaliation

Church leaders have been especially concerned for the escalation of violence—described as the worst since 1967. They have not refrained from pointing the finger at Israel.

On Oct. 9, Presiding Bishop Frank T. Griswold (Episcopal Church) wrote to President Clinton asking him to call upon Israel to refrain from the use of a disproportional military response to the violence, especially the use of heavy military equipment. Teenagers and children armed with sling shots and rocks do not deserve to be shot dead in cold blood.

The killing of Israeli soldiers is also singled out for condemnation. Kirkpatrick (Presbyterian Church) writes, We

deplore hostage taking and the brutalization and murder of Israeli soldiers. Nevertheless he notes, that even this does not justify the unconscionable, massive retaliation of the Israeli military, including indiscriminate shooting of children and adults on the streets.

Anderson, along with the entire conference of bishops of the ELCA also singled out the Israeli army for the disproportionate and excessive use of force. The bishops were specific. We oppose Israel's use of U.S.-supplied Apache and Cobra helicopters against Palestinian civilians. They went on to ask the U.S. government to suspend the sale of such weaponry to Israel. Likewise a statement from the General Board of Global Ministries of the United Methodist Church calls on the U.S. government to halt the sale of new armaments to Israel.

The various church leaders all affirm the basic rights of the Palestinian people and express their understanding of the current rage as frustration over years of injustice. Kirkpatrick wrote, Surely you can understand the frustrations of Palestinian Christians and Muslims forced to live under a clear form of apartheid, in which their land has been expropriated and turned into hostile illegal settlements, their workers denied access to their jobs, their homes destroyed and their basic human rights denied. The dead and wounded, said Bishop Griswold of the Episcopal church are at the end of the day, the victims of the failure to find a true peace rooted in justice.

While the cause of the Palestinian people was recognized, church leaders also addressed their concern for the growing violence and hatred on both sides. Methodist leaders called for non-violent forms of protest and demonstration to be considered in the future.

Calls for a Just Peace

Church leaders offered clear support and encouragement for President Clinton in organizing the Sharm al-Sheik summit and in calling for a cease-fire. However, Clinton and the U.S. government was likewise chastised for taking sides. Representatives of the United Church of Christ and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) wrote, While the U.S. has taken a lead role in convening the summit, they wrote, it has done little so far to pressure the Israeli government to acknowledge responsibility for the continuation and perpetration of unjustified control over the Palestinian people and occupation of Palestinian lands.

The church leaders all called for a greater role for the international community and especially the United Nations in working for a solution to the problem including a full, impartial, investigation of the recent violence and a body to help both sides to work for peace.

Leaders reminded President Clinton of a common Sept. 6 letter in which they already had called upon him to continue the peace process based on principles of justice. This included a call for a return of lands rightfully Palestinian and for a vision of a Jerusalem shared by two peoples (Arab and Israeli) and by three faiths (Jewish, Muslim, and Christian).

These statements are available through the individual church offices or collectively on the web through the Washington based organization Churches for Middle East Peace: www.cmep.org.

Historic Episcopacy and the ELCA – Responses from Readers

Colleagues,

The last two postings (ThTh 121 and ThTh 122) offered Walt Bouman's corrective to my misreading of the CCM document, and then his perspective on the current controversy within the ELCA now that CCM has been adopted. Here are some responses that came my way from these postings.

Peace & Joy!

Ed Schroeder

1. From a prof at an ELCA college—Concerning ThTh 121

Ed— don't eat that crow just yet— you aren't as wrong as Walt Bouman seems to think you are. Just because it will take time for the HE to be instituted in the ELCA in no way negates your point about the "gottas" in the agreement— they will become ironclad, over time. The difference is in the amount of time it will take. What is undeniably true is the following: new ELCA Bishops MUST be "installed" by Bishops in a form of the HE, and the new ELCA pastors will have to be ordained by a Bishop, who will eventually all be in the HE. There is no provision for any other options. And whether the installing bishops are Lutheran, ECUSA, or whatever else, is of absolutely no difference. The exclusion of non-HE Bishops from counting in the "installation" of new ELCA Bishops is also another legalism— a "gotta," based solely on an historical fiction.

About some of the other points: The non-recognition of the

Anglican and other forms of the HE by Rome shows what a real ecumenical dead-end this thing (CCM) really is. It will not take us anywhere— COCU shows no real sign of any interest in this, that I can tell.

The idea that we are going from a “protestant” type of church organization to a “catholic” type makes no sense to me, especially given the often-repeated claim that CCM is only a minor change. Proponents of CCM often want to argue the case both ways – they want to claim that CCM is only a minor organizational changes which will affect nothing (“oil on the waters”), but then they turn around and make sweeping generalizations about how this will revolutionize the ways in which our church operates. Bouman makes both these claims in the same posting— so which is it?

As I see it, the substance of your original postings are as valid as they ever were.

[EHS' comment: The distinction between “protestant” and “catholic” types of churches deserves examination. Walt's sentence in ThTh 121 said: “What we are doing here [in the CCM] is trying to reconcile the ministries of a ‘protestant type church’ (the ELCA) with a ‘catholic type church’ (the ECUSA).” My question: what's the difference between these two church types of ministry? Especially for Lutherans whose Augsburg Confession, Art. V, gives clear specs for “the ministry of the church.” Are those specs catholic or protestant? AC V doesn't mention bishops. Even more surprising, it doesn't mention clergy either! As Luther so often says in the catechism: What does this mean?]

2. From an ELCA pastor in St. Louis—I agree with what you wrote a while ago—the whole alleged HE is little more than an historical fiction. And why, amid all the talk about succession, does the Lutheran accent on *successio fidei* [succession of the faith] come in for scant mention? HE is presented as a sign not guarantee of THAT succession. What do we say about a sign behind which there is so little substance? It's hard to escape the notion that all this is the preoccupation and, sadly, time-consuming occupation of bishops and ecumaniacs. Can there be much more persuasive expression of the Kluft [German for "chasm"] between the hierarchy and the church-in-mission below?

[EHS: Methinks this respondent has put his finger on something significant, the "Kluft" twixt the hierarchy and the congregations in the ELCA. Even though the magic word "mission" is in the title of the CCM, the "merely baptized" members of the ELCA don't see how the new arrangements for bishops and interchangeable clergy will impact missions at all—and I think I agree. It all depends, of course, on what you think mission is. Here's a fascinating example of mission today: the Ethiopian Evangelical Church – Mekane Yesus [EECMY]. Five years I was at their seminary as a guest prof. EECMY membership then was one-and-a-half million. Today it is 3,000,000. Why? Primarily because of a specific mission-mindset among the laity: "If you're baptized, you're a missionary." That's the basis of their call to common mission—and everybody understands it.

3. From a layman in the Twin-Cities—Greetings. As a lay leader I've felt some obligation to come to a better understanding of the CCM proposal, and toward that end

I've read with interest your recent communications that my dad has been forwarding.

In posting #121 you followed the correction by asking (at least I think these were your questions), a number of pertinent questions, including, "Can HE-succession itself be Gospel-grounded – both the one the pope claims for himself and the ones he disallows for Anglicans and Lutherans and others?" This is an interesting question that seems to me to come close to the heart of the matter.

A related, though prior, question I have is: Does ordination itself have a "ground" in the Gospel? Does baptism as a "prerequisite" for communion have a Gospel-ground? Is there a gospel ground for Lutheran pastors "doing" marriage? Where would I find Luther's answers to questions like these?

[EHS comment: The respondent is a family friend, so I already responded saying "no, I don't think so" to his first 3 questions in the last paragraph. As far as "Luther's answers" go, I said I didn't know of such direct quotes. But they might well exist. And even if Luther didn't say so, he should have. See my last comment below.]

-
4. From a doctoral student at an ELCA seminary. I am a PhD candidate concentrating in 16th century history and Luther Studies. While I was doing a search for the keywords "historic episcopate called common mission," I was directed to the "Crossings" website and to the July 27, 2000, edition of Thursday Theology #111 (titled, "Requests from Bishops"). I write merely to respond to your statement, "Granted the 16th century Lutheran Confessors

did not critique the hist. episcopate.” I’m afraid such a statement grants more than what is suggested by the historical record.

In 1539, Melanchthon wrote in an essay titled: Concerning the Church and the Authority of God’s Word: “Carnal opinions...imagine the church to be a state of bishops and bind it to the orderly succession of bishops, as the empires consist of the orderly succession of princes. But the church maintains itself differently. Actually, it is a union not bound to the orderly succession but to the Word of God.” (Melanchthons Werke in Auswahl, ed. by Robert Stupperich [1951], 1:330.)

[Ed’s comment: I checked the Latin original. The essay is linked to Melanchthon’s “conversations with Canterbury (sic!)” in 1539. I’ve not yet been able to check out what that means. Here’s the fuller context (my translation) of the citation above. Melanchthon has just cited a number of Bible passages and then he says: “I have cited these testimonies so that first of all we consider what the church is, and move our minds away from the carnal opinions, which imagine the church to be a pontifical republic and connect it to a regular succession of bishops, just as empires rest on the regular succession of princes. But the church operates differently. Instead it is a community not connected to a regular succession, but to the Word of God. The church is renewed wherever God restores its teaching and gives the Holy Spirit. And in this way he governs and conserves the church, not via regular succession, as Paul testifies in Ephesians 4. He gives gifts to people—apostles, prophets, etc. He teaches indeed that the real church is a community in which Christ is at work and to whom he gives true teachers.”]

And here's brother Martin himself (in 1541): "The succession of bishops does not make a bishop, but the Lord alone is our bishop." (WA 53:74.)

[Ed's comment: I checked the original Latin again and here's the full context of this citation (my translation): "Notice that before the time of the kings (of Israel) there was no fixed succession of leaders from one specific tribe, but the Lord himself was their Leader and King. Just as Gideon said: 'I will not rule over you, but the Lord, etc.' And in Samuel's case God says: 'Not you, but me they have rejected from being king over them.' Thus God chooses leaders indiscriminately from the tribes. Also in the church the succession of bishops does not make a bishop, but the Lord alone is our bishop raising up bishops wherever, from whomever, and whenever he wills—as we see to be the case with Jerome, Augustine, Ambrose, Huss and ourselves—neglecting succession which the papists keep insisting on." (WA 53:74.)]

Furthermore, I recently completed reading "An Example of How to Consecrate a true, Christian Bishop" ("Exempel, einen rechten, christlichen Bischof zu weihen" in WA 53) in which Luther, while supporting the concept of a bishop's office, and in the wake of installing Nicholas von Amsdorf as Bishop in Naumburg, nevertheless thumbs his nose throughout at the idea that Roman bishops have sole rights where the creation of new bishops is concerned. Luther is at his sarcastic best in this work. That the work has remained obscure is, I think, due to the fact that it appears only in the WA [=Weimar Ausgabe, the scholarly edition of Luther's Works in his original German and Latin – over 100 volumes] and that it was written during the "cranky" (as some would have it) last years of

Luther's life. Nevertheless, it is unfortunate that the editors of the American Edition did not see fit to include it. Had they done so, Luther's contempt for the idea that Christian authority hinges on the orderly succession of bishops would have been more accessible to American readers and the ELCA would not be in the mess it is in now.

Anyway. . . the concept of HE as it is presently understood was not even on the reformers' collective radar screen when the Augsburg Confession was drafted. But clearly, once the issue of historic/tactile succession came before them toward the end of the 1530s, the two chief Lutheran Confessors of the time were less than "deeply desirous" of historic succession. Those who support CCM by arguing that the reformers never said anything against historic succession are, at best, ignorant of the historical data which proves otherwise.

[Comment: Just because Luther or Melanchthon said something doesn't make it authoritative for Lutherans. But if any claim, theirs or someone else's, is indeed Gospel-grounded, then Lutherans can't ignore it. Come to think of it, other Christians shouldn't ignore it either.]

The debate within the ELCA

about (continued)

HE - succession

Colleagues,

The core of last week's ThTh 121 was Walt Bouman's analysis of the specifics of the document "Called to Common Mission" (CCM), the recent agreement between the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Episcopal Church USA. Walt corrected some misinformation I'd passed on in earlier ThTh postings. His words drew interesting responses from a number of you on the listserve. I intend to hold these responses till next week and send out today another piece, a sequel, from Walt. It's his thoughts about the current brouhaha within the ELCA now that CCM has been officially adopted. For folks who may be outsiders to the ELCA, "Word Alone folk" in Walt's essay refers to an organized movement within the ELCA of folks critical of the provisions of the CCM and calling for something to be done about it.

Peace & Joy!

Ed Schroeder

Walter R. Bouman

Dear Ed:

Here's my take on the current controversy in the ELCA. If there are those who give "consilium abeundi" [Latin: counsel to depart, i.e., "If you don't like it, you ought to leave."] to the Word Alone folk, they are wrong, and they at least give you grounds for the theological analysis which you had in [THTH #116](#). But the Word Alone folk also deserve a theological analysis. Mine starts with Wilhelm Maurer's historical commentary on the Augsburg Confession. Maurer claims that

Charles V [Holy Roman Emperor at the time] requested the princes and cities who had introduced reforms (e.g., marriage of clergy, vernacular use of the mass, chalice to the laity, relaxation of fasts, and the non-observance of certain saints days) to justify what they were doing.

The Saxons went to Augsburg with the concerns and the proposal of Article XXVIII ["The Power of Bishops"]. The concerns were that bishops could not do two things,

1. Govern with the sword as if by divine right such coercive power belonged to the office of bishop,
2. Introduce human regulations with the stipulation that they were necessary to salvation.

Such bishops burdened consciences and betrayed their office. They cite Augustine that "one should not obey even regularly elected bishops if they err or if they teach or command something contrary to the divine Holy Scriptures." (XXVIII, 28) Because the bishops in Saxony refused to permit the reforms, refused to ordain clergy who supported the reforms, or were absent from their dioceses (69-70), "the princes are obliged, whether they like to or not, to administer justice to their subjects for the sake of peace and to prevent discord and great disorder in their lands." (29) This was the legal right of the civil authorities according to both canon law and civil law."Bishops or pastors may make regulations so that everything in the churches is done in good order, but not as a means of obtaining God's grace or making satisfaction for sins, nor in order to bind men's consciences by considering these things necessary services of God and counting it a sin to omit their observance even when this is done without offense." (53) Examples from St. Paul follow (54). "It is proper for the Christian assembly to keep such ordinances for the sake of love and peace, to be obedient to the bishops and parish ministers

in such matters, and to observe the regulations in such a way that one does not give offense to another and so that there may be no disorder or unbecoming conduct in the church. However, consciences should not be burdened by contending that such things are necessary for salvation or that it is a sin to omit them, even when no offense is given to others.” (55-56)

The proposal is best articulated in the Latin text of AC XXVIII: “It is not our intention that the bishops give up their power to govern, but we ask for this one thing, that they allow the Gospel to be taught purely and that they relax some few observances which cannot be kept without sin.” If the bishops cannot do this, they are responsible for schism. (76-78)

The Torgau Articles from early 1530 then served Melanchthon as the apologia [= supporting argument] for the reforms (Articles XXII to XXVII). Largely because of Eck’s charges (“The 404 errors of Luther”), Articles I to XXI were added, based on the Schwabach Articles, the Marburg Articles, and Luther’s 1528 “Confession.” Thus the Augsburg Confession became a confession as well as an apologia and a proposal. Other princes and cities [represented at Augsburg] joined the Saxons to make the AC their own.

By 1555 it became one of the two legal bases for “church” in the Holy Roman Empire, although the adherents of the “old religion” did not fully recognize the adherents of the Augsburg Confession as “church,” or even regarded them as heretics. This is the basis for AC VII [“The Church’]. The confessors at Augsburg were insisting on two things with regard to “church.”

- 1. The Gospel proclaimed in its purity and the sacraments administered according to the Gospel are alone constitutive of church.*
- 2. Differences in human traditions (e.g., mass in the*

vernacular, marriage of clergy, fasts, observance of saints days) do not destroy the unity of the church, that is, one may or may not have mass in the vernacular and still be church.

Applied to CCM, Lutherans insist that the practice of having bishops at all, and of installing bishops with the laying-on-of hands by bishops who share in a succession that goes back to the 2nd or 3rd centuries A.D., is not required for being church, and Episcopalians agree. In order to make their case, Lutherans insist that they can be in full communion (i.e., have interchangeable ministries) with Presbyterians, the United Church of Christ, and the Reformed Church in America, and Lutherans requested and required a "sign" from Episcopalians they truly agree. This "sign" that Episcopalians truly agree and truly recognize Lutherans as church is the suspension of the 1662 preface to the ordinal so that Lutheran clergy who have not been ordained with bishops presiding (as I was not) can be interchangeable with Episcopal priests.

The ELCA has not violated Article VII because CCM is not about our recognition of other churches as church. It is only about full communion with a particular "denomination," the Episcopal Church. For the sake of communion with that particular denomination, but not as a general rule for communion with other churches in the LWF or with the churches of the Reformed tradition, the ELCA will in the future install bishops with the laying-on-of-hands by bishops who share in the succession (and also with the laying-on-of-hands by bishops who do not share in the succession, and with the laying-on-of-hands by Executive Presbyters from the Presbyterian Church or Conference Ministers from the UCC). And in the future ELCA bishops will "regularly" (which the Denver Churchwide Assembly defined as "no planned exceptions," meaning there could be unanticipated exceptions caused by a bishop's sudden illness, or inability to travel due

to bad weather, or an unavoidable breakdown in travel arrangements) preside at ordinations. Again, the possibility of unanticipated exceptions testifies to the Lutheran conviction that the presidency of bishops at ordinations is not absolutely necessary.

Lutherans can do this without sin because it contributes “to peace and good order in the church” (Article XV). The Episcopal Church does not believe that these practices are necessary for salvation, nor were the traditions of succession of bishops or the presidency of bishops at ordinations “for the purpose of propitiating God and earning grace” (Article XV). The Word Alone folk claim that the opinion of a panel of Episcopal Bishops in the case of Bishop Walter Righter has made the Church Lambeth Quadrilateral (which includes the so-called Historic Episcopate) “necessary for salvation.”

But every Episcopal authority in my acquaintance, including the House of Bishops, has stated that this opinion is not the position of the Episcopal Church, and even the bishops who issued the opinion have indicated that they were simply casting about for some definition in their tradition of “core doctrine,” and seized upon the Lambeth Quadrilateral because of its reference to Scripture, Creeds, and sacraments. They were trying to exonerate Bishop Righter, not make the HE “necessary for salvation.” If, on such shaky ground, the Word Alone folk are right, then Lutheran participation in the HE violates a number of articles of the AC, including XV and XXVIII.

The Word Alone folk also refuse to recognize the provisions of CCM which keep the ELCA in communion with churches that do not have the HE as preserving the ELCA’s commitment to AC VII.

What this means is that the Word Alone folk believe that they have grounds for disobeying the bishops and the Churchwide

Assembly (contrary to AC XXVIII, 53) or for leaving the ELCA. No one is persecuting them for their teaching of the Gospel. They are allowed to disagree with the Denver decision and work for its reversal. Although an individual here or there may have wrongly suggested that they leave the ELCA, that is not the ELCA's official policy (in fact, quite the contrary).

Thus they are threatening to leave the ELCA not for the sake of the Gospel but because of a human tradition. That, in my opinion, is schism, and it is wrong. They should be admonished, and I would pray that they hear the admonition.

This can be shared, if you want, with your ThTh readers.

Walt

Greater Accuracy on the ELCA's agreement with US Episcopalians

Colleagues,

I have to eat crow. I was wrong, simply mistaken. About what? About the picture I had of the document "Called to Common Mission" [CCA], the agreement between the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America [ELCA] and the Episcopal Church USA [ECUSA] pertaining to ordination of future pastors in the ELCA.

Here's what I now know. The specs of the agreement do NOT require a bishop with historic-episcopate-connections to be

involved when future ELCA pastors are ordained. The specs DO call for such a bishop to be involved when future BISHOPS of the ELCA are installed into office. But it is not so for pastoral ordinations.

When ELCA bishops who received the HE-connection as they came into office subsequently ordain ELCA pastors, the HE-connection passes on to the new pastor. So HE-connection for ELCA clergy is a long haul. How long? If this process continues uninterrupted (and if the ELCA and ECUSA stay in existence that long) it may take most of the entire 21st century before all pastors serving in the ELCA do so with HE-connections.

My new clarity was brokered by friend and colleague Walter Bouman, who finally saw some recent ThTh postings on this topic. His basic counsel was: "Read the text." To wit, the CCM text. I did. Here's what Walt said:

Dear Ed:

I now have a printout of your postings. You are mistaken on some stuff.

- 1. No ECUSA bishops will be involved in ANY ELCA ordinations. ELCA bishops will preside at ELCA ordinations. It's in CCM. Read the text.*
- 2. Nothing is changed for remaining in unity with this church, i.e., the ELCA. CCM calls for us to change two things internally:*
 - a. Bishops in succession from LWF churches (at first) and at least one ECUSA bishop will lay hands on FUTURE NEWLY ELECTED ELCA bishops at their installation.*
 - b. ELCA bishops will preside at all FUTURE ELCA ordinations. Because we have agreed to do this, and*

in fact, have already adopted these internal changes constitutionally, the ECUSA recognizes our intention to have our bishops and clergy eventually share in the succession which they have, and on the basis of this intention has adopted our proposal (CCM) to them for full communion.

- 3. Nobody is asking anybody to do anything except abide by an internal ELCA decision, like the decision on diaconal ministers (who will be consecrated, not ordained, by a synod bishop) about which nobody has raised any objections, and like the decision to require all newly ordained clergy to do three years of ELCA-approved and -organized continuing education, a proposal with far-reaching time commitments by all newly ordained clergy, and about which no one has raised any objections.*
- 4. The ECUSA version of the HE is mandated in the 1662 preface to the Ordinal in the Book of Common Prayer: clergy who are not episcopally ordained (i.e., ordained with a bishop presiding) shall not serve in parishes of the Episcopal Church (and other churches of the Anglican Communion). The ECUSA is suspending the applicability of this preface to all current ELCA clergy. Future ELCA clergy will be episcopally ordained, though not all by bishops in the HE for the next 15 to 20 years. And the ELCA will have non-HE ordained clergy who will be able to serve in Episcopal parishes for the next 60-80 years.*
- 5. What we are doing here is trying to reconcile the ministries of a "protestant type church" (the ELCA) with a "catholic type church" (the ECUSA). I think this is an ecumenical breakthrough involving an issue that up to now has proven to be very sticky (in COCU, for example). Our Reformed full communion partners are very interested. The Methodists are interested. Rome is interested.*
- 6. The Episcopal Church has no Prayer Book definition of*

what the succession means. And the Prayer Book is the only thing that defines an official position in the ECUSA. Some Anglo-Catholic Episcopalians believe in what Cyrille Vogel ("An Alienated Liturgy," Liturgy: Self-Expression of the Church, Vol 72 of Concilium) calls "absolute ordination," (in contrast to relational ordination) an ordination that conferred absolute power on the priest to effect the eucharistic miracle. It had to be carried out by a bishop who was consecrated in the succession that supposedly went back to the apostles. Many if not most Anglicans do not believe this notion of what the succession means. But the Anglican "way" of keeping peace in the family (the unity of their church) is do the practice even if they do not agree on what it means.

Succession involves what CCM and BEM say it involves: a sign, though not a guarantee, of the church's unity and continuity. That is the way I understand succession.

Peace! Walt

[Ed again]

Two news items from the outside in recent days impinge upon the CCM agreement, I think.

1. ONE COMES FROM THE BISHOP OF ROME, in the recent statement (Sept. 5) that neither Anglicans nor Scandinavian Lutherans (along with many others) have HE-succession no matter what they claim. Consequently they are not be called "church" [although "ecclesial communities" is OK]. In addition their celebrations of the Lord's Supper are defective. Question: If the chief honcho of HE-succession, the bishop of Rome, says such claimants haven't got it,

what is/is not being passed on into the ELCA as the CCA goes into effect in our church? Simplest is to say the pope's wrong, for sure, about what constitutes church and sacrament—as I believe he is—and my reasons for that are Gospel-grounded.

But what about HE-succession? Is the pope wrong about that too? And if he is wrong here, can that critique be Gospel-grounded too? Which is but one step away from asking the fundamental question: Can HE-succession itself be Gospel-grounded—both the one the pope claims for himself and the ones he disallows for Anglicans and Lutherans and others? I wonder if that question ever arose as the CCA was being fabricated. But, you may say: Just what is Gospel-grounding?

Thought you'd never ask. Back in Seminex days, we had a "Reader in Systematic Theology" called "The Promising Tradition." The preface to the collection came from the pen of Bob Bertram, at that time chair of the dept. of systematic theology. It's good enough to reprint in full, despite its blindness to inclusive language at that time.

ON THE NATURE OF SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

What is most "systematic" about systematic theology is not merely that it arranges its material—say the biblical data—in this or that orderly way, (that much is true of all theological disciplines) but rather that it consciously and explicitly insists on asking "Why." It asks for The Sufficient Reason, The Adequate Basis, The "fons" [Latin for "fountain," the source where a stream comes from], never resting until it has found "Reason Enough." Why, for what reason finally, is this or that Christian claim made? By saying that the systematiciann

ASKS for the “why,” I am not suggesting that he does not know what it is.

On the contrary, because he does know, at least in principle, what that sufficient reason is, his asking is meant chiefly to ask it into clarity, into the full prominence it deserves. He cannot even settle for the explanation, “Why, because Scripture says so.” He still persists and asks again, “And why, in turn, does Scripture say so?” His job is done only when he has traced the reason back to THE SOURCE: namely, God’s reconciling the world unto himself in Christ Jesus—in other words, the gospel. The systematician’s task is to “necessitate Christ.”

The systematician’s task is properly to distinguish law from promise. But this distinguishing is not an end in itself. Law and promise need distinguishing so that they can be restored to the original RELATIONSHIP in which they already operate within scripture. The trouble is that we all come to that biblical law-promise relationship prejudiced by a perennial pre-conception—the Reformers called it “*opinio legis*,” a legalist mindset. And thus we re-combine law and promise unbiblically, with the resultant loss of both, law and promise. The systematician disentangles this mis-meshing, does the proper distinguishing, so that law and promise can be restored to their original biblical—i.e., evangelical—order.

So far Bertram. Now linking that to the topic: HE-succession is a claim made by the bishop of Rome and—though he disallows it—also by numbers of other Christians. “Why, for what reason finally, is this Christian claim made?” Can we “trace the reason back to

THE SOURCE, namely, God's reconciling the world unto himself in Christ Jesus—in other words, the gospel?" That is the question. I don't know of any one who has. But—as illustrated above—I've been wrong before.

2. A SECOND ONE COMES FROM THE BARNA RESEARCH GROUP. The October issue of THE LUTHERAN, the ELCA's monthly magazine, publishes a Barna report that the majority of USA Lutherans (54%) and Episcopalians (58%) answered "yes" to this question in a recent survey: "Can a good person earn his or her way to heaven?" Seems to me that any Call to Common Mission between the ECUSA and the ELCA has got to address this datum as fundamental to such a call. If these percentages are not a "call, a Macedonian call, to common mission," I don't know what is. Note well, the unbelievers are not outside, but inside our denominations. Works righteousness, the Pharisee-heresy, "opinio legis," still gets a majority vote from both Episcopalians and Lutherans. Can the HE-succession elements in the CCM agreement impact this "in-house" mission field in any palpable way? That would indeed be a "sign of the church's unity"—first of all with Christ and, on the rebound from him, with each other. If there is a "yes" answer for that question, the Gospel-grounding question about HE-succession will probably have its "yes" answer too.

Even so, Peace & Joy!

Ed

P.S. Next Thursday, Bouman's theological reflections on the conflict within the ELCA now that it has adopted the CCM.

Reader Response on Necessitating Christ in Preaching

Colleagues,

Here's some feedback that's come my way on the topic above.

Peace & Joy!

Ed

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1. From the pastor who preached the sermon that triggered the discussion, this one-liner—Re: Thursday Theology 118. Thanks Ed. Nice job. Fun to read. (Name)

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2. From a Seminex grad, now a pastor in Indiana—It seems simple enough to me: There is no other name under heaven by which we must be saved. Of course, just saying, “Jesus, Jesus, Jesus” is not proclaiming the Gospel. But neither is a gracious act by you, me or my aunt. They may reflect the gospel, be empowered by the gospel, even carry the gospel; but what they aren't is the Gospel.

The confessions say (as I am sure you know) in Augsburg Confession, Article V, that the Holy Spirit works faith through the means of Word and sacrament.

1. That seems to me to exclude the good deeds we do as the “means” of grace.
2. So experiencing the gospel in the good deeds and words of others is not the same as proclaiming it in the pulpit in a public setting.

3. And the Gospel proclaimed through Word and Sacrament is AC IV, i.e., Justification by Faith; or in the words of the liturgy, "Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again."

I always thought the task of preaching was to connect our deeds and experiences to the Christ, not to proclaim our deeds as the Gospel. Anyway, this seems to be the big debate in preaching these days. Do I proclaim the Gospel or a good moral lesson? Do I proclaim what God has done in Christ or what we have done in Christ? To me, the answer is the difference between life and death.

3. From a Seminex grad, now theology prof in a church college—Thanks for ThTh 114's analysis of the sub-Christic sermon, and thanks also for today's reassertion [ThTh 118] of the hermeneutic of promise in response to the preacher's explanation.

Your preacher's comment that he doesn't claim Caemmerer as mentor helps to clarify for me how much I do. With Caemmerer/Hoyer as homiletics profs, and Schroeder/Bertram as systematics profs (in light of Ebeling's admonition that "Theology's task is to make itself superfluous and to make proclamation necessary"), I simply can't receive nourishment from sermons that aren't shaped by Augsburg Confession, Article IV.

I am grateful that the college is blessed with two strong preachers. However, preachers in our local parishes leave me high and dry. One preaches his own story, assuming we will find mirrors to our stories; a second preaches sanctification (good sanctification, mind you, but assuming we already know the cross stuff); the third and youngest preaches canned sermon illustrations. It's been a

long, long summer waiting for campus worship to begin again.

Perhaps this is where my earlier comments about the well-roundedness (better word: integration!) of the Seminex faculty are most apt. Preaching, pastoral care, exegesis – all were done in light of a clear justification-by-faith/theology-of-the-cross understanding of the Gospel. I don't know if that seminary faculty model exists any more. It certainly seems clear that most seminarians aren't learning it. Lutheran seminary curricula don't have the solid Confessional focus that grounds it all. One studies the Lutheran Confessions, to be sure, but already midway through one's curriculum at most ELCA seminaries – quite unlike the way you drilled it into us in our very first semester, so that no later part of our learning was Confessions-free. I am, on the one hand, profoundly grateful for the grounding I was given. I am, on the other hand, profoundly pained by how much that grounding seems lacking in the church as I experience it today.

4. From a retired pastor in California–Re ThursTh #114–your vacation experience of a no Name of Names sermon is all too common, and it ought to be a barley beard in your pants (I got something similar today as I was weed-eating around the place). At least I think so, and since you have a vehicle and an on-ramp to the net, I encourage you to keep bringing it up. Don't accept the 'shame on you' which you dutifully reported in # 115. "A poor, overworked pastor?" Puh-lease! That one should be asked what the true work of ministry is.
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5. From an LCMS pastor in upstate NY–Some thoughts on the

interesting exchange between you and the preacher in #118: At first blush I want to agree with the preacher's negative reaction to lots of religious talk and "Jesus" name-dropping in sermons or conversation. It is true that religious talk and dropping Jesus' name can actually get in the way of the Gospel. I can understand the preacher's reaction since some of that drives me crazy too.

But then I begin to think about the whole thing while remembering Luther's explanation of the 1st commandment in the Large Catechism and also R.J. Neuhaus' thoughts on religion. Neuhaus says one way to look at religion is that the root word is the same one from which we get the word ligaments; thus as the ligaments hold the external body together so a religious system holds together the conceptual and meaning life of any human being. There is no such thing as a human being with no ligaments and so there is no such thing as a human being with no religion. At the center of any religion is a god or gods—but at the dead center there is a god (what we look to for all good and run to in time of trouble). This means that we are into religious-talk and god-talk the moment we open our mouth and enter into conversation with anyone.

When I am in conversation with someone who talks on and on about the prince of the family (the oldest son) and ignores the daughter who is in special ed, we are into god-talk. When a young widow tells me her only reason for living is to see her son through his education and then she can go ahead and die, we are talking god-talk and religion. When I am talking to a church professional who has been chewed up by a church agency (happens a lot) and begins to say she is sounding like her super-pious mother and I ask her what she thinks her mother's image of God is, she blurts out: "electric fence," we are doing god-

talk and religious-talk.

It is inappropriate to drop "Jesus" all over the place but the battle between the risen Christ and other gods is going on all the time just as the process of living and dying is going on in some form all the time. Thus I have become more and more convinced that worship connects with life in the language of the people and in language that not names Jesus but presents Jesus as the "I AM" in the center of worship clarifying his connection with us in the death and resurrection process of all of life.

I find it very interesting in Luke 24 that Luke's hermeneutic is not just tacking Jesus on to the story that opens minds to the scripture but the risen Christ opening minds to the scripture by showing how, I think, the died and risen Christ is necessary to open our minds to scripture which in itself is the story of the death and resurrection of Israel and in him all of life. Thanks for the exchange and food for thought.

6. From a lay theologian in St. Louis—For that California pastor who said: "All I could think of is that I am glad you and your Schroeder clan don't drop in on me. Shame on you." Tsk, tsk, the shoe must fit. You Schroeders really OUGHT to drop in on this guy, sounds like he needs some help seeing that he needs some help.

7. From a worker-priest in southern Illinois—In regard to those who would criticize your criticism of the sermon delivered the weekend of the Schroeder reunion, I can also say to your nay-sayers, "If the shoe fits, wear it." Would they also say "Shame on you!" to the prophets: Jeremiah,

etc? Would they support out of secular sympathy those who preached “another gospel” and who came under Paul’s criticism? If the “hard working pastor” hasn’t delegated some of his burden so that he can do the primary purpose of his ministry, i.e., to proclaim the good news from God over against our lethargy and misdirections about Him, the pastor should be doing some other vocation instead of just holding hands and getting paid for it.

8. From an Anglican priest in Canada—Must admit (confess) the first response of TT115—the words from the ELCA pastor defending Christ-empty sermons—made me rather angry, not in a hot tempered way, but very cold and deliberate. If I as a priest—a minister of the gospel—and am too busy and overworked to have at least one sentence in a homily that points to some GOOD NEWS, then I am too busy and working at the WRONG things. I know that my preaching often falls short, and when it does, I wish there were people in the congregation theologically aware enough to notice and would (in charity!) point that out.

I am on your side, but unlike you, I don’t have the courage to listen to preaching when I am on holidays. So we go to the 8:00 Communion, where we hope there is no homily. When there has been, it has invariably been a disappointment. So my wife and I preach to each other on the way home about what we hoped would have been said.

9. From a second-career recent graduate of Luth. School of Theology in Chicago--“Christ-less” sermons – Methinks Mr. ELCA, California doth protest too much [see direct quote in #7 above], but I know that I usually am careful in the way I try to get at this because that kind of reaction is precisely the kind I’m not interested in eliciting.

Interesting story: At our Synod Assembly the bishop actually stepped up to the plate Friday night and preached a B-minus sermon for once (topic: how hard it is to make Jesus front and center when there's so much fresh pain in the "congregation"?). That night the usual suspects gathered at the hospitality suite for relaxation, beer, pretzels, and chat. One pastor walked in beaming about the bishop's sermon – as if it were par for the course. He got unanimous and overflowing support for his appraisal from the entire room . . . except for yours truly who had the nerve to say I'd heard several of our bishop's sermons that didn't measure up in my book. The pastor stopped dead in his tracks and looked at me like I had horns and demanded an example. I said, "How about the one at our conference a couple of years ago, that all of us heard. There was not one iota of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in that sermon." At which point, another pastor said: "well, I can't critique other people's sermons..." To which I said, "Friend, you just got done telling us what a wonderful sermon that was tonight. How can you know that if you can't critique other people's sermons?"

Mr. ELCA in California may well have a point, but unfortunately, it's not just every once in a while that the necessitating of Christ is missing. It's almost every Sunday in many places, and it's a serious issue.

Luther's Theology of Mission

Colleagues,

Six months ago an ELCA bishop asked me: “Was Mission the ‘Great Omission’ in the Lutheran Reformation?” Robin Morgan and I had heard that question turned into an indicative statement earlier this year at the international missiology conference in S. Africa. Finally I’ve come across something that speaks to the question. It’s an essay published in “Missionsblatt” (Mission Bulletin) of the Bleckmar (Germany) Mission Society from way back in October 1967. I’ve translated it for today’s ThTh.

The Bleckmar Mission is rooted in the Lutheran Free Churches in Germany. Readers of these postings have already crossed paths with its work. To wit: the Enhlanhleni Lutheran Seminary in Kwazulu-Natal, South Africa. That seminary, where Dave and Darlene Schneider serve, is a Bleckmar founding. Dave’s recent contributions—ThTh 108 & 117—come from that venue.

There was no author indicated for the piece that follows. My hunch is that it comes from Friedrich Wilhelm Hopf, who was the “Missionsinspektor” [= head honcho] at Bleckmar in 1967. But that’s only a guess.

Peace & Joy!

Ed

“Was Mission the ‘Great Omission’ in the Lutheran Reformation?”

Lutheran churches did not move into mission work in the wake of the Reformation era nor in the next two centuries that followed. This long delay has nourished the widespread opinion that there was no mission consciousness in Luther’s own theology nor any interest in mission activity in the church that arose from his witness. Such has been the accepted wisdom on this topic, most often expressed as a reproach and criticism of Luther and the Lutheran churches.

Many reasons have been adduced to explain this:

- The massive task of organizing church life throughout large areas of Europe where the Reformation took hold demanded all the time and energy they had.
- Very few of the Lutheran territories had direct access to international waters and thus did not acquire overseas colonies to raise the mission issue.
- By contrast, Spain and Portugal had worldwide colonies, opening the doors to Roman Catholic mission theology and mission activity in those centuries.

Also internal factors get mentioned:

- Luther expected Judgment Day to arrive soon, perhaps still in his lifetime, and was convinced that the Gospel already had come to all nations, so no mission operations were needed.
- It was also said that early Lutheranism understood Christ's mission mandate (Matt. 28 and Mark 16) to apply only to the apostles, not the entire church, and consequently no one should engage in evangelization without explicit call and authorization.

Granted, the Lutheran church in the past neglected important elements of its calling, as have Lutherans since then. And Luther too could well have missed the mission message in the scriptures. But if he was indeed the trustworthy witness to the Gospel, as the later Lutheran confessions call him, is it likely that he could be right about the evangel, and yet miss the element of evangelization intrinsic to it? Given Luther's intense wrestling with the theology of St. Paul, the "apostle to the Gentiles," how could he have missed the missiology in Paul's theology?

One place to look for answers is the sermons Luther preached

year after year on the Feast of the Ascension. Why those sermons? The text for that festival—year after year in the old church lectionary—was Mark 16:14-20, the Great Commission pericope in Mark's Gospel. The fundamental words are in verse 15: "Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation." Luther's sermons on this text contain mission theology aplenty. We shall look at three of them.

In the 1522 sermon he says:

"What should they proclaim? Nothing less, says Christ, than that I am raised from the dead, have conquered and wiped away sin and all misery. Whoever believes this is saved (selig). That faith alone suffices for salvation. . . . Faith does not coerce or pressure anyone to the gospel, rather it invites and encourages everyone freely. Whoever believes, believes. Whoever comes to it, comes. Whoever stays away, stays away."

How shall we understand the words: Go into all the world? What concerns Luther is the fact that the "apostles did not get to the whole world. For no apostle ever got to us in Germany." In view of what he knows about the recently discovered New World [Ed's note: Luther was nine years old in 1492], he says: "many islands have been discovered in our own time, where unbelievers live and no one has ever preached to them." Doesn't that contradict the scriptural word that Luther knows from Romans 10:18, where Paul (citing Psalm 19:5) testifies "Their voice has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world"? How to reconcile this with the plain fact that there are vast places where neither the holy apostles nor anyone up to Luther's time has ever proclaimed the gospel? Luther answers: "The message has gone out into all the world, although it has not yet arrived in all the world. The transmission has begun, but is not yet finished. It will be preached wider and further

until the Last Day. When this message is proclaimed and heard throughout all the world, then the last day will arrive.”

Luther sees three facts:

1. The Holy Apostles began the proclamation in response to the dominical mandate to bring this message to all peoples.
2. The movement of the Gospel throughout the world is not at all concluded, but persists and moves forward.
3. The Gospel’s continuing movement is linked to the day of Christ’s return. Luther illustrates this “mission theology” with a stone tossed into a pond, where ripples go out from the impact spot in ever expanding circles until the entire surface has been reached.

“The message of the Gospel is like a stone cast into water. It makes waves and the waves push outward relentlessly, one pushing the other, until they come to the shoreline. Even when the middle calms down, the waves do not stop, but go on and on. That illustrates Gospel proclamation. The apostles started it and it continues in ever widening circles through other proclaimers. Hounded and persecuted though it may be, it moves on to those who have not heard it before, even when in the process it is crushed and condemned as heresy.”

Luther then offers another illustration. Even worldly rulers send proclamations throughout their entire territory, but it takes time before the messengers get that proclamation to all parts of the realm. “This is how we should understand apostolic preaching,” he says.

Such preaching is a public event, not done “in a corner.” “Universal and public throughout the whole world, not to be kept away from anyone, till the end of the world comes.” “Thus the gospel has now come to us as well, us here at the end of the

world, at the edge of that pond.” Here Luther shows that he sees himself and his Christian community, now enlivened by the revived Gospel, as part of the expanding waves of that original stone cast into the pond of the peoples of the world rippling through humankind hastening toward the Last Day.

The message must be spoken out loud!

On Ascension Day 1523 Luther again preaches on the lectionary text. This time he accentuates the Gospel’s quality as something not written in books, but an oral announcement from public messengers sent by God: “A palpable proclamation to be heard throughout the world to be shouted out before all creatures, so that all who have ears would have to hear it.” He also emphasizes its public character, “preached in such a way that it could not be more public for everyone to hear.” He contrasts it with the ancient law and what the prophets preached, “restricted only to the Jews in their synagogues. The Gospel however is not to be restricted at all, but move out unfettered throughout the world, so that no corner of the earth shall have not heard it before the Last Day. That is God’s decree, his decision, that those who cannot read, nor have heard Moses and the prophets, are still to hear the Gospel.”

The Work of the Exalted Lord

The Gospel’s ongoing ripple-effect, says Luther, is the work of Christ now exalted to the right hand of the Father. But his ascension does not mean that he has moved away. Rather just the opposite: now he is present and accessible in all places. “For had he remained on earth...all people could not have been equally near him and able to hear him. Therefore he initiates a new way whereby he can work with everyone, reign in all, proclaim to all, and all of us can hear him and he be with all of us.”

Alongside these first two Ascension sermons from the early days

of the Reformation we look at one more, his sermon from 1536. Here Luther is struck by the overwhelming magnitude of the mission mandate. "These are words of impressive majesty, pure majesty. Jesus commands these poor beggars to go and proclaim this new message—not in one city or nation, but to the whole world, every principality and kingdom. They are to open their mouths with confidence, with no inhibitions, to the whole creation, so that every human hears this message. A command so powerful, so overwhelming, has never been given in the world before." The Lord gives "his eleven beggars" a command of such dimensions "that they are not to flinch or cower before anyone, no matter how high and mighty he be, but openly move on and on as far as the world extends, and proclaim as though everyone would have to listen and no one would be able to resist them." Only with the Lord's own strength is it possible to "move from Jerusalem to the ends of the world telling everyone about this King Christ." "For he does not want his message stuck in a corner nor anyone to be ashamed of it or have it be secluded or under cover. He himself made it so public that the sun in heaven, yes even trees and stones, would wish to hear it—if only they had ears to do so."

The Great Commission

Here is how Luther describes Christ's commission to his apostles:

"Wherever you go in the world and preach, you shall not say that they must come to Jerusalem nor hold fast to Moses' law. But this you shall say: if they desire to be saved, they should believe your preaching about me and be baptized in my name. Begin such preaching among my people, who seek to be saved by their law and sacrifice, and then move out through the whole Roman Empire and all corners of the world, to those who hold to other gods. Reprove and condemn it in one heap, and tell them:

this is the command that I, the Lord of Heaven and Earth give, that they believe in me. That is my sermon, intended to go throughout the world, unhindered, unprotected, regardless whether the Jews do not believe it...or the Gentiles seek to suppress it by force."

To this exposition of the mission mandate Luther adds some practical counsel for his hearers and for his time: "For us here this is a comforting sermon. For in these words of Christ we are included. He says: Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation. "All the world" includes us, wherever we are and how many or how few we may be. The world is where people are. Thus the Gospel must be on the run, continually on the run. Even though it may not remain [if it bears no fruit] at some places, it must come to every place and be heard everywhere. And just as this is a universal command to have the Gospel reach all humankind, so it also is a universal command and mandate from God, that all should believe this word."

These examples show how Luther's witness moves directly to mission. One thing is clear: mission is not the product of human organizing and project-management. It is the activity of the living Lord Christ. Consequently the continuation of Luther's thoughts about the course of the gospel through the inhabited world and the public proclamation of the saving message to all humankind now funnels into his testimony about the church.

The Church of God Throughout the World

Luther says: "No longer need we go to Jerusalem or some other specific place, as God commanded for his ancient people. Rather God has now designated another place and built a church, whose walls encircle the entire world. St. Paul says that the gospel has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven (Col. 1:23).

Its blueprint extends to all nations and its message to the ends of the world. That indicates a church as wide as heaven and earth are. When Christ gives the mission command (Mark 16:15) he is saying: "By the preaching of the gospel I want to build a church as wide and as large as the world itself is, where I wish to live and speak. For wherever in the world his word or his preaching office goes, there Christ lives, there he makes himself known and speaks with all of us." Even so Luther sounds a sober note. He knows well that hand in hand with the expansion of the church throughout the world goes opposition, to which the church is constantly exposed. "The church is destined to go to the ends of the world, even though in the world she will suffer persecution."

The correlation of gospel-preaching and baptism in Christ's mission mandate is, in Luther's 1536 sermon, evidence that Christ the Lord intends to expand and preserve his church in this world. For with baptism the faith created by the gospel becomes confession, a confession that binds Christians to each other and moves them to be witnesses to others. Christ's command "Teach the nations and baptize them" (Matt. 28:19) signals that "the faith which the Gospel proclaims must not remain hidden or kept secret as though it were sufficient for anyone to hear the Gospel and believe it for himself, without wanting to move out and confess that faith before others."

"Rather so that it become publicly evident where the Gospel is not only preached, but also accepted and believed, i.e., where the church and Christ's kingdom stands in the world, Christ wants to unite us and preserve us through the divine sign of baptism. For if baptism were not present we would be dispersed (zerstreut) without external assembling and signs, Christianity would never expand nor survive till the world's end. Yet Christ wants to unite us via such divine gatherings so that the Gospel move on further and further and by our confessing it be brought

to others. Thus baptism is a public testimony to the doctrine of the Gospel and to our faith before the whole world. Thereby all can see where and among whom this Lord reigns."

In this connection Luther also emphasizes that the true unity of Christians throughout the world is evident in the simple means of grace, which are universally the same in contrast to the "wide variety of countries and peoples, nations and languages." Christ's kingdom is to go into "all the world and to all creatures," but baptism is "everywhere one and the same." The same is true of preaching "one and the same here and in all places." It renders us "equal before God." "Should someone come from the end of the world and observe how we do these things, he would have to say that this is one and the same word and sign that he had learned and received."

Luther's notion of the gospel moving through the world reaches its conclusion in his picture of the church, a "people gathered from all tongues of the world" into the unity of faith.

We won't go on here to show what consequences arise from this mission theology of Luther, and to what extent he himself articulated them, for example, in his verdict on non-Christian religions, or his words about Christian responsibility for witness to Jews and Muslims, and not the least in his understanding of the second petition of the Lord's Prayer. In his Large Catechism he instructs us to pray for God's Kingdom to come with this understanding: "that we, who have received this kingdom, remain and daily grow in it, and that we seek to have that kingdom win acceptance and commitment from other peoples so that it move through the world with power, that from those peoples many come into the kingdom of grace, participate in salvation mediated by the Holy Spirit, so that all together we remain forever in the kingdom now begun."

Response to Sermon

[N.B. The writers for Sabbathology and Thursday Theology do their work for free. Our Listserve provider, however, does not. Contributions to palliate his pressing us for pecunia are welcome. Here's the address: The Crossings Community, PO Box 7011, St. Louis MO 63066-7011.]

Colleagues,

Four weeks ago (ThTh 114) I reported on the Schroeder clan reunion and our family discussion around the picnic tables of the sermon we'd received that morning. The trigger for that conversation was some folks noting Christ's name not mentioned in the sermon, but appearing only in the votum at the end: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all."

The preacher and many of us in the clan are friends, so I sent him a copy of ThTh 114. Few days ago he sent a thoughtful letter and also gave permission for me to pass it on to you. He also said I could mention his name if I wished. He had no reason to remain anonymous. However, since this sermon review began in anonymity, I'm opting to keep it that way. Here's his text:

Dear Ed:

Thanks for the commentary on my 6 August sermon. I always appreciate hearing from others, even if it's critical. Your insights were interesting. I probably have a different view of the modern preaching task than you do. My style may be a bit less narrow linguistically. I don't have such a fixed division of the Trinity that I feel compelled to accentuate the "Christ quotient" at the expense of the other dimensions of God, especially when preaching on an Old Testament text. [I Ed's note: The OT text for the day-parallelizing the day's Gospel from John 6-was Exodus 16, manna in the wilderness.] Caemmerer was neither a teacher nor a mentor of mine, though I have read the man. When it comes to preaching conceptualization and design, I certainly do not "take the Gospel for granted," to use those words from Caemmerer. In actual delivery, I do work hard to avoid "religious talk" that pervades much of the good and bad theology (and preaching) across the church. As I see it at least, people in the pew deserve better than a string of holy words lumped together. (I have a relative who talks this way, tossing in the name of Jesus for accent and legitimacy, and it drives me crazy.) Newcomers to the faith seem more apt to get a realistic foothold in Christian community if they get more than Jesus language applied to their everyday realities.

Sprinkling Jesus' name across the paragraphs, especially in a sermon on Exodus 16, is not my definition of what makes for Gospel. The Gospel comes in many different forms. In fact, in all kinds of human encounters I witness, from pediatric intensive care units to factory lunchrooms, I receive Gospel straight and solid from parishioners of every kind. Rarely, if ever, in such instances do they invoke the name of Christ. That's a good thing. If they did, it would dampen some of the raw beauty and incarnational mystery in some of those moments, and be downright phony in others. Still, I believe they have as much to proclaim about the Lord Jesus Christ through their words and deeds as I do. When Jesus talks about knowing some and not knowing others on the final day, I have trouble believing that it's related to how frequently we "dropped the NAME."

Your reflections do give me something on which to chew. And I'll continue to do so. Do keep [our parish] on your list if ever you're in the community again. It's always a treat to see you . . . and now to reflect with you.

Warm personal regards...

Some thoughts--

1. Christian preaching on OT texts is always dicey. It forces the preacher to come clean on the distinction between a synagog sermon and a Christian one. Clearly the "Christ quotient" is central to that distinction. But how? The writers of the N.T. give some pointers. They were the first Christian proclaimers who had to figure out that distinction for themselves in their own preaching. Remember, they were always using O.T. texts. It was the only Bible they had. And hardly any of their O.T. texts mentioned the Christ-vocable--even in Hebrew!

2. John's Gospel is most obvious in this. He presents Jesus "preaching" on a series of OT texts: Jacob's ladder (chap. 1), rites of purification and the temple (2), serpent in the wilderness (3), Jacob's well (4), Sabbath-keeping (5). Toward the end of chapter 5 Jesus articulates his "new" hermeneutic for the Hebrew scriptures--and the grim consequences for not following it: "You search the scriptures anticipating therein to find eternal life; and it is they that testify on my behalf. Yet you refuse to come to me to have life."

3. In order to make this O.T. hermeneutic "perfectly clear," John then offers chapter 6, a long one, all of which has Jesus himself exegeting the text of Exodus 16, Moses and the wilderness manna. [Both of these texts, Exodus 16 & John 6, were the lessons appointed for the Sunday of the sermon under discussion above.] John 6 gives us not only Jesus' feeding folks in the wilderness, his parallel to the Moses-manna event, but a sermon, a dialogue sermon (47 verses!) on Exodus 16. What do we get? Exodus 16 cum "Christ quotient," that more-than-Moses feeder in the wilderness. Call it the first recorded Christian sermon on Exodus 16.

4. For sure, this is not Exodus 16 "straight." Rather it's Exodus 16 exegeted by Jesus himself according to his new hermeneutic to reveal what Moses-manna can and cannot do. Gift of God though Moses-manna was, it didn't (couldn't?) offer the life that lasts. Thus (in Crossings lingo) Exodus 16 under Jesus's hand becomes diagnostic data. It exposes our problem, does not provide a solution for it. When offering his "new" hermeneutic in chapter five, Jesus concluded by applying it specifically to texts of Moses: "Moses is your accuser, on whom you have set your hope. If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. But if you do not believe what he wrote, how will you believe what I say?" (5:45ff)

5. In John's "sign-theology" Moses' manna signals Moses' law. That signal marks every reference to Moses in John's gospel. He says it point blank in his prologue (1:17) contrasting "the law given through Moses" and the "grace and truth coming through Jesus Christ." Under the sign of bread, John 6 presents both Moses and Jesus as bread-winners. Both of them and their breads come from God. But the nutritional value of each is as different as death and life. So says Jesus in this sermon on Exodus 16. The fathers "ate" the Mosaic manna-law and they still died. Anyone who eats Jesus' alternate bread "will live forever." It's not caloric deficiency, nor caloric magic. It's that one bread is law, God's law, and the other is grace and truth, God's grace and truth. One of these gives life to sinners, the other does not. [N.B., this is not Paul speaking, but John!]

6. If Exodus 16 was indeed godly bread, but no remedy for death, then you can't preach a sermon "just" on Exodus 16 and have it come out as good news. Surely not Christian Good News. So how to utilize this Johannine hermeneutic when preaching on Exodus 16 today? Can Christians somehow get back behind John 6 and preach JUST on Exodus 16? Not if it's to be more than a synagog sermon-Moses straight. After John 6 Christians can no longer get back to Exodus 16 "just on its own." For we no longer have it "on its own." We're blessed (or "stuck") with John's (and Jesus') midrash to that text. We can't go to Exodus 16 as though John 6 doesn't exist. It's not that John 6 dictates how you must interpret Exodus 16. Rather John 6 claims: given Jesus' own exegesis both of the OT text AND OF HIMSELF, Christian proclamation cannot preach about Exodus manna without "adding" Christic bread.

7. Here we have a classic instance of the issue Melancthon faced (Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article 4) when he asks: "What to do when your sermon text has no Christic promise in it at all?" His solution: "Simple, 'add' the promise to the promise-deficient text." But can you really get away with "adding" something to the Bible?! Well, Jesus did. He adds his own promise to Exodus 16 and he authorizes his disciples to do likewise with un-promising texts. Not to do so is not following the Master. John was following Jesus' lead when he wrote John 6.

8. But note well, John doesn't present Jesus bad-mouthing Moses here. Nor does he do so anywhere in the 4th Gospel. Instead he specifies what Moses can and cannot do for us, and then links it to the Christ-addendum. It's a brash claim, but not complicated. To wit, there is only one way for us to access God's grace and truth. That is the one "through whom" grace and truth came, Jesus the Christ. John claims that Jesus himself made such claims with his "I am" statement about the way, the truth, and the life. What chutzpah! What scandal! But that chutzpah, that scandal, is the core of Christian proclamation. Sermons that bypass it--on texts from the Old Testament or (as has been known to occur) even texts from the New--are engaged in some other enterprise.

Peace & Joy!

Ed