

Grace Notes – Two of them

Colleagues,

For this first week of Easter some Grace Notes. The texts come from two ThTh subscribers. Number 1 is from Edwin Boger, a college biology prof in Worcester, Massachusetts. Number 2 is from Paul Marshall, the Episcopal bishop of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. I was once blessed to have both of them as students, Edwin at Valparaiso University, Paul at Concordia Seminary. The blessings continue—as you will see.

Peace and Joy!

Ed Schroeder

GRACE NOTE #1

[Edwin Boger's introductory note to ES: ThTh 94 speaks of two kinds of reflecting on the part of Christians. One is reflecting-T (as in thinking) the other is reflecting-M (as in a mirror). Here's one for reflecting-M. The story-teller is Brenda Seefeldt . She's a Youth Evangelist in the Washington D.C. area and also is a substitute school teacher. She wrote this to her parents, Bill and Merrlyn, students of yours and friends of mine way back in Valpo days. They sent it on to me and now I on to you. Enjoy.]

Here's the story of Frank. It's the best way I know of telling what has been going on.

Frank Brinson IV died March 9, 2000 in a car accident. He was 18 years old. He was one of "my kids." He was one of God's kids too—and left quite a legacy because of it.

I must first begin with how I met Frank. I was subbing at my

school and had a much larger than a regular freshmen boy in my PE class. A large, threatening-looking guy complete with cornrolls. But he was fine in class that day and the next couple of times I had him. He was always smiling—didn't fit the look.

One day I was doing lunch duty and there was Frank wearing a black t-shirt with 4-inch white letters which said "God's Grace" across the front. That was it. Nothing clever. No artwork. I squealed out to Frank, "What is that?" To which he gave me his brief testimony. A year ago he was locked up in juvenile detention after being gang associated. His grandmother died and spoke some life words into him. He and his mother decided to move to northern Virginia to get a new start. Which he did with God's help.

No one knew what Frank left behind in Pittsburgh. They knew him as a good football player (his passion which he put extra effort into), a good student, someone who constantly talked about his bright future (he was always forward-thinking), and someone who always smiled.

When news of his death spread that next morning at the school, a pall hit. Nearly the entire school. The halls were full of weeping and walking wounded. "Not Frank!" were their cries. The football team put on their football jerseys from storage. Football players broke down in sobs. Students used ink to make makeshift tattoos with Frank's football number (21) on their bodies. And everyone talked about his smile. Even students who didn't know Frank were visibly upset because he had once smiled at them. It was a dark day.

What started happening next is what is amazing. Only a God-thing.

The next day the front page of the local paper had a picture of Frank's sisters wearing the "God's Grace" t-shirts he had made

for them. Teenagers had their own "God's Grace" t-shirts made. And in the chain-linked fence in front of Gar-Field High School, two seniors took styrofoam cups and spelled out "God's Grace RIP 21." Not "Frank RIP." Frank has become known as "God's Grace." This made the front page of the local paper, again. Gar-Field High School has been marked by "God's Grace."

The viewing was the worst I had ever been to. Hundreds of youths congregated in front of the casket. Lots of crying. Some wailed so loud they had to be removed from the room. That set off a chain reaction to the rest of the mourners. Some did not have the strength to stand. Some passed out. Most would come and look, leave the room, go outside and scream and yell, only to come back in again and start the cycle over.

The screams and wails were "Why Frank?" "Why not drug dealers?" "Why not criminals?" "Why Frank? He was so good." "That's not Frank (open casket). He's not smiling." "I don't want to leave him."

Hundreds of teenagers devastated by Frank's untimely death. Hundreds of teenagers having to face their own mortality. Hundreds of teenagers facing death in such a personal way for the first time. Hundreds of teenagers wearing "God's Grace" t-shirts.

After the questions and the wailing, we would start to hear and overhear stories about Frank which brought laughter and joy (a breakthrough from the intense mourning). The stories always included his smile. From the stories we would hear, "I'm going to live my life like Frank did." It was an undercurrent from all the grief, but it was starting.

The family borrowed a church to have the funeral at. It seated 1400. Around 1300 streamed in to the funeral. Lines and lines of teenagers dressed up (a very untypical look for the student

body) crossed the street from Gar-Field High School to this church to attend the funeral. More than there were for the viewing.

Everyone was seated for the funeral. You could hear the muffled cries and the occasional wail. Joy had not come in the morning yet for these students.

To start off the funeral, the pastor decided to play the song, "God's Grace." A song Frank played over and over again. The wails erupted. Students poured out the church doors to get out of the sanctuary. Some students fainted again. For a long moment, it looked like the mourning would never end.

But then the preaching started. And was it anointed! The challenge was sent out clearly and directly, "If Frank could come down from heaven and talk to you all one last time, he would tell you all to get saved...God's Grace. What better legacy to leave behind... You all need to pick up your lives and win like Frank did. You need to carry on and live your life with God's Grace."

A very specific and clear altar call was given and before the pastor was even done, James stood up. James was one of Frank's friends. Others stood up following James. In less than a minute, over 1200 people stood up to commit their lives to Christ. The spirit of death lifted and joy came rushing in.

Now we will see how these commitments are lived out. James is committed to living his life changed. Some will fall along the path and be eaten by the birds. Some will fall among rocky places and spring to life quickly but not have much soil. Some will fall among thorns. And some fell on good soil and will grow and multiply. (Mark 4:3-8) If what fell on good soil grows, that is 300 students of a 2500 population at Gar-Field High School.

Frank's short life of 18 years, his shorter life as a Christian and his 13-month life as a Gar-Field student influenced 1200—for starters. What is most interesting is how he did it. He didn't preach. He didn't hand out tracts. He didn't start a Bible club. He didn't use a high-tech audio visual production.

He was a good student. He was polite in class & didn't push his limits, even if the teacher was a substitute. He worked and got good grades. He played with that little extra on the football field. He smiled at everyone. He talked to everyone. And he wore a simple t-shirt that gave witness to his life.

A definition of grace is being accepted before you are acceptable. Frank received that and never forgot it. Now hopefully 1200 others will never forget it.

GRACE NOTE #2

"Grace in the Airport" by Bishop Paul V. Marshall *[The text comes from the April 2000 issue of DIOCESAN LIFE, a monthly publication of the Episcopal Diocese of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. As Bethlehem's bishop Paul recently visited Swaziland, a tiny African country smack-dab in the middle of the Republic of South Africa. Several parishioners from his diocese work at an AIDS hospice there. "Under their guidance," he said, "I sought the face of Christ among the suffering and those who care for them."]*

Here is Paul's text—

Can lost luggage be an act of God? Do angels disguise themselves as porters? I do not know, but the possibilities are intriguing.

With my body screaming in several places after fourteen hours that are best left undescribed, I got off the plane in

Johannesburg to find my main piece of luggage lost. Turtles are built for survival, not speed, and thus I do not travel light. In my carry-on I had only a partial change of clothes because of the room taken up by my other survival tools. I thought bitterly of the old joke about the Concorde: breakfast in Paris, lunch in New York, baggage in Bermuda.

The gift came in the form of a young man whose name tag said "Daniel." He zoomed in on my wounded and fretful appearance and offered to help me. Daniel spoke English, but in accents that were difficult for me to understand. I gave him a brisk "No, thank you" and moved on.

He followed me! This was not good news to a city boy. He persisted even when I dodged into a telephone area, only to discover that I had no idea how to work the South African telephone system. He cornered me and asked me somewhat urgently if I wouldn't please let him help me, as it was his job to help strangers.

I started to realize how much I had mentally locked my car doors because Daniel was black. Like many other people of good will, I thought I had "gotten over" that.

Out of guilt I let him guide me to the shuttle bus, and found myself apologizing for my resistance on the grounds that I was upset that I had lost my luggage, was generally disoriented, and had never been to South Africa before.

His response was odd. He shoved an open hand to me, almost at eye-level, and said something I could not understand, and said it again when I did not respond. I bent my head close to his, and he said very slowly for the third time (by the grace of God a rooster did not crow), "Wel-come." I took his hand gratefully.

It would have been enough if this were the end of it. For some

strange reason the shuttle bus kept on not coming. This left us standing together, and we did what males of our species do instead of conversing: we asked each other questions. In response to something I asked he said, "If you are going to have a good visit in South Africa, you will have to be patient." I said, finally getting it, "Just like you've been patient with me?" Somehow proper grammar does not seem necessary during an epiphany.

In my first hour in the country, Daniel had opened me to experience and to human community when I had been focused on disorder and inconvenience. It took them four days to get my luggage to me. In the meantime, up in Swaziland I learned what it was like to wash out one's underwear each night, and what it is like to have "only" two shirts in places where some people feel fortunate to have one.

As I write this I remember that "Daniel" means "gift of God," a fact that may set the indoor record for slowness of perception. All of this took place as described, and perhaps gives us something to think about during this Lenten season in what will be Africa's century, a time when Africa will be recognized worldwide as a gift of God to many.

ANNOUNCEMENT

The board of directors of The Crossings Community, Inc. meets once a year. At this year's meeting in June, one full day—June 24—is set aside for a Crossings Practicum. That means a Show-and-Tell [8:30 a.m. – 4:15 p.m.] about the Crossings model for Bible study and for linking the Word of God to daily life. All are welcome to come to St. Louis and participate. There is no charge for the event. Five dollars to cover lunch costs will be appreciated. A printed brochure for the practicum exists. To get one, tell the Crossings office what your snail-mail address is

and we'll send it to you. You can access Crossings by email info@crossings.org or by phone: 314-576-0567.

A Time for Confessing in the Missouri Synod (continued)

Colleagues,

Last week's ThTh 96, Steve Krueger's essay on the "The Promising Tradition – For A Time to Confess" in the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod, elicited considerable response. I pass on to you a few of them for ThTh 97. You may remember that Steve spoke of some of these LCMS confessors as the "Daystar" group. Steve himself describes Daystar thus: "About a year and a half ago a number of us decided to create a community of voices in order to confess the Gospel over and against our Synod's terrible legalism. Thus was born a conversation among over 500+ voices in the LCMS. . . . Daystar's website is: ."

Steve also mentioned other LCMS confessors rallying under the "Jesus First" banner, and tells about other voices in the movement. Of one of them he says: "There is a community of women in the LCMS who are working for change in a number of areas, including ordination of women. They are called Different Voices/Shared Vision (Voices/Vision). They have a subscriber egroup community and are some pretty neat people." Below some of the responses.

Easter Joy!

Ed

I. THE PORTLAND FREE CONFERENCE [= Daystar get-together in

Portland, Oregon, earlier this year]In January I flew from my home on the Atlantic coast (Virginia Beach, Virginia) to Portland, Oregon. I want to tell you about my trip, because it was special. I attended the Portland Free Conference of Lutherans in the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod. Why would I do such a thing? Why would I leave the comforts of my post-Christmas home to travel across the country?

To tell you why, I need to go back to about the year 1969. You see, I have been a pastor of the Missouri Synod since 1945. That year of 1969 is a year I will never forget. That was the year J.A.O. Preus was elected president of the synod.

But that was not a simple election, an ordinary changing of the guard. That synodical convention and that election were held in the midst of great turmoil in the synod. Some of the faculty of the St. Louis seminary had been accused of false teaching. The convention decided that the accusation was correct, and the person the [majority of] convention delegates chose to “straighten out the mess” was J.A.O. Preus.

I remember that I was devastated with this action of the convention. Although I cannot give you a detailed account, I know that I had no quarrel with the faculty; in fact, several of the members of the faculty were friends of mine. I had, and still have, every confidence in their theological position.

The action of the convention brought about a significant change in the climate and policies of the Missouri Synod. I think it was the same convention [ironically] that had declared pulpit and altar fellowship with the American Lutheran Church! This had been, in my opinion, a great

step forward in the maturation of the Missouri Synod, and an action which I considered in keeping with the will of God that His people should be in fellowship with one another.

But now we began to move backward into isolation. Under Dr. Preus' leadership, a spirit of legalism and isolation began to grow. It had always been there in the history of the synod, but now it began to grow and flourish. It waxed through the eighties and the nineties.

During these years, it became more and more difficult for me to hold up my head with pride about being a member of the Missouri Synod. I began to feel more and more like an outsider in the very church that I was serving as a pastor. There were several reasons for this. I have already mentioned two of those reasons: the growing legalism, and isolationism from other Christians.

The legalism has taken the form of operating with rules, rather than under the freedom of the Gospel. There has been a growing tendency to equate synodical resolutions with Scripture. Under this tendency, pastors have been expected to treat synodical resolutions as though they were the word of God. And now, under the present administration, there is a concerted effort to push this development further.

This has led to a push toward centralization. Under synod's constitution, the synod is advisory to congregations. But under Dr. Barry's administration, the national synod has already given the president of the national church the authority to remove presidents of districts from office. These presidents were elected by the local district in convention, but now they hold office

only as long as they honor the party line of the national administration. So much for congregational authority!

Also, the president of synod recently accepted an accusation of false teaching levelled at a member of the faculty of one of the campuses of Concordia University by an individual who complained to him. Dr. Barry communicated with the faculty member and asked him to defend himself. By doing this he lent credence to the charge, even though he had not followed the stipulations of synod's handbook, which states that charges against faculty must first be made to the chief administrative officer of his school, and the board of regents of the school.

Through the efforts of several members of the Daystar movement, the matter was referred to the Committee on Constitutional Matters. This group decided that Dr. Barry was, indeed, following an improper procedure. The matter is, therefore, as far as I know, in abeyance. Nevertheless, it is another chilling example of the developing centralization of power in our church.

Another facet of this centralization is that there is presently being developed a proposal for the next synodical convention which would, if adopted, change the position of circuit counselor [pastor to the pastors in a sub-section of one of the synod's 35 districts] so that the counselor would, in effect, be charged with the task of monitoring the teachings and practices of pastors and congregations in the circuit. Instead of being a counselor, as at present, the position would be that of a local "enforcer" of synodical rules, regulations and policies. This would, of course, be another blow to the advisory nature of synod.

It seems to me that the movement toward centralization, and accompanying legalism, are leading toward a basic change in our church structure. Instead of synod being advisory to congregations, congregations are becoming servants of the synod. The cart is being turned upside down. Instead of congregations being the vital center of our church, the national apparatus is assuming that role.

Another issue which prompted my interest in attending the Free Conference was the question of the role of women in our church. During my lifetime as a pastor, women have moved from not having a voice or vote in meetings of the congregation, to having a voice but no vote, and finally having voice and vote in congregational meetings. But this is not universal throughout the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod. I understand that there are still congregations which do not allow women to vote. As Mary Todd has pointed out in her book *Authority Vested*, [see Thursday Theology #93], the Missouri Synod is a “male church.” Missouri’s pastors (all men) have always told women what their position should be.

Predictably, that role looked much like the Germanic rubrics for women: Kirche, Kueche, Kinder (go to church, stay in the kitchen, raise children). For years I have wondered where were the women of Missouri who wanted to do more in the church than they were allowed to do. I wondered if Missouri’s women were in agreement with the official position of the church. I found out at Portland that such is not the case. I heard women making sophisticated theological presentations. I heard women teaching me and other men. And I was edified. I rejoiced. I am more than ever convinced that Missouri’s ban on ordaining women is an offense against God. It is based on faulty exegesis. How long before the voice of women is

heard in our church on a par with the voice of men?

Through the past several decades, I have felt like part of a “loyal opposition” in the synod. Part of the difficulty of such a position is that Missouri has no concept of a loyal opposition (as Mary Todd has pointed out in Authority Vested). We in Missouri labor under a concept of total agreement in doctrine as a prerequisite for church fellowship. The result of this is that criticism has usually been equated with disloyalty.

Another result is that we have demanded total agreement as a prerequisite for inter-church fellowship. The result? Missouri has not been able to develop any meaningful ties of fellowship with other Lutheran churches in North America. The only church-to-church fellowship we have is with relatively small groups of Lutherans in other parts of the world. Why is it that we are so isolated?

I said above that I am part of a loyal opposition. It is not easy to carry this stance in a church that is so heavily legalistic and so committed to control. I have had feelings of anger through the years against this situation. But that anger is connected to my love for the synod; if I had not loved her, I would have left her. (By making this statement, I am not suggesting that those persons who have left the synod because of these matters, or others, did not love her.)

I hope and pray that the 2001 convention of our synod faces up to these issues and that we become a more open, loving, trusting, and mission-driven church.

Arne P. Kristo

II. **A PAIR OF MESSAGES FORWARDED TO ME**A ThTh subscriber sent

this from exchanges among Gay/Lesbian Christians on the Internet:

“Ed, thanks for the Promising Tradition post. Being a life-long Missouri Synod Lutheran, I found it very interesting. What is “Seminex”? (I know I should probably know, being Lutheran.) Also, what is the address for the Daystar website? I’d like to read more of this document and anything else relating to changes in the LCMS. Any sites you could suggest for further reading, I’d appreciate! I had sort of given up on my beloved denomination ever changing its thinking on ordination of women, doctrine on homosexuals, etc. I love it anyway...it’s my church, even if I can’t participate openly as a lesbian in my congregation. I would like to keep up on any changes in doctrine/confessions, etc. Thanks! [Her name]”

That prompted a pastor named [x] to send her this paragraph:

“Seminex (Concordia SEMinary IN EXile) was the alternative Seminary in St. Louis which was formed in February of 1974 in response to the campaign being waged within the LCMS to purge itself of any theology which was less than the fundamentalist bent that Pres. Preus had instilled. 95% of faculty and students left their campus behind and set up shop on the grounds of St. Louis University and Eden Seminary. I was one of the student leaders then. Sadly, I doubt if the LCMS will ever change its positions on the ordination of women and homosexuality.

III. **FINALLY THIS ONE**Ed, thanks for the Krueger piece. Again lots of pain, and the thrill of seeing such an articulate

spokesperson in a lonely crowd. I especially like his addressing all denominations. We are all tilted toward law, and the challenge that presents to each of us.

What about the silence within with in ELCA regarding quotas? I have no trouble with Affirmative Action within the US and state system, I advocate it, but in the church of Christ that lives (or struggles to live) beyond the law, in the freedom of the Gospel, where we are to be a sign of God's Kingdom breaking in – are quotas appropriate? How can folks supportive of Krueger's theological insights and the many other Promise-centered theologians keep silent on this issue? I've not read anything, to my knowledge, that takes up the quota issue from the theological perspective of law/gospel. Maybe I've missed something. I know this is an emotional issue in ELCA and therefor a most difficult one to discuss civilly. However, by now we ought to have obtained a maturity among us that would allow a civil discussion of the subject, one in which a theological analysis is not subject to charges of being anti-women or racist. In Christ we ought to be able to esteem each other even more highly than the law (quotas).

A similar issue: The ELCA set a highly unrealistic goal in 1987 to obtain a 10% growth among persons of color in the first decade. In my experiences during that decade, since the goal was in place, there seemed to be little need within the leadership for the challenge of the Gospel, that the love of Christ constrains us to reach out. Just do it and grow! We need now a critical review of that decade in this regard, asking outreach questions from a theological basis regarding Christian mission and Christian motivation for growth.

Paul F. Goetting

A Time for Confessing in the Missouri SYNod

Colleagues,

The more things change, the more they stay the same. There is theological conflict, serious conflict, in the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod. Yes, again. In some respects it looks like a re-run of the Seminex epic of the seventies, though this time the LCMS St. Louis seminary is not the focus. Instead, and on the “other side,” the LCMS seminary in Ft. Wayne, Indiana, appears to be the home base for protagonists of Missouri orthodoxy, who support the synod president in identifying the leftover liberals from a generation ago and “throwing the rascals out.” A number of these current rascals were co-confessors with us Seminex folks during the wars of the 70s—when we rascals were thrown out.

The LCMS national convention in 1998 was for them a tripwire, as you will read below. A number of these co-confessors from earlier days went public identifying themselves (and their website!) under the banner “Daystar.” I like that name, an emblem of hope from the season of Advent. In some future ThTh we may say more about their movement, as we learn more about them. For today’s ThTh 96 we pass on to you one of the primal documents in their “confessing movement.” Its author, Stephen Krueger, is pastor at Zion Lutheran Church (LCMS) in Portland, Oregon. He’s a Seminex alum from the class of ’77. I took this from the Daystar website—and using it here with Steve’s permission. You’ll soon see why I like it—even if he hadn’t mentioned my name!

Peace & Joy!

Ed

The Promising Tradition For A Time To Confess

I. **History** We called it “The Promising Tradition” during my seminary days. It represented a thin tradition of confessing theology which boldly affirmed with Luther, and he was just borrowing the notion from St. Paul, that the Gospel is victorious (as it must be) over the Law. The Promising Tradition represents a theology which tries to capture the essence of the 16th century Lutheran confessional movement, although such a thing can never be captured, and reconfess all over again the truths of our Biblical faith for the sake of the Gospel within our contemporary setting.

The Promising Tradition is not the “official” court theology of any denomination. As a matter of fact, most Lutheran denominations I know of have tended to resist it and resist those who confess the theology of the Promising Tradition as their own. Confessing the Gospel is always dangerous business for denominations. Denominations still reflect the old order of things. They are godly, necessary to a degree (pension plans, organizational structure and the like), but decidedly nomological. Certainly they are bound to ethos under the Law, as Werner Elert put it. The Gospel deliciously, joyously, triumphantly threatens all that with its whole, new, victorious order, ruled by the crucified and risen One.

Nevertheless, as much as “the Church will be and remain forever” (AC VII’s opener), so will the Gospel and the theology of the Promising Tradition. Its confessing has

spilled over into many churches through the Christ-connected men and women who confess the Gospel of the Promising Tradition. It even remains, however oppressed, as a thin tradition in the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod.

The Promising Tradition is associated with voices like those of Bob Bertram and Ed Schroeder. I, with many others, have been a shameless borrower of many of the things they taught me. But, then, so were they, as they would be the first to say. It was Richard Caemmerer, "Doc," who opened their eyes and rescued them, as he did so many, from the staid and dead dogmatism and legalism which seem to ever dog Missouri. Caemmerer of course, from his sainted place in heaven where he will forever be proclaiming the Gospel, would point to others, contemporaries of his; O.P. Kretzmann, whose Valparaiso University was where the Promising Tradition was kept alive and flourished, comes readily to mind. They were borrowers, too, from the European voice of Werner Elert, who, often discredited, found many young LCMS pastors eager to hear a tradition of Lutheran Confessional theology that was actually consistent with the Gospel. In truth, Elert let the 16th century version of the Promising Tradition, first and foremost Luther's own voice, speak for itself, rather than be muted through the more moribund voices of 17th and 18th century Orthodoxy, which had formed so much of the Missouri Synod's consciousness. And, of course, they, those 16th century confessors, were shameless borrowers, too, as Epistles like Romans and Galatians grabbed their hearts and left them no choice but to confess the Gospel's victory over the whole ethos of the Law.

In Missouri today, we have no choice, either. It is long-past due to speak of what we know as the Promising

Tradition. To some, who are so bound to the Law and its deadly power, it will sound like heresy all over again. They will rear up like Eck did against Luther or the Judaizers did against St. Paul, to say nothing of the Pharisees against Our Lord himself. Yet, try as they will to suppress the Promising Tradition, they may destroy a denomination, true enough, [but] they will never suppress the Gospel. The Gospel's winsome power to forgive sinners their sins and offer a whole new chance at life, is simply too strong. The Gospel's wondrous gift of evangelical freedom is simply too right. The Gospel's triumph over the Law is simply too appropriate in our situation to ignore.

If ever there was a time in Missouri, this is it. Now is our time to confess.

II. **The Strange Morass That Is Missouri** Missouri is now in an ironic state of affairs. When I was a student at Concordia Seminary, entering in 1971, not only was I quickly engrossed in the theology of the Promising Tradition, I got a first-hand experiential taste of learning how to properly distinguish Law and Gospel. With Bertram as our guide, the whole affair of crisis and exile was interpreted through the lens of Lutheran Confessional theology. At Concordia Seminary in Exile, my alma mater, we saw ourselves as confessors of the theology of Wittenberg, countering a theology which was thoroughly sub-Lutheran.

Today in Missouri, it is the sub-Lutheran legalism, which has so thoroughly confused Law and Gospel, that now seeks to pass itself off as "confessional." How ironic! It is no more "confessional" than the Confutation, written by Eck in opposition to the Augsburg Confession. Nevertheless, the legalists today often see themselves as champions of a "confessionalism." Their target is frequently another

party of very dear people who have found some source of evangelical freshness and life in the Church Growth Movement. The latter are often very bright and gifted Christians, with a heart for the Gospel, who, hearing nothing but death and Law in the so-called "confessional" party, sought something, anything, which could give their witness to Christ life.

The Church Growth group of sisters and brothers are the first who need to hear about the Promising Tradition. They have never been given the opportunity to hear about a Lutheran Confessional option which validates, authorizes and strengthens their many wonderful concerns. They, too, ridiculed by the legalists, hunger for the victory of the Gospel. They need to know that the Lutheran Confessional tradition, as it truly is, is on their side more than they know.

Then there are those in the LCMS who simply do not trust the Gospel. They may call themselves "confessional" but they are as far from the Lutheran Confessional faith identity as one can get. To the extent that they fear the rule of the Gospel and oppose it through the rule of Law, is the extent to which they are in danger of losing their souls.

For their sake, we of the Promising Tradition must also confess. We long and ache for them, our brothers and sisters, to entrust their lives to the same Gospel as we. True, they "just don't get it," as they relentlessly impose their rigid and dead pathology onto the rest of us. Still, even for their sakes, we must confess. For their sakes as much as for our own we must not let them rule us. You can't build Christ's Church by fostering a climate of suspicion, mistrust, and constant accusation. You can't

build the Church by the Law. Only the Gospel builds the Church of Jesus Christ. Only the Gospel can redeem them, as it does us all.

III. **The Proper Distinction between Law and Gospel**At the core of the Promising Tradition lies the proper distinction between Law and Gospel. The legalists thoroughly misunderstand this most precious theological tool of all. They treat Scripture as if God's Word were not the living voice of God, speaking God's accusing Law for the sake of God's victorious Word in the Gospel. To them, Scripture seems to be filled with eternal propositions of truth, all equally the same, all equally able to provide "proof texts" for doctrine.

For us, confessors of the Promising Tradition, "all Scripture should be divided into two chief doctrines, the law and the promises" (Ap. IV, 5). The Law reflects one reality, one rule, one ordering. The Gospel proclaims another, which must triumph over the Law's rule, or we poor sinners are lost forever. We confess that the Law is godly, to be sure. It speaks directly to our old identities, our Adamic natures, which we carry with us to the Law's final verdict, the grave. The Gospel, on the other hand, is God's new verdict on our lives in Christ. The Gospel breaks in with a whole new freeing identity, fashioned after Christ in us. The Gospel establishes a brand new "regime," Luther called it "the kingdom on the right," by which Christians begin a new life with God and with one another. "There is no longer Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3: 28).

The legalists choke on the belief that the Gospel is the Christian's victory over the Law. They mute St. Paul's words which declare, "But if you are led by the Spirit,

you are not subject to the law" (Galatians 5: 18). They often have accused us of subverting the so-called "Third Use of the Law" which we do not. The Law, even after our regeneration, continues to speak to our sinful natures. Only as we trust the Promise is the Law's accusing voice silenced.

The legalists, in fact, are the ones who err, by trying to silence the accusing voice of the Law. They do not understand how deadly the games they play with the Law are. Not trusting the new rule of Christ in their lives, they try in vain to seek a comfort zone in the old order where the Law rules. But that comfort is not there for them. It will never be. So they add more rules, seeking to impose their will on everyone else, hoping to find a comfort that will forever elude them.

There is no comfort in the Law. There is only criticism of the most divine kind in the Law. The comfort they seek, to silence the Law's accusations in them, can only come from outside the Law. It can only come in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

IV. **Justification by Faith Alone** Also key to the Promising Tradition is the chief doctrine of the Christian faith, Justification by faith alone.

The legalists claim to champion this central doctrine. They are doing it now. Yet, if they believed that Christ alone was the only justification necessary for all our lives before God, then why do they persist in imposing rule after rule, Synodical resolution after resolution on us all, as if the Gospel alone was not the sole sufficient norm for the Church? If Christ alone was the only justification necessary for all our lives before God, then why do the legalists persist in charge after charge

against anyone who dares speak out differently than merely to puppet the “official position of Synod?”

The fact is, while knowing the doctrine of justification by faith alone in their heads, the legalists contradict that doctrine by their behavior and their lives.

The Promising Tradition understands the Gospel of Justification by faith alone in Christ alone to be the freeing doctrine that it is properly meant to be. Trusting that my life is justified by faith alone in Christ alone, I am free from the need to justify myself in any other lesser courtroom, including the ecclesiastical ones of men.

Why do the legalists turn around and demand of professors and pastors, “Justify yourself for the comment you made in public which was not consistent with this or that Synodical resolution?” They wouldn’t do that if they truly believed that Christ alone is their brothers’ or sisters’ only necessary justification. Why do the legalists simplistically seek to rule over complex pastoral and theological issues, such as ecumenical worship, evangelical Eucharistic hospitality, and the ordination of women to the pastoral office, as if the Gospel of justification by faith alone could not be the adequate justification for these matters?

The legalists, in fact, do not seem to be in the least bit fazed by the core doctrine of the Christian faith held so dear by the Promising Tradition: the doctrine of justification by faith alone in Christ alone. The Gospel’s voice is silenced every time coercion, fear and force are used to rule in the Church.

V. **Christian Liberty** The Promising Tradition rejoices in a

church that once could say, as if it meant it:

In its relation to its members the Synod is not an ecclesiastical government exercising legislative or coercive powers, and with respect to the individual congregation's right of self-government it is but an advisory body. Accordingly, no resolution of the Synod imposing anything upon the individual congregation is of binding force if it is not in accordance with the Word of God or if it appears to be inexpedient as far as the condition of a congregation is concerned (Synodical Constitution, Article VII).

We ask, however, what has become of that church?

What truly is different now between our Synod, after its 1998 Convention, and the medieval papacy which forced the hand of the Lutheran Reformers? In the 16th century a pope ruled. In the 20th century an office of the Synodical President is virtually vested with a pope's power. In the 16th century church councils and sacred tradition were placed on equal authority with Scripture. In the 20th century Synodical Convention resolutions now rival the voice of the Word.

True enough, there are still signs from a better day, in part, reflected in Article VII of Synod's Constitution. Yet, how did our Christian freedom slip so quickly away?

The Promising Tradition cherishes the gift of Christian liberty. While the legalists do not trust the gift (perhaps it is they themselves they do not trust the most), Christian freedom is a gift that comes under the gentle rule of the Gospel. Christ has authorized us to have freedom to his glory. The legalists have no right to take it away.

The legalists have not understood the essence of Christian freedom. They are worried that Christians who are free will abandon Biblical Christian doctrine. What they do not understand is that it is precisely that Christian doctrine which authorizes Christian freedom. The purpose of doctrine has never been to organize Biblical truths in this or that arrangement. The purpose of Christian doctrine is to keep the Good News of Jesus Christ good! That is the whole rationale behind the major statements of doctrine, like the Creeds, the Augsburg Confession and Apology, to name a few.

The Promising Tradition is about confessing Christian doctrine for the sake of the Gospel which makes and keeps God's people free for him.

VI. **A Time to Confess** There are times and occasions when men and women of God are called to take the witness stand and confess the Gospel as the sole-sufficient norm of Christ's Church. For us, in our little corner of the kingdom, confessors of the Promising Tradition recognize that now is such a time.

Confessing is serious and, from a human point of view, a dangerous business, as Luther and the Reformers found out in their time of in statu confessionis [=taking the witness stand]. The first danger of confessing is that confessors themselves are in imminent danger of losing their souls. Sin crouches as much at their door as it does anywhere else. They can become easily prone to self-righteousness, to hatred, to character assassination, the very things they recognize in their opponents. Confessing can only be done in profound humility before the Lord of the Church. It is done for the sake of the Gospel, that the sole sufficiency of the Gospel of Jesus Christ get the new and fresh hearing that it alone deserves in the life

of the community of faith. It is done, also, for the sake of the opponents. They are God's children, too, and confessors dare never forget that.

Confessors confess peacefully. It was Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. who opened many of our eyes in our time to that. Of course he, a soul-mate to the Promising Tradition, stole most of his lines from one, Jesus of Nazareth. We will love our enemies and persecutors and we will never stop loving them no matter what they do. That's how to confess the Gospel. We will offer our humble, unworthy confessing up to the Lord, trusting that he will use it to open the eyes even of our enemies to the very Gospel we confess.

However our confessing takes earthly shape in the days and months ahead, it will have been, as Richard Caemmerer said a quarter of a century ago, when he was asked how he, the teacher of three generations of pastor-proclaimers, felt about being branded a heretic, "A privilege to suffer for the sake of the Gospel."

Let us take it up again in the name of Christ. Now is our time to confess. The Promising Tradition, as it always does, insists on taking the stand.

Stephen C. Krueger
July 15, 1998

Book Review – “Reviving Sacred Speech” by Gail Ramshaw

Gail Ramshaw's latest book, "Reviving Sacred Speech: The Meaning of Liturgical Language," (Akron, OH: OSL Publications, 2000) is a second edition of "Christ in Sacred Speech" which was published in 1985. In the introduction, Ramshaw explains that her publisher wanted to reissue "Christ in Sacred Speech," which had been out of print since 1994. She decided that she had learned too much in the last fifteen years to allow the work to be reissued without some "Second Thoughts". As a result, Ramshaw has added an essay at the end of each chapter to elucidate her more recent knowledge of the topic at hand. She also added a "Second Thoughts Bibliography" to offer readers the benefit of her more recent study.

The book contains ten chapters: Liturgical Language as Speech, Liturgical Language as Sacred, The Paradox of Sacred Speech, Names for God, Metaphors for God, Sacred Speech about Time, Sacred Speech about Place, Sacred Speech about Objects, Sacred Speech about the Assembly, and Learning Sacred Speech. Each chapter builds on the reality that liturgical language is "speech mated with symbol and accompanied by music and ritual...which occurs in the assembly before God." Ramshaw asserts that "the liturgy is rhetoric, communal speech of formal eloquence. The liturgy is metaphoric, its words, phrases, and sentences functioning within a creative tradition as the symbols of our faith. Thus, to analyze the meaning of liturgical speech we must ask questions of rhetorical purpose and of metaphoric meaning."

Through the extensive use of Biblical references, examples from the traditions of the church, and, where appropriate, historical

background outside the boundaries of the church, Ramshaw illuminates the development of the liturgy. In the "Names for God" chapter, she discusses the significance of the various names for the Triune God, how they have been passed down to us and how we might best use them to enliven the corporate life of the church today.

Throughout this chapter, as well as the rest of the book, Ramshaw struggles with the significance, or lack thereof, of gender in our liturgical language. In her section on the Holy Spirit she writes: "We find it difficult to talk about God as person without implying sexuality. Since the Scriptures do not name the Holy Spirit with any images of anthropomorphic sexuality, we find it hard to picture the Holy Spirit, and artists resort to a bird or a puff of cloud...Our asexual yet personal naming of the Holy Spirit illustrates better than does the language of 'Father' and 'Son' our theological sensitivity to the nature of divinity."

One particular paragraph in the chapter on "Sacred Speech about Objects" encapsulates Ramshaw's love of and concern for liturgical language as she discusses the language of the Eucharist: "As we receive the bread and the cup, words repeat the promise that Christ is made known in this breaking of bread. Roman Catholics say simply, 'The body of Christ, the blood of Christ.' United Methodists and Lutherans add, 'given for you.' Episcopalians include the metaphors 'the bread of heaven' and 'the cup of salvation,' adding Hebrew images of manna and Seder cup to the Greek terminology of body and blood. Here is liturgical language at its purest. We have not even full sentences, only phrases that, when spoken as the people commune, name the bread and wine to be the body and blood of Christ. There is no explanation. There are not even verbs. We have only the words of faith, language used strangely. The bread does not look like body, the wine does not taste of blood. This is not

literal language. It is supreme metaphor, not as image contrary to fact but as religion, reality re-created by the power of the resurrection."

After reading "Reviving Sacred Speech" I have two questions. Ramshaw professes allegiance to her Lutheran background and yet waffles a bit – or so it sounds to me –about that heritage, especially with regard to Christology. She talks of Lutherans attending "to Christology with fierce denominational fervor" in her introduction, but I was disappointed that she offers Trinitarian language as a feminist antidote to "a too-male Christology." Because Ramshaw has the scholarly, liturgical and Lutheran background, I had hoped for a feminist Christological answer to the patriarchal corruption of our understanding and worship practices.

I can understand the need to press beyond the doctrinaire shibboleths of denominationalism, but it seems to me that soft pedaling the Christology of this tradition is like cutting off your nose to spite your face. The centrality of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, theology of the cross and the distinction between law and promise, are the centerpieces of what the Lutheran church has to offer the church catholic. As endearing as the hymnody, piety and heritage of the various Lutheran communions may be to some people, it is our Christology that can continue to be our distinctive contribution to the ecumenical world in which we now live. I have no quarrel with Trinitarian language, but no one, feminist or not, gets to the Trinity except through Christ.

My second question arises from our multi-cultural world (particularly the African-American congregation I serve) as well as the instantaneous communications (if you're reading this, you're part of that world wide revolution) which continue to push us toward the global village. As we become more and more

aware of the multitude of hymnodies, pieties, and heritages that churches around the world have to offer, does Ramshaw's definition of liturgical language and its proper function continue to hold true? "The liturgy is rhetoric, communal speech of formal eloquence. The liturgy is metaphoric, its words, phrases, and sentences functioning within a creative tradition as the symbols of our faith." The need within some traditions for spontaneous utterance and movement which signal the Holy Spirit's presence seems at odds with the idea of "communal speech of formal eloquence." Are these spontaneous expressions of faith outside the confines of the liturgy, an interruption of the proper flow of the service, or are they part of the "creative tradition" that enlivens our corporate worship to the glory of God? Or in the words of an 89 year old friend of mine, "How do we keep the church a hospital for sinners, not a museum for saints?"

Robin Morgan

An extended Postscript from Ed Schroeder

Robin had this review mostly done when serendipity surfaced. Gail Ramshaw came to our town this past weekend for a board meeting of the North American Liturgy Conference. Gail is currently president of the conference, a signal that she really is numero uno (numera una?) in that crowd. After her sessions with the liturgy-pros she came over to our house for Sunday lunch. Robin came down from her northside parish after the liturgy, and they and Marie and I talked and munched for two hours before Gail headed for the airport to get back to Philadelphia. It was a power lunch of high delight. Could even have been a foretaste of the feast to come.

Of course, Gail and I rehashed our days at Valparaiso University

in the 60s. [Yes, I was indeed the false prophet who told her she'd have no future if she went into liturgical scholarship. Despite my own "senior moment" about the episode, she had incontrovertible evidence which I did indeed remember.] She and Robin did some weaving of life histories and talked shop on items Robin mentions above. And there was laughter throughout.

Not till dessert did I pick up another one of Robin's items above, Gail and her Lutheran heritage. She is not trying to undo it, she says, but to cherish it and capitalize on it. Evidence from this book (p.161): "Someone more Lutheran than me (can this be possible?) said [such-and-so]." I asked: Why does the proper distinction between God's law and God's gospel (aka promise), surely a core axiom of Lutheran theology, never surface in this volume—or in other stuff from you that I've read? When you call yourself unashamedly Lutheran, what are you telling your audience?"

She: *Hmmm. That's a very good question. I have no immediate answer. I'll have to think about that.* **Me:** *(Doubtless taking her silence as space to be professorial again—thereby back-sliding to the sixties in our common history) In Luther's commentary on Galatians, Paul's own big essay on the difference between God's law and God's promises, he notices that these two messages from God have different grammars. And educated as he was in the ancient skills of grammar, logic, and rhetoric, he goes on to describe the differences.*

In your analysis of sacred speech, Gail, you are always using the terms rhetoric and metaphor as your fundamental building blocks, and doing so with the technical meaning of each term. If you had distinguished the rhetoric & metaphor of the gospel from the rhetoric and metaphor of the law—and I know you know what I'm talking about since you aced those "Lutheran" exams I inflicted on you at Valpo—if you'd done that, wouldn't we have

a very different book about sacred speech? I think so.

She: *Good point. I'll have to think about that, and I'll get back to you later.*

Soon it was time to sign the guest book and say farewell. Robin took her to the airport. An hour later the phone rang.

She: *I'm boarding in one minute. I've been thinking. I'm Lutheran this way: Christ and the cross is for me always the bottom line. That's it.*

Me: *Can't complain about that. Let's keep the conversation going.*

Two spots I'd hope to touch in those future chit-chats:

- 1. If Christ and the cross is the Good News, what is the Bad News? What gets trumped by such Good News? One proposal from Paul is that "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not counting our trespasses against us." So God's trespass-counting—aka God's law—gets trumped by what God is doing in Christ. And that leads to the following thought.*
- 2. Trespass-counting and reconciling have different grammars, logics, and rhetorics, don't they? E.g., GRAMMAR. The grammar of conditional clauses vs. the grammar of consequent clauses. Law's grammar is: "If you do such-and-so, then God will do such and so." Au contraire the grammar of the promise: "Since God in Christ..., therefore you..."*
E.g., LOGIC. Law's logic is the logic of moral equity. You get what you've got coming—both for good and for ill. Au contraire God's promissory logic. It reasons that we get what we don't have coming to us, good stuff that we don't deserve. It goes on to argue that God finds this

logical—yes, right and righteous on God's part—and concludes that it's logically right and righteous for us to trust it. The law's logic could never come to that conclusion.

E.g., RHETORIC, the art of persuasive speech. In persuading us to admit the truth of God's X-ray of us, call it the language of the law, God uses one sort of persuasion. It arises from our own experience, our significant others, our personal perplexities, all sorts of stuff impacting us in daily life. Still we can deny the X-ray's validity: "Not me." If we just can't see it, if we're recalcitrant or blind, God's final persuader is a tombstone, the ultimate two-by-four. Au contraire the other persuasion. God persuading us to trust the promise is categorically impossible with the 2×4. [Not surprising, the wood gets used for other "bottom-line" purposes.] "Beseech" is a primal vocable for this kind of persuasion. It's invitatory, laudatory, look-see language. Never ever coercive. How can you arm-twist anyone into trusting a promise? You have to coax, cajole, say it again, plead, witness to its winsomeness to render a promise persuasive.

Yes, when it comes to the Gospel, friendly persuasion is REALLY needed. We do have biographical evidence—even if our eyes are only half-open—to corroborate the law's rhetoric. The Gospel is so contradictory to all that. Persuading people to trust a freebie, a no-strings-attached-gift, borders on the impossible. For we all know from experience that there is no free lunch—not even from God. Even the grace of daily bread, along with all the other goodies of God's creation, is a grace that obligates. Yet here the Gospel-persuader urges us not to trust our experience, but to appropriate the experience of Gail's bottomline: Christ

and the cross. That is a different grace, a grace that liberates. Yes, even liberates from the consequences of unfulfilled obligations arising (daily!) from the gifts that come tagged “no free lunch.”

Gail told us that her current study (next book?) is on trinitarian speech. I didn’t say this at lunch, but I’ll tell her now. [See, that lunch wasn’t a freebie either!] “Exploit your Lutheran roots on this one, sister. Show us the relevance of brother Martin’s Gospel-rhetoric about God, that the Trinity is Gospel-speech about God, not just “true facts” about the deity. You’re our expert in rhetoric. Give us some pointers in your next book on God-as-gospel and the blessed beseeching, the friendly persuasion, coming our way from that God—and that Gospel.”

Peace & Joy!

Ed

Christology at the Tenth I.A.M.S. Missiology Conference

Colleagues,

TWO PRELIMINARIES

NUMBER ONE: The text for ThTh 94 is some thoughts I posted to fellow-participants at that missiology conference Robin and I attended in January. Our group is the International Association for Mission Studies [IAMS]. We meet every 4 years. This year we gathered in South Africa—220 of us from 50-plus countries—at the Hammanskraal campus of the

University of Pretoria. Most of you on our Crossings listserve weren't there, I know, but you may still be interested in my reflections. If not, tune in next week.

NUMBER TWO: Bob Schultz of Seattle, Washington, USA alerts us to a bargain. It's Kittel's Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (Unabridged) on CD-ROM. All for 50% off—US\$150 instead of \$300. But the catch is that you've got to order it now before April Fools Day arrives to get such a good deal. Here's the message:

"Just a reminder you need to get your pre-order in on Kittel now to save 50% because the price will go up in April. Remember—your credit card will NOT be charged until we ship, but you must place your pre-order now in order to get the 50% off discount. Place your order at:<http://www.logosbiblesoftware.com/logosbiblesoftware/unabr-kittel.html>

"All orders received before March 31, 2000 will receive the special introductory price of \$150. We have decided to make this an Internet only offer as we will be able to use automation to process the orders and track production and delivery of the CD-ROMs. After March 31, the price will go up each month until shipping day. Our goal, barring any unforeseen production problems, is to have the product in your hands on or before July 1, 2000.

*<newswire@logos.com>
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Peace & Joy!
Ed

CHRISTOLOGICAL DIFFICULTIES AT IAMS 10

Some Thoughts about IAMS 10

January 21-28, 2000 in Pretoria, South Africa

Part I. Looking for Christology at IAMS 10

It seems to me that we had trouble reflecting on Christology at IAMS #10 – January 21-28 in Pretoria, South Africa. Our trouble was not that we got into arguments about the person and work of Christ. I don't recall that sort of thing happening at all. Our trouble with Christology at IAMS 10 was that it never got much attention at all—no forthright head-on discussions—at least not in our plenary sessions.

That is doubly strange when you consider that the theme banner facing us from behind the podium each day of our assembly was REFLECTING JESUS CHRIST: CRUCIFIED AND LIVING IN A BROKEN WORLD. Today's broken world [hereafter TBW] got almost all of our attention; Jesus Christ Crucified and Living [hereafter JCCL] hardly any at all. JCCL received nowhere near the specific analytic and programmatic attention that TBW did. Is that significant? I think so.

Klaus Schaefer had told us in his preparatory essay, published in MISSION STUDIES [32. XVI-2. p. 179f] that the planning committee intended the term “reflecting” to be a pun with double meaning. First of all “to engage in thinking, discussing, debating, theological reasoning.” Let's call that “reflecting-T” (for thinking). “But [reflecting] also hints at the image of a mirror in which something is reflected.” Call that “reflecting-M” (for mirror). If you don't engage in reflecting-T about Christ crucified and living, how can you do reflecting-M to TBW? Only when the image in the mirror is itself clear can it be

reflected to some other person or place.

That saddens me for more than one reason. Least important is this one: A number of us at IAMS 9 in Buenos Aires (and even before at IAMS 8) had observed that differing versions/visions of the person and work of Christ regularly surfaced at IAMS gatherings. Often they appeared to be crucial (no surprise) to our debates. So why not address Christology head-on at the next gathering of the association? What better time than at the nexus of the second and third millennia? So having learned of the theme for IAMS 10, I bought my air-ticket and was smiling as I checked in at the Hamanskraal campus. But the smile faded.

This is not to say that I was somber or morose for those 8 days. Not at all. For all 200-plus of us attending from some 50 nations, I'm sure, these were days of joy and gladness. The face-to-face exchanges with dear people, the seminar sessions and Bible studies, the exposure experiences, the mealtime conversations and Kaffee-klatsches, the laughter, even the steady stream of announcements from both Willem and Klaus—all that made IAMS 10 a blessing.

But I don't "count it ALL joy." For I was anticipating that Christology, the JCCL, would get equal time with TBW at our gathering. But it did not, and that signals the second sadness. It's not sadness because MY wishes went unfulfilled, as though I'm now pouting because I didn't get my way. I think the whole conference suffered because of this real absence. IAMS 10 didn't get as close to the goal as we could have, because of this Christological neglect. Stated bluntly: Our reflecting-M in today's broken world could have been better, much better, if our reflecting-T on JCCL had gotten equal billing. How so?

First I wish to take a look at Klaus's preliminary paper, and then listen again to the papers presented to us in the plenary

sessions. My question is simply this: what did we indeed hear about JCCL?

KLAUS SCHAEFER

Klaus's paper [MISSION STUDIES 32] picked up on the term "reflecting" in 2 Cor. 3, telling us that this term in Paul's own mission theology "has influenced the formulation of the conference theme and illuminates the intentions of the conference planners." (182) So the planners wanted us to attend to "the interrelatedness of Christological and missiological reflection . . . in 2 Cor 2:14 – 7:4" when we came to Pretoria. Klaus gets even more specific: "...this style of reflection, moving from the Christological vision to the perception of missionary praxis, and from missionary praxis to the vision of Christ, makes 2 Corinthians a stimulating document for our conference."

Too bad we didn't follow the conference planners' lead to spend time, plenary time, on "such intertwined Christological and missiological reflection" offered here. Did we ever take a serious look at 2 Cor. at all?

Klaus traces what's offered in these Christology-cum-missiology chapters of 2 Corinthians. I see him highlighting three items.

1. He notes Paul merging the (seemingly opposite) terms, glory and cross, into his claim for the "glory of the theology of the cross." In my words I hear Klaus showing that in the cross of Christ the "glow" central to God's own glow-ry was "reconciling the world unto himself." This cruciform glory generates reconciliation between us and God, says Paul, and that in turn generates our own "ministry of reconciliation [call it mission] our "beseeching you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God." It's not just that Christ and mission are linked;

it's Christ's cross and mission that are the correlates here. Wouldn't this theological assertion have given us a boost at IAMS 10? I think so.

2. Klaus also shows us Paul correlating the crucified and living Christ not first of all with the "broken world." Perhaps to our surprise, Paul draws no parallel between Christ's suffering and its mirror image in TBW. Instead Paul correlates JCCL with his own broken life as a missionary. Klaus cites the classic words (2 Cor 4:8-110: "Afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be manifest in our bodies. For while we live we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh." It's not that the missionary is the one who holds the mirror and seeks to get JCCL's reflection projected over to the broken world. Rather the missionary in person is the mirror "so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh." The biography of the missionary mimes the missionary's message: Christ crucified and living gets mirrored in the missionary's own personal Good Fridays and Easters.
3. Granted, I have extended these two points above a bit beyond where Klaus takes them in his very brief 7-page essay. But I do not think I've taken them beyond his (or St. Paul's) intent. It is now, after offering us these two anchor points, that Klaus links this Christology to TBW. Both the original JCCL in the person of Jesus AND its mirror image in the apostle now get linked to TBW. By being third in the sequence of the reflecting-T process, reflecting-M comes with God's promise that "everything" in TBW is a candidate for becoming "a new creation." That is

St. Paul's claim. The truth is in the details—how the sequence holds together and why it works.

We would have benefitted by devoting some of our time at Hammanskraal doing “Mission Studies” on these topics. Here are some thoughts about such benefits:

A. From #1

The primal locus of the reconciliation that comes with JCCL is not reconciliation between peoples, but between people and God. Thus the prime focus for the human brokenness which JCCL alleviates is humanity's God-problem. It's not the problem people have believing in God at all—sometimes called today's problem—but the problem they have because on their own they are NOT reconciled with God. There's enmity between the two parties. The enmity is bilateral. The enmity is lethal. That's what Paul claims. Granted that claim was disputed in his day, in the two millennia that have passed since then, and in our day as well. But suppose that Paul is right, that this genuinely IS the God-problem manifest in today's broken world as well. Then that problem has to be addressed when IAMS gathers every 4 years for missiological deliberation. Did any of that happen at IAMS 10? Not much. It was the world's intramural brokenness that got most of our attention, and therefore also intramural reconciliation got prime time—often articulated in today's p.c. terms “peace and justice.” However, when people's peace-and-justice with God is neglected (or even worse, taken for granted) in order to attend to peace-and-justice with one another, the latter, Paul would say, is a lost cause.

B. From #2

IAMS 10 would have gained from our hearing one another do what Paul does in showing how “my very missionary-biography mimes my mission-message.” We did have

speakers—I'm thinking of folks reporting from the TRC—who did that. But we all would have gained if the Christ-connection of these biographies was not left to our imaginations, but made explicit for us, so that we too could improve our own miming of the message in our life and work. When the missionary's own life mirrors the message, Paul claimed, reflection-M happens. Wouldn't it have been profitable, maybe even fun, to do reflection-T on that thesis? And maybe even have a laboratory for doing some practice in mirroring?

- C. Might we not also have profited by doing some reflection-T on the sequence of our process: not jumping to TBW before we had done our Christological homework? One of the dangers of starting right away with TBW—often with the untested assumption that “we all know about JCCL and now we've got to get to the really tough item, TBW”—is how we appropriate TBW. We do not approach TBW on its own terms. Post-modernity has shown us that “appropriating anything on its own terms” is not really possible. We do all our appropriating through a variety of ad hoc lenses already at hand. We are always envisioning our world(s) through some (or several) set(s) of lenses. Christian theologians, like everyone else, need regular lens-check-ups as they do their work. What better place for missiologists to do just that than at IAMS 10! In our particular case we would have done well to check out the lenses we'd brought along with us to Hammanskraal, doing so—as the planning committee proposed—by checking our own lenses with the JCCL-lenses proposed in 2 Corinthians. We might even have been daring and tried to construct a consensus model of what those lenses look like in 2 Cor. Then, but not until then, we move on to use them to bring TBW into focus. Granted, such focusing is only instrumental to help us see TBW the way God sees it and then in our work of reflecting-M in that

world. But without focusing, both the seeing and the reflecting-M are blurred. Having done our homework on the lenses we would have had more fruitful results, I think, on our TBW agenda. Wouldn't that have incited even more Hallelujahs at Hammanskraal? I think so.

Part II – Christology in the Plenary Papers (to be continued)

[This posting of Part I goes to all participants listed on the IAMS 10 roster for whom an e-mail address is given. If you wish to receive Part II also, tell me that via e-mail and I'll post it to you when it's finished. Cheers! Ed]

A book on Authority in the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod.

Colleagues,

This week's edition of ThTh is a book review. You'll see very quickly why I got it as soon as I heard it was out, viz., one-third of it is about my life. If that fact might deflect you from reading on any further, forget the fact, and read on anyway.

Peace & Joy!

Ed Schroeder

Mary Todd. AUTHORITY VESTED.

A STORY OF IDENTITY AND CHANGE IN THE LUTHERAN CHURCH – MISSOURI SYNOD.

Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000.

“I think she’s got it!” So said Henry Higgins [aka ‘Enry ‘Iggins] as Liza Doolittle deciphered the code to spoken English in *My Fair Lady*. Her test, you may remember, was “the rain in Spain stays mainly in the plain.”

Mary Todd ‘s book unravels the code of the Missouri Synod. I think she’s got it. What makes Missouri tick, she shows, is how authority gets exercised and where that authority is “vested.” Pun intended, I’m sure. One of her concluding theses is: “The Missouri Synod is a male church.” In Missouri authority is always vested in the “vested” gender. It never comes “skirted.” Punning on Liza we might say: [Much of] the fury in Missouri comes from that all-male jury. But that’s only one of Todd’s findings in her monumental research on authority in Missouri’s 150-year history.

Three other conclusions come with that “male church” finding. The Missouri Synod is “a clergy church . . . a biblical (more accurate, biblicistic) church. . . and a congregational church.” All four of these descriptors—even though two contradict each other—are the context for authority and how it is vested in the LCMS.

These four theses will doubtless raise hackles among Missouri’s present authority figures. They’ll likely say that Todd held these opinions (prejudices?) before she even started, and that discredits her work. I think not. Some of these 4 theses may well have been her hunches, for she is a Missouri “insider.” But all researchers have hunches. The scholarly project then is to verify or falsify the hunches. I think she’s done it. It’s

brilliant—and witty too.

But Missouri's all-male jury isn't Todd's main point, although the evidence for that is overwhelming, and nowadays almost bizarre. For example, from the very outset the synod's various "commissions on women" never had skirted members. They were always suits.

So what is her main point? It's finally not even about where authority in the LCMS is vested, but what kind of authority Missouri's church authority is. Her parallel point is that the LCMS has never examined its own theology and practice of authority. Perhaps no church organization really has—or even can. But not having done so in Missouri has left an elephant in the living room. Everybody knows that the elephant is there right in front of them. But no one (yet) has directly addressed that grey eminence in the parlor to decipher what it really is. Mary examines the elephant. And here's what she finds in the three 50-year segments of LCMS history.

In the first segment the Saxon immigrants had hardly gotten off the boat at St. Louis in 1839 when their authority structure fell apart. Martin Stephan, the bishop they had all followed—was he a Pied Piper?—from the old country to the new, was run out of town (actually rowed across the Mississippi) for sexual hanky-panky. And the ones who had to confront him—and eventually do the rowing—were the handful of young pastors together with some of the educated laity, whom Stephan had enlisted—or was it mesmerized?—to join him in building Zion on the Mississippi. The immigration had accepted Stephan's hierarchical episcopal authority as their vision for their new Zion and now it blew up in their face. Was it all a mistake? A con job? Who was in charge? Could they even call themselves church after this fiasco? If so, by what authority?

One of those crushed Stephanites was Pastor Carl F.W. Walther, still in his twenties. In coping with the shock he came up with an alternate model of church authority for the stranded Saxons. The frazzled community, pastors and laity, bought it. Walther reasoned: A de facto congregation of Christians (which they surely were, even as leaderless sheep in Missouri—maybe even sectarians, a dreadful term in Lutheran lingo) has God-given authority to have the ministry of word and sacrament done in their midst. That authority the congregations may transfer to one of their number, via a formal call, who then carries out that word-and-sacrament ministry in their midst. So church authority resides in the congregation. It is the authority for the Gospel to happen in preaching and sacraments so that Christ's sheep be fed. The constitution of the synodical organization formed a few years later made that perfectly clear.

Yes, but. . . . But the image of hierarchical episcopacy still resided in the minds (and maybe the hearts too) of many of those whom Stephan had recruited. In, with, and under Missouri's official congregationalism has been a 150-year history of the "Herr Pastor." Pastors are not just laity who have received an "authority-transfer" from a congregation. They have status (= authority) on their own as a class sui generis somehow or other alongside the congregation. When they go to synodical conventions they do not (by proxy) cast the congregation's vote. They cast their own "pastor's" vote, and the congregational delegates do likewise for their congregations.

Todd shows how the wires of authority get tangled here. In the first formative 50 years the LCMS never faced the snarl head on. Nor has it done so up until now a century and a half later. Result: the longer you ignore the elephant the messier things get in the living room.

Mary Todd traces the messiness through the next two 50-year

chunks of LCMS history, i.e., the two halves of the 20th century. Most fascinating for this reviewer, of course, is the last fifty years. That's my history too. I got thrown out of Missouri for not obeying church authority. So did many others. Most often that action was linked to our alleged disrespect for the authority of the Bible. But for many of us exiles, that focus on biblical authority actually blurred the real authority issue: what is the church's own rightful authority, and consequently the legitimate authority of church leaders, especially in times of controversy?

It was that very issue that we never could get onto the agenda for serious discussion during the "Missouri wars" of the 1970s. E.g., we could never get the church's president to let his own authority in the church be the focus for discussion and debate, let alone get him to have his own theology put under scrutiny. We were always dancing around this elephant. No wonder we sometimes looked clumsy—both to insiders and outsiders—and messiness multiplied.

Also in the 20th century's first fifty years—the middle segment of Todd's partitions—Missourians maneuvered around the grey eminence as they had since Stephan. One example, parochial school teachers. What is their authority? Are they clergy or congregational laity? When men are called up to go to war, do such teachers get clergy deferments or get drafted? And when women become parochial school teachers, and eventually the overwhelming majority of the teachers, what sort of authority do they exercise? And then what about woman-suffrage, first of all as it came to pass in American civil society, and then as that civilly legal egalitarianism stuck its nose into congregational voters assemblies? In this middle segment of its history Missouri muddled through on the authority issue. Never addressing it head on, but always adjusting "our teaching" to fit what just "had to be done."

For the last 50-year segment of the century Todd addresses the ordination of women for pastoral ministry. It's the mountaintop of her masterwork—in two ways, at least. One is in historical research. As far as I can tell—and I was “there”—she has read all the primary documents, listened to oral histories from all the players, and done her own interviews of all the principals still living. The other is in making sense out of that history. I can't summarize it. You'll have to read it for yourself.

As a kind of epilogue she gives us 20 pages of theological analysis. The problem of authority in Missouri is interior to all of the major problems Missouri confronts today. She ticks off those problems: of ministry, of women, of scripture, of polity—showing how the unexamined elephant vexes them all. And in her last few paragraphs she does point the way. Which way? Away from “the synod's heteronomy—the authority it claims for itself—[to] an alternative authority, one based on the Gospel.” (275).

Some of us still think we were trying to do that in the Battle of Missouri 30 years ago. But it didn't become Missouri's own agenda then and has not up until now.

So now I'll get personal, since I count Mary as a friend. If “they” don't do it, Mary, you'll have to do it for them. You are after all an insider, born into one of the clergy-clans of the LCMS. So you know what (even “whom”) you are talking about also from your own life in the synod. So how about this as your next book: A Gospel-Grounded Authority for the LCMS?

You've hinted at that more than once. E.g., your brief excursus on the Formula of Concord Article 10 where you show that the Lutheran Confessions, so highly touted in Missouri, are actually the critic of the kind of authority practiced in Missouri.

The Formulators of Concord got their bearings on this point, of

course, from the Augsburg Confession, Article 28, of 50 years earlier. AC 28 contrasts the coercive authority of the sword (“You’ve GOTTA—or else.”) with the authority of the Gospel (“Because of Christ you GETTA do such and so...”). Along with that AC 28 describes how “a bishop according to the Gospel” exercises the latter, not the former, in Christ’s church.

All of this finally is rooted in Jesus’ own words in the Gospels as he straightens out the disciples in their authority confusion. Of “gentile authority” (authority “over” others), he says, “It shall not be so among you.” His alternative Christic authority is “authority under”—not being served, but serving—all the way to “giving his life a ransom for many.” Churchly authority is rightly practiced only when rooted in the theology of the cross.

When church authority in the LCMS—and the ELCA and the WELS and any church body—gets re-rooted in the Gospel, all related problems get easier. Even if easier does not yet mean “easy,” then this much is sure: they cease being elephantine. Even better—the strain of pain no longer reigns these plains. Mary Todd, like her ancient namesake, points to the one thing needful.

Edward H. Schroeder.

Fasting & The Resurrection of the Body

Dear Folks,

This week we have two pieces for you. The first is by Fred Niedner of the Theology Department at Valparaiso University. It's his pre-Ash Wednesday column for the Post-Tribune which is part of the Chicago Sun Times chain of newspapers.

The second is by Rick Mueller, pastor at The Lutheran Church of the Atonement in Florissant, Missouri. It's his Epiphany 2 sermon on 1Cor 6:12-20.

Enjoy,
Robin

This Wednesday Christian communities throughout the world begin observing Lent, a time named for this season's lengthening daylight hours. Lent spans the 40 days, not counting Sundays, from Ash Wednesday to Easter, and commemorates Jesus' 40 days of testing in the wilderness prior to the start of his ministry. Jesus' desert sojourn, in turn, recalls Israel's 40 years in the wilderness between slavery in Egypt and freedom in the land of promise.

Jesus fasted during his 40 days of testing. Israel survived on bread whose name testifies to its strangeness. Manna, they called it, Hebrew for "What's that?" A daily ration of the same, old stuff, month after month, year after year, put Israel to the test even as fasting brought Jesus to the brink of vulnerability. Accordingly, as part of their Lenten practice many Christians abstain from something they ordinarily take for granted.

Some who learned this tradition as children imagined it a wonderful boon to their lives. What a perfect reason to give up broccoli, spinach, and cooked carrots! As for modern manna and quail, that sounds like a sacred diet of macaroni and cheese with an occasional burger, right?

Not. Most who tried that little gambit learned quickly enough

that the vegetables stayed while the good stuff, like soda pop, chocolate or the movies, went on the abstention list. Adults who took this practice seriously gave up something precious—a favorite food item, alcohol perhaps, or most anything they might consider an indulgence.

The whole idea was to put oneself to the test so as to see if something in one's life had become a lord and master, a god even, instead of a benign servant over which we have control. Have idols crept into our hearts and souls without our noticing and begun to rule us?

This ancient practice is worth trying, especially if taken seriously. But one can exercise alternative disciplines in Lent that serve a similar purpose. One stems from another perspective on Israel's wilderness journey. The Bible says that in those 40 years God tested Israel, but Israel also tested God. God was put to the test? Indeed. God bore with the people through all those years, and the more they murmured the harder it got. Moreover, all the while God knew he didn't have to carry on or bear with this crowd. They were a burden God chose.

Therein lies an alternative Lenten practice. Rather than give up something, choose to take on something new. For 40 days, devote yourself to someone who doesn't, and perhaps couldn't, deserve your devotion.

Pray for someone who wouldn't think of praying for you, and maybe doesn't think to raise a care for anyone else.

To your already busy days, add one more regular stop that enables some small act of kindness that's completely new to your routine.

"That's nuts!" you say. And you're right. But you'll likely be amazed at what gets displaced in your life to make room for

carrying this one new thing for 40 days. If you still want whatever it was when the 40 days is up, it won't be too hard to circle back and retrieve it. More likely, you won't need it any more.

One last thing-the same rule that applies to fasting or giving something up for Lent holds also for picking up a new burden. Don't let anyone else know what you're up to. Keep it a secret between you and God. It's part of a discipline whose beauty is to keep one from making an idol of others' approval and admiration.

But even better, it invites us to imagine with complete abandon just how much goodness is going on around us secretly, waiting to burst forth at any moment, just like the great surprise of the season's grand finale.

Frederick Niedner, Jr.

Have you ever noticed that for a preacher, I don't use the word "soul" very often, that I don't talk about "saving souls" or about how many "souls" we have here at Atonement, and that I rarely pick hymns that include the word "soul" or, if I do, that we skip over the stanza that includes "soul"? When our cancer support group was formed – an excellent program, by the way – I balked at the promotional line, "Saving Lives, as Well as Souls." Those of you who know me know that I try to choose words with some degree of precision, and so you might wonder why I regard this hallowed word of Christendom with such disdain. After all, isn't "saving souls" what the Church is all about – or have I become one of those "modernists" who doesn't think that this is important any more?

Well, the answer to all these questions is found right in our

Lesson from First Corinthians. But, to understand this lesson, you need to understand the world which Paul is addressing. There were two basic and competing “schools of thought” in Corinth and elsewhere in ancient Greece, the Epicureans and the Stoics. They operated from the same philosophical premise, but they took it to diametrically opposite conclusions. The premise was that “bodies don’t count,” that “your body doesn’t matter.” What matters, the ancient Greeks agreed, was your “soul,” that indefinable, invisible, little “inner butterfly” that supposedly makes you who you are. And, so, the Greeks argued, what happens to and with your body is of no consequence. “Bodies don’t count.” So, the Epicureans took the argument one way and said that, if what you do with your body makes no difference and all that matters is your “soul,” then, “live it up – wine, women, and song, and whatever else feels good or strikes your fancy,” because “bodies don’t count.” The Stoics took the argument in the other direction. If “bodies don’t count” and what really matters is your “soul,” then subject your body at every turn; deny yourself every bodily sensation; hold your body in submission, in order to purify your “soul.”

Those were the two competing worldviews held by those in Corinth to whom Paul is writing, and, as we discover by reading elsewhere in First Corinthians, were very much in tension and causing some very sharp divisions, even within this Church. And, much of Paul’s letter is written specifically to address those divisions, but Paul does so, not by taking sides, but by pointing out the radically different nature of the Christian faith, which believes and teaches that, because we are created in the image of God, God regards our bodies as “of the essence.”

Which is why, for St. Paul, it is so important to proclaim that Jesus was put to death in the body – in other words, that He really died – and that He was raised from the dead, bodily! This is not just some “out-of-body” or “spiritual” experience Jesus

had. He was really dead, and He really rose from the dead. Bodily!

In the same way, the Creeds of the Church, drawing heavily on Paul and rejecting contemporary Greek philosophy, refuse to speak of “the immortality of the soul” and instead declare that the Christian’s hope is “the resurrection of the body.” That’s what we celebrate every Easter; that’s what we proclaim at every funeral: “the resurrection of the body”!

Frankly, I could digress at some length on this glorious promise from the Creeds. I could digress at some length on the scandal created by Paul’s teaching. I could digress at some length on how these Greek ideas “wormed” their way into the Christian faith over the years to the point that they became almost indistinguishable from it. [Just look at the ways in which so much of our hymnody, theology, and devotional literature uses the word “soul” in the Greek sense – that “invisible little butterfly” – rather than in the biblical sense – the totality of our being.] But, our text points us in another direction.

Consider these few phrases: “The body was not meant for fornication, but for the Lord [for] God raised the Lord and will also raise us by His power. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Or, do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you? You were bought with a price; therefore, glorify God in your body!” What we do with our bodies does “matter”! So, how do we “glorify God” with our bodies? For starters, we can ask ourselves why Christians can be among the most glum-looking people on earth, often wearing our faith like “a chip on our shoulder.” We can look so glum! Just stand in the narthex some Sunday morning and look at the faces of folks coming to worship – and then compare them to the faces of folks going to the Rams’ playoff game later today.

We've been given the gift of eternal life; our sins are all forgiven; God's love goes with us every step of the way. Maybe we could "glorify God in [our] bodies" by standing up straight, holding our heads high, putting a smile on our face, and even [this'll be tough] singing a hymn that isn't our favorite. "Glorify God [with] your body!"

And, because our "bodies do count," we can also "glorify God" by taking care of them. Our "weigh-down" group has been working on that – and has reported some pretty interesting results. What we do with our bodies "matters," in terms of diet and exercise and hygiene and medical care and overcoming our worst habits and compulsions. And, because God cares about our bodies enough so that His Son died in His body, so that "God could raise our bodies to be like His is glory;" we can be certain that God will be with us to strengthen and support us, as we strive to "glorify God" in these ways also "in our body"!

And, we certainly cannot do justice to this particular text, if we overlook the necessity to "glorify God in our bodies" in how we use God's good gift of our sexuality – to use it to strengthen and sustain marriage, the family, and the basic structures of society. Reject all those excuses and arguments that have their roots in Greek philosophy or in pure self-centeredness – and, they're out there aplenty. What you do with your body does matter. Use it to express your love for the one to whom you are united by God in marriage – "glorify God in your body." And, God will strengthen you there, also!

No, this is one preacher who has no interest in saving "invisible little butterflies" and every interest in proclaiming with St. Paul that "yes, it's your body, " but it is also "a member of Christ," a "temple of the Holy Spirit," it was "bought with a price;" it will be raised on the last day, so "glorify God in your body."

Amen.

Rick Mueller

Faith/Works Responses

Conundrum

Dear Folks,

Thanks so much to those of you who responded to my query last week. You offer us all some great insights about a topic that obviously is still alive and well even this long after the Diet of Augsburg.

I give them to you in the order I received them.

Enjoy,

Robin

Robin, the “conundrum” about faith and works is relative to how we get justified—set right—with God. It is not, however, a conundrum of Christian existence—though that is a commonly mistaken sense among both Lutherans and Catholics today. At the JDDJ Workshop this past Saturday, there were some Catholics at my table who did not think that Lutherans valued good works at all. Luther never separated the two—only distinguished them. Apology IV does the same—and notice how it begins, where Melancthon says that he has more than a response to AC IV in mind—also V, VI and XX. VI is about the new obedience, and XX is about good works!

For more, read the fourth chapter of my book, The Faith that

Works.

Peace and Joy!
Mike Hoy

Robin,

A few thoughts... Thanks for the prompt... always "in Christ"... for me, us, that is key: faith and works, works and faith; faith shown in works; works showing faith is more than in the brain; etc... It is "in Christ..." for others... and we are blessed in the giving, serving, receiving again.

I like to start with 2 Cor 5:14-15... and Eph 2:8-10 (most Lutheran leave off v 10, unfortunately) ... and 1 Pet 2:9-10 & 4:10-11; & Gal 6:1-10; and the life of Joseph, Gen 32ff; and even James 2 (esp 17).... if I need to...

There is a response that is "of God"... Holy Spirit given; Christ honoring and emulating,... like Paul in 1 Thess 1 ff (2:14)... and it shows itself in service, witness, care to the people around us... all kinds of people... not just "churchy" ones... "in the name of Christ"... and this is where we "get to" serve our Lord as we meet him in the eyes of others... it's not a matter of "have to"... but "want to"... and it's fun... satisfying, fulfilling... and when it gets to be too much: retreat, rest, spend some more time with Jesus Christ, and the grace of gratitude will grip us again... and we serve again, anew....

Well, for me, it's something like that... trust in Christ for here and for eternity shows itself in love for others HERE and NOW... because this is the world of people we know God sent His Son to love, to serve, to save... Keeping our eyes on eternity earth is thrown in a place to do good along the way... focus too much on earth and we miss the Cross that points us to eternity. There

is something about faith showing itself in love, in good works, in that reality (Gal 5)

Dave Belasic

Robin,

I have had some thoughts about JBFA these days that may coincide with your piece. Nothing major, but I started reading James Barr's "The Scope and Authority of the Bible" recently for my MA Thesis, and he pointed out something that I've always taken for granted. He's speaking specifically about a movement during 1945-1960 that he calls "Biblical Theology", which was a "reaction against the liberal theology and against the way in which biblical scholarship had behaved in the era of liberal theology. Many of the things that biblical theology maintained had an adequate relative justification when seen against the older liberal position (and equally against the older conservative positions), ... But it was not properly observed that such things, though relatively justified when set against the liberal theology, were not thereby absolutely justified; nor were they made free from internal tensions which would later damage or destroy them" (page 2).

In other words, confessional statements that arise out of conflict are not necessarily universally applicable to all contexts. The Nicene Creed seems to have remained valid, but given how many times we Lutherans have to answer people who think we disparage works because we insist on sola fide, I have begun to wonder if at the very least we need a new way of expressing the central core of Lutheran teaching that is so precious to us. Even Bertram in the Lutheran Confessional Heritage class I took struggled with a new way of saying it, something like "Justification altogether by Faith" or something

like that. But even that doesn't immediately help when our critics seem to have James 2:24 on their side. In short, I am suggesting that we need to find some way to promote works without harming faith. After all, if as we keep having to insist, faith never is alone, then at the very least works are related to our justification and deserve our attention theologically, ecumenically, and pastorally.

Justification by Faith Alone was a necessary stand to take in the 16th century, but in the heat of the moment, one is focused narrowly on a specific heresy and uses arguments that attack it without giving much thought to how they will fare when the ecclesiastical war is over. Unfortunately, we tend to assume – improperly, as Barr points out – that such statements can be just reused as is in any new situation, with no need to reinterpret or reexamine such statements in an entirely new context. I don't know that this isn't one Missouri Synodism we might have taken with us into the AELC.

Well, those are my thoughts.

Yours in Christ,
Jim Squire

My first thoughts in response are really questions, viz.:

1. Is it so? What about the more languid cultures of the tropics, where people are in little danger of over-working themselves? Come to think of it, there are subcultures right here at home in the USA where there does not appear to be any fear of the Conductor. Maybe that fear is not general to humanity, but only to folks like us.
2. Is the busy-ness always in fact a sign of unbelief? Could it also be a sign of faith, VERY active in love? Perhaps

the surface symptom, the lack of quiescence, is not univocal any more than honoring one day as better than another, or eating and not eating, but one really needs to ask the next question, "Why are you working so hard?" before impugning motives.

3. The third commandment is REALLY interesting. Yahweh: "Sit down. I MEAN IT!" Maybe, after all, it is SIMPLY sin to work too much!

I doubt this helps, but here I stand.

Todd Murken

Robin,

Yes, we define ourselves by what we do.

Ask someone, 'How are you?' They will respond, 'I'm busy.' Then they will tell you how busy they have been, and they really have been. But 'how I am' depends on how much I do. Therefore, the more I do the better I am. When told how busy someone is, we will respond with admiration at how much they do, and even feel a bit of shame or guilt that we are not doing as much.

This being busy is finalized in obituaries, where the list of a person's being busy is listed. And the more that is listed, the more worthy the person.

Listen to people at the visitation hours in a funeral home. What will they say about the deceased? 'He was a good person. Yes, never said a harsh word. Always there to help a neighbor.' Only nice things are said about the deceased, for we do not want to condemn them by mentioning something they did wrong.

When asked, 'How was your day?' people will answer in terms of how much they got done. The day is good according to what got

completed. 'I got a lot done.' How contrary to Paul's idea that no one can boast.

Never is the answer to such questions something of faith, 'I have been forgiven today. I am feeling in faith. "I look like this (+)." (from Bertram's prayer of a child) The day has had mercy.'

Here is a member's thoughts on God and my response. The idea of greater life forms is the same as those who have achieved more, done greater works.

2. In regards to your science and faith question. I guess I would have suggest that the image of God as a "clockmaker", i.e. one who makes the machine, winds it up, and lets it run on its own accord, is more easily reconciled with the Big Bang Theory and the Theory of Evolution than the biblical accounts of creation and the Garden of Eden. Here's the rub. Can we be satisfied with a distant God, a God who created it all, including the laws that govern the universe (some quite chaotic)? This would be a God, who wouldn't meddle in the course of human events. Or, as the Bible describes, do we believe in a God who is intimate, who does care about the daily lives of humans? From a scientist point of view, we humans have existed for only a mere blip in geologic time. We live on a planet which is just one of nine revolving around a very average star, in a galaxy of billions of stars, which is just one of many more galaxies. I find it unbelievable that we are the only life in the universe that has had, or will have intelligent life. The Bible records the stories of man's relationship on Planet Earth, with a Judeo-Christian God over a several thousand year period. This is like a nano-second in the life cycle of a universe. I find myself envisioning God as much older and much bigger than described in the Bible. This God has had to be many things to different worlds and

life forms over a very long time. I imagine, more advanced lifeforms will envision and need a different kind of God or life force, than what we have described in the Bible. In the perspective of geologic time, the Bible is very contemporary, because people really have not evolved much over the several thousand years it describes. But I think the Bible describes only a very limited view of God, as seen through the lens of human eyes

(which is all we've got at the moment!)

Linda,

Sir Newton rendered the world to work as a machine. There was order and dependability. Even morals were thus firm and stable.

Einstein theorized relativity. Now there is no order, rather chaos and unpredictability. Even morals are now relative and there is no universal truth.

Yes, God could be much bigger than our faith descriptions in the Bible, though the Bible would agree that God is from the beginning of creation, from before the Big Bang. 'More advanced life forms will envision and need a different kind of God or life force,' you say. To put this in Lutheran vocabulary, from the Big Bang to Newton to Einstein, the universe functions by laws. Even our relationship with God is based on Law (laws that demand good and are against evil). If the universe is all governed by the same laws, would even an advanced life form have something else instead of law by which to live, by which their world worked, by which they relate to each other and to 'God'?

Our human experience is limited to law, though in different forms from the king's will to tradition and custom, to

constitution.

If all we have is law by which to relate to God, then we feel the law's (God's) judgment against evil and its demand for good. We do not meet those demands.

Jesus, by death and rising, created a new way of relating to God. That new way is FAITH. (This past Sunday described all this as the letter of the law versus the Spirit. Jesus calls the sinners (those who do not meet the law's demands for good) to become God's new goodness. Faith is the new Big Bang. It does not have law, but instead Christ and the Spirit of Christ by which to live and relate to God and to each other. The new kingdom of Faith is not yet fulfilled, but one day will be.

Would such a new Big Bang be good news for advanced life forms who are also in this universe of law?

Peace,
Pastor

Why doesn't the question of 'How was your day?' get translated not to a law response (I got a lot done.) but to a gospel response (I have been gospelled today. I have received forgiveness today.

Peace
Timothy Hoyer

Last but not least is a response to the ST this past week. As I said on Saturday, I figure at this time of year we need all the preaching help we can get. RJM

I have always been troubled by the somewhat outer space view we have of Jesus and his ministry. Anders Nygren in Agape and Eros points out that Christians seem never quite to get it that Jesus is both man and god. We opt for one or the other. Actually only recently have Crossan and Borg begun to earth Jesus.

But an urban ministry in New York and St. Louis long ago said to me that unless Jesus is with us, for us, in our daily struggle to live on this earth in all its strife, then what does the gospel mean to us – pie in the sky by and by?

But years ago (1954-57) in seminary I came upon a wonderful book by Vladimir Simkovitch, professor of economic history at Columbia University – Towards an Understanding of Jesus. In it he posits that the temptations are to take political leadership, his choice being Zealot, Pharisee, Sadduccee.

The temptation to turn stones into bread is the temptation to political revolution. And indeed the people do need bread, a fact none of us must ever forget. But he replies Man/woman does not live by bread alone. Indeed.!(See Dorothee Soelle, Death by Bread Alone)

To jump off the pinnacle of the temple is to be a Pharisee, hating the Romans, but unwilling to act, waiting for God to act. But that is to tempt God. We are called, all of us, to work for justice and peace, as through the eyes of Christ we see them to be.

The final temptation to take rule of the nations is to serve Satan for whatever reason, sometimes apparently good. The Sadducees clearly saw collaboration with Rome as good for their country. And that I suppose is the temptation to

realpolitic. The answer is to serve God alone. And never to compromise our service to God.

This makes total sense to me. It is not esoteric. I see no sign in scripture that Jesus was esoteric. And everything I have read of late, especially Crossan says that the great issue of the time was the Roman occupation of Israel and all the spiritual fall out of it.

Simkovitch has no real answer to what Jesus chose. That is instead for us to work out. But I find Crossans' understanding that Jesus in feeding and healing was undermining the whole structure of society and thereby proclaiming the kingdom. That makes sense to me.

J. C. Michael Allen

The Faith/Works Conundrum

Dear Folks, This past weekend I got a new computer and cleaned off my desk in the process. At the bottom of one pile (don't tell me you never have piles on your desk!) I discovered this reflection I wrote a while back and realized that it was, unfortunately, still part of my struggle as a parish pastor.

The context of the piece was a Lutheran Confessions class I was taking with Ed through the Lutheran School of Theology here in St. Louis. I had decided that I needed a confessions "tuneup" after a couple of years in the parish. As you'll see when you read it, I was finding the faith/works conundrum that the Reformers and the Confutators argued about at Augsburg to be a

living reality in my own life.

I'm hoping that I'm not the only one who struggles with this issue and that you'll share your thoughts and experiences with us. Next Thursday I'd like to be able to publish a compilation of what you've sent in as Thursday Theology #91. So, if you send me something, I'll assume you're giving me permission to use it next week and I'll publish it with your name unless you ask to be anonymous.

For those of you who aren't Lutheran and/or don't remember the context of the Augsburg Confession: In 1530 Holy Roman Emperor Charles V summoned to an imperial diet in Augsburg both sides of the religious debate that was dividing the Empire and making it difficult for him to present a united front against the Turks who were threatening Europe from the south. The Reformers prepared the Augsburg Confession to present their position to Charles V (remember, heresy equals treason at this time). The Confutators were the men from Rome who responded to the Reformers on behalf of the Pope, allowing some of the Reformers' points to stand, but disputing others. The Apology to the Augsburg Confession was the Reformers' response to the Confutators' critique.

Article four was the linchpin in the debate between the Reformers and the Confutators and the center of my reflection as well. Is justification by faith in Christ alone without works the only criterion for salvation? We might, as descendants of the Reformation, offer an automatic yes to that question, but I wonder if it's really as automatic in our lives as we sometimes assume. The question may not come up exactly the way it was phrased in the 16th century, but the faith/works conundrum is alive and well in the 21st century as far as I can tell.

I hope this inspires some thoughts in you, even if the empire isn't at stake or is it?

*Peace,
Robin*

I recently read an article in "Civilization" the magazine of the Library of Congress, entitled, "Why Can't We All Just Relax?" The author, Verlyn Klinkenborg, explores why, with all the labor saving devices, doubled productivity of American workers since WWII and advanced technology, we have one third less leisure time now than we did in the early 1970s.

Klinkenborg rightly highlights the heretical sound of a 1935 essay by Bertrand Russell called "In Praise of Idleness" and that "in a society where, for better or worse, we all define ourselves by what we buy, leisure is now just another (highly profitable) market, just another commodity."

However, I wonder if our self flagellation about materialism and its penance – simplify, stop and smell the roses – is merely another cover-up for what we refuse to acknowledge; that eventually the Conductor will be coming through our car and we'd better have a ticket for him to punch.

Justifying our existence through activity, measured by whatever yardstick we use, is as much a part of life today as it was in the 16th century. Though we have edged our Judeo-Christian heritage far from the center of our world, we still know that there's no free lunch.

As one who ministers in a neighborhood where anarchy isn't just knocking at the door, he's sitting in the living room, drinking beer and watching TV, I am concerned, along with the

Confutators, about the doing of good works. It would certainly be easier to hook something eternal onto the care of the world so that people would be motivated by self-interest to take care of business. Today, rather than going to the Bible, we might take our cues from public television's begging week strategies, the environmentalist's planetary doom scenarios or the fear that lurks in the back of every red blooded American's mind – what if we lose our position as the richest, most powerful nation in the world?

The Reformers, in surveying our present landscape, would say that people today have no resources with which to do good works because the Good News of Jesus Christ has not been preached in all of its efficacy to these terrified and anxious consciences. Our materialism, addictive behaviors, even our refusal to live and work on behalf of the community's good is because people, for the most part, are bereft of faith in the promise that Christ has set us free to live for Him rather than according to the dictates of the world. We clutch at what we know or what we have; we drown our inadequacies in anything that will get us through the night.

The Church's primary call is to preach the Gospel and administer the Sacraments so that the gathered congregation can be brought to faith, created in Christ Jesus and then sent into the world to do the good works that God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

A Book Review of FAITH ALOUD: DOING THEOLOGY FROM THE HYMNS IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA. by Marcus Felde, Goroka, Papua New Guinea: Melanesian Institute, 1999

Law-Gospel theology (aka Lutheran) was hard to find at the Tenth Conference of the Int'l Association for Mission Research [IAMS] in Pretoria, South Africa Jan. 21-28, 2000. Seminex alum Richard Bliese, missiologist at the Lutheran Seminary in Chicago, said it was even worse than that: "Lutheran theology is not just a minority voice in missiology today, Ed. It's no voice at all." Would that Marcus Felde had been there and that his FAITH ALOUD had been one of the major presentations! If so, IAMS Ten would have been different.

This volume, basically Felde's Ph.D. project at the U. of Chicago, does just that – missiology with Augsburg Confession theology as the yardstick for what makes something Christian. Now the fact that Marcus is a Seminex grad, and that he quotes me with approval in his work, has nothing to do with my own joy and gladness about FAITH ALOUD. It's the project he undertakes here plus the skill and theological savvy with which he carries it out – that's the grounds for my good cheer.

Marcus's project was to examine the soteriology, the understanding of salvation, in the texts of favorite hymns sung by the Lutherans in PNG – and they are a singing church – and then compare it with the classic paradigm(s) for salvation

central to the Lutheran Reformation. He does this by listening to “three voices.” First is “the voice of the church, how it proclaims its faith in its hymns.” Next comes the “voice of culture [accessed] through anthropological analysis.” Finally “the voice of the gospel” through what he calls “the theology of the Lutheran strand of Christian tradition.”

The first chapter demonstrates why you must “take songs seriously” if you want to get to the center of the project. “Not only as Melanesians but also as Lutherans, the people of this church come from traditions in which singing plays a commanding role.” The next chapter digs into the Lotu Buk [Worship Book], one of the “centers of identity” of these Lutherans. Within the Lotu Buk, “there is a core of hymns so well known as to constitute their confession of faith.” Chapter three unpacks the theology of salvation present in those hymns. “The dominant metaphor turns out to be closeness. We want God to be with us and we want to be with God.”

In chapter 4 Marcus compares this picture of salvation in the hymns with that present in local culture and contrasts the expectation embedded in local culture with the answer provided in the hymns. The two pictures do not coincide. Not that they necessarily ought to, for the salvation people long for may well not be the one they genuinely need. Thus Jesus often finessed his questioners away from their initial requests to a more fundamental need of which they were seemingly unaware – and even more important, a need for which he had Good News to offer.

That’s what we get in chapter 5, even though it is too brief and compact. But it is a start, and it’s what Marcus should spell out in extenso in his next book. Simplest is to use his own words to describe it:

“In the final chapter, we bring to bear insights from the

Lutheran Christian theological tradition. Just as the starting point of our theological task was a concern for what the church is confessing, so the end of our task is to suggest what the church OUGHT to be 'believing, teaching, and confessing.' We are not concerned with correctness for the sake of correctness, or tradition for the sake of tradition. We are concerned that the Gospel of Jesus Christ be proclaimed in its strength and fullness, for the life of the world. If theology, like a good steward, can bring forth from its storehouse something new or something old that releases the power of the Gospel, that is good.

"We assert that the opposite of the good news (expressed as 'God is with us') is not that God is FAR OFF, but that God is AGAINST us. As we examine this possibility, we find that such a teaching is not only more faithful to biblical evidence but also responds more effectively to the concerns of local culture. A fair reading of the local culture, especially of the role played by the underlying logic of reciprocity, leads us to the conclusion that the experience of the wrath of God is as real, and reflection upon it is as universal, as the experience of God's blessing. If we hope to make meaningful contact with local culture, we will be wise to articulate this not as the threat of hell but as the experience of God's implacable, unrelenting opposition to evil, and opposition that is a part of universal human experience apart from revelation.

"In sum: We believe that the nearly canonical core of the Lotu Buk is weakened by its inadequate soteriology. To strengthen it, the church should make more use of the metaphor of divine-human reconciliation, the overcoming through Christ of the enmity between God and us."

Marcus offers "a word about the Lutheran bias of our work. We

believe that the calling of denominations is to be REMINDERS, not DEPARTURES. Every denomination or sect has an ecumenical responsibility to remind the whole church of the truth, not a divine calling to depart from the one church. We believe that especially in the whole area of contextual or local theology the Lutheran theological tradition has important gifts to offer, which are rarely seen." IAMS Ten verified the last four words of that paragraph.

Both Marcus's book and IAMS Ten tease me to devote future issues of ThTh to this topic. Richard Bliese, quoted earlier, was even feistier in wondering out loud: "Maybe you can't even do missiology on the basis of Lutheran theology." I know he doesn't believe that. But if it is "rarely seen," then those of us who think it's there must let folks see it. Felde's book cheers us on. At one point he gets so explicit as to say "Luther's theory of the 'hiddenness of God' holds promise – for connecting the gospel in a meaningful way to the cultures of the world. And a lean Lutheran definition of church – 'the assembly of all believers among whom the Gospel is preached in its purity and the holy sacraments are administered according to the Gospel' – has broad ecumenical possibilities. Even the centrality of the theme of justification by faith may give some light on our common path."

FAITH ALOUD is not just for missiologists. But on second thought, maybe it is, since today all six continents are mission fields. So I commend it to all Sabbatheology subscribers. After many years in Papua New Guinea, Marcus now pastors an ELCA congregation in Indiana. That's his current mission field. Each of us has our own.

Peace and Joy!
Ed