

Two Letters 1: Out of Africa – Some Observations 2: How ugly evil is!

Colleagues,

The text for ThTh #117 is two letters just arrived from South Africa.

First letter comes from Art and Mitzi Preisinger, ELCA mission volunteers. Art and I were seminary classmates in the 1950s. The Preisingers did campus ministry for a good long while, and in more recent years Art taught theology at Texas Lutheran University (Seguin TX). He retired last year, freeing them up to be in S. Africa this year.

Second one is from Dave and Darlene Schneider. Lutheran Theological Seminary Enhlanhleni, also in Kwazulu-Natal, South Africa. Earlier this summer Dave gave us ThTh 108 (July 6, 2000) on the topic of Church Discipline.

Peace & Joy!

Ed

LETTER #1

Sun, 27 Aug 2000

Subject: Out of Africa – Some Observations

Dear Ed,

We have about a month to go before we return to the States. It will then have been about five months that we have been working at the Lutheran Seminary at Umpumulo, South Africa, in the province of Kwazulu-Natal. The provincial name tells you that we are in an area the majority of whose population is Zulu,

although there are large groups of Indians nearby – Stanger, 40 kms. away (total pop. 220,000) and Durban, 90 kms. (total pop. over 1 million). [Ed's note: Both cities are on S. Africa's southeastern coast overlooking the Indian Ocean.] Zulu is the main language spoken by the seminary staff, the workers, and the people of the nearby village. Students' primary languages include Zulu, Xhosa, Tswana, Setswana, Venda, Afrikaans. During class breaks, the "quad" is Babel redivivus. Most of the students are South African, but a few come from other parts of southern Africa: Swaziland, Botswana, Zimbabwe and Zambia.

The language division bespeaks social division as well, particularly vis-a-vis the few colored [=mixed race] students from S.Africa's Western and Northern Cape provinces and the black students. The former generally gravitate socially toward the couple of colored lecturers and the colored staff librarian, who themselves, since they do not speak Zulu, pretty much socialize among themselves. Apartheid lives.

Recently you remarked that a sermon from an ELCA pulpit which you had heard contained little or no gospel; that in fact even the Name was not named. This concerned you. Well, here the name is named a lot, usually with adjectives (wonderful, Lord, savior, etc.). Often when students read the scripture lesson in chapel they preface the reading with "I read in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ." Trinity? All over the place, many students crossing themselves at the appropriate invocation. (Note: They refuse to say Holy "Ghost." They will always and only say or sing Holy "Spirit." This is sometimes amusing when it comes to, e.g., the last two lines of the Common Doxology.)

If it is true that "cantat bis orant " [the one who sings is praying twice] these folk pray up a storm. They worship here probably more than all the ELCA seminaries put together: morning and evening, Sunday through Friday. Weekly Eucharist.

Worship is a curious mixture of high church and low church. There is a kind of piety around here some of which could be profitably emulated stateside, although the ten or so nineteenth-century sentimental hymns they sing over and over wear thin.

But all this does not mean we are always hearing gospel. Beating people over the head with the cross is not gospel proclamation. What sounds like gospel, the Name being named notwithstanding, is often disguised law. Wife Mitzi, working in the library, ran across a 1975 article in a Festschrift for one O.G. Myklebust . [Ed's note: Olav Guttorm Myklebust was born 1905, ordained in 1930 and sent to S. Africa by the Norwegian Missionary Society. He taught at Umpumulo—where Preisinger's now are—and beginning in 1934 was its principal.]

This article by the then first black rector of the Seminary, Douglas Duma L. Makhathani is titled "The Lutheran Church in Kwa-Zulu: Then and Now." Makhathini says that the white missionaries wanted "to establish a self-supporting, self-propagating, self-administrating Lutheran Church among the Zulus and kindred tribes, preserving their characteristic traits as far as possible." He notes that the missionaries wanted some kind of separate development by "preserving their (Zulus' et al.) characteristic traits as far as possible," and yet they (the missionaries) remove all characteristic traits (customs, traditions and practice) "by means of laws and ordinances – as was the case in the planting of the gospel..."

He goes on: "I believe that the Gospel, rightly preached is able to direct people in relation to what they should be or become better than having to direct them with man made ordinances and rules. . . . If the Gospel were permitted to go its own way I am convinced it would have produced stronger and more stable Christians. You see, Zulu people (read everybody,

all humanity, Luther would say) are people of law and obedience. This they well understand. It remains to be seen whether or not missions succeeded to evangelize with the Gospel. It is crystal clear that making church people legalistic was a great success. . . . Lutheran missionary aims, I am sure, were never those of building legalistic Christian communities. They aimed at building Evangelical Communities. Because they (missionaries) were not aware of a Zulu's inclination to the law and his love of the law, their innocent efforts yielded legalism and a bad mixing of law and gospel to this day."

[Does that sound like some Lutheranism you and I know stateside?]

The library here is fairly extensive. Foreign, mostly American, groups, churches, pastors, etc., have donated books, probably many they didn't want. Many books from our Missouri Synod days. CPH stuff. Quite a few nineteenth and early twentieth century books, conservative, some to the point of fundamentalistic, on the shelves. One could let them moulder there, except that students use them, imbibe them, then regurgitate it back in their papers. One is tempted to play Philip and ask, "Understandest thou what thou readest?" But whether they understand it fully or not, the groundwork has been laid for a conservative, law-oriented approach to Lutheranism.

As you well know, one of the biggest problems in southern Africa is the AIDS epidemic. When we came to Umpumulo, AIDS was an issue rarely talked about. I think that has changed, maybe not dramatically, but to a considerable degree. One of the reasons for the high incidence of AIDS (and several students have died because of it) is the promiscuity of African males and the myths about AIDS, e.g., the statistics are inflated to make blacks look bad, or, one can cure AIDS by sleeping with a

virgin (consequently, very young females, many in their very early teens, are bedded and often impregnated). Other myths: "if you eat more than five times a day you will not get AIDS"; "you won't get AIDS if you are circumcised"; "AIDS is caused by witchcraft"; "only homosexuals get AIDS."

There is a high incidence of rape because many African males feel it is their right to sleep with whomever they please. If the female does not consent, she is raped. And the morality of condom use is hotly debated in the church. The word "cultural" gets used a lot to justify certain activities. Thus, "Why is that guy beating up that woman?" "It's OK, it's cultural." Shaka [Ed's note: Zulu chief, 1816-28, founder of southern Africa's Zulu empire, who created a fighting force that devastated the entire region] did a superb con job on Zulu women: men are made to protect women; women are made for everything else – intense labor, bearing children, cooking, cleaning, polishing floors on their hands and knees, carrying heavy things on their heads, etc. *ad infinitum*.

It has been a rich and varied experience, not only due to the fine hospitality of our hosts, the faculty, and the students, but also because of the beautiful area in which Umpumulo is situated and, for the most part, great weather. So God answered the fourth petition of the prayer his Son taught us—and as Luther's Catechism interprets it—God gave us "good weather, peace, health, discipline, honor, good friends, faithful neighbors, and the like."

Joy and peace,
Art and Mitzi Preisinger

On Monday, Sept. 4, came this postscript—

On the first Sunday of the month no Sunday morning (7:30 a.m.) Eucharist is held in the Umpumulo seminary chapel. Rather,

students are enjoined to attend the “parish church,” about 2 kms. distant. So today, the first Sunday we were able to do this, we attended.

The service was fascinating. Dr. Biyela, rector of the seminary, preached and presided. All in Zulu, except the sermon was partly English. Biyela is a good preacher. A good storyteller. Fluent in at least three languages. Sermon was gospel – based on Ephesians 2.

But the liturgy! They like vestments here. Biyela processed in cope. Then took it off and wore alb and stole. Then chasuble for the celebration. Incense like mad. They censed the altar, the Bible, and even the chairs brought to the chancel by students. These were white plastic chairs, the kind you can get for about \$7-8 in the patio section of US supermarkets when spring rolls around. Apparently the sem was gifting the parish with them. There is a kind of Ladies Aid, I think they call it the Women’s League, and they wear a “uniform”–black dress with white collar and white cap that looks something like a U.S. navy sailor’s hat. The Methodist women wear red and white, the Anglican purple and white [what else?] and sit together. There were about 75 of these women. Quite a sight. Service lasted almost three hours.

LETTER #2

August 2000

Dear Ed,

What a mystery evil is! It is so twisted and ugly–especially when sitting beside the good and the beautiful. We had a beautiful Bible study in our home late last month. My heart was full of admiration as white South African farmers were willing

to look seriously at the hard words of James 5:1-6. "Have we oppressed our workers?" "Is our relative wealth based on their poverty?" "Have we paid them proper wages?"

God's law was working. "Yes, we will be judged. We have done our best as we see it, but will it be enough to satisfy our Lord, who is standing at the doors, ready to come in judgment?"

But His Gospel was also strong. The coming Judge is "compassionate and merciful. He is the same One who died to save us."

"But, you know, some of us might have judgment before others," I said, thinking that Darlene and I were about the oldest people in the room. "Actually Judgment Day for me is the day I die." "Yes, indeed!" (Nods of agreement around the circle.) A beautiful, honest, blessed discussion.

After one of Darlene's great desserts and warm personal words of sharing back and forth, they all left and we put our living room back into everyday shape.

Going home after the study, Ronald and Ella approached their house and farm, at the end of the road, near the Buffalo River. Even though it was now about 9:30 p.m., they weren't too surprised to see a car there, for someone had earlier borrowed the key for a gate, to visit some friends who lived on the property. The men in the car needed some water for their overheated radiator. Then they asked for a drink of water.

As Ronald handed the water to him, a gun appeared in the hand of the man reaching to receive it. He shot Ronald in the face, killing him instantly. The group then forced Ella to open the safes, so they could take documents and the money kept there, for paying the farm workers the next day. They locked her in a bedroom, then thoroughly looted the whole house.

How ugly evil is!

And it works still more evil. The murderous looters were black men. When other such people have been challenged, they have said that they are reacting against the apartheid oppression of the past.

Of course the white farming community reacts to the murder. Some have ugly, racist words: "You can't trust any blacks! See what they're doing to us farmers. They won't be satisfied until we are all dead."

Evil begets more evil.

The funeral last Sunday was really something. About 500 people crowded into and around the small rural church building. Many black people hovered around the edges, having come to show their respect and love for the bereaved family.

We all expected the widow and her only daughter Marit to be "basket cases," paralyzed with grief and anger. Don't underestimate the power of God's loving salvation, as we did. Widow and daughter were towers of strength. They spoke of their loss but also of God's blessings. Their faces were ready to smile and to discuss other things, including their future plans. They intend to keep the farm and work it, with Marit and her husband Eric on the scene.

You didn't see it, but can you believe it? Exactly as it is written in Romans: "Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign [more powerfully], to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Our fellow-Christian farmers, also present at the Bible study, tried to catch the criminals on the back roads. They were too

late. But they reported a shower of stars, magnificently filling the night sky, as they stood on the gravel. Their conclusion: a heavenly celebration, welcoming friend Ronald home.

David and Darlene Schneider

Unity of the Church: the ELCA's In-House Controversy on the Historic Episcopate

Colleagues,

Last week's posting, a series of your responses to ThTh #111, asked me to re-think the historic episcopate [HE], specifically my contention that if HE is now a YOU GOTTA in the ELCA, then it could indeed be a no-no for Reformation-rooted Lutherans.

Several of you respondents went to the Lutheran Confessions themselves to show that the Confessors' critique of YOU GOTTA was regularly linked to YOU GOTTA that were "contrary to the Gospel," items prescribed as add-ons to faith-in-Christ for the sinner's salvation. Nobody, either among the Episcopal Church USA [ECUSA], nor in the ELCA, is saying anything like that, you reminded me. In both communions it is consensus: Salvation is by faith in Christ alone—sola!—regardless of one's opinion/practice of HE.

You went on to say: It is in another sense that HE is now a YOU

GOTTA in the ELCA. That is in the realm of church order, in Lutheran lingo, the “left-hand-of-God” rules and regulations whereby we manage our life together in the ELCA. Church constitutions and bylaws are full of YOU GOTTA’s. Nothing wrong with that. It’s not about salvation!

So HE is now a YOU GOTTA in the ELCA. But is not one contrary to the Gospel; it’s not about salvation. It is not a YOU GOTTA that “they” [ECUSA] laid upon “us” [ELCA]. We ourselves decided to adopt it as a “left-hand-legitimate” assembly of the ELCA, by more than the constitutionally kosher 2/3 majority vote. No more coercion there than when we elect our own national bishop and supporters of other candidates “lose.” It’s Roberts Rules of Order process, our chosen form for doing things “decently and in order.”

The “loyal Anglican reader” among you responders also noted that if polity [for Lutherans] is an adiaphoron, then the ELCA could adopt the historic episcopate as a strategy for Christian unity. So, you asked, what’s the fuss from the grumblers? Lutheranly—from confessional theology—they don’t have a leg to stand on, do they? [One quip that I didn’t sent out last week wondered if my words weren’t “adolescent objection to any kind of authority at all.”]

Here’s how I see it.

Who says YOU GOTTA? I was not at all saying in ThTh #111 that “they” laid this YOU GOTTA upon us. I was taking it now as a given in ELCA canon law, that all future pastoral ordinations will have an HE-connected bishop among those doing the ordaining. The YOU GOTTA is now “in house.” It’s a YOU GOTTA we prescribe for ELCA future pastors of ELCA congregations.

That's one reason I went to the Formula of Concord, Article 10, in the Lutheran Confessions. The FC is an in-house document aimed at settling (?) intra-Lutheran hassles. The contenders then were all Lutherans. The squabble now is inside the ELCA. And the rhetoric gets shrill, such as bread-crumbs down to me even though I'm pretty far away from the main tables. I've heard from more than one source talk like this: "If the gripers within the ELCA don't like our decision for HE, let them seek their fellowship elsewhere." Seminex veterans recall that we were told those very same words by the the LCMS President in the 1970s.

But at the time of the Missouri civil wars, one of you said, the YOU GOTTA was indeed an add-on to the Gospel, a doctrinal opinion being forced upon us. It was not a matter of church order freely chosen in a left-hand-kosher convention. Is that a "Gospel-issue" or not? That all depends on how it's carried out, now that it's on the books. If the execution of an item of church order concludes with: "Seek your fellowship elsewhere," then it IS a matter of the Gospel, isn't it? Is it not an add-on? Not an add-on to what you MUST believe, but an add-on to what you MUST do or accept to stay a member of the church, at least of "this church." It impacts the unity of the church, and unity of the church is a Gospel issue. Telling people to seek their fellowship elsewhere, or coercing their departure, for any reason other than that they no longer trust the Gospel, is itself "contrary to the Gospel."

The issue in FC 10, though labelled adiaphora, is actually the unity of the church. When adiaphora become YOU GOTTA's for staying membered to Christ's church, says FC 10, then the YOU GOTTA's must be disobeyed. Not only disobeyed by those who didn't like them in the first place, but also disobeyed by those who DO like them. Even these folks are called upon by FC 10 to join in confessing that adiaphora, likeable though they may be for them, when they become YOU GOTTA's for staying church'd, are a no-no in

the church of Christ. They create a “time for confessing,” in the language of the FC, a time to take the “witness stand,” and to testify what really creates and maintains church unity. Coerced adiaphora dis-unite Christ’s church. They are themselves schismatic.

So if the HE polity in the ELCA is administered in such a way that some folks are forced to seek their fellowship elsewhere—which as far as I’ve heard has not yet actually occurred—then the exact opposite of “loyal Anglican reader’s” claim has transpired. Not at all will the new canon law of HE in the ELCA have been a sign of the unity of the church. It will have rent asunder what the Gospel has joined together.

My reason for bringing in AC 28 was to signal the theological roots of the adiaphora stance in FC 10. There in AC 28, of course, the hassle is about salvation and the YOU GOTTA’s impacting it by what the bishops of the time were doing. It now depends on what the ELCA bishops will do with the dissenters. “Loyal Anglican reader” gives sensible counsel: “But, what of those who for whatever reason conscientiously cannot accept such an ordination? To force them to do so would be wrong, in my opinion. We faced that issue when we decided to ordain women and found ways to accommodate conscience. I suspect that the ELCA will find ways to do likewise.” That Anglican counsel is rooted in good old common sense, which even Lutherans can appreciate. But YOU GOTTA’s about polity and practice in the church are even more than that for Reformation-rooted ELCAers. Because they impact the Gospel, they betoken times for confessing. Such times are always intra-ecclesial, protests by some in the church against others in the church, often the underdogs against the overdogs, for the sake of the unity of the church.

The adiaphora hassle reflected in FC 10, as I recall it and I haven’t researched it anew, was making YOU GOTTA’s out of things

that would make it easier to live with RC folks in some of the religiously diverse territories (Lutherans and RCs in the same neighborhood)—really adiaphoron stuff like wearing chasubles, elevating the chalice, and such like. What makes that an issue of the GOSPEL, says FC 10, is not that these requirements were claimed to be “necessary for salvation,” (an obviously contra-Gospelly item), but that they were necessary for the “unity of the church” (also a fundamentally Gospelly item, but not always immediately visible as such). The practice was that you can’t stay in “this church” if you don’t do what the YOU GOTTA calls for. Isn’t that an analog to HE, if that’s what it now means in the ELCA?

Back in my seminarian days, I remember Jaroslav Pelikan telling us that with the 1870 dogma of the infallibility of the pope “the Roman church made itself a sect.” The claim that the Bishop of Rome was infallible in some of his judgments—and thus not subject to evangelical discipline—and making that a YOU GOTTA for the faithful, relegated the huge RC church into sect-hood and separated it from the Una Sancta body of Christ. I didn’t realize then what chutzpah there was in Pelikan’s statement. But actually he was just applying Lutheran confessional theology to the issue of the unity of the church.

The Lutheran confessions, well before FC 10, were also confessing what church unity is. Luther was in hot water in the days before Augsburg as much for his dubious obedience to the Bishop of Rome as for his explosive Gospel teaching. That’s why “true unity of the church” was a hot potato issue in the days leading up to the Augsburg Confession [AC] of 1530. Luther (and all those agreeing with him) had been excommunicated. They were no longer members of “the church,” baut were cut off from the Bishop of Rome and the clout he allegedly carried by virtue of his own HE. Can one be “the church” without Roman connections? Are you Christian if Rome says your an outsider? So Augsburg

Confession 7 (church unity) is really a flip-side of AC 4 (justifying faith). They are two spokes of the wheel of Christian faith and life, two of the spokes coming from the hub of the Promising Good News called Gospel.

Concerning what “is sufficient for the true unity of the Christian church” we have some simple specs in AC 7. For the “true unity of the church it suffices that the Gospel be preached purely [= with no legalist add-ons] and that the sacraments be administered in accord with this Gospel.” HE is not on that list. It couldn’t be, since the reigning HE authority had un-churched those who thought AC 7’s specs were “sufficient” for the church’s unity [“genug” in German, “satis est” in Latin].

One might say that these AC 7 specs amount to YOU GOTTA’s for the unity of the church, but they are the unique YOU GOTTA’s without which there is no unity of the church at all. “Preaching the Gospel purely and doing the sacraments in accord with that Gospel” constitute, create, maintain the church’s unity. Without these it doesn’t exist. If HE or chasubles or whatever, including, yes, all those YOU GOTTA’s in church constitutions and bylaws, if any of this stuff becomes the criterion for whether or not “you must seek your fellowship elsewhere,” then we are in effect back to 1530 (not just 1577 and the FC) where the bishops are adding something to the Gospel as a requirement—not for salvation, but for (what is the flip-side of the same thing) the unity of the one and only church that there is. In Pelikan’s words from half a century ago, bishops (or church assemblies) making such requirements are sectarianizing themselves from the una sancta. The Gospel’s “Platzregen” will be moving elsewhere.

I don’t know whether the major protesters within the ELCA are saying anything like this. I don’t see their stuff—and I think I’m grateful that I’m spared. Whether or not they are, anyone in

the ELCA articulating what's said above is on solid ground, I'd say. And the folks on the other side better scramble if the ELCA is to stick to its moorings in Reformation theology.

The "YOU GOTTA's" in church constitutions—"church-wide" and local—are always dicey because they regularly dance back and forth on the line of distinction between God's two regimes, between the rhetoric of law and the rhetoric of promise. If church constitutions, the ELCA's too, were just about the management of a left-hand kingdom organization—let's say a religious club called so-and-so—then YOU GOTTA's are in order to see who's finally in and out of the club.

But not so the holy Christian church. For the "true unity of the church" one might even say that there actually are no YOU GOTTA's for the members! All those YOU GOTTA's in AC 7 are addressed to the bishops, pastors, apostles, evangelists: YOU GOTTA be offering the law-free Good News and offering the Gospel-grounded sacraments. Punkt! Gospel and the sacraments are not what YOU GOTTA believe; they are what must be offered so that faith can happen. They're the only thing that connects sinners to Christ. Christ-connected sinners ARE what the unity of the church is all about. Christ-connected sinners are what the church is.

To add people on, or to peel people off from the church by any other criteria is seen in the confessions as:

1. Burdening consciences that Christ wants un-burdened,
2. Destroying Christian freedom which Christ wants preserved,
3. Contradicting the Gospel, which hardly qualifies as church work.

We did have an ELCA mini-precedent on this a few years ago, I think, in California, when a congregation there (or was it two of them?) called gay/lesbian pastors to do the "unity stuff" (Gospel/Sacraments) in their midst. As I recall they were

eventually disciplined OUT of the ELCA. Sticky as this is, it seems clear to me that AC 7 and FC 10 were contradicted by that action. Additional criteria were invoked for staying united with “this church.” They were Gospel-add-ons.

[The ancient parallel to LCMS a quarter century ago was the way “The Handbook” got used at that time to determine who was in and who was out. Already back then the Preus-crowd granted that excising us from the LCMS by these Handbook/Convention criteria to “seek our fellowship elsewhere,” did not cut us off from the Una Sancta. Seems that they did not notice who DID get cut off from the Una Sancta by such action. Namely, the cutters themselves. Add-ons to the Gospel always do that, even when “good guys” like us ELCAers have the knife in hand.]

So am I morbid? Pessimistic about the ELCA? Don’t think so. Here’s an opportunity for “this church” to get its Gospel-grounding improved. The focus is the unity of the church. Linked to that, of course, is the exercise of authority in the ELCA. You might call it, as realtors do, a matter of “location, location, location.” The location for the UNITY of the church is the locus that AC 7 specifies. The location for church AUTHORITY, if not already there, needs to be re-located in the same Gospel, viz., Christ’s upside-down authority articulated in Matt. 20, vis-a-vis which all other models—also in the ELCA—“shall not be so among you.”

To ground HE similarly in the Gospel is more difficult. If, as I understand present historical scholarship, HE cannot be documented as genuine history back through the fuzziness of the church’s early generations, then its Gospel-grounding is a lost cause. Do we have the oxymoron of a non-historical HE? What is it really? Fiction? A phantom? Is it what we LCMS Germans used to call an “Un-ding?” Could it still be a pious Un-ding? Even for “common mission and the unity of the church” as our CCA-

document says? I don't see how, if AC 7 is our dipstick for that common mission and church unity.

Peter himself, prime primate for the HE, was no great shakes as a sign for the unity of the church. At Antioch he showed signs of an "other" Gospel, one that split the congregation there. So even Peter—long after his return to the fold—was no guarantor of the true unity of the church (ala AC 7). Ditto for the subsequent bishops of Rome—not only during the Reformation era, but (ala Pelikan) including the infallibility pope who sectarianized his own communion. Why would anyone expect that bishops of any sort, let alone those with possible HE connection to Peter, could by that connection be signs of the unity of the church?

Church unity is not a 2-millennia-long human chain of holding hands all the way back to Peter who has his hand linked to Christ. That's possibly "left-hand" kind of unity, but hardly the churchy kind. Church unity gets created ad hoc and on location when something specific happens. The connection element is not the bishop's connection to an HE chain, but the sinners' connection to the crucified and risen Christ. It's not a succession, but a procession, as Ghanaian theologian Kwame Bediako says, "third article stuff." The Holy Spirit proceeding from the Father and the Son, proceeding to connect sinners to Christ and thus to God the Father. The signs that do such connecting, that "suffice for the unity of the church," are pragmatic actions, irrespective of the person doing them: a specific sort of preaching, alongside a Gospel-grounded mode for administering the sacraments.

My frequent drumbeat about Christ's "real absence" in much of today's preaching—also within the ELCA—is at root the same issue. It's about the unity of the church. It bemoans the absence of what "suffices" to create that unity, what fashion

Christ-connections for those in the pews. Interchangeable clergy between ECUSA and ELCA won't faze this a bit. HE-ordained pastors from now on in the ELCA won't make any difference here either. What will it take? Probably a reformation, a reformation not unlike the one we claim as our heritage. "Ecclesia semper reformanda" is a shibboleth among theologians, viz., "the church always needs reforming." Well then—what about reformation in "this church?" The HE controversy within the ELCA could be its catalyst. The call of the hour is: "Don't let this trouble go to waste!" And some, like the 16th century heroes we hype, may well have to go to the mat to do so.

Even so, Peace & Joy!
Ed

Readers' Responses

Colleagues,

Today's edition, ThTh #115, offers readers' responses to recent postings. There's quite a bunch. If possible I'll try next week to address some of the items raised here.

Peace & Joy!

Ed

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1. Last week's critique (ThTh 114) of a Christ-less sermon we encountered on the weekend of the Schroeder family reunion elicited this from an ELCA pastor in California—

"Your monologue was forwarded to me by a friend . . . my

comments: Hard up for content in the late summer, Ed? If the goal of Christian conversation is mutual consolation / edification, perhaps a bit more reflection on a poor sermon by some overworked pastor might be in order before speaking. I assume your missives are read by casts of dozens if not hundreds who just might be Lutheran enough to remember the word 'grace' if not 'gracious.' That would, I believe, put some moral requirement on you to 'impart grace to the hearers.' (see Eph 4:15, 29) All I could think of is that I am glad you and your Schroeder clan don't drop in on me. Shame on you."

Three weeks earlier ThTh 111 was posted, my answers to two questions from an ELCA bishop—one about Luther and the Jews, the other about the “historic episcopate,” now that it is canon law (or something close to that) for ordinations in the ELCA. That elicited a lot of response.

2. From an ELCA pastor in Wisconsin, Seminex grad, Crossings veteran—

I have pasted in this section from TT #111. It is, I think, the only argument possible to make that the confessions forbid us to have only bishops ordain & to have bishops installed always by three other bishops. My bishop made the same argument you do, and I was for a time persuaded by it.

That's where the old term “adiaphoron” comes in—something neither PREscribed nor PROscribed for the church living according to the Gospel. By itself such hist.epis. ordinations are an adiaphoron, the confessors (would) say. BUT if someone says YOU GOTTA have such an ordination, then, say the confessors –

this time in Formula of Concord Article X – it ceases to be adiaphoron. Then it's a "time for confessing." And then you must resist it even though by itself it is no big deal.

What is a big deal is the YOU GOTTA that's added on to the issue. Any such add-on that amounts to a YOU GOTTA, is a no-no for Reformation Lutherans.

Already back in the Augsburg Confession and its Apology, Article 28, Melancthon was speaking against such things. Such church ordinances that make adiaphoron-stuff into YOU GOTTA's, he says there,

- a. burden Christian consciences,*
- b. undermine Christian liberty, and*
- c. conflict with the Gospel.*

Well put! I take no exception to your description of the issue, only to its application in this case. If anyone were saying that only by the aforementioned rubrics can we be saved, can we be the church of Christ, can our sacraments genuinely convey forgiveness, then it would be an objectionable GOT TO. But ECUSA and CCM are explicitly denying this.

I think what is needed by well-intentioned Lutherans is a bit more discrimination about GOT TO's. It is those which touch on conscience or justification that are objectionable. "Honor your father and mother [and aged professor]" is certainly a GOT TO. It becomes objectionable only when linked to my righteousness. Keep it in another realm, and it is good.

A very good friend, with whom I am sharply disagreed about CCM, always says these rubrics "are being imposed

on us.” Well, at the 1999 CWA the ELCA – we ourselves – decided to take this upon ourselves. Is that imposition? He would argue that the majority is imposing it on the minority but, heavenly days, if THAT is outlawed then we can no longer govern ourselves in any way by vote. Those who voted for Bp Anderson’s opponent could argue that he is imposed on them as bishop, and that is a GOT TO which destroys Christian liberty. Well, I think this *reductio ad absurdum* is persuasive.

Et tu?

3. Here’s one from a good friend, the ecumenical officer of an Episcopal diocese in the midwest–

Several brief Anglican thoughts on the question of Dr. Bohlmann’s comment on the historic episcopate. Is he perhaps saying that the confessions are not negative on the historic polity? that they even express a willingness to use it in order to preserve the unity of the church if the (then) bishops would ordain gospel-preaching pastors? [which, alas, they weren’t] Is his second point perhaps that since polity is an adiaphoron for Lutherans one today could oppose any given form for a variety of practical or even theoretical reasons? e.g. that the historic episcopate has too much negative historical baggage or doesn’t support lay ministries enough, etc. [Likewise, one could support any given form including the historic episcopate for a variety of practical or even theoretical reasons, including common mission and the unity of the church.]

Your YOU GOTTA argument is a good one if the issue is one touching on doctrine, gospel, salvation, or conscience,

but I wonder about its scope in this area of discipline, i.e. polity. If polity is an adiaphoron, then the ELCA could adopt the historic episcopate as a strategy for Christian unity. In fact, the ELCA constitution is full of YOU GOTTA's that are adiaphora as well as confessional. No organization could exist without them.

My take on CCM is that the ELCA is saying that it is willing to exercise its freedom to shape its polity whatever way is best for its mission by adopting the historic episcopate in order to make the interchangeability of clergy possible with the Episcopal Church. Since the Episcopal Church has for almost twenty years practiced mutual eucharistic hospitality with the ELCA, the issue is not the validity of the Lutheran pastoral office. The willingness to accept current pastors who have been ordained by other pastors is further evidence. The acceptance of ELCA's full communion with other Lutheran bodies as well as with Reformed Churches is a recognition that the ELCA will always have pastors in its ranks who were not ordained within the historic episcopate. The rub seems to be on our insistence that in the future interchangeability of clergy requires such an ordination. That is our internal requirement as we seek to be faithful to a discipline that goes back to Canon 4 of Nicea and which is observed by a large majority of the Christian world. As a norm, we want our clergy to live within that discipline, hence the interchangeability rule.

But, what of those who for whatever reason conscientiously cannot accept such an ordination? To force them to do so would be wrong, in my opinion. We faced that issue when we decided to ordain women and found ways to accommodate conscience. I suspect that the

ELCA will find ways to do likewise. Hopefully, in time the issue will be seen in a different light and cease to be divisive. Meanwhile, we must learn how to work cooperatively with those whose consciences are burdened by our internal rules and who feel they must reject ordination by bishops, all the while rejoicing in the exciting new possibilities that interchangeability will make possible with those who freely accept such ordination as God's gift for expanding our common mission.

Peace, Your loyal Anglican reader

4. From a retired ELCA pastor on the East Coast—

Re: ThTh #111, part 2—hist. episcopate and the Episcopalians and ELCA. Do you really think so? I have my doubts. It seems to me that both Article 28 of the Augsburg Confession and Article 10 of the Formula of Concord have to do with the imposition of adiaphora that are CONTRARY TO THE GOSPEL. "It is patently contrary to God's command and Word to make laws out of opinions or to require that they be observed IN ORDER TO MAKE SATISFACTION FOR SINS AND OBTAIN GRACE ...that by such works GRACE AND EVERYTHING GOOD MIGHT BE EARNED FROM GOD" (AC XXVIII, 34-38). "Inasmuch as such regulations as have been instituted AS NECESSARY TO PROPITIATE GOD AND MERIT GRACE are contrary to the Gospel it is not at all proper for the bishops to require such services of God" (50). "We believe, teach, and confess that IN TIME OF PERSECUTION, when a clear-cut confession of faith is demanded of us, we dare not yield to the ENEMIES in such indifferent things...In such a case it is no longer a question of indifferent things, but a matter which has to

do with THE TRUTH OF THE GOSPEL...(FC, X,6). (Emphases added.)

When our Episcopalian sisters and brothers ask us to join them in the historic episcopate they are not our “enemies,” their making of that request does not constitute “a time of persecution,” and is certainly not made with the understanding that the HE in any way “makes satisfaction for sins” or that we “obtain grace” by means of it.

So I’m mystified by the invocation of AC 28 and FC 10 in this matter. It doesn’t seem to me to fit.

ThTh #111: “Any such add-on that amounts to a YOU GOTTA, is a no-no for Reformation Lutherans.” Really? Any such add-on that amounts to a you gotta TO OBTAIN GRACE or MAKE SATISFACTION FOR SINS is a no-no, yes, but joining them in the HE is not such an add-on.

AC 28 also says, “To this our teachers reply that 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...” (53). Granted that the Es get closer than is comfortable for us Lutherans to making the HE “necessary” and “a sin to omit,” but do they not, in this dialog, make it clear they are NOT doing that? Are they not including the HE as part of “everything in the churches [being] done in good order”? Should we not be content with that? I think so.

Besides, the FC says (7), “We believe, teach, and confess that no church should condemn another because it has

fewer or more external ceremonies not commanded by God, as long as there is mutual agreement in doctrine and in all its articles [past experience makes me very unhappy with those last five words, but there they are] as well as in the right use of the holy sacraments..." Since we have found mutual agreement in doctrine and in all its articles (?) as well as in the right use of the holy sacraments, we ought not condemn them for holding to the HE, nor they us for not. Well, they're not condemning us for not having the HE, since they recognize our ministry as valid without it. They are asking us to adopt it for the sake of a common mission because they cannot do otherwise (I don't think we appreciate this sufficiently). Neither do we condemn them for having the HE, but are willing to join them in it for the sake of this common mission.

Back to ThTh and the YOU GOTTA add-ons. There are a lot of "you gottas" added on in the church's life, e.g. you gotta call a pastor who is on the ELCA roster, you gotta get the bishop's signature on the letter of call, you gotta be willing to call a pastor of either gender, you gotta have your congregation's constitution approved by the synod, you gotta attend synod assemblies, etc. None of these is a "no-no" to Reformation Lutherans because they are not prescribed to obtain grace or make satisfaction for sin.

As Marty emphasized when defending Called to Common Mission, if we were merging all this would have to be looked at in an entirely different manner, but we're not merging. We're recognizing each other as church, and joining each other in mission. So cool it. Well, those last words are mine, not his.

Can we really compare being asked to accept the HE to the LCMS demanding that the Bohlmann/Preus Statement be affirmed as the true teaching of the Gospel in all its articles? It doesn't seem comparable to me. The latter compromised the Gospel (we didn't, after all, oppose it simply because we were in a snit because somebody said, "You gotta"), whereas the former is indeed a simple acceptance of an adiaphoron for the sake of peace and the fulfilling of God's mission and does not compromise the Gospel.

Well, then are my doubts to ThTh #111 for whatever they're worth. Know, though, that in your real calling, man, are you appreciated!

5. From a lay theologian, Crossings Community member here in St. Louis—

Thinking about your comments #2, concerning the historical episcopate and the YOU GOTTA that makes it non-adiaphoron. Writing off the top of my head (and you can picture that if you want!), I would hope that the Concordat didn't say "we gotta do the h.e. thing" but it should have said "the Lutherans agree that they will do the h.e. thing." This would still be adiaphoron in a doctrinal sense; it has no more theological force than the documents that say the ELCA will adopt a budget by majority vote at the conventions and other such business matters. We agree to do the h.e. to make our guests (new brothers/sisters?) comfortable; and there is Scriptural precedent for this. "To the Greeks I became as a Greek, that I might win the Greeks." Of course, there is Scripture that can be brought to bear against it, such as Paul castigating Peter for changing his dining patterns

when the circumcision party visited (did I get that right?), but I suspect the key difference is how and why you do things – “that I might win the Greeks” is a much better reason than “so I don’t get embarrassed.” And the reason here? To promote church unity. Sounds like a Godly reason to me.

Pax

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6. From a newly ordained ELCA pastor, former student of mine. She came for a Lutheran seminary degree from her Roman Catholic heritage after years of work (and a PhD) in RC contexts–

Your words on the historic episcopate interested me very much, considering my history and all. From where I stand, I believe you have the reasoning on this one right. That is a theological reason why I became Lutheran (Gospel/Jesus Christ centered.) Episcopalians are RC “wannabes” without pedigree—at least institutionally, that is. Cheers!

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7. From an Anglican priest in Canada, once upon a time my Seminex TA–

Glad you are getting some comments on TT 111. Any of it from Anglicans? I’ve just been re-reading some Richard Hooker. He makes it quite clear in his polemic against the Calvinists that the Episcopate is a matter of indifference, but defends it as good for the Church of England.

So, Lutherans say the same thing about their polity and

its appropriateness to their situation.

The problem then becomes one of two individual communions, ostensibly agreeing on the nature of the Gospel and the Sacraments, but unable to work in fellowship, because both are putting each other in statu confessionis by asserting their Christian Freedom to use a particular polity. In much of the discussion I've heard from both sides of the Thames/Elbe waterway, it seems that people are so busy exercising their Christian Freedom and rarely, if ever, discussing the practical advantages of either system.

Probably you and I would disagree about which system is more advantageous, but I find it tragic that this is a barrier that none seem to be able to surmount. Canada is doing okay, it seems, in this regard, but the situation here is different than that in the States. Personally, I think most of the people on both sides who voted in favour of the concordat in the States (and probably Canada) did so for the wrong reasons. Here I agree with Eliot's Beckett...this is the greatest treason, to do the right thing for the wrong reason.

Anyway, it reminds me of two spoiled children refusing to play ball unless it is on their turf in their way. Saddest is that the game is never played, and the two churches could do such wonderful things together.

- 1. Anglicans might learn something about preaching and practical systematics and*
- 2. Lutherans might learn something about the spiritual life.*

Enough for now.

8. From a lay theologian in Mississippi–

Well, this whole topic–Luther and the Jews– just stirred my pot. We have a Jewish branch in our family, so I have had some exposure to typical middle class modern Jewish thinking and concerns. Just like we are typical middle class modern Christians. In other words, not theologians, not the best example of what we should be, with views tempered by the societal pressures. This response to Luther's anti-judaism views did not satisfy me. It was a little too ethereal. Doesn't hold up under the best mudslinging. To me, Luther missed the big boat. The issue should not have been "Why are the Jews so pigheaded [sic!]", but rather, "Why hasn't God changed their hearts?" Isn't it God he needed to rail against?

If we believe that our own works cannot accomplish our salvation; that only the work of the Holy Spirit can open our eyes, open our hearts; then I'm left wondering what was God doing with the Jews of Luther's day. Why isn't Luther respectfully railing at God? David did. Moses did. Jonah (my fav) certainly did. Why didn't Luther write about spending days fasting and praying for God to move among the hearts of the Jews? (perhaps he did, I don't know).

Maybe ol' Luther was more like Jonah than we like to think. After all, Jonah didn't want to go to Nineveh because those folks were political enemies. Jonah also knew that God was going to work in their hearts and cause them to change. Jonah knew that God would forgive those who repented and bless them. SO maybe for all the reasons your friend Steve lists, Luther was not fond of the Jews. Perhaps it was a little threatening for Luther to think

what those mighty OT scholars would be like if their minds and hearts were opened to the gospel.

I think we Christians need to say to the world, Yes, Luther was dead wrong about this issue. His writings do not reflect God's method of grace. His writings may have made others feel justified in bigoted behaviour. Jews with closed hearts are no different than anyone else with closed hearts. We will beg God to open hearts and minds of all men. In the meantime, we as Christians ask God to enable us to provide common grace and justice to those we live with, regardless of their spiritual status. Sorry about the soapbox, but I think we have to speak very plainly to the secular world, even if we have to eat a bit of crow on behalf of the mothers and fathers of the church.

Your Armchair Theologian

9. From a pastor (LCMS, I think) in Florida–

Not that you asked: In ThTh 111 you say that “the other bishop” asked:

A. Was missions the “great omission” in the Lutheran Reformation, and if so, why?

B. In a post-modern world what does it mean to talk about the Bible as “source and norm” as we Lutherans do?

Is it possible that a part of the reason why mission was and still is a “great omission” of the Lutheran on going Reformation is the way we think? We want to clarify, what does it mean and all that. We want to explain why we are right, instead of just doing or confessing the truth of

the Gospel. Maybe that has something to do with the second question as well. A source and norm to ground our statements makes us more comfortable with what we say. Mission is more about helping another person see God's Yes in his life in the person of Jesus. It really doesn't matter what the Bible, the Confessions or the other sources and norm, including the Historic Episcopate, say or contribute. That comes later. Mission is not rational, and what it means is that someone comes into the kingdom, not that someone understands what it means to come into the Kingdom.

Preaching the Gospel (again!)

Colleagues,

It's clearly a bone caught in my craw (or a barley-beard inside my pants leg, as we used to say back on the farm 60 yrs ago). Namely, preaching, less-than-Gospel preaching—and that from preachers who know the Gospel, but (apparently) don't notice when they are NOT preaching it.

Case in point.

Background: Every two years on the first weekend in August the Schroeder clan gathers for the family reunion back home at Grandpa and Grandma Schroeder's farm in NW Illinois. After five generations it's still a Schroeder farm. So a big bunch of us gathered there two weeks ago. There are something like 270 direct descendents of that immigrant pair who came to America in

the 1880s. For the umpteen of us Schroeder cousins who grew up on the four farms that bordered "Schroeder Road" August 1 was always picnic time. It was Grandma's birthday. She was born in 1874, 126 years ago.

Most of the clan is still churchy, and most of these are in Missouri Synod congregations. For the (maybe) one-quarter of us in the clan who are ex-Missouri Lutherans, a local ELCA church is where we show up for worship on reunion Sunday. It's a big congregation—big staff, great spirit, great music, great senior pastor, who's also a great preacher. Except for this Sunday he didn't preach the Gospel. The 20 or so of us who worshipped there Reunion Sunday (Aug. 6) gossiped about that "real absence" at the picnic tables under the shade trees over fried chicken, baked beans and potato salad later in the day.

The sermon text was the second slice of John 6 (verses 14-36), the second of about five slices that the lectionary is serving us here toward the end of summer in the northern hemisphere.

The post mortem on the sermon went something like this—

Someone noticed that THE NAME didn't get dropped until the vatum at the end of the homily—"And now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father..." Not ever mentioned before. God's faithfulness to "give us THIS DAY our daily bread," and our call to trust God for this, was the message from the manna that was put on our plate.

Well, then was the crucified/risen Christ needed or not for the sermon to achieve its purpose? Probably not. But all of us in the congregation this morning were already Christians, someone proposed, so the preacher presupposed that we were Christ-trusters already. Even if that were true (and how can anyone tell?) can that ever be taken for granted in Christian proclamation? Didn't Doc Caemmerer, of blessed memory, say: A

sermon that “takes the Gospel for granted” is a sermon with no Gospel in it?

And wasn't there all that hassle in the Reformation era about “necessitating” Christ? Can you necessitate something without ever mentioning it? Granted, mere name-dropping is not necessitating. What the Reformers were urging upon the pastors of their day was to weave in the Christ-quotient in such a way that you couldn't get to the desired goal without it.

The goal of the Aug. 6 sermon was clear: to get us to trust God for our own daily bread—and do so day by day “with no thought for the morrow.” What the sermon could/did presuppose in us hearers was that we were indeed all hoarders, giving humongous energy to “thought for the morrow,” and all that intensified in America as we're bombarded by a consumer culture that “required” such futurism of us. Such a mindset and such behavior are rooted in the un-faith endemic to us all. So much for the sermon's diagnosis of us hearers.

What some Schroeders thought they heard as the proposed remedy for that malady was: “Stop it. Why? God is indeed trustworthy for day-by-day sustenance. He did it for the original Manna-nites; he promises to do it for us. Ergo trust God.” No Christ component was mentioned (thus not needed?) to move us from malady to goal. Is that enough to transform a hoarding heart? Probably not.

In the Sunday's Gospel itself the text's alternatives are two kinds of feedings, Moses's and Jesus's. And both of them come from God! For John those two feedings signal two kinds of faith-ings. Then what's the difference between trusting God for daily bread ala Moses, and ditto ala Christ? John 6 says you can see one big difference in the results of those two kinds of feedings: life or death.

That's heavy bread, someone punned. If the preacher had needed to necessitate Christ to get us to the sermon's goal, where would/could it have come?

Right about there in this preaching-post-mortem someone shouted: "Hey, there's Whitey's ice cream for dessert—three different kinds!" All Schroeders know that Whitey's is creme-de-la-creme in more ways than one. We also know that in this crowd Whitey's (like manna) wouldn't last til the morrow. So the agenda changed. Moses won. In a post-post-mortem some thought that also in the sermon Moses won. A pity.

Even so, Peace & Joy!
Ed Schroeder

The Authority To Be (Culpably) Inclusive: A Mark of Bonhoeffer's Confessio

Robert W. Bertram

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1. Preview

A. Entitled To Be Tainted

Previously I had occasion to write about Bonhoeffer's

exclusiveness. (1) Really it was God's exclusiveness, as Bonhoeffer witnessed it. But that was only the first shoe. With this follow-up essay I hope to drop the second shoe, Bonhoeffer's (God's) inclusiveness. As we might expect, inclusion will win out over exclusion, mercy over wrath. But Bonhoeffer's God being what God is, in Jesus Christ, there is something else we should expect: the divine inclusion will supersede the divine exclusion not at all cheaply, not like a predictable TV happy ending, but at an exorbitant price both to Christ and to his followers. The way he and they include outsiders, the kind of outsiders they include, is costly in the extreme. The wonder will be: like Christ, his followers construe their including of outsiders, even the most suspect, as a privilege. It is something for which they believe themselves "astonishingly" authorized.

Few people will believe this about them, even about Bonhoeffer. Many, including his admirers today, will be embarrassed by such indiscriminate inclusiveness. Embarrassed? Yes, and understandably. In order for a Bonhoeffer to be as embarrassingly inclusive as he was, he would have needed an authority which supercedes the very authority of God, that is, any God with standards, any discriminating God. It was one thing for Bonhoeffer to identify with those who suffered innocently. For that he is almost universally admired. But for him to identify with those who suffered deservedly, those whom even we may have grave questions about, and for him to take sides with them against the likes of us, for him to refuse to let us make excuses for him and to insist instead on consorting with the guilty—that is something else. That makes him, along with the dubious company he kept, an object of embarrassment, all the moreso when he acts as if we're entitled to our embarrassment.

As we warned, for the followers of Christ to claim such a higher, prior, apparently promiscuous authority incurs a cost.

It incurs for themselves, right within their own circles, the suspicion of betrayal and, with that, their being excluded all over again, this time closer to home. The trick is for them to suffer that exclusion with a minimum of regret, confident of their authority to do so, seeing in whose name they do it.

B) Bonhoeffer On Luther's Two Kingdoms

From even this much of a preview, with its hint of two conflicting divine authorities the canny reader may have detected a suspicious echo of Martin Luther, specifically Luther's theology of "two kingdoms." The more's the wonder, since that is the very theme in Luther's theology which had become most controversial, most stigmatized in Bonhoeffer's own embattled church situation. All the same, never one to shrink from controversy, Bonhoeffer made an explicit point of reasserting that provocative Lutheran Reformation accent for the churches' new, quite different plight in the twentieth century.

To do so Bonhoeffer not only had to oppose the old Pseudoluthertum with its statist partitioning of God's two kingdoms, state from church, into separate zones or "spaces." Also he had to contend more and more with those Barthian "Enthusiasts" in his own Confessing Church who in reaction to the "so-called Lutherans" relapsed, zig for zag, into a church-dominant theocracy. Worst of all perhaps was that mainline Protestantism in the USA where Bonhoeffer found Luther's distinction virtually non-existent, a church uncritically assimilated to its culture. Up against such entrenched reaction all around, Luther's reformist theology of two kingdoms was not apt to persuade (nor is it today) even with an advocate as articulate as Bonhoeffer. But then, of course, I could be wrong. The test would be, as Bonhoeffer learned, Are there still among us such sacrificial confessors who will pay what it costs to overcome God's exclusiveness, namely, to bear that exclusion

themselves under the expansive cross of Christ? For the more expansive it is, the more expensive.

That hard-won superseding of one divine kingdom by another, always and only via the Cross, is what we have called the reprioritizing of authorities. It is the supplanting of God's exclusionary authority by means of a contrary, superior authority, namely, God's authority to include. It means, in short, including the very ones whom God, the same God has excluded. How to do that without blasphemy, without simply negating one divine authority—cheapening it, de-Authorizing it—by means of another, more convenient to ourselves? Answer: by still giving the old, condemnatory authority its full due yet without granting it the last Word. It is the analogy of demotion: God's critical Law, which is still very much God's, is demoted to "penultimate" (vorletzt, Bonhoeffer calls it) by comparison with God's forgiveness, which is "ultimate" (letzt).

It is the patristic metaphor of an ambidextrous God, whose authority to reject is only his "left hand" but whose "right hand," which he favors, is compassion. And no wonder, for at the right hand sits the beloved Son. Yet he, remember, gained that upper hand only through suffering the world's sin in his own body on the tree. That is still The Way by which his disciples trump exclusion with inclusion, by their co-suffering with Christ the world's sin and sinners—to the death if need be, even at the risk of appearing irreligious, and all as if they had the right.

C) A Time For Confessing

It is in some such way as this, I hope to show, that Bonhoeffer quite intentionally retrieved for his own time Luther's theology of two kingdoms, namely, not just by

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distinguishing their two-ness—that, too—but then by reprioritizing them: reasserting the distinctiveness of God's gospel over God's Law yet without discrediting the Law in the process. That is one of the most crying needs in a time like Bonhoeffer's. And what time was that? It was a time like that of his confessional predecessors in the sixteenth century. They had called theirs "a time for confession."

The term occurs in the Lutheran confessional book, Formula of Concord. That document, as Eberhard Bethge recalled, had become a consuming preoccupation for Bonhoeffer and his seminarians at Finkenwalde. "A time for confession," indeed. What else but that, a status confessionis, a witness-stand, was their own threatening situation! What it called for was not just some act of confessing, however fearless in its martyrdom, but a confessio, a contrary truth claim, a sharp articulation of the faith, a painfully explicit message. For that was exactly what was being threatened, the church's message. And by what? By "heresy," not just by tyranny but heresy. The "German Christians" were inverting God's authorities, state over church, Law over gospel. These inverted authorities now had to be reversed. Bonhoeffer branded this heresy "legalism." For though it mimics Law as well as gospel, it in fact destroys them both and therewith the church altogether. Under the circumstance that heresy could be countered in no other way than by a most outspoken witness in deed and Word. It was that kind of "time."

D) Lutheranizing Barmen

Come to think of it, wasn't that clearly what the Barmen Declaration had been doing, topping exclusion with inclusion? Clearly? Well, yes and no. No, not so clearly, if we heed the Lutheran critics of Barmen. Though most of them eventually supported the Declaration, more or less, they still complained how Barthian it was, particularly how its first two articles had

confused, not clarified, the difference between God's two kingdoms. They had a point. Yet on the other hand, yes, Barmen did deal unmistakably with these two contraries, God's rejecting and God's reclaiming. Right in the Declaration's first two articles, doesn't it emphasize, first, how exclusive is the Word of God but then, next and contrariwise, how uniquely inclusive? In fact, who are the offenders whom Article One excludes? Isn't it precisely those rival totalitarian authorities which arrogate to themselves an all-inclusiveness for which, as Article Two insists, Jesus Christ holds the monopoly?

Isn't that in effect what Luther saw the two kingdoms doing, Law and gospel in their sociological effect: God ruling who's out and who's in, peccatores and iusti, accusing and forgiving, putting to death and resurrecting, excluding and including? Well, candidly, that may be reading Barmen with a Lutheran spin. Exactly. And that, as I hope to show, is what Bonhoeffer was doing both in deed and Word.

Recall how the delegates at Barmen, despite their unanimous approval of the Declaration, still acknowledged the deep intra-confessional differences which divided them, Lutheran and Reformed and Union. Recall also how they declared their good intention, once they returned to their home churches, to provide "responsible interpretations" of the Declaration each from their respective traditions. Recall how the Lutherans, for all their criticism, by and large failed to come up with such a "responsible interpretation." Recall how Bonhoeffer, beginning with his ministry in Pomerania, found himself in a quandary there. He was surrounded by Lutherans as committed as he was to the Confessing Church but who yet were critical of Barmen, which he was not. Still, they were critical of Barmen because they were confessional Lutherans, which he too insisted on being. So, how to be both a Barmenite and a Lutheran?

E) The All-inclusive Authorizer

We shall recall especially, in the pages which follow, how Bonhoeffer at last accomplished an explicitly confessional witness, maybe even a Lutheran one, in his reprioritizing the authorities. Where and when shall we look for that? Answer: to his years in the conspiracy, his second return from America, his imprisonment and execution. And all thanks to his “most astonishing experience,” as vivid a spiritual and theological breakthrough as Luther’s own “tower experience.” This will entail some re-reading of Bonhoeffer’s posthumous Ethics and of his Letters and Papers From Prison but also, as if by second sight, some “aha” recollections of his earliest theological themes. None of these writings of course will score the confessional point, the reprioritizing of God’s authorities, except as an exegesis of Bonhoeffer’s actual suffering and death.

“Suffering and death”: does that sound sacrilegious, to characterize Bonhoeffer’s witness with words usually reserved for Christ alone? That is a hazard, I admit. Yet evidently that is the only way the reprioritizing of authorities can be brought about by sinners like ourselves, at least in “a time for confession,” whether the confessors in question die violently, as Jesus did, or in their beds. Either way, it is a martyrological fact that the Creator’s authorities are restored to their own respective ultimacy/penultimacy only when confessors who claim to include those whom God excludes pay the price for their shameful inclusiveness, the price which the same God first paid in Christ for them all.

Does Bonhoeffer’s explication of his “experience” qualify as a “responsible interpretation” of Barmen or, for that matter, of Luther’s theology of two kingdoms? In both cases I freely give Bonhoeffer the benefit of the doubt. (In this case isn’t it

rather the benefit of the faith?) At the least, I find it impossible any longer to think of Luther's theology of two kingdoms without thinking of Bonhoeffer's in the same breath, now that both are before us. Finally, though, neither Bonhoeffer nor Luther is the One whom we associate with the reprioritizing of authorities. Nor did they.

2. Bonhoeffer's "Experience": How The Excluded Came To Be Included

A) Bonhoeffer's Exclusiveness Reviewed

As I mentioned before, the writing which preceded this one concentrated on Bonhoeffer's God's exclusiveness. That much, we found, reflected the exclusiveness of the Barmen Declaration, even outdid it. So far, then, Bonhoeffer's theology and life seemed to provide the Declaration with a "responsible interpretation," maybe a Lutheran one. Yet being left with only that much, exclusiveness, was disappointing. In the end we were left wondering, Surely there is more to Bonhoeffer's "responsible interpretation" of Barmen than his door-slaming disclaimer, "Whoever knowingly separates himself from the Confessing Church in Germany separates himself from salvation." We tried exonerating Bonhoeffer from sounding so negative. We reminded ourselves, as Bonhoeffer himself had done, that the real separatists were those who separated themselves, those who set limits to the church from outside, not from inside. That is why, from that "alien" distance, they heard merely the church's Law, not its gospel. Still, we had to admit that the Law which they heard, which confirmed their self-separation, was God's Law, not just Bonhoeffer's. No one knew that, and sweated it, more than he.

Again with all good intentions, we reminded ourselves that for

Bonhoeffer to equate the Christian church in Germany with just “the Confessing Church” only reflected what for him was axiomatic, namely, that God’s Word for the church is always “concrete,” historically situated, never abstract or vague. So then why, we pleaded in his defense, perhaps a bit desperately, shouldn’t the church likewise be concrete, not some church in general but this church, in this Germany, with just these confessors? Yet we knew all along that by the same token whoever “separates himself from the Confessing Church and thus “from salvation” must likewise be a concrete, historically situated, never abstract or vague human being. Even separatists are concrete. So, for all our efforts to put Bonhoeffer in the best possible light, the reader could probably detect between the lines our own uneasiness about Bonhoeffer’s exclusiveness. Through it all we too were asking, Doesn’t Bonhoeffer’s confessio let alone his interpretation of Barmen, somehow provide a church-world relation which is not just exclusive but also inclusive? And now at last we can announce, Indeed it does.

B) Bonhoeffer’s “Most Astonishing Experience”

In fact, for Bonhoeffer Christ’s claim upon the world is inclusive, “total” (ganz) exactly because it is “exclusive” (ausschliesslich.) This paradox, I grant, sounds a bit abrupt. It will require some unpacking. To explain this dialectical claim of Christ Bonhoeffer refers autobiographically to “one of our most astonishing experiences during the years [under Nazism] when everything Christian was sorely oppressed.” So formative must this “experience” have been—Bonhoeffer calls it “an experience of our days,” “an actual concrete experience,” a “living experience”—that the reader is reminded of Luther’s Türmerlebnis. True, the experience did confirm Jesus’ words of “Law,” that “Whoever is not with me is against me” (Mt. 12:30). That much is exclusive. But the same experience soon confirmed

the amazing contrary as well, "Whoever is not against us is for us" (Mk. 9:40). That is inclusive in the extreme, and the church has Jesus' authorization for that.

The experience, Bonhoeffer recollects, had begun some years earlier, with the "confessing congregations" and with their "exclusive demand for a clear profession of allegiance to Christ." The exclusiveness of their demand, as we saw, was directed not just against the "anti-Christian forces" of Nazism, which actually had had the effect of driving the confessing congregations together in the first place. No, "the greatest of all the dangers which threatened the Church with inner disintegration ... lay in the neutrality of large numbers of Christians." Alas, "the exclusive demand for a clear profession of allegiance to Christ caused the band of confessing Christians to become ever smaller."

The excluders – or shall we say, those (like Bonhoeffer) who pronounced judgment on the self-excluders? – had themselves now become the excluded.

However, "precisely through [the church's] concentration on the essential," on Christ alone, so Bonhoeffer recalls, "there gathered around her [those] people who came from very far away, and people to whom she could not refuse her fellowship and her protection." Who were these new outsiders? Bonhoeffer dared not list them by name, for obvious security reasons, lest the Gestapo find the list. So he identifies them as one would list the "Virtues" in the cast of a medieval morality play. They are: "Injured justice, oppressed truth, vilified humanity and violated freedom." Notice, all these characters had themselves been suffering exclusion from their Nazi colleagues. So where could they turn for help? Answer: "These all sought for [the church], or rather for her Master, Jesus Christ." Remember, they had come on their search "from very far away." Bonhoeffer seems

to have had in mind Germans like those he joined in the conspiracy, those humanists whom his Jewish-Christian brother-in-law, Gerhard Leibholz, called "the other Germany," "the upholders of the European and Western tradition in Germany." That was, compared to the Confessing Church, "very far away."

But to these new outsiders, however far they had come, the church could not "refuse her fellowship." For like the church they too had been excluded, if for apparently quite different reasons. Apparently different. Yet in these secular refugees, so Bonhoeffer marvels, the church "now had the living experience of that other saying of Jesus: 'Whoever is not against us is for us'." "For us"? These humanists? For "the church or, rather, for her Master, Jesus Christ"? Wasn't Bonhoeffer being naive? No, they are "for us," Bonhoeffer explains, because "Jesus gives his support to those who suffer for the sake of a just cause, even if this cause is not precisely the confession of His name." That is, "He takes them under His protection, He accepts responsibility for them, and He lays claim to them," all to the profound surprise of those secularists themselves. Thus "it happens that in the hour of suffering and responsibility, perhaps for the first time in his life and in a way which is strange and surprising to him . . . , such a person appeals to Christ and professes himself a Christian because at this moment... he becomes aware that he belongs to Christ."

Again Bonhoeffer assures his reader, this "is not an abstract deduction but... an experience which we ourselves have undergone, ... in which the power of Jesus Christ became manifest in fields of life where it had previously remained unknown."

C) Homesick Humanists

Bonhoeffer's theological explanation of this experience, I suggest, is part of his "responsible interpretation" of Barmen, specifically on the issue of reprioritizing the authorities.

First, consider those cultural values in European humanism which at the time were so under attack from the prevailing nihilism and brutality: "reason, culture, humanity, tolerance and self-determination, . . . concepts which until very recently had served as battle slogans against the Church, against Christianity, against Jesus Christ Himself." Nevertheless, originally, where had those values come from? From Christianity. Their "origin [Ursprung] is Jesus Christ." But in the intervening centuries of widespread defection from Christ, the "good" Europeans had "fallen away from their origin."

Only as they are now made to suffer for their humane causes at the hands of Antichrist do these persecuted, "homeless" humanists rediscover their own Ursprung in Christ, who himself suffers for his claims of exclusiveness. What these secular martyrs discover is that the values for which they are persecuted are ultimately unsustainable without their basis in Jesus Christ. "It is not Christ who must justify Himself before the world by [his] acknowledgement of the values of justice, truth and freedom." On the contrary, quite the reverse, "it is these values which have come to need justification, and their justification can only be Jesus Christ." But if he is their justification, altogether by grace, who is it, what sort of God, who demands such justification in the first place? That demand of a just God for a reckoning, and at such a cost, is that grace?

3. Then Is There Also A Contrary Reign Of God: Wrathful, Exclusionary?

A) Is Bonhoeffer suggesting, apparently contrary to Barmen's first thesis, that there is after all

another “kingdom” or rule of God – say, the “wrath” of God – alongside God’s gracious rule in Christ?

If the answer is yes, it can only be a very nuanced yes. For, notice, even though the cultural values of a secularized Christendom might somehow persist for awhile without their humanist practitioners acknowledging their source in Christ, it is he who is still their source, their only one. It is he, Jesus Christ, who still graciously acknowledges them even when they do not acknowledge him. And he acknowledges them as his by means of that gracious claim which the church, his church, makes in his behalf. So it does seem, at least at first glance, that God’s reign in Christ, an inclusive reign, is God’s only reign. Then is Bonhoeffer saying, the only authority God exercises is to include, never to exclude?

There does seem to be a real, persistent antithesis to grace. Is it our sin, our unbelief? Of course, but only that? True, sooner or later Christ in turn must be acknowledged if those humane values are to be “protected” and “justified.” They cannot indefinitely survive apart from our recognizing Christ. At least so Bonhoeffer seems to be saying. But if so, if those values perish for lack of nourishment from their root, possibly forever, isn’t that perishing, that extinction also an action of God? It may not be an action of God apart from Christ. In fact it may be Christ’s own judgment, but certainly not a judgment of Christ’s grace? So isn’t Bonhoeffer counterposing an antithesis to Barmen’s Article One, especially if that article is suggesting that “the one Word of God” is always and only gracious?

B) Is The Other Kingdom the Antichrist’s?

What is clear from Bonhoeffer’s “most astonishing experience” is that there is definitely an adversary vastly more than human, a very real principality and power besides Christ, but worse,

contrary to Christ–Antichrist. So real is this antagonist of Christ that, were it not for his antagonism, the homesick humanists may never have discovered their need of Christ, namely, in reaction to the tyrant’s persecution of good causes and values? Yet by that very token, is this Antichrist then really all that anti, if in the end he is but a means to bringing people, at least some people, back to Christ? Wasn’t Nazism’s very terrorizing of the humane tradition “sufficient to awaken the consciousness of a kind of alliance and comradeship between the defenders of these endangered values and the Christians?” “The children of the Church, who had become independent and gone their own ways, now in the hour of danger returned to their mother.”

That there is a “mother” is of course essential, also sheer grace. But also essential was the humanists’ “hour of danger,” their “hour of suffering and responsibility.” For without that “hour” they may never have returned home. Sure, there is a striking affinity, a common ground, between “the Christ who is persecuted and suffers” and the humanists’ own “concrete suffering of injustice.” Yet this common ground, their very need of Christ, is brought home to them by something presumably antithetical to Christ, namely by “Antichrist,” personified in Hitler’s Nazism. But if so, we are asking, is Antichrist finally all that antithetical, except as an intermediate stage in some larger, divine dialectic?

Repeat the question: This tyrant in whom Bonhoeffer spots the Antichrist, is that the one finally who conducts the contrary reign to Christ’s reign of grace in the world? It might be comforting to think so. For that dualistic explanation would have the advantage of exempting God from the onus of being the adversary. Still, over and over, Bonhoeffer unflinchingly traces the current affliction he and his people are suffering to the retributive “wrath of God,” which obviously is not grace.

Indeed, says Bonhoeffer, it takes grace to be able even to recognize, as few of his contemporaries could, the “wrath of God” for what it is. So if there really were only one kingdom of God, by this time its oneness has become pretty problematic, dialectic or no dialectic.

C) Then Is The “Wrath Of God” The State?

Accordingly, it is not just the reign of human unbelief or even of Antichrist but finally of divine “wrath” which God’s grace in Christ must come to terms with. For even Antichrist is outranked by that superior opponent, “the wrath of God.” Yet the way divine wrath opposes Antichrist is definitely not the way divine grace does so. Wrath and grace may be joined in their opposition to a common foe, nevertheless they are also opposed to each other.

Divine wrath and divine grace are at least as opposed as state and church are. So, consider that church-state opposition as a parallel. Though church and state, too, may be allied against Antichrist, their alliance is at best a “polemical unity.” Furthermore, this polemic between them must somehow reflect a struggle within God. For the state is definitely God’s doing. (That Lutheran, at least, Bonhoeffer still was.) The state is not Antichrist.

Notice, the Nazi regime, now turned Antichrist, no longer qualifies as “the state.” On the contrary, it is the state’s enemy. “The power of the state” has now passed to other hands, presumably the conspirators’. But even if this new “state” finds itself allied with the church of Christ, their alliance is still extremely strained. That is “the most astonishing experience.” For these two newfound allies, church and state, fight with such markedly antithetical weapons that the two of them cannot help but be at odds. What is “astonishing” is not that they are “polemical” but that between them there is any “unity” at all.

In his Ethics Bonhoeffer resorts to Paul's Second Epistle to the Thessalonians, the classic reference to Antichrist, though of course Bonhoeffer has to keep the equation with Nazism cryptic. In that epistle who is it, besides the church, who opposes Antichrist? It is as the apostle calls him "the restrainer." (II Thess. 2:7) Bonhoeffer now identifies that "restrainer" with "the force of order, equipped with great physical strength." "Force of order," "great physical strength" (a bomb in a briefcase?): these are precisely not the weapons of Christ's church. Quite the opposite.

"The 'restrainer' is the power of the state to establish and maintain order." In Bonhoeffer's current circumstance "the restrainer" appears in the persons of those anti-Hitler co-conspirators like his brother Klaus, his brother-in-law von Dohnanyi, Admiral Canaris, General Oster and others, military officers and politicians, secret agents and lawyers, executives and intellectuals who are using their power to plot tyrannicide. That, shall we say, is an act of consummate exclusion. It does not take much imagination to see that as the wrath of God.

D) Church And State As Co-Sufferers, But Whose Co-Sufferers?

"The 'restrainer,' the force of order, sees in the Church an ally, and will. . . seek a place at her side." The two, church and restrainer, "are entirely different in nature [verschieden in ihrem Wesen], yet in the face of imminent chaos they are in close alliance." The church's unique task is that of proclaimer, "preaching the risen Jesus Christ," "the saving act of God, which intervenes from . . . beyond whatever is historically attainable." By contrast, "the 'restrainer' is the force which takes effect within history through God's governance of the world, and which sets due limits to evil." One thing the proclaimer and the restrainer have in common: they are "both

alike objects of the hatred of the [Nazi] forces of destruction, which see in them [both proclaimer and restrainer] their deadliest enemies.”

As a consequence of their being hated in common, proclaimer and restrainer have something else in common: persecution. Notice the incongruity. The restrainers— admirals and generals and political conspirators—are by vocation and commitment all people of power, “equipped with great physical strength,” “the power of the state to establish and maintain order.” Yet in this “hour of suffering and responsibility” they find themselves to be instead the weak, the persecuted, the suffering. In their “hour of danger” they, the weakened strong, see the proclaimer-church as likewise suffering. It too is suffering exclusion because of its exclusiveness. The two, church and state, are co-sufferers.

If anything, the restrainers see that the church’s suffering, by comparison with their own, “presents an infinitely greater danger to the spirit of destruction [Nazi Antichrist] than does any political power [of their own] which may still remain.” Above all, “through her

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message of the living Lord Jesus Christ the Church makes it clear that she is not concerned merely for the maintenance and preservation of the past.” The “miracle” entrusted to her is “a raising of the dead.” With that, “even the forces of order,” namely the conspirators or the restrainers, are compelled “to listen and turn back.” They, “after long straying from the path, are once more finding their way back to their fountain-head.”

The church in turn dare “not reject those who come to her and seek to place themselves at her side.” “While still preserving the essential distinction [wohl gewahrter Unterscheidung] between herself and these forces,” at the same time “she

unreserved allies herself with them [in aufrichtiger Bundesgenossenschaft.]" How the church is to do that, we shall soon see. But in passing let us note that in this long section in his Ethics Bonhoeffer is trying in so many words to recoup Luther's "doctrine of the two kingdoms." In the centuries after the Reformation that doctrine had degenerated into a false "emancipation and sanctification of the world and of the natural." By contrast, for Luther as for Bonhoeffer "there are two kingdoms which, so long as the world continues, must neither be mixed together nor yet be torn asunder. There is the kingdom of the preached word of God, and there is the kingdom of the sword." The King in both cases may be the same, but his kingdoms definitely are not. Here Bonhoeffer definitely sounds like Luther.

4. The "Polemical Unity" As "This People"

A) "My People"

So there are two kingdoms, the one of the preached Word and the other of the sword, which "so long as the world continues must neither be mixed together not yet be torn asunder." However, we dare not stop there. For "the Lord of both kingdoms is the God who is made manifest in Jesus Christ." How to retrieve that "doctrine of the two kingdoms," where both kingdoms are held together under the same Lord? And how to do that not just theoretically but "concretely," for a suffering church ministering to suffering restrainers on its doorstep?

In answering that question we should emphasize what in Bonhoeffer studies is often de-emphasized, that the weak and the suffering for whom Bonhoeffer found himself called always included, perhaps especially, "Germany." By that, so far as I

can tell, Bonhoeffer meant Germany as a Christian Volk. (Bonhoeffer did not concede the National Socialists a monopoly on that ethnic term.) But a Christian folk. Notice: Christian, not sinless, not right or righteous. "Germany", for Bonhoeffer, meant this uneasy reunion of the church and "the promising Godless," this Christentum. "I have loved this people," he exclaimed. Of all the "voiceless" ones in whose behalf he spoke—the Jews, the victims of euthanasia, the "illegal" Finkenwaldians—no oppressed group seems so fully to have engaged his confessor's energies as did his fellow-countrymen, and surely not because of their innocence. For his solidarity with innocent victims, Bonhoeffer is renowned. For his solidarity with guilty ones, he is not renowned.

In this special sense of "Germany" Bonhoeffer was as outspokenly pro-German as those in the confessing movement who, church-politically, seemed to be his opposites—for example, Werner Elert, who long before had written his own Kampf um das Christentum. Does that make Bonhoeffer a nationalist? Hardly. Bonhoeffer opposed "internationalism" for the same reason he opposed its cause, "nationalism," since both were alike "revolutionary" enemies of the corpus christianum. Re-enter Christentum, this Christian, German people. It may be that Bonhoeffer's agonizing for his own people is underemphasized in the histories about him lest he might appear insufficiently different on that score from the "German Christians." That would be the gravest of errors. His theological cause was diametrically opposed to theirs. For him "the question really is: Germanism or Christianity." His passion, as it was Elert's, was not for a German Christianity but for a Christian Germany. Without Christ the Ursprung, at least for Bonhoeffer, Germany could not truly be a people.

B) A Nation? Or A Civilization?

During his first stay in the United States, in 1930, Bonhoeffer told a New York congregation, "We [Christians] are no longer Americans or Germans, we are one large congregation of brethren." But then he added, "Now I stand before you not only as a Christian, but also as a German, who rejoices with his people and who suffers when he sees his people suffering" And their suffering, their mass deaths and impoverishment and starvation and epidemics as a result of World War I but still evident in 1930, Bonhoeffer vividly recounts to his American hearers. He has the boldness to add, no one "who knows well the history of the origin of the war [World War One] believes that Germany bears the sole guilt of the war—a sentence which we were compelled to sign in the Treaty of Versailles."

Less than a decade after that sermon Bonhoeffer was back in New York, but this time for barely a month. Germany was now going back to war, diametrically contradicting Bonhoeffer's earlier prediction. That put him in a mortal quandary. Should he absent himself from this evil war? Or return to engage in it? We know his answer. No sooner had he arrived in the States than he cancelled his plans for an American stay and promptly returned. As he explained to Reinhold Niebuhr, "I must live through this difficult period of our national history with the Christian people of Germany." "Christians in Germany will face the terrible alternative of either willing the defeat of their nation in order that Christian civilization may survive, or willing the victory of their nation and thereby destroying our civilization. I know which of these alternatives I must choose." There, in that choice of his, we have Bonhoeffer's rationale for the conspiracy: to give evidence to the Allies that there is in fact an "other Germany," which the victors dare not again destroy by demanding unconditional surrender. Leave aside that the conspiracy failed and that the Allies were heedless.

5) How The Unity Works:

A. Secretly The Unity Works Non-Religiously

Bonhoeffer's role in the conspiracy concretizes how he saw the church entering into aufrichtigen Bundesgenossenschaft with the state, specifically with the "restrainer," that "power of the state to establish and maintain order." His own conspiratorial role in this church-state alliance was not as a public representative of the church but nonetheless as one of its servantlike, "arcane" disciples. Yet as I see it, that very feature of arcane, servantlike discipleship is exactly the most significant feature of Bonhoeffer's "responsible interpretation" of Barmen. That is, in the end it is a "nonreligious interpretation," particularly so with reference to Barmen's prickliest issue, the reprioritizing of spiritual and secular authorities. And Bonhoeffer's non-religious interpretation is, as Bethge would add, "more an ethical than a hermeneutical category and also a direct call to penitence directed to the Church and its present form." "Non- religious" and "arcane" entail repentance, and repentance is emphatically servantlike.

What is arcane or hidden about the disciples' "discipline" as they practice it concretely amongst their homesick humanists is precisely the "non-religious" exterior of that discipline. Amongst themselves, by contrast, when they gather in the explicit name of their Lord to hear his gospel and receive his sacraments, or in private intra-believer conversation or correspondence, there the cultus and prayers and hymnody and theological discourse are still openly exercised. But in the believers' secular associations their "religious" practice is kept secret or, if we may put it so, is restrained. That religious restraint out in the world is their disciplina. This self-restraint on religiousness, not to mention religiosity, is not altogether different from the restraint placed upon civil

evil and disorder by the “restrainer.” For it is part of the very promise of our age that it is “godless,” not only by its own apostasy but by God’s intentional acquiescence therein. The purpose is to make of the age an age of grown-up responsibility, no longer baby-sat by the tutelary supports of religion and pietism.

B) A Unity Of Suffering Sinners

However, arcane as the believers’ discipline is in their associations with “the promising godless,” let us emphasize: the locale in which they exercise that secret, as secret, is precisely the most worldly of contexts. And what is that well-kept secret of their inner- worldly discipleship? It is their world-affirming solidarity with the other worldlings, especially in the latter’s sufferings and most especially in their suffering together from sin. Theirs is a solidarity of the penitents. Four and a half years after Bonhoeffer’s return from America he finds himself in Tegel prison on trial for his crimes, justly so, and writes of this to his friend Bethge. “I haven’t for a moment regretted coming back in 1939—nor any of the consequences, either. . . . And I regard my being kept here ... as being involved in Germany’s fate, as I was resolved to be.” But the arcanum, the secret of one’s penitential co-involvement with fellow-sinners is the doing of that “in faith.” “All we can do,” Bonhoeffer confides to Bethge, “is to live in assurance and faith—you out there with the soldiers, and I in my cell.”

Bonhoeffer’s collusion with the restrainers, really as one of them, implicated him in the most grievous sins. That he was mortally guilty, as he himself recognized, we minimize or heroize only by not taking his penitence seriously. He and his fellow conspirators were “good” people only relatively to the “wicked,” whose sin is not “suffering” sin, but not because the conspirators and their acts did not need Christ’s

“justification.” That was their most abject need. For all of them, deceit, connivance, forgery, feigning loyalty to the Fuehrer, misleading their fellow Christians, endangering the lives of others, conspiring to kill were not lapses of weakness but deliberate policy. Worse yet, with all this came their often overwhelming temptations to cynicism and despair. However, the culpability of those few conspirators only writes large what is everyday truth for the church in the world generally. In Bethge’s words, “This ‘borderline case’ is ... an example of being Christian today.”

6. The Secret Church: Co-Atoning For The World

But then how, through such clandestine collaboration with the worldlings’ sin, are the church’s believers being church? For that, as Bonhoeffer sees it, is what they are in their solidarity with the world as it is: not just private, isolated Christians but representatives of the church of Christ, though hiddenly. But then all the worse, how as the church’s representatives are they really any different from those who do not (yet) acknowledge Christ? Where is there here any meaningful entry of the church, let alone of Christ, into the world? Bonhoeffer’s answer employs the extravagant picture of worldly Christians as agents of “atonement.” As penitent and forgiving co-sinners, these Christian collaborators infiltrate the state with that exclusive churchly authority which the state does not have, the all-inclusive, sinner-embracing authority to atone.

Bonhoeffer pondered how in the New Testament the Christian “who suffers in the power of the body of Christ suffers in a representative capacity ‘for’ the Church.” “For while it is true that only the suffering of Christ himself can atone for sin, and that his suffering and triumph took place ‘for us,’ yet to some

... he vouchsafes the immeasurable grace and privilege of suffering 'for him,' as he did for them." By the end of his days Bonhoeffer must have seen that this "vicarious activity and passivity on the part of the members of the Body," this "immeasurable grace and privilege" extended also to himself.

The quotation just cited comes from Cost of Discipleship. But already in his doctoral dissertation, Sanctorum Communio, Bonhoeffer, barely out of his teens, was writing about "the love which of its own free will is ready to incur God's wrath for its brother's sake, . . . which takes its brother's place as Christ took our place for us." Bonhoeffer there recalls how "Moses wished to be blotted out of the book of life with his people, and

Paul wished that he himself were accursed and cut off from Christ, not in order to be condemned with his brethren, but to win communion with God for them; he wishes to be condemned in their stead." Years later, less than a year before his execution, in his poem "The Death of Moses," there is the line: "God, this people I have loved." As Bethge assures us, by "this people" Bonhoeffer "did not mean the Church, but Germany." And of this people, he writes, "that I bore its shame and sacrifices/ And saw its salvation— that suffices."

7. The Fallacy Of "Two-Zones Thinking"

A) The Fallacy: Not No Unity But Forced Unity

The way Bonhoeffer retrieves Luther's doctrine of the two kingdoms is as a "polemical unity." By contrast, what Bonhoeffer repudiates, as he believes Luther also did, is a "thinking in terms of two spheres" (Raeumen) or "spaces." It would be tempting, as the literature about Bonhoeffer betrays, to

misunderstand his objection as if he were against the two-ness of the kingdoms. He is not. Their Unterscheidung is essential. That they are "opposites" (Gegensaetze) is essential to their "unity." Else it would not be a "polemical unity."

What Bonhoeffer objects to is a two-ness which regards secular and Christian as "ultimate static" opposites, as "mutually exclusive givens." And what is it that is wrong with this mutual exclusiveness? Not that it discourages all interest in unity. On the contrary, that interest persists in any event. But now, given the false assumption of a mutual exclusiveness, the kind of unity which people then seek is a "forced unity." It is a unity which subjugates one opposite to the other in some imposed system, either sacred or profane.

Moreover, when secular and spiritual are construed not as polemically unified—the way, I would think, two debaters in a dialogue are unified—but instead as mutually repellent spheres whose unity has to be forced, then one of the two, alas, tends to be identified with "Christ" and the other with "the world." That restricts the reality in Christ to merely a partial reality. It forces people to abandon reality as a single whole and to seek either Christ without the world or the world without Christ. But it is the whole world that Christ has won for himself. There are not two realities, only one: his. All that is real is real only in him.

Granted, not all that is real in Christ (Christuswirklichkeit) is yet "realization" (Wirklichwerden.) Though the world is included in his reality, it only very partially recognizes that. That part of the world which does recognize itself as his is the church, das Christliche. "What is Christian" is not identical with "das Weltliche." Though the two are one reality as Christ's, they still are polemical opposites.

On the other hand, what is Christian—that is, what is church—by no means exhausts what is Christ's. For Bonhoeffer that distinction, too, is decisive. "The dominion of the commandment of Christ over all creation is not to be equated with the dominion of the Church." That is what a triumphalist church forgets, as the Roman church did in expanding its ecclesiastical power over the secular. That is why Luther polemicized in behalf of secular authority. He "was protesting against a Christianity which was striving for independence" from the secular. But by doing so, alas, that newly independent Christianity was also "detaching itself from the reality in Christ."

Of course, the reverse also happens, as the militant secularism of the Nazi Antichrist brazenly illustrated: das Weltliche forcibly denies its dependence on das Christliche, only dramatizing thereby its renunciation of Christ. To this great divorce the church contributed when, as in Pseudoluthertum after the Reformation, "the autonomy of the orders of this world" is counterposed to "the law of Christ." As this escapist distortion of Luther's two-kingdoms theology showed, "any attempt to escape from the world must sooner or later be paid for with a sinful surrender to the world." Bonhoeffer's critique of this "so-called Lutheran" doctrine of the two kingdoms has been widely and enthusiastically advertised. And that definitely was one, though only one, of his favorite examples of post-Reformation "thinking in two spheres".

B) Another Example: Ecclesiastical Theocracy

There is a second example of post-Reformation "thinking in two spheres" which Bonhoeffer almost always mentions in the same breath with his faulting of the "pseudo- Lutheran" doctrine. But this second culprit is frequently purged from the citations by Bonhoeffer enthusiasts, particularly by those with Barthian proclivities. As a result it is less well known that Bonhoeffer,

perhaps especially in his later years when he became increasingly critical of his own Confessing Church, mounted strong objections against "ecclesiastical theocracy" or, as he also called it, "Enthusiasm" (Schwaermertum.) In the same sentence in which he commends Luther for protesting "with the help of the secular and in the name of a better Christianity," Bonhoeffer adds, "So, too, today, when Christianity is employed as a polemical weapon against the secular, this must be done in the name of a better secularity." "Above all it must not lead back to a static predominance of the spiritual sphere [Sakralitaet] as an end in itself."

For Bonhoeffer the classical form of this "ecclesiastical theocracy," itself a version of "two spheres thinking," is that "scheme of the Enthusiasts" in which "the congregation of the Elect takes up the struggle with a hostile world for the establishment of God's kingdom on earth." In face of such Enthusiasm Bonhoeffer agrees that "there is good reason for laying stress on the autonomy of the state in opposition to the heteronomy of an ecclesiastical theocracy."

True, the church must raise questions, for example, about "certain economic or social attitudes and conditions which are a hindrance to faith in Christ and which consequently destroy the true character of [humanity] in the world." (As examples Bonhoeffer mentions "socialism or collectivism" but first of all "capitalism.") However, "the Church cannot indeed proclaim a concrete earthly order which follows as a necessary consequence from faith in Jesus Christ." On the one hand, the church's "negative" strictures against those social attitudes which subvert faith in Christ do need to be made "by the authority of the word of God," as "divine," as "doctrine." On the other hand, the church's "positive" "contributions toward the establishment of a new order" are not doctrine but "Christian life," "earthly," "not by the authority of God but merely on the

authority of the responsible advice of Christian specialists and experts.”

C) Still Worse: America’s “Enthusiastic Spiritualism”

The “enthusiastic spiritualism” which Bonhoeffer faults as an instance of “two spheres thinking” he finds exemplified in the Anglo-Saxon countries and particularly in the USA. In the development of American democracy the dominant influence, more dominant than Calvinist ideas of original sin, was the spiritualism of the Dissenters who took refuge in America: “the idea that the Kingdom of God on earth cannot be built by the authority of the state but only by the congregation of the faithful.” True, Bonhoeffer concedes, America too is “suffering from severe symptoms of secularization.” But there “the cause does not lie in the misinterpretation of the distinction between the two offices or kingdoms, but rather in the reverse of this.” And what is that? Answer: “the failure of the enthusiasts to distinguish at all between the office or kingdom of the state and the office or kingdom of the Church.”

That, too, we recall, is a form of “two spheres thinking.” And in this case, too, it “ends (only with the total capitulation of the Church to the world.” Bonhoeffer finds that documented by “the New York church registers.” “Godlessness remains more covert. And indeed in this way it deprives the Church even of the blessing of suffering and of the possible rebirth which suffering may engender.”

8) What The War Was Really For: The Polemical Unity, Christentum

So we return to Bonhoeffer’s (Luther’s?) doctrine of the two kingdoms. It is a solidarity of the suffering church with the

suffering world, both suffering from their common sin. In that solidarity between two “polemical opposites” the church is represented not as an ecclesiastical theocracy, whether of the left or of the right, imposing its agenda upon the state, though it does call all society to account for its subversion of faith in Christ. Nor in this solidarity is the church’s most positive contribution the “earthly” wisdom it offers toward “a new order.” That, too. But the church’s “immeasurable grace and privilege” is through its servantlike disciples in the world. It is their unique authority, as church, penitently and forgivingly to “atone” for their people – and for now, arcanelly. With that comes “the possible rebirth which suffering may engender.”

Might this Bonhoeffer, both in his life and his writings, qualify as a “responsible interpretation” of Barmen, maybe even a Lutheran one, specifically on the embattled issue of reprioritizing the authorities? For he does describe the church’s battle in its entirety, not only as a Kampf amongst the Kirchen to exclude the inner-church secularization of the gospel. He does that, too, and first of all, though only as a Vorgeplaenkel, a preliminary skirmish. But especially does he engage the major battle, that Kampf um das Christentum, in which the church contends for the world as sinner among sinners, but atoningly as suffering servant? That is the polemical unity which Bonhoeffer envisioned. And that polemical unity, as he saw it, constitutes “Christian civilization.” And that polemically unified Christentum, in turn, is what the real Kampf was all about. If so, if that is what Bonhoeffer was fighting for, let alone Luther, do they still have takers? Who can afford to be that inclusive, and on those terms?

Robert W. Bertram
Berlin, August 2000

[The Authority To Be \(Culpably\) Inclusive \(PDF\)](#)

Common Christological Declaration of the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East

This week's piece comes through Richard Leigh, a frequent student of the Lutheran School of Theology here in St. Louis. Enjoy!
Ed

Common Christological Declaration of the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East

His Holiness John Paul II, Bishop of Rome and Pope of the Catholic Church, and

His Holiness Mar Dinkha IV, Catholicos-Patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East, give thanks to God who has prompted them to this new brotherly meeting.

[Richard Leigh's comment: Both of them consider this meeting as a basic step on the way towards the full communion to be restored between their Churches. They can indeed, from now on, proclaim together before the world their common faith in the mystery of the Incarnation.]

As heirs and guardians of the faith received from the Apostles as formulated by our common Fathers in the Nicene Creed, we confess one Lord Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, begotten of the Father from all eternity who, in the fullness of time, came down from heaven and became man for our salvation. The Word of God, second Person of the Holy Trinity, became incarnate by the power of the Holy Spirit in assuming from the holy Virgin Mary a body animated by a rational soul, with which he was indissolubly united from the moment of his conception.

Therefore our Lord Jesus Christ is true God and true man, perfect in his divinity and perfect in his humanity, consubstantial with the Father and consubstantial with us in all things but sin. His divinity and his humanity are united in one person, without confusion or change, without division or separation. In him has been preserved the difference of the natures of divinity and humanity, with all their properties, faculties and operations. But far from constituting “one and another”, the divinity and humanity are united in the person of the same and unique Son of God and Lord Jesus Christ, who is the object of a single adoration.

Christ therefore is not an “ordinary man” whom God adopted in order to reside in him and inspire him, as in the righteous ones and the prophets. But the same God the Word, begotten of his Father before all worlds without beginning according to his divinity, was born of a mother without a father in the last times according to his humanity. The humanity to which the Blessed Virgin Mary gave birth always was that of the Son of God himself. That is why the Assyrian Church of the East is praying the Virgin Mary as “the Mother of Christ our God and Savior”. In the light of this same faith the Catholic tradition addresses the Virgin Mary as “the Mother of God” and also as “the Mother

of Christ". We both recognize the legitimacy and rightness of these expressions of the same faith and we both respect the preference of each Church in her liturgical life and piety.

This is the unique faith that we profess in the mystery of Christ. The controversies of the past led to anathemas, bearing on persons and on formulas. The Lord's Spirit permits us to understand better today that the divisions brought about in this way were due in large part to misunderstandings.

Whatever our christological divergences have been, we experience ourselves united today in the confession of the same faith in the Son of God who became man so that we might become children of God by his grace. We wish from now on to witness together to this faith in the One who is the Way, the Truth and the Life, proclaiming it in appropriate ways to our contemporaries, so that the world may believe in the Gospel of salvation.

The mystery of the Incarnation which we profess in common is not an abstract and isolated truth. It refers to the Son of God sent to save us. The economy of salvation, which has its origin in the mystery of communion of the Holy Trinity – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – is brought to its fulfillment through the sharing in this communion, by grace, within the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church, which is the People of God, the Body of Christ and the Temple of the Spirit.

Believers become members of this Body through the sacrament of Baptism, through which, by water and the working of the Holy Spirit, they are born again as new creatures. They are confirmed by the seal of the Holy Spirit who bestows the sacrament of Anointing. Their communion with God and among themselves is brought to full realization by the celebration of the unique offering of Christ in the sacrament of the Eucharist. This

communion is restored for the sinful members of the Church when they are reconciled with God and with one another through the sacrament of Forgiveness. The sacrament of Ordination to the ministerial priesthood in the apostolic succession assures the authenticity of the faith, the sacraments and the communion in each local Church.

Living by this faith and these sacraments, it follows as a consequence that the particular Catholic churches and the particular Assyrian churches can recognize each other as sister Churches. To be full and entire, communion presupposes the unanimity concerning the content of the faith, the sacraments and the constitution of the Church. Since this unanimity for which we aim has not yet been attained, we cannot unfortunately celebrate together the Eucharist which is the sign of the ecclesial communion already fully restored.

Nevertheless, the deep spiritual communion in the faith and the mutual trust already existing between our Churches entitle us from now on to consider witnessing together to the Gospel message and co-operating in particular pastoral situations, including especially the areas of catechesis and the formation of future priests.

In thanking God for having made us rediscover what already unites us in the faith and the sacraments, we pledge ourselves to do everything possible to dispel the obstacles of the past which still prevent the attainment of full communion between our Churches, so that we can better respond to the Lord's call for the unity of his own, a unity which has of course to be expressed visibly. To overcome these obstacles, we now establish a Mixed Committee for theological dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East.

Given at Saint Peter's, on 11 November, 1994.

Nestorius and the Nestorian Church

Colleagues,

Last week's ThTh #111–Luther and the Jews, historic episcopate–generated considerable response. It's still coming in. So I'll wait a week or two before sorting it out and passing it on to you. Another reason for such a delay is that we're doing a bit of vacation from now to mid-August–and NOT taking along the laptop!

So for ThTh 112 something guaranteed(?) to be non-controversial: Nestorian and the “Nestorian” Church of the East.

Richard Leigh, dear friend here in town and omnivorous theologian, found this on the Internet and sent it on to me. I think it came from a pastor of a “Nestorian” congregation in California. The piece takes us back over 1500 years, a long long time ago. Nestorius, one time patriarch of Constantinople, died in exile in 451 under a heresy label he'd gotten during the church-political wars of his day.

The closest I've ever come to Nestorians was–of all places–in Xian, China in 1992. Modern tourists flock to Xian primarily to see the mammoth excavations of the terra cotta warriors. Our Crossings group did too. But another Xian attraction is the “Stele Museum,” a vast collection of standing granite monuments, one of which is the “Nestorian Stone.” I think it dates from the 8th century. It verifies the presence of Nestorian Christians in China, the fruit of missionaries who'd brought the gospel from Persia into the Chinese empire. “Nestorius was no heretic.” I remember Prof. Werner Elert saying that during the summer semester 1953 when I was an exchange student at the Univ. of Erlangen in Germany. If

you've never had an opinion on that issue, you may use what follows to see for yourself.

Peace & Joy!

Ed

Is the Church of the East “Nestorian?”

Why is the Church of the East regularly called the “Nestorian” Church? A dispute among western Bishops in the fifth century ultimately came to affect the relationship between the Church of the East and the Greek and Latin Churches. This was over the definition of the Union in the Messiah of God the Word and the man, Jesus of Nazareth. One party, championed by Nestorius, the Patriarch of Constantinople, charged the other with confusing the natures of Godhead and manhood in the Messiah and of suggesting impossible and unthinkable things, such as that God died, suffered, thirsted, tired, slept, etc. In other words, those characteristics and properties of manhood in the Messiah were being thoughtlessly ascribed to his Godhead, confusing the two natures. The other side charged Nestorius with so distinguishing the natures as to effectively deny the Union of God the Word with the manhood in the Messiah. He was also thought to teach the Union (such as he understood it) so loosely as to turn the Messiah into two persons.

Popular terms such as “Mother of God” [Theotokos in Greek] for the Blessed Virgin were denied by Nestorius, thus making him seem insensitive to traditional sensibilities and usages in Constantinople, and further suggesting that the Incarnation was a loose association of manhood and Godhead rather than a substantial Union. Nestorius was concerned with preserving the theological insistence upon two natures in the Messiah, Godhead and manhood, without confusing them or suggesting a change in

their properties. This view was that of the Antiochene [from Antioch in Syria] School of Theology.

The opponents of Nestorius were more concerned with preserving the theological insistence upon "one subject" in the Messiah. This view represented the Alexandrian [from Alexandria in Egypt] School of Theology. It took many generations of councils and commentaries in order to sort out this problem in the West, which was ultimately decided in favor of Nestorius' opponents, but only partially. In the end, much of Nestorius' view prevailed. Today the Christological expressions used by most Christian denominations reflect that of Nestorius; The Messiah was perfect God and perfect man, without confusion or change, division or separation.

In the East (beyond Byzantine borders), the same issue was debated and, after generations of similar councils of Bishops and discussions, the outcome was favorable to Nestorius rather than his opponents. This was due, perhaps, to political and cultural considerations (at least to some degree), but also to the fact that the theology of the Church of the East, as formulated among the theologians of the Antiochene school (where Nestorius had received his training) had always exerted the greater influence in the East. The formulas and arguments of the Nestorians had already become standard for Christians in the Persian Empire, and this fact greatly affected the course of the debate. Subsequently, because the Church of the East had the same doctrinal outlook which Nestorius himself held, the Church came to be called "Nestorian" by those in the West, the Byzantine Empire.

In the present state of ecumenical feeling in the Church at large, the Church of the East has sought as much as possible to reach out to the western Churches and to try to comprehend the theological differences on this issue which create suspicion and

distrust on either side. Both the Church of the East and its detractors believe firmly in the two natures and one person ("parsopa" in Syriac and "prosopon" in Greek) of our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Messiah, and both call their position the orthodox position. The sticking points between the two parties are two:

1. The meaning of the word "nature" ("qa'numa" in Syriac or "hypostasis" in Greek), and
2. The "communicatio idiomatum" (a phrase which describes the exchange of predicates in reference to the Messiah, as in phrases like "God suffered" or, in reference to the Blessed Virgin, "Mother of God.")

Qa'numa is regularly viewed in the Church of the East as "the essence of a nature which differentiates it from other natures" (a nature being an abstraction unless individuated and its properties defined which characterize it against other natures, whether like or unlike itself). Thus God the Word is a qa'numa of the nature of Godhead, and Jesus of Mary is a qa'numa of the nature of manhood. Two individuated and substantial natures underlie the one "person" of Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God. Qa'numa and nature are viewed, then, as synonymous in the Church of the East. This was the use of the Greek word "hypostasis" prior to the fifth century.

In the West (within Byzantine borders), on the other hand, hypostasis came to be a synonym for "person." In such a case, "two hypostases" would equate with "two persons." Therein lay an impasse for the Christology of the Church of the East, only recently overcome in the Latin Church and yet to be resolved in the other Churches.

The West further insisted upon the "communicatio idiomatum," that is, the verbal attribution of the Messiah's human properties to his Godhead (and vice versa). The Church of the

East has always strongly resisted the popular tendency to ascribe suffering, death, or any passability, mutability, etc., to the Godhead, and out of an intense desire to protect its theological definition of Godhead (which it shares with the West), it has reacted against the “communicatio idiomatum.” It chooses, rather, to utilize terms in a more cautious way – “Mother of the Messiah,” for instance, rather than “Mother of God,” or “the sufferings of the Son of God, which he voluntarily underwent in his manhood for our salvation,” rather than, “the sufferings of God.” These two sticking-points – an agreement over the use of the term hypostasis and its application and implications, and the propriety of the communicatio idiomatum – stood as barriers between the Church of the East and the Greek and Latin Churches.

Both sides would wish to remove the barrier without vitiating their traditional theology. Recently, such has been the case. On the 11th of November, 1994, the Catholicos-Patriarch of the East and the Pope of Rome signed a “Declaration of Christological Unity.” In it, both Churches recognized that the Christology of the other was not only orthodox, but actually the same Christology, expressed in different terms. Both Churches upheld the validity of the others terms for Mary, stating, “We both recognize the legitimacy and rightness of these expressions of the same faith and we both respect the preference of each Church in her liturgical life and piety.” A renewed interest in the West towards the thought and writing of Theodore of Mopsuestia, Nestorius and Bawai the Great, as well as other theologians of the Antiochene School of Theology, may continue to help improve understanding and enhance dialogue. We pray God’s blessings on these developments.

Next week, d.v., we’ll post the text of this “Declaration of Christological Unity” as ThTh #113.

Requests from Bishops

Colleagues,

Two ELCA bishops have asked me for some theological help on sticky questions. That doesn't happen often, so when it does, I perk up. Each bishop had 2 such tough questions. One bishop's pair was:

1. What did Luther really say about the Jews (and why)?
2. Do the Lutheran Confessions give us any real help in the ELCA's in-house hassle about historic episcopate and all that?

The other bishop asked:

1. Was missions the "great omission" in the Lutheran Reformation, and if so, why?
2. In a post-modern world what does it mean to talk about the Bible as "source and norm" as we Lutherans do?

I tackled the first pair first. Maybe next time the second pair. Here's how the first two questions were presented and then what I said.

"My wife is taking a master's course on Diversity, Equity, and Social Justice. Recently they focused on the ways Christianity has made its unfortunate contributions, and a page in one of

the text books was 'dedicated' to Luther's writings against the Jews. They quoted him and linked the European hatred of the Jews in the last 500 years to him. Sandra (not her real name) was quite unhappy about this—probably the first time she came face to face with those quotes. I thought I'd heard that later in his life, Luther had other words to say that showed he came to a more grace-filled understanding of the Jewish people's place in our world. But I don't know. Have you got any information I could hand on to her?"

My response—

I'm no expert on this one, but sorry to say, Blessed Martin did NOT say nicer things about the Jews toward the end of his life. Just the reverse. All the super-nasty things came in the last years of his life. Earlier on he was more friendly as far as is known from his published stuff. There are lots of publications about this end-of-life nastiness. Some painting ML as a forerunner of Hitler—as apparently is the case in your wife's class—others putting it into the overall context of the times, where it still sounds bad, but is not Hitlerian.

I called our local Luther-and-the-Jews expert, Prof. Steve Rowan, German history prof at Univ. of Missouri/St. Louis (UMSL). Steve gave Bible classes at our church on the topic some years ago, has researched and written considerably on the issue. Steve's a Lutheran, non-cleric, big name academic in the field.

The essay by Steve that I'm sending is titled "Luther, Bucer and Eck on the Jews." In the essay, and over the phone in our conversation, Steve points out that as nasty as Luther's old-age cranky comments were, guys like Eck (Luther's opponent at the Leipzig debate) were even worse in some of the things they said. Also Bucer, reformer of Strassbourg, and thus reformation ally, was awful. But among the close insiders of the reformation,

Luther's colleagues, his anti-Jewish statements toward life's end were an embarrassment. And when no one picked them up to agree with him, he got even more ticked off, says Steve, and thundered on.

So why was he so friendly in earlier years and then such an ogre toward the end? Steve says:

In the early years of Luther's life Jewish scholars helped him with translation of the OT; other Christian humanist scholars whom ML honored, Reuchlin, for example, were affirmative about Jews; and Luther apparently had the hope that when the Gospel got presented clean of its frightful papal incrustations, European Jews would hear it, read it, and come to believe it. In the final years of his life, of course, this hope did not come true. Thus in these awful things at the end ML is hollering: "Why don't they see that Jesus is the merciful Messiah, the promised seed of Abraham, the suffering servant Isaiah proclaimed? 'Reason' itself should show them that, and still they resist."

Remember that Luther thought Judgment Day was just around the corner, maybe even before he died, and so he gives voice to his desperation. Another factor, says Steve, is Imperial politics. European Jews allied themselves with the Holy Roman Emperor, who was not exactly friendly to the reformation folks. Another item was the appearance of Judaizing among folks in "Lutheran" circles, some of it promoted by the Lutherans themselves, some of it linked to Jewish missionizing efforts. The pitch was perhaps something like this: "You want to throw off the incrustations of 1500 years of papalism? Then why go back just to the NT documents, why not all the way back to the originals of the Hebrew scriptures." Luther knew very well how that had had great appeal for the early Christians in Galatia, as

Judaizing messengers entered the Christian community there. And if it was now being repeated in the places where the Reformation gospel had taken root . . . well that was the last straw.

Historically (from the 16th to the 20th century, that is) Steve says there is no line of connection between Luther's nasty anti-Judaism (note, it is not anti-Semitism: not contra Jews as Jews, but contra Jews for not believing their own Messiah) and the philosophy that the Nazis worked out for their Holocaust program. The Nazi philosophy drew on other sources for its extermination program.

Well, so much for that.

For his #2 M says:

"I heard Ralph Bohlmann say to a group of LCMS/ELCA clergy several weeks ago that [the ELCA people fussing about the imposition of the historic episcopate in our church] do not have a confessional leg to stand on against the historic episcopate. He said, 'if we know our Lutheran confessions well, we would know that the confessions are not the place to base an argument against HE.' But then he did not elaborate and I was unable to stay long enough to hear further conversation. Have you or has anyone you know done a thorough piece on this?"

My response—

I have rejoiced that Marie and I were out of the country (as ELCA Global Mission Volunteers) in the last year or two as this episcopacy hassle hit the fan in "this church." So I'm really out of the loop. Most of the pro-and-con publications I don't even get. It's clear that God has another calling for me, I think. But when dear guys like you ask, then that's my "another

calling” showing up, I guess.

I wouldn’t quite know what Ralph is referring to about the critics in the ELCA not having a confessional leg to stand on in their opposition to hist. episcopate. Granted the 16th century Lutheran Confessors did not critique the hist. episcopate. They did, however, in practice ordain new pastors without the benefit of bishops in the hist. episcopate putting their hands on the new pastors. All of that was occasioned, of course, when existing bishops said: “I’ll not ordain anyone who learned his theology at Wittenberg.” And the confessors had no difficulty finding Gospel-grounded theology for such a “new” practice.

That’s where the old term “adiaphoron” comes in—something neither PREscribed nor PROscribed for the church living according to the Gospel. By itself such hist.epis. ordinations are an adiaphoron, the confessors (would) say. BUT if someone says YOU GOTTA have such an ordination, then, say the confessors – this time in Formula of Concord Article X – it ceases to be adiaphoron. Then it’s a “time for confessing.” And then you must resist it even though by itself it is no big deal.

What is a big deal is the YOU GOTTA that’s added on to the issue. Any such add-on that amounts to a YOU GOTTA, is a no-no for Reformation Lutherans. Already back in the Augsburg Confession and its Apology, Article 28, Melanchthon was speaking against things. Such church ordinances that make adiaphoron-stuff into YOU GOTTAs, he says there,

- a. burden Christian consciences,
- b. undermine Christian liberty, and
- c. conflict with the Gospel. Seems to me that amounts to:
Three strikes and you’re out! Don’t you bishops talk about stuff like this?

And again I ask—doesn’t someone somewhere in the mix of your

bishop meetings ever ask: Is there really anything like the historic episcopate in the first place—a hands-on line right back to St. Peter? Is that fact or fiction—even if it's pious fiction? All the stuff I've heard on the subject—even from RC church historians—says that it is impossible to document any such connexion back into the church of the first and second centuries. So if that is so, and I believe it is, this whole schlamozzle is worse than just a tempest in a tea pot. It's a case of "The emperor has no clothes on!"

And I'm sure that you, a Seminex grad, see the connexion between an ELCA "ordinance" which is now a YOU GOTTA in our church with the LCMS New Orleans convention taking the Bohlman/Preus statement of 1973 and making it a YOU GOTTA for us in those days. Here's one place where the old LCMS constitution had it right: "Matters of doctrine and matters of conscience will not be decided/cannot be decided by majority vote. Only the Word of God [call it Gospel] can do that."

So Luther (at the end) was wrong about the Jews; Paul (here and there) was wrong about women; Bohlmann was wrong in 1973ff (dunno about 2000). So whom can you trust? I'm glad you know WHO that WHO is.

Peace & Joy!

Ed

Reader Responses

Colleagues,

Our posting for ThTh #110 is a collection of smaller items—a

mixed bag, but good stuff. After a lead-in citation from Luther there follows reader-responses to recent postings and then an insider's report from Canada.

Peace & Joy!

Ed

1. God's law and Christian ethics: The heart of the matter. Sent in by an ELCA pastor

Luther's Sermon on I Timothy 1:8-11-

In order to understand truly how to use the Law you must divide man into 2 parts and keep the two clearly separated, namely, the old man and the new man, as St. Paul divided man. Leave the new man completely undisturbed by laws, but the old man you must unceasingly spur on with laws, and must give him no rest from them. In that way you use the Law well. The new man cannot be helped through works, he needs something higher, namely, Christ, who is neither Law nor works, but a gift and present, of sheer grace and goodness of God. When through faith He comes to dwell in your HEART, God makes you saintly. But if you should ever think of becoming acceptable through some deed of your own, such as entering some order, or pursuing some vocation, you would have failed to use the Law aright, and denied Christ. He wills to help you without any work of yours, but if you desire to help yourself through your works you have carried the Law too high and too far. For you drive Christ out of your HEART where He should be seated and reign alone, and in His place you put the Law and your own works.

In this manner (I say) the new man carries in his HEART Christ and all His heavenly goods, and has everything he should have and is in need of nothing, whether in heaven

or on earth. W.A. 17.1.122f.

2. Responses to ThTh 108 (Church discipline)

A. From a Crossings student in St. Louis: One of the best things I've ever seen on Church discipline is the book "Discipling the Brother" by Marlin Jeschke (Herald Press, Scotsdale Penn, 1972). Its subtitle is "Congregational Discipline According to the Gospel." The man himself is Mennonite, I believe, but draws from quite an array of historical sources. Another is the material called "Peace in the Parish." By an ALC pastor commissioned by LCMS! I believe our brethren in South Africa might well benefit from these sources.

B. From the bishop of an ELCA synod: Thanks for the helpful piece on discipline. This Lenten, post-Easter season, we had three cases of pastoral discipline, with a fourth one possible, all at the same time. These four situations became my "stations of the cross" this paschal season. It is the most difficult part of this calling, as I know you would already understand. TT#108 was helpful. Blessings!

C. From a Lutheran pastor in Australia: Your recent Sabbatheology on Church discipline [amongst the Lutherans in KwaZulu-Natal] interested me personally and professionally. Personally, because our daughter is at work in KwaZulu-Natal these days; we hope to visit her in December.

Professionally, because I have trouble justifying the use of Matthew 18 to justify the practice of

church discipline. In Matthew, 'Gentiles and tax collectors' are either praised or are the object of our Lord's special concern. The whole gravamen of Matt 18 is 'winning the brother/sister'. The phrase 'let him be to you as a gentile and tax collector' must mean, in Matthew's context: 'Let him be for you an object of special concern'(and so keep him within the fold; cf the contrasting ways in which Luke and Matt use the story of the lost sheep: Luke, to seek those outside and bring 'em in; Matt, to seek those inside and keep 'em in).

3. Response to ThTh 109 (Women pastors as Christ's gifts to the church)From a Lutheran Pastor in upstate New York:
ThTh 109 is an oldie but goodie!

1. Can it be easily adapted and applied to the issue of ordaining homosexuals?
2. Two quotes:

'Does Jan's public ministry weaken the scandal of Christ's free mercy? Of course it can happen that Jan could exercise her office contrary to the forgiveness of sins. But it could never happen because she is of the wrong gender. It can only happen if she proclaims the wrong gospel. That's the only yardstick for measuring whether anyone is on the pastoral gift list.'If that Word and Sacrament are what Christ wants served, then the re-presenting that Christ wants is happening. The gender of the representer cannot make that Word and Sacrament more or less Christ-like. For it is not his masculinity, but his mercy which is "the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."

I rarely if ever see such reasoning outside of Crossings.

But where was this reasoning among the ELIMites before the ELIMites faced the issue of women's ordination? Was it used elsewhere and only brought to this issue after unthinking tradition was challenged? How did it grow in your life? I ask because I grow in my own crossings.

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4. Response to Sabbatheology text studies: From a Lutheran Deaconess, now a pastor in a Canadian home for the aging: I just want to say thank you. I do greatly appreciate Crossings theology and the weekly matrix for Sabbatheology. You did a very great favor for many people when you started crossings and then gave us a way of understanding the pericopes. I've been going back to the ones from three years ago, and I'm so glad have them. As I work on sermons and messages and Bible studies for people in the home, I am more and more convinced of their need to hear the words of forgiveness and the assurance of their relationship as God's children. There are so many misunderstandings between the residents and their families, so much need for forgiveness, which sometimes doesn't happen until the funeral is being planned. A few times I've felt like I was being repetitive, but often people will say it's just what they needed to hear. So thanks again for the theology. It's a real blessing.

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5. And then another one from Canada: From a Seminex grad (1977) who "swam the Thames," as he is wont to say, and is now an Anglican priest in Canada.

Greetings from one of the Canadian Diaspora!

The reading for today from the Martyrology contained a quote from St. Isaac the Syrian which was a rather pithy summary of the theologia crucis, so of course, was reminded of you folks, hence this note. (Excuse the politically incorrect language!) "The wondrous love of God for man can most easily be perceived when a man is in such dire straits that his very hope is threatened. God thus demonstrates His power of salvation, for a man never acknowledges the power of God when he enjoys tranquillity and freedom."

The Anglican Church of Canada is preparing for its own particular crucifixion. Until the early 70's, the Canadian government hired the RC, United, and Anglican Churches to run a number of residential schools for the native peoples. They were a product of their day and present standards would not approve of the cultural oppression, racism, etc. implicit in the system. There were also instances of abuse, physical and sexual, some of which were dealt with, others not as well as one might wish. Certain abuses have recently come to light, resulting in law suits against all of the churches involved. The courts have ruled recently in a case involving the Anglican Church, that the church shared responsibility with the government for what happened, 60%-40% respectively. The litigation has been so costly, and the church can in no way begin to meet the claims against it.

Result: unless the government steps in, the Anglican Church at the national level will have exhausted its endowments and assets by the end of the coming year, if not sooner, will be forced to declare bankruptcy, and will therefore cease to exist. Because the Ang. Church of C,

hence ACC, is a federation of sovereign dioceses, unless the courts so decide, the assets of the individual dioceses will not go on the block yet. However, there are suits involving at least three of the dioceses, including the one I am in. Two dioceses will probably within the year be forced into bankruptcy, and their assets sold. The courts have yet to rule on whether the parish churches themselves are properties held in trust and thus untouchable. All other properties will be liquidated. These dioceses will then become missionary districts of the neighbouring diocese.

Our diocese has at least 12 cases against it—enough to bankrupt it, even if the decisions are in our favour. The school in our diocese was run by a missionary society out of national headquarters in Toronto and had nothing to do with us, but defense is costly. By the time the suit makes it through the courts, at the present rate, I will be just retiring before St. Luke's goes on the block.

So, the sins of the fathers are indeed visited on the children. But, as the Seminex experience reminded us—or some of us—this is where the cross shines brightest, and the loving presence of God most keenly felt. It's a time of liberation.

Women Pastors – Christ's Gifts

to the Church

Colleagues,

For this week, one from the archives of 24 years ago. Ancient as it is, it may cheer some ThTh receivers in the Lutheran Church of Australia right now. In the next days the LCA at its 2000 church assembly will vote yes or no on women clergy. Our year in Adelaide (1994) as guests at the LCA seminary still has us connected downunder even at half-a-planet's distance, so we've been following the yin-yang debate in the church press. This week an LCA woman, dear friend from those days, herself inches away from the ordination credentials required of men, told us of her hopes and enlisted our prayers.

Back in 1976 when Seminex granted the M.Div. degree to our first woman graduate, the congregations supporting us faced the same question. That support group called itself Evangelical Lutherans in Mission [ELIM]. Ex-Missouri Synod Lutherans as we all were, our heritage said women pastors were a no-no. Seminex itself was a loud "no" to a number of Missouri's no-no's, so was Missouri's nix on women pastors another one that had to go? I was asked to speak to the subject at the ELIM assembly that summer. Here's what I said. Peace & Joy!

Ed

"Whose Church Is It? – Receiving Women Pastors"

A Presentation to the 1976 ELIM Assembly

Chicago, Illinois – August 19, 1976

By Edward H. Schroeder

"And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, for equipping the

saints to do their work of ministry." That was last Sunday's Word of God in the second lesson.

The question before the house is whether Jan Smith Jones (not her real name), M.Div., Seminex 1976, belongs on that gift list. Does Christ have her on that list as his pastoral gift to us? And if so, can we see her as such despite our heavy tradition to the contrary?

I hope you have noticed how I've shifted the focus for this hot-potato issue for us ELIMites. Actually it is a double shift. The first shift is from the hypothetical to the particular, the personal, the actual: from "women's" ordination to "Jan's" ordination. The second is a shift in the subject of the question before the house. Instead of "Do we dare to ordain Jan?" The Ephesians text asks us first to ponder "Does Christ dare give Jan to his church as one of his pastors?" The second is a more troublesome question. It seems almost impossible to answer. How do we know what Christ dares to do? But in the end it is the better way to go. For if we can find out whether Christ dares to give Jan to us as his gift-pastor, then the other question is easily answered.

Let's try it. But how to proceed? How to find out what Christ would dare to do? Answer: Read the New Testament. In the gospels we have lesson after lesson of all the risky things Jesus Christ dared to do. The evangelists point out that the riskiest of them all was his daring to forgive sinners. Do we see why that is so risky? Often we do not. We take it for granted. Like Heinrich Heine we say: "C'est son metier." That's his job. Of course he forgives sinners! What else?!

Not so! says the Bible on nearly every page. God's ancient word about his job with sinners is what we memorized in catechism class: "visiting the iniquities of the sinners unto the third

and fourth generation of them that hate me.”

Christ's forgiving sinners is the contrary of God's regular job. Thereby it becomes costly grace. It costs him his life. Since God's own word says, “The soul that sinneth it shall die,” anyone who dares to interfere by offering sinners forgiveness is tangling himself in the sinners' web of death. That is for sure. Nothing iffy on that score. He made it clear on Maundy Thursday evening and every Lord's Supper since then: His body and blood given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. As the writer to the Hebrews puts it: Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.

Well, if his death itself was not the risk, what was? What was so daring about his associating with sinners? Is it not this: He dared to trust that God approved of his befriending and forgiving sinners even though this put him under God's death sentence? Talk about daring – daring to trust that God could administer the sinners' death verdict on his Son and vindicate him all on the same weekend!

In a nutshell, Jesus' daring risk is to speak and act as though God too believed his own Gospel and was committed to act according to it. He dared to trust that God did not will to take a detour around his legitimate criticism of us sinners, but, by driving straight through it in his beloved Son, to conquer it.

The most incredible item in the Christian Gospel is the Gospel. The wildest risk of Christian faith is not angels, virgin birth, or walking on water. The wildest risk is that of the publican in the temple: “God be merciful to me, a sinner.” THE scandal of the Bible is the forgiveness of sins. To the folks with some sense of morality it is obscene. To the folks with some sense of real guilt, it is too good to be true. Yet Jesus dares to do it and invites us to dare to trust that God the Father concurs.

But what does all that have to do with the question before the house: Would Christ dare to have Jan on his clergy-gift list? It seems as though those two dares (forgiveness and Jan as pastor) are in different ball parks. Maybe. Yet there are two connections that I see. There may be more.

One is that the daring actions of Jesus do not come to an end with the New Testament gospels. They continue through the rest of the New Testament. Most of that primeval church history is not the chronicle of what the early Christians dared to do, but of what the resurrected Lord dared to do. Very often these early Christians (even with good and pious intentions) were looking in the opposite direction as the Lord did his next daring deed.

The episode of Peter and the Roman centurion Cornelius is a classic of the post-ascension daring action of the Lord of the Church. Not hypothetical, but actual, concrete, personal. Cornelius is suddenly there, a non-kosher Gentile. Christ dares to give Cornelius to the Jewish Christians without benefit of circumcision, Torah-commitment, proselyte baptism, or whatever; and suddenly 2,000 years of tradition plus some rather explicit Bible passages go down the drain.

Other daring acts of the ascended Lord are:

- a. Daring to put the chief persecutor (Saul) into harness as a chief promoter of the cause. (Draw your own analogy for what parallel act of daring Christ might yet do among us Elimites!)
- b. Daring to let Peter and Paul slug it out at Antioch, trusting that the Gospel itself (not Peter nor Paul) would win that controversy.
- c. Daring to unleash this foolishness of forgiveness upon the non-Jewish ancient world which couldn't care less about a crucified Messiah or the sales-pitch of forgiveness of

sins associated with his name.

- d. Daring to entrust his whole operation to people like Paul the persecutor, Peter the denier, John and James the political wheeler-dealers, to people like you and me. Treasure in earthen vessels, indeed! Clay pots, most often cracked pots!

That is one line of linkage between Christ's daring actions in 30 A.D. and us today. He continues as he has for 2,000 years to do daring things – upsetting, unnerving, discombobulating things that are spin-offs from the big dare of befriending sinners. If I have to be more concrete: we ourselves as confessing movement are an actual episode of Christ's daring foolishness, his magnanimous mercy for us sinners.

A second connection between Christ's daring to forgive sinners and his possibly daring to put Jan on the gift-list of Ephesians 4 exists in the big gift of the forgiveness of sinners itself. Just how big is it? No limits on the beneficiaries, no qualifications on them whatsoever. No limit on the intended clientele – all the world – every creature – all you who labor and are heavy laden.

What about the mechanisms for making it happen beyond New Testament time? Here too the New Testament accent is on the lavish. Read about that in the first three chapters of Ephesians. Luther, too, in the Smalcald Articles says: "The Gospel . . . offers counsel and help against sin in more than one way, for God is surpassingly rich in his grace: First, through the spoken word by which the forgiveness of sin . . . is preached to the whole world; second, through baptism; third, through the Holy Sacrament of the Altar; fourth, through the power of the keys; and finally through the mutual conversation and consolation of fellow Christians. (This happens) 'wherever two or three are gathered together in my name . . .'" (310:IV)

Christ's body, the church, is the locale where these mechanisms operate. And that leads us to the topic of structure and order in Christ's church. Order includes the ticklish question of Jan's ordination, which question is answered if she is on the Ephesians 4 gift list.

But let us not forget Christ's big risky gift – forgiveness of sinners – as we approach the topic of order and structure. In the Large Catechism Martin Luther writes: "Everything in the Christian church is so ordered that we may daily obtain full forgiveness of sins through the Word and the sacraments appointed to comfort and revive our consciences as long as we live." (417:54f)

Many of us memorized the same confession in the Small Catechism, the third article. See if you can recite that paragraph along with me:

"I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him. But the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith, even as he calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. In which Christian church he daily and richly forgives all sins to me and all believers, and will at the last day raise up me and all the dead, and give unto me and all believers in Christ eternal life. This is most certainly true."

Here we have the gospel linkage for the question before the house. If Jan is on Christ's gift-list, then her gift must be congruent with that third sentence we just recited: "In which Christian church Christ daily and richly forgives all sins to me and all believers." Everything is ordered in the Christian church for that to happen. Could Christ have ordered half the

human race out of the candidate roster if “richly and daily” is his will? The only Gospel-grounded case against Jan’s being on that list must seek to show that her exercise of the public ministry contradicts Christ’s will to have sinners “daily and richly forgiven.” Does Jan’s public ministry weaken the scandal of Christ’s free mercy? Of course it can happen that Jan could exercise her office contrary to the forgiveness of sins. But it could never happen because she is of the wrong gender. It can only happen if she proclaims the wrong gospel. That’s the only yardstick for measuring whether anyone is on the pastoral gift list.

And that brings us back to the big question.

Whose church is it? Whose ministry of forgiveness is it? The answers are obvious. It’s Christ’s. Could the gender of the person administering have any necessary thing to do with the validity of that ministry? The answer is no, by definition.

Melanchthon summarizes the church’s ministry in the Apology as follows: “Ministers do not represent their own persons, but the person of Christ. When they offer the Word of Christ or the Sacrament, they do so in Christ’s place and stead.” (173:28) Note well: The office of ministry re-presents Christ, but it does so not in the PERSON of the minister who looks like or reminds us of Jesus, but in the Word and Sacrament coming from the ministering person’s lips and hands. If that Word and Sacrament are what Christ wants served, then the re-presenting that Christ wants is happening. The gender of the representer cannot make that Word and Sacrament more or less Christ-like. For it is not his masculinity, but his mercy which is “the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.”

Would Christ dare to give us Jan as gift-pastor today? There is nothing in his long list of daring surprise gifts that flat-out

opposes it. Fact is, his tradition in that respect commends it – surprising, upsetting, routine-wrecking crucifixion and resurrection to get more people on the receiving and the giving end of his daring forgiveness of sins. Could we dare to trust that?

But if Christ has Jan and other women on his roster as pastoral gifts to his church now, why did he wait so long to make the move? I do not know. Could 2,000 years of Christian tradition have been mistaken? That perplexes me too, and challenges my own convictions that that is so. But then why did he wait so long with the Gentiles before he pushed Cornelius as gift in front of Peter? Why was the “fullness of time” so long in coming, such a long wait till the Blessed Virgin Mary? Why was it not the time of Joseph, David, Isaiah, or the Maccabees? I don’t know.

But those are hypothetical questions again, which the Bible regularly avoids. Instead it confronts us with personal, concrete, actual questions. They are finally faith/unfaith questions. Will we trust the big gift from the big Gift-giver and take Jan as part and parcel of Christ’s gift to us his church? If so, fine. Remember Christ’s biggest gifts are people. And the highest trust of him is to receive them as he intends.

If some among us cannot see the connection between the big Gift-giver and Jan on his gift-list, can we trust the gift of forgiveness we do have and refrain from burdening the consciences of those who may call and order Jan to “daily and richly” administer the means of forgiveness to them? Fine. Take counsel from St. Paul: If Christ is proclaimed, we rejoice, even if the way it is done strikes us as non-kosher.

Can we who think we see the clear connection trust that Christ is still caring for his church and for us, even when some of our fellow-confessors don’t or can’t join us in what is clear as day

to us? If so, fine; then we acknowledge that Christ is still the church's Lord.

But what if we are wrong? The risk element is never totally absent. Suppose that on judgment day, or even before, we get the message loud and clear: You were wrong in your conclusions favoring women pastors. What then? Confronted by God's judgment we know there is only one way to go: in the publican's daring words, "God be merciful to me, a sinner – in Jesus' name." The big surprise from the Word of God is: "I tell you, that one went down to his house justified."

If Jan and the other women called to pastoral ministry are indeed Christ's gifts according to Ephesians 4, nothing we do to the contrary can change that. Remember the word of God from our brother Paul, the reluctant feminist: "For the gifts and call of God are irrevocable." When he gives them, we have them.

"And his gifts are that some should be pastors . . . to equip his saints for their work of ministry."