

# Christians Amidst the Bali Massacre

Colleagues,

In 1999 Marie and I were the clergy couple serving an English Language congregation on the island of Bali in Indonesia. We lived just a few blocks north of the site of last weekend's cataclysm. Our church bldg was just a few blocks east.

Some of our colleagues from that time continue to serve there. One pair is a fellow Concordia Seminary alum from the 1950s, Bill Hansen, and his wife Margaret. More than one of Bill's illustrious "Class of 1952" have broken from the "Missouri mould," and traipsed off into non-conformist ministries. In Bill's case, he didn't "take a call" in 1952, but wandered off into worker-priest venues—unheard of back then—and wound up in Anchorage, Alaska, running an automobile hubcap business [I kid you not!] and working as peripatetic evangelist. In his early 70s he and Margaret came to Bali as "faith missionaries." We met them there. They've been there ever since doing strange and wonderful things. Lots of teaching and preaching and also actually washing the feet of the poorest of the poor and feeding them. Does that remind you of someone you know?

We e-mailed them after we heard the news. They responded: "Thank you for your note. We are still in Bali and are fine. It is a tough time for many people here, and the inevitable fall-off in tourism will create hardship for many people in the future, but God is alive and watching over all of us. We are weighing our options of staying and leaving. Pray that God will give us understanding and obedience to His will."

Another colleague is Ed Trotter, pastor in the Uniting Church of

Australia, who spends large chunks of each year as street evangelist and Good Samaritan in the Kuta district where the explosion occurred. On Monday we received this from him:

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*Your expression of interest and compassion for Bali, and your prayers, are overwhelming. Thanks, from the depths of my heart. You'll probably keep up to date through news media with the scene. To add to your ongoing prayer:*

- 1. The obvious consolation for families and friends of the victims, foreign and local. Many bodies too unrecognizable. Still numbers of missing persons.*
- 2. Australian authorities seem to be evacuating all foreigners in need of medical treatment. That process should be pretty much completed today. Due to security reasons, Indonesian victims will have to stay behind here and be subject to unbelievably inadequate facilities. they ran out of disinfectant yesterday; there's no proper treatment available for burns. You've probably seen footage of wounded burnt bodies. Trauma is another thing again!*
- 3. It was fantastic that many Christians and other volunteers have been at the hospitals attending tirelessly to the wounded. Without them, it would've been an even more massive disaster. Our help was required to assist in transport of patients to the airport.*

*Another wakeup call.*

*Even after September 11th, we think it probably won't happen in "our town." Bali is in shock. the main street of Kuta, Jalan Legian, looks like a war zone. It is a war zone! While life seems back to normal quickly, it is now a different place.*

*The economy will probably be decimated, bringing unbelievable*

hardship to the Balinese, who've been increasingly dependent on tourism and associated foreign investment.

But it is the reaction of the Balinese, once they take stock of the situation, that needs prayer. While there is an increasing sense of solidarity with Aussies and other foreigners, because they have suffered as Bali's guests, it is the non-Balinese Indonesians who are nervous and uncertain of their future here. There has been long term animosity under the smiling surface, between Balinese (90% Hindu) and especially Javanese (usually = Muslim).

Ironically, even Ambonese, already here in refuge from their own [Christian-Muslim]war zone [on the island of Ambon], are considering returning there!

The Lord is sovereign and compassionate, allowing what will ultimately be for our best as well as for the glory of his name. Isaiah 44 [= the prophet's ridicule of a craftsman fashioning an image with his own hands and then prostrating himself before it as his god] happened to be one of my scripture passages this morning. Bali's economy and culture derives from such idolatry. He wants the best for them, and I know His heart breaks until these precious people come to know the true and living God. Please in your prayers, remember that the Balinese are still "an unreached people group."

However, in the last year especially, every Christian denomination, including our English-speaking ministries, is experiencing a season of favour and increase.

Please also remember the perpetrators of this evil, according to the words of Jesus in Matthew 5:43-48 ["Love your enemies..."].

Someone said the safest place in the world to be is in the

centre of God's will. The bomb in Kuta exploded about one & a half kilometres from my room that I've been renting in a Balinese compound for the past 5 years. Apparently some debris landed on the street outside. Although the street is closed to vehicles, our morning prayer services yesterday [Sunday Oct. 13] went ahead, with a powerful motivation to pray, a few hundred metres from where the tragedy had occurred just hours before.

Pray for opportunities to minister with friends and neighbours during the aftermath. Most are shocked, sad, uncertain or fearful. Already I've witnessed a Christian brother who had a miraculous escape, as he'd just passed the Sari club & entered his internet workplace nearby when the blast occurred. His internet cafe was just blown in, all the staff & customers were bleeding with wounds from spraying glass and debris. He remained physically untouched. Ironically again, he's from Ambon.

I believe the Lord had my travel plans rearranged to be here for a while longer. I will probably fly back to Australia later this week.

Again, thank you for your ongoing love and pray for Bali.

The Lord bless you heaps.

Shalom.

Sincerely in His love and grace,

Ed

Kuta, Bali, Indonesia

October 14, 2002

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Peace & Joy!

Ed Schroeder

P.S. We received a third message from Indonesia this week, from the island of Sumatra a thousand miles to the west of Bali. That's the home of the Batak Lutherans. Retired Lutheran Bishop and seminary prof Armencius Munthe (a long time buddy from days gone by when we all were grad students in Hamburg, Germany) is coming to Dallas TX in a few weeks to continue translation work he's currently doing. Why Dallas? I don't know. Are there any of you in that territory who might connect with him and practice your gift of hospitality? Let me know. His English is good. His German even better.

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## **Luther's essay ON WAR AGAINST THE TURK**

Colleagues,

Two days from today our eldest grandson Peter turns 18 yrs old. It's got me thinking. That used to be "draft age" for military service when I turned 18—also when Peter's father turned 18 a generation later. And each of us duly registered for the draft on that birthday in 1948 and 1977. Neither of us was ever called up. There's no conscription in place in the USA as Peter rounds the bend, but the drums of war are beating much louder in our land on his birthday than they ever were when his father and father's father had 18 candles on their cakes. Of course, there'll be hoopla on Saturday as we gather to celebrate. But sobriety too. For 18 yr olds not everything awaiting them tomorrow is a piece of cake. The bad news/good news that Jesus gave his disciple Peter at the end of John's gospel signals our message to our Peter for such a time as this: "Another [may] carry you where you do not wish

to go.” And after this Jesus said to him, “Follow me.” The first Thursday Theology response to September 11 a year ago [ThTh 170] claimed that the “‘R” word repentance was our best response to the catastrophe. Jesus, Amos, Isaiah, Augustine, and Luther were cited as warrants for that claim. My hunch is that not too many of you checked any of those five authorities to see if they did indeed support that. So now, with repentance continuing to be an alien in our land, and war-talk oozing from every media pore, this week’s Thursday Theology offers a Readers Digest version of Luther’s classic treatise—foundational for the argument in ThTh 170 13 months ago—ON WAR AGAINST THE TURKS. This was his counsel to his people in 1529 as 600,000 Muslim soldiers camped outside the gates of Vienna, his counsel for . . .

Peace and Joy!

Ed Schroeder

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***Martin Luther: ON WAR AGAINST THE TURK***  
***>From LUTHER’S WORKS, vol. 46: 157-205***  
***Revised translation by Robert C. Schultz.***

*[The treatise is dated 474 yrs ago yesterday, “October 9, 1528”]*

*Preface: Luther’s pastoral purpose: “So that innocent consciences may not be deceived” by the current propaganda on this topic. He reviews his past argument with the papacy on the Turks. When the pope excommunicated him (1520), he cited as one of Luther’s heresies his words from two years earlier: “To fight against the Turk is the same as resisting God, who visits our sin upon us with this rod of his anger.” [Isaiah 10:5]*

*That's still true, but the context 10 yrs later is different, so here's how it applies today.*

## **Introduction**

- 1. Warfare is a dicey issue for Christians. Controversial too. Jesus says: Don't resist evil. But obeying secular authority is also God's mandate.*
- 2. Civil governments are God-given realities. God authorizes them. Calls leaders to their jobs through local historical processes.*
- 3. The current papacy is all wrapped up in the current business of the war against the Turks, and its hands are dirty. Specifically on two points:*
  - a. it continues to urge a pre-emptive strike without any concern for anyone's prior repentance, especially repentance by the papacy itself. "I shall never advise a heathen or a Turk, let alone a Christian, to attack another or begin war. That is nothing else than advising bloodshed and destruction, and it brings no good fortune in the end. It never does any good when one rascal punishes another without first becoming good himself."*
  - b. it calls for this war "in the name of Christ." That is the real abomination, the pope and other bishops desert their God-given office as bishops of the Gospel and assume secular military calling.*

*On both counts the word of God says "No."*

- 4. Look at the dismal track-record so far—we've been beaten by the Turks in every engagement. That shows the true value of such papal political theology. Also shows "clearly that God is not with us in our war against the Turks." God "mocks" all wars fought under the banner of*

the church. He gives some examples. "If we will not learn from the Scriptures, we must learn from the Turk's scabbard."

Luther's primary concern in this essay to his Christian audience: "I want to teach you how to fight with a good conscience," that means, how to fight and continue to please God. It's not: how to fight and be sure that you'll win.

### **LUTHER'S TWO KEY POINTS**

1. The Turk has "no right or command" to wage war on us, yet God is using him as the "rod of his anger" against our (phoney) European Christianity.
2. Since we are now confronting two enemies: both God and the "rod of his anger," the Turk, we must be clear just who is authorized to fight in this war and how. To this question the answer is: "two and only two: one is named Christian, the other Emperor Charles."

### **Part I.**

The first "authorized" warrior—to "fight" the first enemy—is any & every Christian. "The fight must be begun with repentance, and we must reform our lives, or we shall fight in vain as Jeremiah says in chapter 18." The "strategic value" of repentance? "The first thing to be done is to take the rod out of God's hand, so that the Turk may be found only in his own strength all by himself." Repentance does that. Even though Christians are "spread thin" in the world, God listens to the repentant remnant. So repentance is the church's calling. "Every pastor and preacher ought diligently to exhort his people to repentance and to prayer. They ought to drive us to repentance by showing our great and numberless sins and our ingratitude, by which we have earned God's wrath and disfavor, so that he justly gives us into the hands of the devil and the Turk." Even though the bigwigs will laugh at this, not to do so



*makes God angrier still.*

*“After people have thus been exhorted to confess their sin and amend their ways they should then be most diligently exhorted to prayer and shown that such prayer pleases God.” Scriptures are full of examples and Luther cites some: Especially Abraham praying for Sodom and Gomorrah, a prayer based on God’s commitment to spare the place if five righteous ones could be found there. “It is easy to see,” he claims, that God wants the praying faithful “to set themselves in the way of his wrath and stave it off. That is what I meant about “Taking the rod out of God’s hand.”*

*Interlude: Some info on the Turks, i.e., on the religion of Islam. Luther has read “some parts” of the Koran, and “when I have time I must translate it into German.” He thinks it’s a “shameful book.”*

- 1. Jesus gets praised, but is not the savior of the world, only a prophet. Mohammed supersedes Jesus. He is God’s last word. By putting “Christ beneath Mohammed . . . everything is destroyed.”*
- 2. The sword (=murder) is the basic law in Muslim civil government. It is the foundation of the expanding Muslim empire. As Augustine also noted: “an empire has seldom come into being except by robbery, force, and wrong . . . without any justice.” Though God is using the Turk now as the rod of his anger, God finally recompenses the bloody practice of all empires. “They shall go down to hell, even though it may take the Last Day to send them there.”*
- 3. Monogamous marriage is despised. These three cut the heart out of God’s way of running the world (true religion, true civil authority, true domestic life). There are 3 other items of importance about Islam:*
- 4. War is always a Holy War;*

5. Its radical iconoclasm forbidding any “imaging” of God at all;
6. It’s works-righteous message of salvation—just like the papacy.

Luther then comes to the summary of his counsel to the “first man” [= any Christian] authorized to “fight” God, the first enemy, in War against the Turk. Remember: none of this person’s fighting is done with the sword.

### **Then comes Part II.**

The second one authorized to fight the “second enemy” in this war is Emperor Charles V. Luther directly addresses “Emperor Charles, who ought to fight against the Turk . . . for it is his duty as a regular ruler appointed by God, to defend his own.” And his very next sentence reiterates his repentance prerequisite: “I repeat it here: I would not urge or bid anyone to fight against the Turk unless the first method mentioned above, that men had first repented and been reconciled to God, etc., had been followed. If anyone wants to go to war in another way, let him take his chances.”

Even though Luther “see[s] clearly that kings and princes clearly are taking such a foolish and careless attitude toward the Turk that I fear they underestimate God and the Turk too greatly,” he proceeds “to point out [Charles’] duty [=his call from God] and to instruct his conscience.”

1. Charles is in command by God’s ordinance. Obeying Charles is obeying God.
2. The proper goal for Charles in the conflict is “simply to protect his subjects,” not at all as “protector of the church and defender of the faith . . . which only makes things worse.”
3. If Rome were ever to get involved it should be as a preacher to “hold God’s commandment before them [=the

political leaders, Charles included] and make it an unavoidable issue, and say: the empire is given and committed to you by God for you to protect, rule, counsel, and help, and you not only should, but must do this at the risk of losing your soul's salvation and God's favor and grace." All this even though "it is evident that none of you believes this or takes it seriously."

4. The right "banner" for the Emperor carries "the commandment of God that says, 'Protect the good; punish the wicked.'" Yet even here a caveat. "It is not enough for you to know that God has commanded this or that to you; you should do it with fear and humility, for God commands no one to do anything on the basis of his own wisdom and strength." Those who "trust in their own bravery and military numbers" are the ones who lose in battles recorded in the Bible, for "God is forgotten and despised."

In his summary to the emperor Luther says: "If these two things are present, God's commandment and our humility...then we are strong." But if we lose the war, "it is certainly because one of the two things is lacking; 1) we were going to war either without God's commandment, or in our own presumption, or 2) the first soldier, Christian, is not there with his [repentant] prayers."

### **WHERE DO YOU FIND FOLKS LIKE THIS IN EUROPE IN 1528?**

1. Luther does a survey of the current European population. Believers are few and far between. Yet they are there and the Bible tells often that "the godless were saved . . . for the sake of one godly man or woman." "So we will not be frightened or moved in any way if the great majority . . . are unbelieving and have an un-Christian mind." And

then with a sigh, "of course, it would be good if all were upright, but that is scarcely possible."

2. Luther has harsh words for those who defect from their obedience to Charles and "desire the coming of the Turk and his government . . . and willingly submit to it." Besides their breach of oath to their rulers (which gets them into trouble with God), and becoming accomplices in the Turk's murder and bloodshed, such folks don't know what they are getting into. Defectors to the Turk wind up as slaves in his empire.
3. How to respond to the claim: "Pope and the Turk are all the same." There are frightening parallels as the pope commands armies, and shameless sexual immorality in Rome matches "what an open Sodom Turkey is." "What are we to do, then? Answer: treat the one like the other and no one is wronged: like sin should receive like punishment." "I do not advise men to wage war against the Turk or the pope because of false belief or evil life, but because of the murder and destruction which he does." No moral crusade of good vs. evil, but equitable recompense for destruction inflicted on those whom God calls the emperor to protect.
4. How about the claim: "Emperor has so many internal political battles, he can't take on the Turk too"? The turmoil within the Holy Roman Empire is a signal that "the empire is almost gone, Christ's coming is at the door, and the Turk is the token of the empire's end." "Nevertheless, the emperor should do whatever he can for his subjects against the Turks, so that even though he cannot entirely prevent the abomination, he may nonetheless try to protect and rescue his subjects by checking the Turk and holding him off."

**Luther concludes: "Finally . . ."**

1. *Remember, we could lose.*
  2. *We need an empire-wide coalition.*
  3. *It's not hopeless.*
  4. *I'll pray, but "it will be a weak prayer, for because of the presumptuous way in which such great enterprises are undertaken, I can have little faith that it will be heard, and I know that this is tempting God and that he can have no pleasure in it."*
  5. *I'm not optimistic when I see what our side is doing right now. It's contrary to everything I've said here about the word of God.*
  6. *Yet I've done my calling, said what had to be said from the word of God.*
  7. *"If it helps, it helps; if it does not, then may our dear Lord Jesus Christ help, and come down from heaven with the Last Judgment . . . and deliver us from all sins and all evil. Amen."*
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## **The Lord's Supper: How open, how close?**

Colleagues,

Marcus Felde is the pastor of St. Paul Lutheran Church, an ELCA congregation in Olean, Indiana. He's a frequent contributor for Sabbathology text-studies, the companion piece to these Thursday postings. If you've read his stuff there, you know he's an awesome Gospeller—and an awful punster. In this essay—with its "pax on both your houses"—he's doing more of the same. Responses, if you wish,

can go straight to him at "mfelde@seidata.com" 'Course, I wouldn't mind seeing a copy. Peace & Joy!  
Ed Schroeder

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## ***The Ecumenist Has No Close (Nor Does the Sectarian)***

*For what reason do we say that Christians in two congregations, separated by distance and partaking of the Lord's Supper at different times, are communing together? What fact or force can we point to, to explain the togetherness of people taking part in two events that are separate?*

*On the other hand, who can say that Christians in two congregations are not communing together when they eat the Eucharistic meal, whatever they call it?*

*Christians who gather around one table, in one building, at one time, are obviously "in communion" with each other. But how are they in communion, what is their unity, with other Christians?*

*It seems to me that much ecumenical effort is founded upon a faulty assumption about how Christians are united in the meal we call the Eucharist. Is it really possible by a vote in a churchwide assembly to bring about a unity in the meal which did not exist before that action? I don't think so. Eucharistic unity would seem to be created by the fact of our doing the same thing. We commune, they commune, ergo we are united in Christ.*

*This leads quickly to a question about when people are doing the same thing. Was the Quaker meeting I attended as a child at*

*which Ritz crackers and grape juice were offered actually the same thing we do at St. Paul Lutheran, Olean, Indiana? Perhaps ecumenical actions amount to recognition that the others are doing what we are doing?*

*Maybe. But if that is so, refusal to recognize the Eucharistic actions of any other Christians is tantamount to denying that they are communing when they think they are communing. That amounts to calling them liars, and saying they are not Christians but only think they are; we are saying that Christ is not among them.*

*What I am asserting is that denominational declarations of full communion are irrelevant hot air. Christ is present, not at the bidding of a denomination, but according to his own promise, even in the Supper. If there is any unity that matters, among those who partake of the Lord's body and blood, it is a unity that exists because Christ has promised that those who eat truly partake of him, for their salvation. That unity transcends time and space, and it transcends our declarations.*

*Any boundaries drawn by denomination decision are fictions. There are two such fictions, of course. Some churches insist they are "not in communion" with other churches. "Because they don't \_\_\_\_\_, they can't possibly be doing what we're doing." (You fill in the blank, either with a belief or a practice.) "Therefore we are not in communion with them." (And we'll let them know, because when they come to visit us, we won't let them take part!)*

*The other fiction is that, after years of comparing notes, we are now ready to establish "full communion" between the members of our denomination and the members of another denomination. The vote is taken, a rousing joint celebration is undertaken (ironically in one building) and we feel we have enlarged the*

*boundaries.*

*Nonsense. Neither fiction amounts to more than the judgment of some Christians on other Christians. Such judgments neither establish nor confound Eucharistic unity.*

*But not so fast, you say. Are there not very serious differences among us? Do not some Christians hold that the Eucharist is truly the Lord's body and blood, while others deny that fact? Do not some Christians guard the evangelical character of the sacrament, while others surround the meal with strictures and requirements? Does it not matter what we do and say?*

*Oh, yes. It matters. But it is dangerous to confuse our judgments about how the sacred meal should be conducted, and what should be believed about it, with Christ's promise to be present when we eat and drink. We confuse these when we use the words "in communion with" to describe the fruits of ecumenical endeavor.*

*Should we not be ecumenical? Oh, yes, we should care about the oikumene, the whole church. We should awaken to the oikumene. We need to know that the whole church is there, and we need to act like brothers and sisters of those who are our brothers and sisters because Christ calls them our brothers and sisters. He gives them to us!*

*But he does not only do so when our denominational assembly decides they are so similar to us in doctrine and practice that we can swap altars, pulpits, and ministers.*

*What I'm suggesting is: lighten up about the "close" of ecumenical dialogues, the triumphant establishment of communion with one another. Get more serious about the reality Christ himself creates. The ecumenist is not able to "close the deal"*



on unity—Christ already has. Nor is the anti-ecumenist able to “close the door” on other Christians—Christ unites us even if we close our eyes to that unity. (Willy-nilly, LCMS Christians [= Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod, whose communion policy is “for LCMS members only”] , for example, commune with every Christian in the world every time they approach the altar.) Christ will decide all by himself whether to be present at this altar or that, in this fellowship or that. And we had better be cautious before we declare, for instance, as I heard one of our ELCA [= Evangelical Lutheran Church in America with its “open” communion policy] ecumenists declare in a rant, that Southern Baptists are hardly Christian.

Are we serious about the Augsburg Confession’s Article VII? It says that “it is sufficient for the true unity of the Christian church that the Gospel be preached in conformity with a pure understanding of it and that the sacrament be administered in accordance with the divine Word.” Our participation in ecumenical dialogues seems to be based on this sentence. Our goal is to figure out whether they, in their preaching and practice, are as right as we are. Are they? We get into full communion with each other! Are they not? They’ll have to wait, to commune with us.

Is this not shocking? What say do we have, on any given Sunday, about whether the people of some village, gathered around some sort of table by some sort of (let’s say) sectarian minister doing his level best (or not!) to obey the Lord’s command, are actually having TRUE communion? Answer: we have no say.

May we safely assume that all congregations of the ELCA are in communion with each other, based on Article VII? That all our preaching is in conformity with a pure understanding of the Gospel? That all our sacramental practice is in accord with the divine Word?

*What if, in fact, none of our sacramental practice is in accord with the divine Word precisely because, by denying that we are in communion with most other Christians, we are denying the body of Christ? Oh, no!*

*But isn't that what we do? Most Lutherans would say that we are "not in communion" with Roman Catholics or Southern Baptists. We eat the wafer and sip the wine under the illusion that we do so only with our relatives in Minnesota and Pennsylvania, and a few million Presbyterians (effective 1998), etc., and not with the Catholics in the church up the street. Does not that false illusion defy the very promise of Christ, that he is present not at the invitation of a denomination but in our eating and drinking? I believe so.*

*When I was little I lived for a couple years in Barbourville, Kentucky. (It's not on Lutheran maps.) My very Lutheran family attended, but never joined, several types of churches during our seven years in Appalachia. One Sunday we were having Sunday School at the Lend-a-Hand Center on Stinking Creek in Walker, Kentucky, with our good friends Peggy and Irma, who ran quite a mission to the people of their hollow. They were Mennonites, I think. Rev. Russell had come over that Sunday from the Red Bird Mission of the Evangelical United Brethren (hope I've got that straight). In addition to leading us in some songs and Scripture readings, he preached and had communion.*

*Before he began that part of the very informal service, he cast a little aside in the direction of my Dad, whom he knew to be a little testy on doctrinal matters. (Dad had attended Luther Seminary and ministered in South Dakota for a few years.) "We can each take part," he said, "according to our own beliefs."*

*Rev. Russell was being quite generous, he thought. Well, Dad didn't think so. Dad thought he was making things worse by*

*being relativistic. So he leaned over to us kids and told us not to go up. So while the other kids joined in, we kept our seats, smug in the certainty that only those who agree with Luther about the Lord's presence actually have communion. These people had better watch out!*

*Now, I think Luther had it right about the presence thing. I think doctrine makes a difference. I think Christians should discuss our differences, even argue about them. I think we should push the Gospel criterion on our brothers and sisters in other denominations. And we should listen to them. And work together with them.*

*But we turn the sacramental Amazon of God's grace into a stinking creek when we set up fictional "zones of unity," and act like they are of Christ when they are really of our own making. We need to say, as the ELCA, not that Christ is present in the denominations where we say he is present, but wherever Christ has promised to be present. We need to declare that our tables are open to all Christians, and never link that openness to denominational business like how to organize our clergy and seminaries, etc. Let our ecumenical officers be busy linking us to other Christians, left right and center. But let them not pretend they are forging a unity that only Christ can make—and already has.*

*Ecumenical efforts to build cooperation should not be fueled by guilt, but by the Gospel.*

*In other words, we should not feel that it is urgent to overcome denominational differences in order to have communion with others. Bologna. We already have communion with them. What we don't have is a clear understanding of how the Gospel works, in this or that respect. So, assuming the meal-based unity, we work on what is not a given—namely, a pure understanding of the*

*Gospel. And that is something the church will always need to work on, not just between us and others but also in our own denomination.*

*Rev. Marcus Felde, Olean, Indiana*

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# **Exodus: A Saving Event? (One more time. Might it be the last?)**

Colleagues,

Two of my seminary classmates (class of '55) and dearest friends, plus a younger co-confessor named after the first Evangelist, keep beating the drum that Exodus IS INDEED the “central saving event” of the OT. And that I should recant my contrary point of view. They make impressive cases, but I’m not convinced.

1. Basically my contrary point of view comes from New Testament texts. That may already be a fork in the road where my friendly critics and I take different paths. All 4 of us agree that there must be congruence between God’s saving work in both OT and NT. All 4 of us are committed to the High Priest of the “better” covenant (as the writer to the Hebrews puts it), the covenant of his sacrifice that REALLY is the ultimate “saving event,” opening the (otherwise closed) curtain to God’s mercy, God’s forgiveness of sinners.
2. How to read the OT, seems to me, has been a clash-point

for Christians ever since the git-go. The synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke) all present Jesus in constant conflict with his associates on the REAL meaning of the Word of God in the Hebrew Bible. Other major NT writers are involved in the same debate—and not just at the edges, but right in the center: John's entire Gospel starting with the prolog statement [1:17] has Jesus arguing with his critics [even Pilate!] about what the Word of God really says. Ditto for Paul (especially in Romans & Galatians and elsewhere as well) and super-ditto for the Writer to the Hebrews.

3. On another "front," a colleague from Texas has a manuscript that strives to help Christian preachers make better use of the O.T. lectionary texts used in Christian worship. He proposes to present what these texts "meant in their original context" without the accretions and misreadings (sic!) that these texts have undergone as they are used by NT authors. From what he's sent me, though he's a Lutheran pastor, I think he's on the wrong track. How do you arbitrate NT "misreadings" of OT texts? Proclaiming the "real meaning" of OT texts is how Jesus got into trouble with Jewish scholars of his own days (aka scribes = scripture experts) who already knew what those texts meant. Who wss "misreading?" The Texas colleague wants to help Christian preachers use these texts in Sunday worship, a noble goal. But avoiding NT "misreadings," I fear, he'll most likely wind up with preaching helps for today's rabbis, but not for Christian preachers. But that's another ball of wax, a dreadfully important one. My reason for saying that is that most of the sermons I've heard in recent years on OT texts—even from Lutheran bishops—are Jewish homilies. They don't need Jesus. And a sermon on an OT text that doesn't need Jesus to get its hearers to the sermon's goal can hardly qualify

as Christian proclamation. If that's the "real meaning" of OT texts, don't tell Jesus. But I digress. Back to Egypt and the Exodus. Here are some NT-grounded reasons for NOT being excited about Israel's exodus as a "saving event" at all, let alone the central one:

4. Nowhere does Jesus in any of the 4 gospels ever say anything at all about Exodus as saving event. Right now, I can't remember if he ever mentions it beyond that one reference in Luke where he's speaking of his own exodus soon to take place in Jerusalem. Since the evangelists present him constantly in debate about the saving God of the OT, such silence on exodus is passing strange. Conclusion, for Jesus Exodus is ho-hum. Israel's specialness lies somewhere else.
5. Not ho-hum is Abraham when it comes to the location of "saving event" in the OT—especially in John's Gospel, and, of course, everywhere in Paul. Also sometimes David, as in "Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me" is an emblem for OT saving.
6. If you look for an OT text that proclaims salvation to God's ancient people, it is in the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53. Is it an accident that Is. 53 gets cited 33 times in the NT?
7. Those are some of the TEXTUAL reasons for being suspicious, seems to me, about calling Exodus "saving," if you're talking about the salvation that Christians hang their hearts on. Then there are THEOLOGICAL reasons. It is my hunch that these theological reasons were primary in leading first generation Christians, and the Jesus they present to us in the NT, to bypass Exodus.
8. Exodus then and now (together with the Torah of Sinai) is indeed the central saving event of the OT for Jewish believers, as I understand it. When they—at the time of Jesus and ever since—conclude from that conviction that

they must bypass Jesus, the first generation Christians (initially all Jewish) drew a theological conclusion: "The saving we've received in Jesus is different from the saving we used to trust before Jesus bumped into us." [Example: see Paul's own "new hermeneutic" for reading the OT (Gal.4) after his Damascus encounter with the Risen One.] "As we remember Jesus, in his own preaching on OT texts he himself linked HIS saving to God's OT saving with Abraham and David and the promise of its fulfillment in the Suffering Servant."

9. Check out the NT uses of covenant. Over and over again it's God's covenant with Abraham. When you ask for covenant-content it's "promise,...forgiveness of sins,...take away their sins." The one reference I found to "rescue from Egypt" as a covenant is in Hebrews and there the author says it was "faulty." It's fundamental defect was that it didn't get you to the "mercy-seat" of God. That means it didn't "fix" the sin-problem. Does that sound "saving?"
10. Any covenant that doesn't fix the sin-problem, but did remedy other dilemmas, might be called a saving event of sorts. But where is there any parallel, any segue, to Good Friday and Easter Sunday? If there were to be a parallel, seems to me, the Jesus story would have to unfold with the Roman occupation forces drowning in the Dead Sea, Masada never happened, and Judea after Jesus the land of the free. But Jesus, the Moses-figure, got crucified by the "Egyptians" with some complicity on the part of his own countrymen. Sure he was raised, but the citizens of Judea, Samaria and Galilee remained just as un-liberated as they were the day before Easter. This saving event did not take place in a face-off with the Roman imperium. No showdown with Pharaoh.
11. Back there Pharaoh's son died for Israel to be saved. But

it didn't "cost" God anything. At Jerusalem God's son died in the salvation event. It cost God plenty. Where's the congruence? Though it happened in the territory of the Roman empire, the "saving event" unfolded in the "heavenly" imperium, where sinners (not in bondage to their Roman oppressors, but to sin itself) stand face to face with God. But that's not up in the sky somewhere. It's down on the ground where sinners do their sinning. And God does his critiquing. And God's son does his dying. After Easter THAT bondage was broken, even as the Roman legions stayed in charge. That bondage was trumped by freedom. Freedom, as Elert says, in the place where folks least expect it, namely, our linkage with God.

12. The letter to the Hebrews is a gold mine on this one. It's all about "saving events"—supposed ones and THE genuine one. It's central claim is that saving events have to undo sin, else the sinner's plight remains un-fixed and there's no salvation worth talking about.
13. Does any OT text make that claim for what happened when God brought them out of Egypt? Fact is, Jeremiah's word about the need for a NEW covenant says "no" on this very point. A new one is needed that will indeed be centered on this word of the LORD "I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more." Neither Exodus (nor Sinai) claimed to do this. Nor could they, even if the claim had been made. It takes THE Lamb of God, not lambish blood on door posts, to take away the sins of the world. Isaiah 53 is in synch with John the Baptist's finger-pointing: "THIS one is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."
14. Some of my debate partners have urged that I distinguish between Exodus and Sinai. Lutherans that they are, they will grant that Sinai is not really good news since the fundamental reciprocal clause of the contract says "you



get what you've got coming to you." That can't be rhymed with the "grace of our Lord Jesus Christ." But Exodus, they tell me, IS good news, saving good news, parallel in some way to what God is doing in Christ. I ask for the "tertium," the point of comparison, where the two touch, where we can see the saving common denominator twixt the two. I can't find it.

15. Concerning the textual issue of linking Exodus and Sinai: The Sinai report (Exodus 20:1ff) itself links Exodus and the two tablets. "I am the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods . . . .etc." Where does any OT text even mention any valid distinction between the two? Where does any NT text? They are uniformly of a piece throughout the Bible, and neither of them "good enough" to be good news for sinners.
16. Seems to me that Christian interpreters are "stuck" with the decision: To accept or reject Paul's post-Damascus OT hermeneutic in Galatians 4. Granted he didn't have this OT hermeneutic when he "read Moses" before his Christ-encounter. But the Christ-encounter, as he says elsewhere, did remove the veil to read Moses—Exodus and Sinai—aright. How to read Moses "aright" is still the hot potato—not only with our Jewish contemporaries, but also with our fellow Christians. And my experience is that way too many Christians—especially those who get into the pulpit—read Moses "awrong."
17. I am on no vendetta AGAINST Exodus as saving event. My one-string banjo is strumming FOR reading the OT using the lenses that come along with the Jesus event of the NT. Viewed through those lenses, Exodus and Jesus are as different as law (with the wide compass given that term throughout the NT canon) and gospel (with its concrete Christic content). We have ample help for getting these

lenses from the NT writers who wrestled this same problem to the ground in their day. I have some hunches why those lenses are is largely unused, yes unknown, in Christian circles today. But that is another topic.

18. I'll be brash enough to claim Philip Melanchthon's adage as the one I'm hustling here. In Seminex days we called this Melanchthon's "double-dipstick." In the Augsburg Confession and its Apology (1530-31) blessed Philip constantly uses a "double-dipstick" when measuring the Biblical exegesis of texts proposed by his critics, texts that allegedly "prove" faith-alone to be false doctrine. The exegesis proposed by the critics, he shows, fails the "double-dipstick" test. It regularly "wastes the merits and benefits of Christ [one side of the dipstick], and (thereby) fails to give sinners the comfort God wants them to have [the dipstick's other side]." Rightful exegesis would do the opposite "USE the merits and benefits of Christ for what God intended, namely, GIVE sinners the comfort they so sorely need." It's all about the work of Christ and Good News for sinners, two sides of the same dipstick. In a nutshell (Lutheran code language) it's about "faith alone." Since faith is always faith-in-Christ's-promise, if the promise is absent, faith can't happen.
19. When my buddies can show that the Exodus from Egypt passes the double-dipstick test, I'll switch and not fight. For then it is indeed a saving event worthy of the label. Maybe even central.
20. How about this? Taking a cue from Claus Westermann, that "saving" and "blessing" are both good things from God in the Hebrew Scriptures, but "are two alteranate modes of divine activity," let's ask: which one was the Exodus event?

SAVING happens when sinners get made right [Hebrew: "zadik"]

with God—and its “event” character is a word, a promissory word—often of forgiveness—spoken by God and then heard AND trusted by the hearer. That’s not really the sort of event you could film as Cecil B.DeMille did with the Exodus. Such saving events are only accessible if you were “listening in,” maybe eaves-dropping, and thus heard it yourself.

BLESSINGS are hands-on, tangible, “photograph-able” gifts needed for life and well-being, even for survival. It’s opposite is “curse . . .[which] results in death, illness, childlessness, and such disasters as drought, famine, and war.”

Conclusion: Isaiah 53 is about a SAVING event. Exodus is a BLESSING event—maybe even the “central blessing event” in the OT. The first has a direct link to Jesus; the other doesn’t. Q.E.D.

Pax et Gaudium!

Ed

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## **Regime Change and the Word of God. Some Theological Reflections**

In a famous passage in Romans 13 St. Paul claims that “there is no [worldly] authority except from God and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists such authority resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment.”

Paul said this when Nero was Roman emperor. He was the Saddam Hussein in Paul's day—brutal, bloody and possibly crazy. Yet Paul, eventually practicing what he preached, appeals to Nero to adjudicate the legal charges against him (Acts 25), journeys to Rome on that appeal and most likely dies at Nero's hand. Does that prove that Paul was mistaken? We'll never know whether Paul thought so or changed his mind on this one.

If Nero can be "God-appointed," why not Saddam Hussein? That's a tease. Granted, Paul was talking about top-down ruler/subject relations. But couldn't the same be said about ruler/ruler relations? Even if one or both are tyrants? It bends the mind. When Luther once wondered out loud why God would put political authority into the hands of tyrants at all, he concluded: "God gives people the rulers they deserve. God frequently uses one scoundrel to punish another." Ouch! Luther wasn't talking about foreign governments. It was local princes within the Holy Roman Empire, people he knew first hand. But note the axiom for God's operations: just deserts whereby God dishes out equitable recompense inflicting one scoundrel on another. So Luther reasoned, claiming Paul's words for precedent.

Suppose that Paul's political theology is correct. Then God runs "regime changes." Granted he does so through human political power mechanics. Most often. Some rulers just drop dead—others get assassinated—as God manages the managers of secular authority. But for any outsider to claim authorization to make regime change happen? That takeschutzpah. In the OT God did now and then whisper to a future incumbent that he was God's chosen as next in line and that he should press on with regime change. The change-agent was frequently a bloody sword. One scoundrel recompensing another.

The "God-instituted" regime in the USA is presently hyping regime change for another country. Seems to me that's

theologically dicey for several reasons.

1. Right off the bat, that's self-chosen entry into God's own reciprocity regime. "Not recommended," says Jesus himself (Matt. 7:1ff.): "With the judgment you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get." So move very carefully when you're an agent for God's left-hand regime. God's rubrics here are very simple: tit for tat. After these words comes Jesus' zinger about the folly of folks with logs in their own eye removing the specks from the eye of another. He concludes using the "dirtiest word" in his vocabulary for such folks. Check it out yourself.
2. Where's the divine authorization? When two squabbling brothers wanted Jesus to adjudicate their conflict, he responded: "Who made me judge over you?" He said he didn't have such authorization. So he did not intervene. But he did signal that authorization is not a trivial issue.
3. If there is no authorization—from God—for imposing a regime change, then grim consequences can be expected. Especially for the one imposing the change! He "resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment." The Greek word rendered "resist" is a military term "to face off in battle." To face off in battle against God is a sure recipe for disaster—not only losing face, but life as well.
4. There seems to be some consciousness among our American leaders that they do need theological justification for the regime change they are pursuing. But the theology—though quintessential American theology—is very bad theology. It goes like this. We are God's chosen people. We have a mission (from God) for the world. Thus we are the good guys. And our enemies—especially such villainous ones as the ruler in Iraq—are God's enemies

too. The language of good and evil is the easiest way to frame the situation. It's clear which side we're on. That's not even discussable. Only our enemies (or dubious allies) question that. So every "axis of evil" is fair game for us "axis of good" folks. And finally it IS a divine mission. Not just us, but God with us against evil. The Bible says so.

5. Some of you will recognize the classic name for this theology: "Manichaeism" [man-uh-KEY-un-ism, accent on the middle syllable]. Its founder was a Persian (! = right next-door to today's Iraq) named Mani (Manichaios, in Greek) living in the third century A.D. He was a brilliant widely-travelled religious philosopher, a compelling teacher, a talented organizer. He'd been to India and China to study religions there, had contacts with Christians, considered himself to be one. Signed his letters "Mani, the apostle of Jesus Christ." He died by crucifixion at the hands of Zoroastrian priests in Persia in the year 273. Was he a Christian martyr or a heretic? The early church said heretic. So does the Augsburg Confession. "The heresy of the Manichaeans" is the first one condemned in the AC. Says Heussi: "Manichaeism entered the western Roman empire in the late 3rd and 4th centuries, a most dangerous competitor of the church. Though outlawed by imperial edict in 296 Manichaeism vexed the church throughout the centuries as a tempting sectarian option inside the church." And it's back again.
6. So what is it? The central notion of Mani's theology is a sharp dualism (linked no doubt to the Zoroastrian world he lived in); two primordial elements, light and darkness, are positioned against each other. One is clearly good, the other evil. The result is cosmic conflict, played out throughout the cosmos, focused here on earth. Salvation is for the entire cosmos. It comes where the children of

light, assisted, of course, by the transcendent power of light, conquer the powers of darkness. This cosmic alliance for good finally puts down the cosmic axis of evil. It cannot fail. Victory is guaranteed.

7. Granted, even among the children of light, not everyone has the full picture. There are some who are the “perfect” with inside knowledge of how the cosmic network runs. But that’s not true for everyone of the light-folks. Some are still partly in the dark, possibly couldn’t rightly interpret even if they were given full intelligence about the cosmic realities. Others are still listening and learning. They still have a ways to go. I’m not making this up. That was Mani’s version of what Christ was all about. Therefore he signed off as “the apostle of Jesus Christ,” and not just apostle for Persia (today’s Iran). His proposal was a world-wide religion with world-wide salvation, entailing a planetary program that would finally make the world “safe” from the evil networks of darkness.
8. Now do some crossings on your own. Replace the nouns in the 2 previous paragraphs with those in the headlines today—terrorists, war on same, networks, Osama, Saddam, Taliban, Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld, the American people, Muslim fundamentalists, our allies, the “intelligence community,” weapons of mass (=cosmic) destruction, the constant rhetoric of good vs. evil, of good’s assured victory over evil. . . . It’s Mani all over again, isn’t it? And the religious factor of us vs. them—as fuzzy as that all is here—though publicly denied, is in, with, and under everything.
9. But Christians dare not forget that Mani was a heretic then, and the Made-in-America version of his plan of salvation is heresy still.
10. “Aut disce aut discede.” That Latin epigram was the lead-

in for last week's ThTh. "Either discern or de cease." In world politics Americans seem to have a learning handicap. We fought evil in Korea and we didn't win. Cease-fire was the best we got. We fought evil in Vietnam and they beat us. All we got was 50,000 body bags returned to the USA. What our most recent Asian war against evil (Afghanistan) will finally bring us is still a conundrum. And the once-hyped main point of that one, "Get Osama," never happened. So we've conveniently forgotten—in just a few months—that it was the rallying cry. Our learning curve in international politics, for all our smarts, doesn't have much of an arch. Our Mani-mentality factors in to flatten it.

11. Another Asian war? What makes us think that victory is assured—as most everyone seems to be saying, even the critics who speak against it? We were the most powerful military nation on earth during the V-N war and the "little men" of that land licked us. We are even more super-super militarily now, but why trust that as a guarantee for victory? Someone recently said—not thinking he was speaking theology—"Don't play chess with someone from the land where the game was invented. [And then sotto voce: Especially if you're a rancher from Texas.] No matter how mega-sized your chess pieces are, it's about brains, not brawn." Yes, that is macabre. Even more so in the political chess-game with the One who invented (instituted) it. Here especially "aut disce, aut discede" applies. Either learn or die. At least learn the word of God in Matthew 7 and Romans 13. That's not enough Word-of-God yet to get you saved. But it can delay your demise.
12. Goliaths get toppled, lose their heads even, in Biblical geo-politics. The "little guy" regularly walks away the winner. Not because he was more virtuous in the supposed good-vs.-evil cosmic battle, but merely on the grounds of



his godly authorization. So it's back to Romans 13. Who is God's authorized agent for what in the current geopolitical arena? That's doubtless not easy to answer, but why not try anyway? Even with "freedom of religion" so fundamental in our land, has this ever been discussed in the US public arena? Not that I know of. And it is important, not just to get our theology straight, but for our own survival—and that of a multitude of others as well.

13. Which brings us back to the theme of last week's ThTh 222, the R-word repentance. Even though the epigram "discern or de cease" doesn't invoke the deity, it is a cameo version of Preacher Niedner's Ezekiel 33 text of last week, especially 33:9. "If . . . they do not turn from their ways, they shall die in their iniquities." Ezekiel claims it's "The Word of the Lord." Expressed positively: learn and turn and live. Seems to me Paul concurs in Romans 13. If you don't "learn" your political theology right, you have no theological grounds for optimism at all with any regime changes you undertake. Worse yet, you "will incur judgment."
14. Mani was wrong. He was not "the apostle of Jesus Christ." He proposed an "other" gospel. Ditto for his apostles today. So do not trust Mani's gospel no matter who proposes it. Granted Mani too got crucified for his gospel, but that doesn't validate it. Two centuries earlier Another One also got crucified. He had a different gospel. We hear that God vindicated him after three days. God eastering Jesus was God counter-signing Jesus' gospel (with his right hand, of course!), the same God who "institutes worldly authorities" (with the other). The bottom line finally is that simple: "aut Mani aut Jesus"—either one or the other—with two contrary gospels for ultimate salvation and for temporal survival. And you

can only choose one.

Peace and Joy!

Ed Schroeder

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## R-words for September 11

Colleagues,

“Aut disce aut discede.” So said the bumper sticker [yes indeed, in Latin!] that I saw just the other day on our street here in south St. Louis. It’s grim: Either discern or decease. In nickel words: Either learn or die. There’s something Biblical about that epigram. Although the Biblical versions (sometimes) articulate the flip-side: Repent and live. Fifty-two weeks ago Thursday Theology #170 gathered such texts from the Bible as a Word from God for 9-11. [If interested, you can check it out on the Crossings website “September 13, 2001”] There’s been scant evidence, so it seems to me, that any such Biblical discerning/learning has occurred in the USA in these 52 weeks. If the adage is indeed Biblical, and thus true, the prognosis is grim. Even so, eleventh hour repentance [learn and then turn]—if only from a remnant—has promise that the whole people may yet live and not die. That’s also a Word from God.

The main text for today’s posting comes from Crossings colleague Fred Niedner, Theology prof at Valparaiso University in Indiana. Some of you may recognize its links to the ThTh posting of a year ago. It’s Fred’s homily just preached in the Valparaiso University chapel on September 10. You will be edified. I was. And be sure to read the Biblical texts Fred’s using to edify us.

Peace & Joy!  
Ed Schroeder

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***R-words for the Eve of September 11***  
***Tuesday in the Week of Pentecost 16***

***Ezekiel 33:7-11***  
***Luke 13:1-9***

*“Remembrance and Renewal” are our theme words this morning. There’s no mystery about what and whom we’re remembering, nor have we any trouble doing so. None of us will ever forget what we saw and heard, or what we were doing when we first learned what was happening on that stunningly beautiful Tuesday morning last year at this time. Indeed, one would have to be blind, deaf, a frequent abuser of mind-altering substances, and perhaps afflicted with dementia in order to forget. In one way or another, we’ve talked of little else since that day’s devastation.*

*Almost immediately that day we began to traffic in R-words, though not yet RE-membrance. Our leaders quickly RE-assured us that they’d help us RE-cover. Moreover, they had a strong RE-solve to go after those RE-sponsible, and when they found them we would have the satisfaction of RE-tribution, RE-prisal, and RE-taliation.*

*We filled up this chapel on that Tuesday morning a year ago, and again that night, and for several evenings thereafter. We were stunned, numb. Our minds could not fathom nor our hearts bear the weight of what our eyes saw on the television.*

We didn't have a name for what we sought when we came here to be together. It was surely complex, whatever it was. Perhaps RE-newal names it aptly. We longed for nothing more, perhaps, than to go back and start over, to rewind the tape of that week and hope that when we played it again, it would all be different.

I traffic in biblical words, and the New Testament has three words for RE-newal. One of them means to be born again. The other two describe a process of being restored to a prior condition, of no longer knowing what you've come to know through life experience, or of no longer being used for the same, unfortunate purpose as before.

Do you fill an old wineskin with new wine, or expect to pour clear, life-giving waters from a container that's held poison for the last year? That's the condition of our hearts and minds, it seems to me. We desperately need RE-newal.

But I'd like to add another R-word to the conversation today, one that hasn't been voiced about as much as the others in the past year, though some have dared to speak it. It's a word that appears in both the lessons we heard a bit earlier, though thanks to our English translation we could easily miss it in the Ezekiel lesson that's part of this week's lectionary.

In Luke's account of the conversation about gratuitous bloodshed and a tower that came crashing down, the word is unmistakable, however. Jesus asks the disciples if maybe they were thinking that the people who died in one of Pilate's atrocities deserved what they got, or likewise those who were crushed when the marvelous Tower of Siloam fell on them.

Well, yes, that is what they were thinking, matter of fact, just like we usually think that those who suffer or die must have done something that brought that on themselves—they drove

drunk, perhaps, or had unprotected sex, or didn't pay attention to their diet, or SOMETHING! There must be some reason. And when we establish the reason, we'll RE-solve surely not do THAT, so we'll avoid the fate of those poor blokes who weren't careful as they should have been—or as we're going to be.

We are a meaning-making species. One way or another, we will find a way to make meaning out of even the most inexplicable circumstances—including such things as September 11. We have to, because human beings cannot abide chaos.

But so much of our meaning-making apparatus has as its true purpose the taking of control over our circumstances and establishing our own innocence, justification, and rightness. Whatever happened, it wasn't my fault. I'm clean.

Jesus has an R-word for us as we think along these lines. "RE-pent," he says. Never mind whose fault things were. Truth be told, our lives are so tangled and enmeshed, not only in our families but on this tiny globe of a world as well, that it's impossible to determine exactly who's to blame for what.

Besides, all the goodness and righteousness you can muster will never make you exempt from falling towers or killers on the loose.

So don't go any further into the darkness of seeking your own control. Instead, Jesus says, RE-pent. Stop. Look where you are. Turn around. Come home.

Or at least just stop, and turn around to face the one who comes to seek you in the dust and rubble and darkness— Jesus Christ, who also fell victim to Pilate's bloody games, and on whom the vaunted towers of Roman justice and Israel's torah came crashing down in a heap of stones and nails that killed him.

*He comes into our darkness as well, to die with us beneath the horror of what we've all together made of this world. He died with and for all who perished in New York, the Pentagon, and in a Pennsylvania field, including those we blame for it all. RE-nawal will only come through dying with him instead of insisting on choosing our own poison, our own righteousness.*

*The same Spirit that raised him from the dead will fill us, too, in the new year of life we're given today, tomorrow, and each day as we RE-member our baptism, so that we are RE-born, used for a new purpose, cleansed of our sorry, old knowledge and experience and planted again where we can bearsweet fruit.*

*We stand in remembrance today. We await renewal. We stop, we turn around in the rubble, and we pray, "Come, Lord Jesus."*

*Frederick A. Niedner, Jr.*

*Chapel of the Resurrection, Valparaiso University*

*September 10, 2002*

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# **Luther and Islam at the Tenth International Congress for Luther Research, August 4-9, 2002 in Copenhagen**

Colleagues,

From Sunday to Friday in the first full week of August 155

participants from 21 countries met in Copenhagen for the Tenth International Congress for Luther Research. 54 Americans and 51 Germans constituted 2/3 of the assembly. The remaining 50 participants came from elsewhere in Europe and from such far away places as Nigeria, Namibia, Argentina, Brazil, Australia, Japan, Taiwan, China (4!), and South Korea. The theme was "Luther after 1530: Theology, Church and Politics." Morning plenary presentations by top echelon Luther scholars examined continuities and changes on major themes during the final 15 years of Luther's life: Ecclesiology, Justification, Anthropology, Church Order and Political Reality.

In the afternoons ten thematic seminars worked through specific Luther texts from the period. My seminar was on "Luther and the Turks." We examined 3 of Luther's major essays on the Turks (= Islam) from the period. Although Luther himself speaks of mission to Muslims rarely in these texts, my presentation proposed using Luther's concept of *deus absconditus* [the hidden God] as a fruitful basis for religious conversation between Muslims and Christians.

## I. MY PROPOSAL

In Islam the deity remains very hidden indeed. Allah's "otherness" bodes no "image" in any reality encountered in human worldly experience. In contrast to current missiological scholarship that looks for common "grace experiences" as a basis for inter-religious dialogue [see last week's ThTh 220] I proposed Luther as resource for the exact opposite. Namely, dialogue based on common human experience of God's hiddenness, even God's absence, in those segments of life that are not grace-ful at all: sickness, oppression, helplessness, death. Starting from that common base of negative lived experience, subsequent dialogue about grace-encounters in one's own religious world, I argued, are rooted in reality, have more promise.

For Luther too the Gospel is not generic “good news,” but is always linked to specific “bad news” in human lived experience—at its deepest level “bad news” in our encounters with God.

## II. DEUS ABSCONDITUS. WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

Luther came upon the notion of deus absconditus – God hidden – straight from the Bible. In Job, the Psalms and especially Isaiah God regularly “hides his face [or] hides himself.” And it is not good news. It is God’s “strange deed,” his “alien work.” (Is. 28:21) Isaiah says it pointblank: “Truly, thou art a God who hidest thyself.” (45:15) Luther speaks of God’s hiddenness with several different nuances. In all of them, however, God’s hiddenness does not mean that there is no evidence of God at all. Deus absconditus IS a revealer. God’s strange deeds and alien works are everywhere at hand. Theistic evidence abounds. But in that abundant evidence a fundamental aspect of God remains un-revealed – specifically the God-data needed “for us and for our salvation.” **Three nuances**

- a. God’s work in creation proceeds via “God’s masks,” [Latin: *larvae dei*]. God’s creatures are the masks, with God hiding behind the masks. That is already a “mercy” on God’s part, for if sinners were to confront God unmasked, *deus nudus* [God naked], they would die on the spot.
- b. Yet even though it is a “mercy” on God’s part to stay behind creation’s masks, that much mercy does not yet redeem anything in creation, least of all humans. Even more “hidden” in God’s left-hand working in creation is God’s mercy that does redeem, God’s mercy toward sinners. That mercy, the “favor dei” [God’s favor], comes as *deus revelatus* [God revealed]. That term for Luther is not just any



“pulling back the veil” on God’s part, but God exposing a merciful heart to sinners – both in its promissory format in the Old Testament and its fulfilled format in the crucified and risen Messiah.

- c. Yet even here in the mercy actions of deus revelatus, another sort of hiddenness surfaces. God’s mercy in Christ comes “sub cruce tecta” [covered under a cross], not so much “hidden” so that it is not visible at all, but “covered” under what looks like the opposite [sub contrario objectu = under its contrary opposite]. The most bizarre contrary opposite, of course, is the cross itself, both Christ’s own and our own. Yet Christ’s cross is manifold mercy. By his stripes we are healed. And taking up our own cross to follow him conforms us to God’s same mercy-management “for us and for our salvation.”

I propose Luther’s first two meanings of “hidden God” above – God hiding behind creation’s masks, which leaves God’s saving mercy still hidden – as a planet-wide common denominator for building a Lutheran mission theology. Both the person witnessing to Christ and the conversation partner not (yet) enjoying “the merits and benefits of Christ” have this broad base of common experience of deus absconditus. Granted, that’s not yet Gospel, not yet redemptive, but it is a common starting point, where there are common places for conversation—and finally for the question: “How do you cope in your encounters with hidden God? You tell me how you cope, and I’ll tell you how I do.” That is a much more “Lutheran” question to focus on than “What do you believe about God? You tell me and I’ll tell you.”

### III. A FASCINATING LUTHER TEXT

1. At the end of his explanation of the Apostles Creed in the Large Catechism Luther says:

*“These 3 articles of the Creed, therefore, separate and distinguish us Christians from all other people on earth. All who are outside this Christian people, whether heathen, Turks, Jews, or false Christians and hypocrites – even though they believe in and worship only the one, true God – nevertheless do not know what his attitude is toward them. They cannot be confident of his love and blessing, and therefore they remain in eternal wrath and damnation. For they do not have the LORD Christ, and, besides, they are not illuminated and blessed by the gifts of the Holy Spirit.” [Bk. of Concord. Kolb-Wengert, edd., p. 440 (66)]*

2. People who “believe in and worship only the one, true God [but] nevertheless do not know what his attitude is toward them” are people who have indeed encountered God, God as *deus absconditus*, to use Luther’s vocabulary. They have not encountered *deus revelatus*, God revealed in Christ. With no “Christ-encounter,” they “do not know what God’s attitude is toward them,” viz., God’s merciful attitude toward sinners. They do not know the Gospel. Not knowing the Gospel (never having heard it), they cannot trust it, and the last two sentences in the citation above are the inevitable chain reaction.
3. Luther does not confine this analysis to the Turks, but to “all who are outside this Christian people.” [German: *ausser der Christenheit*] So initially I propose to proceed with the same general perspective for all mission theology reflection, and later come to specific focus on the Turks, i.e., Islam.

4. At first Luther's evaluation of heathen, Turks, Jews, or false Christians and hypocrites is surprising: "They believe in and worship only the one, true God . . ." "Only the one, true God"? What does that mean? Since Christ is absent in such believing and worshipping – "they do not have the LORD Christ" – the object of their faith and worship must be deus absconditus, the one, true God, but God with his mercy-for-sinners hidden, undisclosed.
5. Remember that the hiddenness of God does not mean that there are no signals of God at all in people's lived experience. On the contrary. God's creation abounds with such signals, as Paul says in Romans 1:19ff: they have been evident "ever since the creation of the world." But not so the Gospel, God's "mercy to make sinners righteous." Out there in our general experience of God in creation such Good News is abscondita, hidden – often contradicted – in the "strange and alien" God-encounters all people have in God's creation. That Gospel is what deus revelatus is all about (Rom. 1:16f): "For in it [the Gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith."
6. Deus revelatus is God in the Gospel. Deus absconditus is God in the law. It is the same "one and only true God" but as different as left-hand and right-hand. Put into the format of the creed: encountering deus absconditus [Romans 1] is a first-article relationship with God – in whatever form it may take – but not (yet) a second-article or third-article encounter with God-in-Christ and the Spirit of Easter that leads to "new creation."
7. Because deus absconditus encounters with God are common among all human creatures – those who trust

Christ as well as those who do not – there is common ground here, common “God-experience” for Christians to engage in God-talk with “heathen, Turks, Jews, or false Christians and hypocrites.”

8. This proposal is in conscious contrast to the widespread axiom in missiology today that “common experience of God’s grace” is a point of contact for Christian conversation with people of other faiths. The Good News of God’s mercy in Christ is not “common experience” in the God-encounters of daily life, even those that do indeed bring blessings. Those are *deus absconditus* encounters, if for no other reason than that God’s mercy in Christ is not accessible there. It is hidden, thus unavailable.
9. Our common human experience of *deus absconditus* is, however, not all gloom and doom. It includes all the gifts of creation that make human life possible and even enjoyable. See Luther’s gift-list in his explanation to the creed’s first article in the Small Catechism. “Alles ist Gabe.” Everything is a gift. But there always comes a “but.” “But” none of those good gifts suffice to get sinners forgiven, to remedy the bad news that “for all of which I am already in debt to God with unfulfilled obligations.” Those are the words, rightly translated, with which Luther concludes that first-article explanation in his catechism. [Too bad that standard English versions of the catechism mistranslate this sentence into a statement of “duty” and not “over my head in debt.”] God’s gifts of creation are gifts that obligate us receivers to “thank and to praise, to serve and obey him. This is most certainly true.” And where is there one human who is “paid up” in fulfilling these obligations?

For just one day, let alone for a lifetime?

10. Hidden here is God's grace and mercy for sinners who aren't paying up – who can't pay up – their "debts." Forgiveness is also a gift, but a grace-gift with a qualitatively different character from God's gifts in creation. This grace-gift covers failed obligations. It does not impose new ones. But what about the common "God-experience" of gifts received and unfulfilled obligations? Why not start inter-religious dialogue there?
11. Deus absconditus encounters have their downsides, also their dreadful downsides. And that too is common God-experience throughout the human race. Suppose we did begin inter-religious conversation with the daily lived experience of "God hidden"? How do encounters with the hidden God appear in the experience and perception of people of other faiths? How do they appear in the lives of Christians? That leads to the opening question for mission conversation proposed above: "How do YOU cope?" Where in their own "grace" experiences do they have resources for coping with the obligatory aspect of creaturely gifts received, and with the consequences of failed accountability in meeting such divine debts? Once we've learned of theirs, it's our turn to tell of ours.
12. "Having" is one of the key terms in the Luther citation above: "They do not have the Lord Christ." "To have Christ"—Christum habere – is a regular synonym for "faith" in Luther's vocabulary. "Glaubstu, Hastu; Glaubstu nicht, hastu nicht." [When you believe, you have (something). When you don't believe, you don't have (it).] Faith is a having, a possessing of a resource not had before.

And with new resources, you can cope as you were not able to cope before. Yes, even cope with dark side of encounters with deus absconditus.

13. So a missionary coming from this deus absconditus perspective would first of all listen as people tell of the God they believe and worship, listen for what they do have, anticipating that since/if they do not claim the Lord Christ, they do indeed not have him. Signals of such “not having” are consistent with deus absconditus encounters: “not knowing God’s [merciful] attitude toward them, [consequently] having no confidence of God’s love & blessing, remaining in eternal wrath and damnation, not being illuminated and blessed by the gifts of the Holy Spirit.”
14. Note that all of these benefits are centered in one’s relationship to God, and all of them a “having,” a possessing that people did not have before. E.g., the freedom that comes with “having Christ” is first of all a freedom at the point where it is often least expected: “coram deo,” to use Luther’s favorite phrase, as we “confront God face to face.” The unitary Missio Dei perspective widespread today, while not ignoring faith (=having Christ), in no way makes this “face-to-face-with-God” reality so central to the mission task as Luther does here. To modify Hamlet a bit: “To have, or not to have (the merits and benefits of Christ) – that is the question.”
15. It ought to be obvious. In order for someone to “have Christ,” someone else must offer Christ. Christian mission is precisely such an offering. In Apology IV of the Lutheran Confessions Melancthon makes the point that the fundamental verb

accompanying God's promise is "offer" (in contrast to the law's fundamental verb "require"). The upshot of "sharing" deus absconditus experience in mission conversation and dialogue is to listen for and to hear those signals of people's need for Christ – the same need(s) the Christian also has living in the same deus absconditus world we all do. It is humanity's face-to-face-with-God dilemma which "necessitates Christ." That Christ-offer is what the missionary is called to do.

#### IV. GOD HIDDEN, GOD REVEALED IN THE LIFE EXPERIENCE OF MUSLIMS

In the presentation for our seminar I cited selections from the texts listed below. I won't list the citations here, but will summarize: they were expressions from Muslims who now are Christians of their move from a "deus absconditus faith" to a "deus revelatus faith in Christ."

1. Letter from Luther Engelbrecht, missionary to Muslims in India: "What's Good, What's New in the Gospel for Muslims?"
2. Lamin Sanneh. Born and raised in Muslim West Africa [Gambia], now Prof. of Missions and World Christianity at Yale University. "Muhammed, Prophet of Islam, and Jesus Christ, Image of God: A Personal Testimony," INT'L BULLETIN OF MISSIONARY RESEARCH (October 1984), p. 169-174.
3. "Muslims Tell . . . 'Why I Chose Jesus,'" an article in MISSION FRONTIERS (March 2001)

#### V. SOME CONCLUSIONS

1. No one's day-in/day-out religious experience – whatever their religion – is grace alone.
2. To center inter-religious conversation—also with Muslims—on grace-experiences leaves vast areas of God-experience untouched, and almost guarantees that

Christian grace-talk, centered in the crucified and risen Messiah, will be blurred.

3. The grace of God in Christ is not simply an unexpected and undeserved experience of goodness, as one missiologist defines it. It is rather a surprising fresh word of mercy from a Creator whom we chronically distrust, and to whom we are unendingly in debt.
4. Might not this fact – Christians' own chronic distrust of their creator, with all its consequences, and their willingness to confess it – serve as a leaven in the dialogue? Even a leveler? Christians come with paradoxical God-experiences and paradoxical faith-confessions. "Lord I believe; help my unbelief" (Mark 9:24). And Christians admit to being "simultaneously saint and sinner."
5. Thus, Christians are no "better" in their moral life or the strength of their faith than their dialogue partners. They might even be worse. Their claim is not about themselves, but about a Word they have heard, that "surprising fresh word of mercy," which encourages them to live in hope before the face of God despite all evidence to the contrary.
6. Inter-religious conversation that sidelines the negative God-experiences is not speaking the whole truth. To talk about Christian grace-experience without specifying the antithetical God-experience it must cope with does not give the dialogue partner a fair shake. Nor does it clarify the Good and New in the Good News of the one Christians call Lord.
7. When Christians do not hear from the dialogue partners how they articulate their own negative daily life experiences of the divine, and what resources they "have" to bring them through their



own valleys of the shadow, then Christians are left impoverished, and the conversation is skewed.

8. It may sound negative to push religious dialogue in the direction of humankind's common experience of deus absconditus, but it does bear promise. First, it ecumenizes the project to include the whole human race. Everyone has personal data useful for the conversation. Everybody can do it. It is not the preserve of the elite. Second, it's existential, not cerebral— about life, not beliefs. Though beliefs may eventually enter, the conversation begins on common ground. Third, the standard barricades in Christian-Muslim conversations – Trinity, Christ's deity, jihad, morality – are moved away from center focus. Fourth, it's "easier" to get to Gospel. What the Christian conversation partner has to offer is the Jesus story as Good News – something Good and something New – both for Christians coping with their own experience of deus absconditus, and for the parallel experience of their Muslim conversation partners.

Peace & Joy!

Ed Schroeder

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**Willingen II (2002), The 50th  
Anniversary Congress on**

# **“Missio Dei” [Latin for God’s Own Mission]**

Crossings Colleagues,

Just last week, Aug. 18-21, Marie and I participated in “Willingen II,” the 50th Anniversary Congress on “Missio Dei” [Latin for God’s Own Mission]. Exactly 50 years ago in Willingen, a small German town in Hesse, the International Missionary Council from 40-some countries gathered for the first post-WW II international gathering on Christian Missions. Curiously enough the final statement of Willingen I in 1952 didn’t use the term “missio Dei,” but focused its rhetoric on “the mission of the Triune God.” But some reporter, so we were told (probably a German!), used the Latin term in place of “the mission of the Triune God,” and it stuck. Missio Dei has been the shibboleth in mission rhetoric ever since. Willingen II promotional material called participants to reexamine the term focusing on

- a. what it means,
- b. how it’s been used in the intervening half century (for good or ill) and
- c. what its promise is for Christian mission in the 3rd millennium.

Major presentations and presenters were:

1. Understanding and Misunderstanding of Missio Dei in European Churches and Missiology (T. Engelsviken, Norway)
2. Missio Dei in Practice: The Struggle for Liberation, Dignity and Justice in African Societies (K. Nuernberger, South Africa)
3. The History and Importance of World Mission Conferences in

the 20th Century (W. Guenther, Germany)

4. Missio Dei – Its Unfolding and Limitations in the Korean Context (S. Chai, South Korea)
5. Missio Dei – The Poor as Mediators of the Kingdom of God and Subjects of the Church (P. Suess, Brazil)
6. Missio Dei Today – Identity of Christian Mission (T. Sundermeier, Germany)

There were discussion possibilities—in plenum and in smaller groups—throughout the program. Unhappily, because of the early departure of our plane home from Frankfurt, we missed the concluding discussion and wrap-up sessions. So my comments below are based on incomplete data. Another lacuna is that none of the major papers were distributed to the participants, so I have only my scribbled notes to jog my memory.

Even so, it seems to me that Willingen II was a mixed bag. It was great on historical reportage and analysis, but it didn't break new ground. Perhaps the planners organized that way. If so, table conversation showed that I wasn't the only one of the 132 attendees from 21 countries who had hoped for more. Perhaps that Willingen II would palpably “move” beyond the retrospective and the reportorial, to what that marvelous German word “aktuell” means, i.e., “relevant to the current situation.” Topics such as Missio Dei [MD] and the Muslim-conscious World after 9/11; or MD in today's de-Christianized western world, a “mission field” if there ever was one; or even just MD vis-a-vis the horrendous Elbe-flood that dominated the TV during our time in Willingen.

Disappointing for me were some “real absences.”

Absence of any theological examination of Missio Dei as a valid term for mission reflection at all. One colleague pooh-poohed the term at Kaffeeklatsch. “Mission entails a sender. If God has a mission, who sends him? Clearly God in Christ's commissioning

sends us disciples as his ambassadors. But that means we are on mission assignment. What is gained by calling it MD?" In some of the retrospective parts of the program it was noted that seeing mission activity to be the "mission of the Triune God," the actual rhetoric of Willingen I, it was a move away from focusing on the "church's" mission and seeing it as God's own. But once again, what is the concrete benefit of that terminological shift?

As I understand it, Willingen I articulated the "mission of the Triune God" as God's salvation project for the world with "God the sender, Jesus the Christ the one sent, and the Holy Spirit now keeping God's mission going through history." But even here, solid as that sounds, "cui bono"? Who benefits from that re-focusing and what is that benefit? Seems to me that an answer to that might begin by noting that the Trinitarian formulation for God-talk is not first of all "the plain truth about the true God." It is rather the Good News Truth about the true God, God-talk that comes out Gospel. But here I'm already invoking some of the "Augsburg Aha!" that you readers know from previous postings. The mission of God-as-Gospel, is distinct and different from other "missions" that God (the same God) is carrying out in our world. There is a difference between God's left-hand mission in our world and God's right-hand mission. More than one New Testament writer calls that to our attention, pointing out that at the extreme these two missions of the one God are as different as death and life. Although that perspective never surfaced in the plenary papers, you can guess who tried to bring it to the mike in the subsequent discussion.

Throughout there was a "real absence," seems to me, of any explicit use of Lutheran theology, even from the Lutheran speakers (4 of the 6). [Speaker Chai from Korea is Presbyterian and Suess from Brazil Roman Catholic.] I am not hyping Lutheran theology because it happens to be mine, but because of the

alternate hermeneutic it offers for God's word and God's work in the world. More on that below. It's not that the Lutheran speakers denied their Lutheran heritage. They more often ignored it, focusing their message mostly on the ecumenical "party line" that Missio Dei includes both explicit evangelism and social action. Thus any radical polarization between the social action emphasis of World Council of Churches ecumenism, on the one hand, and the evangelization emphasis of Lausanne-linked evangelicals is a no-no. But isn't that a ho-hum? How do you get from there to the "aktuell" stuff calling for Christian mission surrounding us everywhere?

Some of my thoughts about Missio Dei—

1. The current use of the concept (which may not be what Willingen I intended) across the missiological spectrum — from Mennonites and Evangelicals to Mainline Protestants and Roman Catholics — sees God's mission to be all the good things God is doing in and for the world, with Jesus the Christ as God's grand finale in that mission. Christians thus are called to "join in God's mission" with its accents on peace, justice, wholeness of human life and care for the environment — along with salvation for sinners. Important for Lutheran perceptions is to note that there is no fundamental distinction between God's salvation agenda in Christ and all the other good things — care and preservation — that God is doing throughout creation. It is finally a "unitary" vision of Missio Dei. There is no paradox, no tension, between any parts of God's work in the world. If God is ambidextrous, he's playing the same game with both hands.
2. It is therefore no surprise that such a unitary vision of Missio Dei — a big package of all the good things God is doing — pushes Luther to the sidelines. For Luther's basic claim is that God has TWO missions in the world and that

all God's work, even all of God's "good" work, cannot be brought under a single rubric. Luther reads the Scriptures proclaiming that God operates ambidextrously – left hand and right hand – and that these two operations are quite different. One classic text for this is 2 Cor. 3 where the apostle distinguishes the serious differences between God's two ministries (Greek: diakoniai), God's two covenants or dispensations (Greek: diathekai). Those two Greek terms are the closest NT words we have for mission—and in using those terms, the apostle says God pursues two missions, not just one, in the world. Mission theology drawing on such a left-hand/right-hand distinction in God's work is unknown, as far as I know, in today's missiology.

3. Today's regnant missiological paradigm built on such unitary Missio Dei theology envisions mission practice as follows: to seek out the good and godly elements, God's "grace," already revealed among a given people before the Christian gospel ever gets there. When that data is in hand the mission-task then is to link God's Grace-revelation-in-Christ to the Grace-of-God that people have already encountered in their lives. Mission does bring something new, but not qualitatively new. "When the missionaries arrived, they found that God was already there graciously working among the people." That is one way such mission theology gets expressed nowadays, for example in my church, the ELCA.
4. Luther would ask: "Which God was already working there? God-hidden or God-revealed?" Better expressed, since Luther is a Biblical monotheist: "The one and only God was already there, but in which format? Hidden or revealed?" And if the people did not already have "the merits and benefits of Christ" in the faith they confessed, that would answer the question.

5. The *Missio Dei* notion just described builds implicitly (even if unconsciously) on the medieval scholastic axiom: *Gratia non tollit naturam, sed perfecit*. [God's] grace does not abolish nature, but perfects it. No surprise, Roman Catholic speaker Paulo Suess drew explicitly on this axiom for his presentation [see #5 above]. The Lutheran Reformation rejected that axiom for Christian theology and replaced it with a law/promise hermeneutic for reading the scriptures, and a corollary left-hand/right-hand hermeneutic for reading the world. That two-phase hermeneutic grounds Lutheran missiology in relating the Word to the world. My attempt to engage Paulo on this point in the plenary session didn't seem to go anywhere, but later a Reformed missiologist from Holland sought to comfort me with the words: "You're making converts."
6. Thus God's manifold works in creation, the first creation – good and godly though they surely are – are distinctly different from what God is doing in Christ, God's new creation. When once commenting on Paul's vocabulary in the Epistle to the Romans Luther notes that Paul differentiates God's GRACE and GIFTS. All the goodies of creation are God's good gifts (e.g., Luther's listing of them in the Small Catechism on the Creed's first article), but not (yet) God's grace, the "grace of our Lord Jesus Christ."
7. One of Luther's favored terms for God at work in the world apart from Christ is *deus absconditus* (God hidden). He uses this term with several different nuances. In all of them, however, God's hiddenness does not mean that there is no evidence of God at all. *Deus absconditus* is a revealer. Theistic evidence abounds. But in that abundant evidence a fundamental aspect of God remains un-revealed – specifically the God-data needed "for us and for our salvation." The paper I offered at the Luther Congress two

weeks before sought to do missiology from this distinction between God-hidden and God-revealed. I hope to tell you about that next week.

## **Summa:**

The agenda of Christian mission is to move people from a faith and life linked to the hidden-God to a faith and life trusting God-in-Christ. Is that the church's mission or the mission of the Triune God? Answer: Yes. Central to this is that the turf which such Christian mission addresses is first and foremost our relationship with God. Any concern with the world's crying need for peace, justice, wholeness of human life and care for the environment that bypasses this primal agenda doesn't come under the rubric of the mission mandate of the Triune God. Those agendas are admittedly good and godly, but they are God's left-hand agendas, and we are called as God's agents to carry them out. However, what God is up to in Jesus Christ is something else. To use Luke's version of Christ's great commission: "That repentance and the forgiveness of sins be proclaimed in his name."

Peace and Joy  
Ed Schroeder.

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## **A Baptism Serendipity**

Colleagues,

You have been getting ancient Schroederiana in the last five Thursday Theologies, #214-218. Today a return to postings "live." Marie and I have been home in St. Louis, for not yet



quite 24 hours, after our four-week's worth of travel and work in Europe. We thought the primary purpose was to attend two conferences—The Tenth Int'l Luther Reearch Congress in Copenhagen, Denmark (August 4-9) and the 50th Anniversary Mission Congress in Willingen, Germany (Aug. 18-21). I presented a paper at the former and was a discussion partner at the latter. Subsequent ThTh postings, d.v., will tell you about those two events. But other happenings, serendipitous ones, may have been the “real” reason we were brought to Europe. One example is recorded below. Alexei is a friend of ours in Klaipeda, Lithuania. Five years ago Marie and I were ELCA mission volunteers in Klaipeda. I taught for a semester at the seminary there. Before this summer's Copenhagen conference we went there to visit friends from those days. One was Alexei, a Russian, at that time 27, brought to Lithuania with his family during the days of the Soviet occupation. Like many Russians, he stayed after Lithuania regained its independence. Alexei was our Mac-expert for computer help when we needed it. We became more than just commercial acquaintances. In the friendship that grew we learned of his burned-out Marxism, his vague belief in God (though not much of a Christ-component to it), his divorce, his joint-custody of his 5-yr old son. On occasion we talked about faith. He was a searcher. In the intervening 5 years we've stayed connected via e-mail.

Writing him is the first thing I've done after getting home. Sending that letter on to you as a ThTh posting is now the second.

Peace and Joy!

Ed Schroeder

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*Dear Alexei, We arrived back home yesterday (Wednesday)*

afternoon. We didn't record your mailing address when we were with you in Klaipeda, so we couldn't even send you and Sasha post cards from the places we went to after Lithuania. I did send postcards to two of my friends in the USA, Richard Jungkuntz and Martin Marty, asking them to do something for you on our behalf. I haven't yet checked with them to see if they did what I asked them to do.

This was the background of my requests to them: Each of them—years ago—wrote a small book on Baptism. I often used both of these books in the past with my students at the university. So I asked Richard and Martin to send you a copy of the books they wrote—if they were still in print. We think they will be useful for you in your on-going life as a baptized Christian. Since we didn't have your mailing address, I gave them your e-address and asked them to find out from you directly what the proper mailing address would be for sending the books. As I said, I have not yet contacted them to learn what they did—or even if they received my post-card requests.

The main purpose of this message, however, is to reconnect with you now three weeks after your baptism. Marie and I continue to talk about that strange and wonderful event in the apartment just a couple hours before we were to leave Lithuania. We keep using the word serendipity when you asked to be baptized. Our dictionary's definition for that word is: "The phenomenon of finding valuable or agreeable things not sought for." In simpler English: "a happening that is very joyful that you weren't even looking for, a happy surprise."

So now Marie and I discuss what we might do by "long-distance" now that we have this new connection with each other—not just good friends, but fellow members of the body of Christ.

First I want to tell you how we remember the event. Since there

was no video-camera recording it, all we have is our memory to go on. And your memory may give a different report. Yours and ours together may get close to what “really” happened. Saturday afternoon (July 27) the three of us went to the Baltic Sea shore, then to your apartment to enjoy the view, then to pick up Sasha, and then to the sculpture park and evening meal at the restaurant. I had great fun in talking with Sasha, and Marie took photos of him enjoying his gift. I mentioned that I was preaching the next day (afternoon service at the Lutheran church in Kretinga) and you said you’d like to attend. So we parted intending to see each other the next day. On Sunday you and Sasha were there for the service and the sermon, which Pastor Darius Petkunas (my seminary professor colleague from 1997) translated into Lithuanian as I spoke.

After the service we tried to arrange something on Monday, which we did. The five of us—now including Maria—spent some hours on Neringa and on the way back to our apartment we stopped at an internet shop to check our e-mail. Since we were leaving the next day shortly after midday, we said farewell at our apartment, although you did ask for one more get-together the next day (Tuesday) if we had some free time before departing for the airport. There was about an hour free the next morning after we got packed before Donatas and Lineta Romanas were to pick us up, so I called you to tell you that, and in a few minutes you were at our place.

I asked you what your agenda was for this last hour together. You replied that there was one thing missing in your life, namely, that you weren’t baptized. And then you said: “I want to be baptized. And I want you, Ed, to do it.” Neither Marie nor I expected anything like that. We were stunned by the serendipity. I didn’t know what to respond at first. Then I remembered the Biblical precedent for just such a request in the early days of the life of the church, and consciously

thought to take my clues from that text as our conversation continued. The story is in the book of the Acts of the Apostles—the fifth book in the New Testament—chapter 8, verses 26 to 40. I found a Bible in the apartment and read the text out loud. It's a story as serendipitous – and as incredible – as the one we were engaged in. A “chance” meeting between people very different from each other in their personal histories. The “outsider” (an African Jew!) has a question about the Hebrew scripture text he's been reading. The Christian partner Philip (not even a pastor, just a deacon) talks with him about the scripture text, “proclaiming to him the good news about Jesus.” And “bang!” he asks to be baptized. Water's nearby. It happens. And once more “bang!” Philip is whisked away, and the outsider, now a Christ-connected insider, goes “on his way rejoicing.” We never learn what happened thereafter.

The 3 of us then talked for some time listening to you tell us how you understood what you had just asked for, how you understood the Christian faith. And now I wish we had had a tape-recorder for jogging my memory. You mentioned that Christ's resurrection had been a stumbling block for you, a miracle that was just too miraculous to say yes too. You then described your new perspective on Christ's resurrection—how it fits into the whole picture for you. That's really where I wish I could remember your exact words. But we can probably learn that again as you fill in the blanks for us.

We agreed to have the baptism there in the living room, and I would baptize you as you requested. When Donatas and Lineta came to fetch us, we would tell them that they were to be the official witnesses at your baptism. Marie found a clean sheet of paper and created a baptism certificate. We had no books at hand for the baptism liturgy, so we discussed the basics and put them together as our format. Marie brought a big bowl from

the kitchen, put it on the living room table near your chair. Donatas and Lineta came. After a prayer of invocation, Lineta read the Biblical text about the African and Philip, you made your own confession of faith in the triune God, I poured handfuls of water over your bowed head reciting the Triune baptismal formula, Donatas repeated the formula piece by piece in Lithuanian, and Marie gave a concluding prayer. There was rejoicing.

We then put our luggage into D&L's car, agreed to stop for two things on our way to the airport. #1 a short visit to the Lithuanian Christian College campus where both Donatas and Lineta are profs; #2 a quick lunch at the Biscuitas restaurant near the college. You came along for the college tour and then went to bring Maria to the restaurant. Our lunch was both a celebration of your baptism and a farewell for the six of us. We remember that Maria raised questions from her own Russian Orthodox heritage if this was a genuine baptism. I asked Donatas to respond in Lithuanian to bridge the language gaps I would have had in doing so. From what I understood, Donatas explained at length how baptism is universal throughout the various confessional traditions; both immersion and washing have NT precedents and image two different aspects of baptism—dying and rising with Christ on the one hand and on the other hand, washing and cleansing for a new life. Maria's next problem was that she wasn't present for the baptism. You admitted, Alexei, that that was a mistake. Still we had a grand celebratory last meal.

In our own thinking, Alexei, we know that new Christians (yes, even old ones too like us) need nourishment and the support of other baptized believers. We asked Donatas and Lineta to be conscious of their calling in this matter for you—just by virtue of the “accidental” connection they had with your baptism. We hope that they can do that in face-to-face ways.

*And we urge you to look around for people and places to become your support community. We'll continue, of course, to do the same through cyberspace. But that does not have the possibilities that we had with our own face-to-face time together at the end of July.*

*Two items I will offer for future e-mail exchange: One is to share with you some of the clues in the New Testament for linking your own baptism with Christ's resurrection, that "sticky" point in your previous thinking about the Christian faith. The second is to pass on to you a few paragraphs in Martin Luther's Small Catechism about Baptism. If you wish, you could contact Darius Petkunas to get the Lithuanian text for Luther's small catechism. It could even be that he has a Russian text for it as well. I know from friends in St Petersburg that there is a Russian edition of that catechism.*

*I'll close now. There is lot of catch-up work for us to do in these first days after being away from home for 4 weeks. Writing to you was at the top of the list.*

*Give our greetings to Sasha and Maria.*

*Peace & Joy in Christ!*

*Ed and Marie*

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# **A Theology of Acceptance –**

# **Part 2 Edward H. Schroeder Proceedings of the 1964 Valparaiso University Workshop and Institute on Human Relations**

## **THE FACT OF ACCEPTANCE IN JESUS CHRIST**

The New Testament sees the word acceptance written large over the New Testament era. The New Testament is a new deal from God, the new age, and acceptance is one title for the age. In Jesus' first recorded sermon in Luke's gospel, following immediately after his baptism and testing in the wilderness, He is in his hometown synagogue. His text is the lection for the day from the prophet Isaiah: THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME BECAUSE HE HAS ANOINTED ME TO PREACH GOOD NEWS TO THE POOR. HE HAS SENT ME TO PROCLAIM RELEASE TO THE CAPTIVES, AND RECOVERING OF SIGHT TO THE BLIND, TO SET AT LIBERTY THOSE WHO ARE OPPRESSED, TO PROCLAIM THE ACCEPTABLE YEAR OF THE LORD. Luke catches the drama of this debut as he further relates, "And he closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant, and sat down (the traditional pose for the teacher) and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." In short, He says: WHERE I AM SPEAKING, ACCEPTANCE IS HAPPENING. What Isaiah hoped for has arrived. Just what this all means is by no means self-evident, for this sermon debut which opened with such expectant drama closes with an equally dramatic attempted lynching. Jesus indicates that as the one who brings the fulfillment of this long-awaited era of acceptance, He Himself is the prophet who

will not be acceptable in his own country. And His explication of that brings a quick close to the sermon as the listeners move to prove how unacceptable this particular prophet is. Luke records: "When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath. And they rose up and put him out of the city, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their city was built, that they might throw him down headlong." At this point in Jesus' career they do not succeed, but the direction is given for the eventual climax of the prophet who fulfills. Nevertheless He is the Fulfillment of the acceptable year of the Lord.

In his correspondence with the Christians in Corinth, St. Paul also picks up this note of the new era of acceptance which now exists by virtue of Christ. Because the Corinthian Christians are themselves residents in this new era, Paul entreats them not to waste it: "We entreat you not to accept the grace of God in vain, for God says" AT THE ACCEPTABLE TIME I HAVE LISTENED TO YOU AND HELPED YOU ON THE DAY OF SALVATION." Paul's own comment on this Old Testament assertion (also from Isaiah) is, "BEHOLD NOW IS THE ACCEPTABLE TIME: BEHOLD NOW IS THE DAY OF SALVATION." In the actual Greek text Paul uses a different word for "Acceptable" in his own comment on the word from Isaiah. Isaiah's quotation uses the normal adjective from the verb "accept." It is the acceptable time. Paul uses a term which might be translated in the superlative: Behold, now is the super-duper-acceptable time. Now that we stand already on this side of Christ's resurrection, we have received more than Isaiah imagined.

Just what is it about the life and work of Christ that makes the time (history itself) one of acceptance and super-duper at that? We could fairly easily envision that such a perfect man might himself be acceptable, and therefore his own personal history and biography would be a piece of acceptable history, but what



about that one small piece of human history that ushers in to history the age of acceptance? HOW DOES HE MAKE THE WHOLE AGE ONE OF ACCEPTANCE? JUST WHAT WAS ACCEPTABLE ABOUT HIM IN THE FIRST PLACE?

## **“BUT EMPTIED HIMSELF”**

We might first be prompted to answer the question of Christ's acceptability, by simply saying, Why, He was the sinless Son of God. Obviously, He is acceptable. Although the New Testament never denies that Christ was the sinless Son of God, it never (to my knowledge) fastens on this divine heredity as the grounds for God's approving and accepting Him. In fact, most often He is accepted by God for almost exactly the opposite grounds – namely, that He got mixed up with sinners, with those who were more sons of the devil rather than sons of God. Not because He hung on to His divine heredity while He was incarnate, but because He sacrificed it in order that others might attain it. This is St. Paul's perspective in the classic Christological passage in Philippians on the mind of Christ: “who though he was on the form of God (had the divine heredity by divine right) did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped (exploited for oneself), but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men ( and for Paul that does not mean just having arms and legs, it means being a man “after the fall”). And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient until death (that is the situation of life after the fall), even death on a cross. (And now comes the evaluation and acceptance.) THEREFORE GOD HAS HIGHLY EXALTED HIM AND GIVEN HIM A NAME THAT IS ABOVE EVERY NAME IN HEAVEN AND EARTH, (namely) JESUS CHRIST IS LORD” – that is what God Himself ascribes to him. And when men ascribe Lordship to Jesus (1964, A.D., e.g.,) they are not competing with the Lordship of God the Father, but they are glorifying God the Father.

Throughout His ministry Jesus is consistently tempted to exploit the divine heredity:

- a. In the wilderness with the tempter who calls to His mind the discrepancy between His divine heredity and the starvation He faces;
- b. in conversation with His own disciples, for example, moments after Peter makes his confession to Jesus' heredity, "You are the Christ, the son of the living God," Christ says: Good enough, and now as such I must head for Jerusalem and good Friday. To which Peter, amazed, responds: "God forbid! This shall never happen to you. You're the Son of God, aren't you?" But Christ senses once more that this is the satanic use of divine heredity – to be used for self-preservation, and so He dismisses Peter with a shattering condemnation of unacceptance: Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance (scandal) to me; for you are not on God's side, but on men's side.
- c. Right down to the wire, as He is already elevated on the cross, the temptation comes to exploit the divine heredity: IF YOU ARE THE SON OF GOD, COME DOWN FROM THE CROSS AND THEN WE WILL BELIEVE YOU.

Christ's acceptability mysteriously inheres in the divine heredity sacrificed instead of exploited. It was just such a perspective that characterized the working Christology of Luther as he mulled over such assertions of the apostles that Christ became a curse for us, that, although sinless He was, He became a sinner, yes, He even became sin itself (II Cor. 5:21). In the Galatians commentary of 1531 Luther worked out this character of Christian Christology in detail in his exegesis of the Galatians passage 3:13: Christ BECAME A CURSE FOR US. Robert Bertram summarized this aspect of Luther's Christology in a paper entitled HOW OUR SINS WERE CHRIST'S. Much of what I say below is drawn from Bertram's work.

## FOR US

The acceptable year of the Lord comes into being with the predication to Christ of such key terms of unacceptability as sin and curse. Despite His divine heredity and without specific sinful acts in his biography to point to, sin and curse are predicated to Christ. However, in the two chief New Testament passages where these terms are predicated to Him, Paul adds the soteriological concern to the purely Christological one. He became a curse for us. He is made sin for us. Luther sees this "for us " as soteriological necessity. "Our sins," he says, "must be Christ's own sin, or we shall perish eternally." "If He is innocent and does not carry our sins, then we carry them and shall die and be damned in them." "But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

As usual, Luther is developing this apparently pessimistic Christology in contrast to the scholastic tradition of his day with its emphasis on Christ's sinless character. Although at first the scholastic emphasis would appear to do great honor to Christ, Luther sees it as doing just the opposite (RWB, 2) "If the sophists had their way, if it were true that Christ is 'innocent and does not carry our sins,' then we carry them and shall die and be damned in them.' But, says Luther, 'this is to abolish Christ and make Him useless.' That is the 'shame and infamy' (and not praise and honor) of denying Christ's sinnerhood."

Therefore it must be said that "our sins 'are as much Christ's own as if He Himself had committed them.' We can state the matter another way: Our sins are Christ's not by means of some transcendent, super-historical transaction, in which God simply 'regards' our sins as his or simply 'imputes' our sins to Him, but by means also of His own immanent, historical 'bearing' of these sins- ' as much Christ's own as if He Himself had committed

them." Although Christ did not of course commit them, He becomes a curse and sin, not by divine make-believe and pretending, but by the same concrete historical facts and situations that ordinarily cause our own sins to be predicated to us and therefore render us unacceptable.

First for example, Luther argues (with Paul, he thinks) that if Christ died, He must have been under the law. The law condemns only sinners to death. A non-sinner it cannot and will not kill. It did kill Christ. Therefore He was under the law, therefore He was sinner. For unless He had taken upon Himself (our) sins...the law would have had no right over Him.

Second, the point of Christ's biographical sinnerhood is His association with sinners. Fraternizing with us enemies of god, He joined himself to the company of the accursed. Therefore when the law found Him among thieves, it condemned and executed Him as a thief. At this point Luther uses a now familiar word in complaining that the sophists "deprive us when they segregate Christ from sins and from sinners."

Thirdly, the sins of the world which the Lamb of God took upon Himself as Luther understands it is no abstract universal, not just sin in general. It is exhaustive of every actual sinner and sin in history. Luther represents Christ as saying, "I have committed the sins that all men have committed," – "the sin of Paul, the former blasphemer, of Peter who denied Christ, of David...an adulterer and a murderer and who caused the Gentiles to blaspheme the name of the Lord." Here too Luther has a soteriological interest, for if Christ really bore the totality of factual sinfulness of real people of all the world, then He also bore away my own de facto sinfulness, since I am one of those real people who constitute the whole world.

Fourth, Luther notes that Paul does not use the adjectival form

(Christ is sinful or is accursed) but in both places he uses the substantive form. Christ is sin itself, the curse itself. Which, says Luther, is the way a sinner reacts when he really comes to a knowledge of himself. He can no longer distinguish between his own self and the sinfulness, as though the two were separable. That is, he seems to himself to be not only miserable but misery itself; "not only a sinner and an accursed one, but sin and the curse itself."

Fifth, our sins are so much Christ's own that He bore them not only psychologically but also, as we do, bodily – "in His body." For Luther the usual ascription to Christ's bearing our sins in His body is that by His bodily dying, He put those sins in His body to death. In bodily death not only the body, but also the sinner and his sin, curse, and impending death, is exterminated.

Sixth, just as we with our sin, so Christ in assuming our sin is sinner by His own choice. "Because He attaches Himself to our sins 'willingly' (sponte), He has only Himself to thank for the fact that He is liable for them. Christ being in the company of sinners is not caught in some arbitrary guilt by association – in innocent ignorance or against His will, but 'Christ was not only found among sinners, but of His own free will...He wanted to be an associate of sinners....' Thus 'the law came and said: 'Christ, if you want to reply that you are guilty and that you bear the punishment, you must bear the sin and the curse as well.'"

Luther exposes Christ's sinnerhood in fullest measure, so that the law is at its strength when it puts Him to death as the sinner of sinners. For it is this same law at its holiest and best, which in the fantastic conflict (duel) that ensues, is eternally discredited. The other tyrants that render men unacceptable as well – sin, devil, curse, wrath, death – are present not as caricatures but at the height of their power and

authority. Since these are the real tyrants with which men must reckon in their acceptance or rejection before God, the fantastic duel of Good Friday and Easter Sunday becomes a most joyful one. The secret to the duel is that the “grace of God and the blessings of Christ” are locked in mortal combat with the full powers of the curse and other tyrants “in this one person.” When the clash finally comes, the divine powers – life, righteousness, blessing – of course prevail over their lesser opposites, death, sin, curse. But the secret is that both sets of contraries are really Christ’s. And when the law and curse do what they have to do to a sinner, attack him and kill him, they were in this one instance attacking the Prince of Life.

“Christ’s intentional self-incrimination, His personal decision to attach Himself to the enemies of God – the very reason He was cursed, and rightfully – was the selfsame decision of the selfsame person (the merciful decision of the divine person) which to curse (or to seek to destroy) is sheer blasphemy. The curiosity is not how blessing conquered the curse, but why curse even tried to wrestle with blessing, why death tried to overcome life. That fantastic duel is reflected in the great Easter hymn: CHRIST LAG IN TODESBANDEN. “It was a strange and dreadful strife when life and death contended.” Luther says that because God’s blessing and our sins were so intimately joined in this one person (the incarnation is not just the union of God and man, it is the union of God and a sinner), law and curse, which had to exert themselves against sin, had no choice but to condemn and thereby condemned the divine blessing as well. The upshot of this strange and dreadful strife (as the Easter hymn continues) was that “victory remained with life, the reign of death was ended.”

## **LOVE**

When asked what makes the sinnerhood of Christ possible at all,

Luther answers: Christ's love. And Christ's love is not confined to the second person of the Trinity, but it is the same loving will which He shares with the Father. (RWB, 11) "The indescribable and inestimable mercy and love of God," who saw "that we were being held under a curse and that we could not be liberated from it...heaped all the sins of all men upon Him." The culpable decision by which Christ attached himself to the enemies of God is simultaneously the decision of this very God. "Of His own free will and by the will of the Father He wanted to be an associate of sinners." Indeed, it is "Only by taking hold of Christ, who, by the will of the Father, has given Himself into death for our sins, that we are drawn and carried directly to the Father." Here is the exclusive claim: Divine acceptance by Christ alone. No one comes to the Father but by Him. Apart from Him the tyrants that really tyrannize men – sin, death, wrath, law, curse – that render them unacceptable to God and make it well nigh impossible for them even to accept themselves – apart from Christ these tyrants remain in force. Non-acceptance prevails.

If normal life after the fall is plagued by the mystery of guilt and shame that betrays our non-acceptance, the mystery of the acceptable era and the foundation of any theology of acceptance is equally a riddle. Luther remarks that "the human heart is too limited to comprehend, much less to describe, the great depths and burning passion of divine love toward us. Indeed, the very greatness of divine mercy produces not only difficulty in believing but incredulity. Not only do I hear that God Almighty, the Creator of all, is good and merciful; but I hear that the Supreme majesty cared so much for me...that He did not spare His own Son...in order that He might hang in the midst of thieves and become sin and a curse for me, the sinner and accursed one, and in order that I might be made righteous, blessed, and a son and heir of God (those are the biblical synonyms for acceptance).

Who can adequately explicate this goodness of God? Not even all the angels."

For Christian theology, that is the big mystery about acceptance. That it is totally and exclusively wrapped up "in his body" and "in His person." The communication and extension of this acceptance is relatively less of a mystery. If the Christ of Easter morning is the completion of the acceptance of unacceptable men by God, then affiliation with Him is the simple mode for having the acceptance oneself. "There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus," says the Apostle in Romans 8. He is arisen, tangible evidence that God accepts Him and accepts His work. "If any man is in Christ, he too is a new creation, the acceptable era, the old has passed away – at least the inevitable necessity of life under the curse of non-acceptance after the fall □ behold the new has come," St. Paul says in 2 Cor. 5, and it is only a few verses later that he entreats his readers, "Behold, now is the acceptable time."

## **MINISTRY**

But the apostolic interest in the communication of this acceptance goes further than just to say: somehow get in touch with Christ and then you have it. That could become a subtle kind of Pharisee heresy itself. Instead, the transmission of Christ's acceptance is no less the result of divine initiative than was the foundation work of Christ himself. The closing paragraph of 2 Cor. 5 ties this communication of acceptance to the great act of Christ's accepting ministry. After the assertion about the new creation in Christ, Paul continues: All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled (that is a term of acceptance) us to Himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation. (God Himself has now passed on to us this ministry of acceptance) John 29, Matt. 28, Matt. 9. That is, God was in Christ reconciling (accepting) the world unto Himself,



not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. (The message, the kerygma, of this completed acceptance is the divine heritage entrusted to Paul and his fellow Christians. Thus he can continue: SO WE ARE AMBASSADORS FOR CHRIST, GOD MAKING HIS APPEAL THROUGH US –that same appeal which a generation previously He had made through the lips of His first acceptable Son in whom He was well pleased) WE BESEECH YOU ON BEHALF OF CHRIST, BE RECONCILED TO GOD (and then Paul unloads the message of acceptance – condensed in one verse) FOR OUR SAKE HE MADE HIM TO BE SIN WHO KNEW NO SIN, SO THAT IN HIM WE MIGHT BECOME THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD. “Righteousness of God” means to be as righteous as God Himself is righteous. That is perfect acceptance. That is what Adam and Eve apparently thought they were striving for, to be qualitatively as God Himself. But this quality of the righteousness of God comes to you; you do not work your way up to it.

Even if Paul should be speaking in the editorial plural in 2 Cor. 5 and referring only to his own commission as an apostle, the ministry which he has in mind here is by no means limited to the clergy. The promulgation, promotion and propagation of the ministry of acceptance is not the exclusive job of the churchly professionals, although they surely ought to be doing it, if they are worth their paychecks. It is a quirk of the history of the English language that minister and ministry have come to be associated with the professional clergyman. In the New Testament era anyone who had responded to the “come unto Me” of Christ became Christ’s minister. He also received the “go ye into the whole world” not into foreign countries, but into your own home, village, family, neighborhood, into your own little world which is still foreign territory as far as the kingdom of God is concerned, and therefore unacceptable until the message of acceptance is planted into that soil. Minister is not a cast

designation – workman. One of the classic New Testament references to this is the statement in Ephesians 4:11 ff.: AND CHRIST’S GIFTS WERE THAT SOME SHOULD BE APOSTLES, SOME PROPHETS, SOME EVANGELISTS, SOME PASTORS AND TEACHERS, TO EQUIP THE SAINTS FOR THE WORK OF THE MINISTRY, WHICH IS BUILDING UP THE BODY OF CHRIST. There are the pros, all right, and they are Christ’s gifts to the church, but here the work of the pros is not even called ministry. Their job is to give the common saints, the laity, the necessary equipment so that they, the laity, can do the work of the ministry in all the corners of the world and nooks and crannies of human existence where they live. And that is the way the Body of Christ grows. That is the way the acceptable age expands in time and space. Earlier in the letter the Apostle has referred to the mystery, which in our terms we can define as the eyeblinking, head-shaking surprise that in Christ every unacceptable man is accepted to God. Then he goes on to call it an integral part of the “plan of the mystery” “that through the church (i.e., accepted unacceptable people) this manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the principalities and powers,” those dueling opponents of Christ which seek to keep men unaccepted and in bondage.

LHRAA has for years been isolating the changing but ever recurring shape of the principalities and powers to whom and before whom God’s accepted people must announce and show forth the new era of acceptance. The church is people, but the church is people entrusted with the kerygma of reconciliation and acceptance. This is the power which is turned loose in the world to proclaim and thus actually to create the acceptable time of the Lord in the world of men after the fall. This is the ministry of acceptance. On sober reflection such a ministry sounds incredible and out of this world, but it is no more incredible than that first recorded Christian sermon – and that was incredible – when that young Jewish man stood in the

synagogue in Nazareth – not out of, but out in this world – and said: “The acceptable year of the Lord? This day that phrase has come true in your lives. Don’t waste it.”