

Book Review – J.A. Nestingen: MARTIN LUTHER: A LIFE

Colleagues,

For this week's ThTh posting a book review. Peace and Joy!

Ed Schroeder

***James A. Nestingen, MARTIN LUTHER: A LIFE.
Minneapolis: Augsburg Books. 2003. 111 pp. Paper.
\$9.99***

Nestingen has given us a winsome "Life" of Luther, presenting a complex figure in a conflicted era in a little over 100 pages. And it'll play in Peoria. Illustrated with color photos from the Luther movie now making the rounds, it is a "must" read for any discussions that, many of us hope, the Luther movie will generate. [We've already had one such with Roman Catholic friends who invited us for dinner a few days ago just to talk about the movie.]

Of course, Luther's life is an incredible story—even for folks not in the Lutheran club. Yet Nestingen makes that story credible, and even a story that makes sense. Partly this comes from the fact that Nestingen—I witnessed him once "live"—is a master story-teller. For "Luther: A Life" he does so with broad attention to the facts of Luther's tumultuous times, plus great skill in weaving them into a real life story. A special "tease" is the author's "Lake Wobegon" dry humor (doubtless his

Norwegian heritage) that accompanies his narrative at unexpected places—as droll as Peter Ustinov’s portrayal of Elector Frederick in the movie.

Here are some of his bons mots:

Concerning the sale of indulgences: “There is good money in bad religion.”

“Martin Luther was a printer’s dream. At one point in the 1520s, three-quarters of the material in print in Germany had been written by Luther.”

“Dumpy little Wittenberg with its university became a dynamite closet.”

Called on to recant at Worms, “like a good professor, Luther began to make some distinctions.”

Nestingen’s segue to Luther’s marriage to Katie: “There is something peculiar about a monk writing an essay like ‘The Estate of Marriage’ and discoursing on diapers.”

On Katie herself (more so than Luther, Nestingen presents her in heroic format): “Once when bleakness was upon Luther and he had gone to his office, she had the door removed and forced him out.”

Luther and Erasmus: Is human will in bondage (so Luther) or free (Erasmus)?: “Erasmus looked at life from the top down; Luther from the bottom up.” After their classic debate: “Luther won the battle even if in the end he lost the war. . . . Erasmus’ view became a keystone for modern life. Luther’s was ignored.”

Not just from the pulpit, where he could talk the language of “the folks,” but also in the classroom, “Luther was always a

preacher.”

Concerning Agricola (Luther’s faculty colleague) and his alleged anti-nomianism: “Agricola argued that trying to make people legally righteous by scaring the hell out of them doesn’t produce faith but self-protection.”

Concerning the umpteen glitches that almost derailed the Lutherans from making their Confession at Augsburg (1530): “Once more, it looked like things would finish before they even started.”

Seems to me that Nestingen gets the theology right. Luther’s fundamental “Aha!” was how to read the Bible so that you hear Gospel, the Christ-quotient in the scriptures. From that Aha! “Luther had a sense of the rhythm of life in Christ. It was and is...a broken meter—a dance of dying with Christ in the crucifixions of everyday life to be raised with him to newness of life—life in faith.”

Which led to the 95 theses on indulgences and the fracas they created. “By the time the smoke cleared, Luther had become—for all intents and purposes, and by accident—a church reformer. It was hardly a calling he sought.”

As Luther’s theology took shape, he articulated it in “opposing pairs,” paradoxical pairs he found in the Bible itself: “law and Gospel...two kinds of righteousness, the two kingdoms, or the Christian’s life as saint and sinner.” “The trick to understanding Luther is to find the pairing and to catch the way the contradictions work on one another and how they develop out of the first Gospel, God’s gracious act in Christ Jesus.”

Nestingén applies the “sinner and saint” set of terms to Luther himself. So we see no unblemished superstar, though superstar he was. Nestingen captions Luther’s shadow side, especially in

his senior years, as being “sick and tired of being sick and tired.” Luther’s sinner-side is not ignored. What trumps even that, of course, is not his “better side,” but The One whom Luther claims to trust even in these valleys of the shadow in his life. None of us, he said, at the end, gets out of life as a hero. “We are beggars. That’s the truth.” But the Good News right in the face of such truth is: Look WHOSE beggars we are!

Ten chapters of about 10 pages each. Nicely parcelled for discussion. Easy to read. A delight to read. GO for it.

Theses on “Biblical Authority and Biblical Hermeneutics” by Werner Elert

Colleagues,

Recent ThTh postings have highlighted Biblical hermeneutics (HOW one reads the Bible) as the jugular in current church debates—especially within stateside Lutheranism. Along the way these postings have articulated a specific hermeneutic and then claimed that it is at the center of the Lutheran Reformation. Some readers have wondered where I got such ideas. ‘Tis now the time to ‘fess up. Here’s how it happened. It was Summer Semester 1953 at the University of Erlangen in Germany—just 50 years ago. Dick Baepler, Bob Schultz, and I were there doing theology. Schultz had just graduated from Concordia Seminary (St. Louis) and was getting started on his doctorate. Dick and I, only half way through at Concordia, had finessed scholarships for a year in Germany

from Deutsches Hilfswerk. [Of course, we had to get the seminary's permission to "escape" for a year.] We three wound up at Erlangen, largely upon the advice of Jaroslav Pelikan, who was prof at "the sem" right then. "Wanna learn real Lutheran theology?" he asked. "Then study with Elert at Erlangen. He's a Lutheran confessional superstar and he's free from Missouri's hangup with verbal inspiration." As you will see below.

So we made the pilgrimage. Dick and I came back after that year to finish at St. Louis in '55. Schultz pressed on and got his doctorate. One course we all attended that summer was Elert's lectures in dogmatics. His pattern was to lecture for most of the hour, and then, minutes before the bell, stop and say: "Ich diktiere." Whereupon he would dictate theses summarizing what he'd just told us. [He called them "Feste Saetze," solid sentences.] These I was able to copy down—auf deutsch, of course—and subsequently translate into English. Here's the section of those theses on hermeneutics and authority of the Bible. I've tried to "lighten" Elert's academic German a bit in my translation. Even so, my spouse/proof-reader says my English still calls for another translation—this time into "real" English. Well, I tried. Real theology takes real work. Marie says she does "get" it. I trust that you will too.

Peace & Joy!

Ed Schroeder

THE WHAT AND HOW OF GOD'S REVELATION
[Das Offenbarwerden Gottes]

(A section of the “Feste Saetze” from Werner Elert’s lectures in Dogmatics at Erlangen University, Summer Semester 1953)

I. THE GOSPEL Intro: “Dogma” is the early church’s technical term for the “Sollgehalt” of the “kerygma.” “Sollgehalt” = what’s gotta be there if proclamation is to be genuinely Christian.

1. The kerygma of the Christian church is, according to the unanimous testimony of its primary witnesses, Good News, Gospel.
2. The Gospel is both a report (indicative sentences) and a message personally addressed to us (exhortation). The Gospel indicatives predominate in the 4 written Gospels of the NT, the exhortation in the apostolic epistles.
3. As indicative sentences the Gospel reports about Jesus in such a way that the word of God is perceptible in him. Christ is the LOGOS (Word) of God (Jn.1). This LOGOS is the “logos tes katallages,” word of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:13).
4. The human speech of the apostles is also called “God’s word” because the person of Christ constitutes its substantive content. Insofar as later proclamation has the same substantive content, it too can be designated the Word of God.
5. The Gospel as exhortation is the application of the report (the indicative sentences) about Christ to the hearers and readers. To this goal the written gospels report how Jesus called his hearers to come to him (Mt. 11:28). The witness of the apostles adds to the reportorial word of reconciliation the additional element of exhortation, an appeal (Greek: paraklesis) to the hearers: “We appeal to

you, be reconciled to God" (2 Cor 5:20).

- 6. In its exhortation mode the Gospel expresses the fact that its substantive content is meant for the hearers. Its aim is to "strike" them, to lay claim to them.*
- 7. All of the apostolic speaking is but the means, the medium, for making the reported event audibly available. The apostles witness to the reconciliation; their testimony does not create it.*

II. FAITH

- 1. The willingness of hearers to acknowledge the substantive content of the gospel as something meant for them and to relate its effective force to themselves is Faith.*
- 2. Faith entails an "obedience," namely, the willingness to submit to the Gospel's exhortation. In this sense faith is obedient submission—not however, submitting to a command, but to the "paraklesis," the Gospel's appeal [I:5 above]. Faith shows that the hearer has indeed been "struck" by the Gospel.*
- 3. The effective force of the gospel for the person of faith arises from the fact that its content is the incarnate Word of God.*
- 4. The criticism that this is all an illusion (e.g., Feuerbach) arises from observers who persist in the posture of mere spectator. By contrast persons of faith know that they have been called out of their spectator position. Believers lose dominion over themselves by handing themselves over unconditionally to Christ as their new Dominus (Lord).*

III. THE LAW AS REALITY INFLICTED BY GOD

- 1. The gospel promises, and faith is, a change of*

existence. Humankind's old existence, according to the testimony of the apostles, is "life under the law." For the apostles this phrase means: being dominated by the law, imprisoned by it, enslaved under it.

2. The law concretely effects God's curse and wrath.
3. The law is effectively in force, not because it is spoken or written, but because it is inflicted by God. Law is not moral prescriptions, but is instead the ominous destiny that hangs over every sinner's head.
4. The law applies to all without exception, for according to Paul's specific testimony it is effectively in force even where it is unknown, at least where it is unknown as God's written law.

IV. THE CONCEPT AND DIALECTICS OF REVELATION

1. Gospel and law cannot be coordinated as two segments of an historical development, nor as two communications mutually supplementing each other. Even if the term "revelation" is used for both in the Bible, it would be invalid to conclude that finally they are not contradictory in their respective effects.
2. God's law, which is inflicted upon us (III:3 above), and the Gospel of which we are the beneficiaries correspond to the NT testimony about God's dual revelation. Corresponding to the law is God's revealing his wrath and humankind's sin; corresponding to the Gospel is God's revealing his mercy and humankind's faith.
3. Both revelations, i.e., law and gospel, stand in a dialectical relationship with each other. They are like a speech and a rebuttal which contradict each other, and yet both are indubitably valid. What one

reveals the other covers up; when one lights up, the other is darkened.

- 4. The paradox of this dialectical conflict reaches its finale in Christ, and finds its resolution in him alone. He alone could take the voice of the law and both make us hear it, and also on his own silence it. He was the victim of the law's order of sin-and-death and simultaneously its conqueror. He alone could open up the grace of God and simultaneously close off God's wrath.*
- 5. The paradox is resolved only for those who have faith, the ones who have been struck by the Gospel because they previously were struck by the law.*

V. FAITH'S KNOWLEDGE OF GOD AND NATURAL KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

- 1. The knowledge of God we have, which is correlative to God's self-revelation in Christ, is not to be confused with mere intellectual apprehension. Faith's knowledge of God entails the involvement of one's entire person, an involvement consisting in our prior awareness that we have been "known" and that we really are the ones who are meant in the summons that addresses us in Christ.*
- 2. So-called "natural knowledge of God," the reality of which is not to be doubted (Rom. 1:19), is rooted in the fact that God actually does encounter humankind in every earthly event. Denial of this encounter is atheism.*
- 3. Corresponding to this natural knowledge of God is God's revelation of his wrath (Rom. 1:18) in the law's order of mortality. This knowledge needs to be conquered by faith in the revelation of grace that comes in Christ.*

VI. GOD'S WAY OF REVEALING THE SINNER

- 1. God's law is God's judicial action. It exposes*

sinners to be “under the judgment of God” (sub judicio dei).

- 2. Through that action God passes sentence on everyone, together with our entire natural self-understanding.*
- 3. Through God’s law the power of fate’s coercive force upon us is revealed to be God’s power, and our self-assertion against it is revealed to be revolt against God.*
- 4. Through the law not merely individual sins are uncovered, but each of us in our entire person is exposed as a sinner, as one who exists in hostility toward God (Rom.8:2).*
- 5. The law leaves no area of our life immune to its accusation. It thereby convinces us that our sinfulness extends all the way back to our natural origin. Sin understood as natural man’s congenital opposition to God is designated original sin.*
- 6. Sin is designated as guilt inasmuch as it is personally charged to our account.*
- 7. The inescapable nature of guilt (revealed in the way the law makes no exception as it carries out its death threat for every sinner) reveals God to be the one who kills his own creatures, the deus absconditus (God with mercy hidden).*

VII. THE SACRED SCRIPTURES

- 1. The theological problem of the authority of the scriptures confronts both the individual Christian as well as the total church. It is both subjective (the Bible as authority for me personally) and objective authority (Bible as authority in the church’s public life).*
- 2. Subjective authority: The OT and NT scriptures certify themselves to the Christian via the*

“internal testimony of the Holy Spirit” as God’s word of law pertaining to each Christian and God’s word of Gospel meant for each one.

3. Objective authority: For the church at large the problem divides into three questions:

- the authority of the NT,*
- the authority of the OT, and*
- the authority of the canonicity of individual NT books.*

4. THE OBJECTIVE AUTHORITY OF THE NT resides in its character as source and norm for the Gospel actually is.

5. It is the only authentic SOURCE for our knowledge of God’s historical self-revelation in Christ, since this could only be certified authentically by eye and ear witnesses (Luke 1:2; 1 John 1:1), and since we today have no access to the oral, but only to the written testimony of these witnesses.

6. It is the only and absolute NORM for the church’s total kerygma (Gospel-proclamation), since the apostles themselves (via their reception of the Holy Spirit promised them by Christ) became organs for God’s self-revelation, and because all subsequent events that happen in the church must be normed by this revelation.

7. As the sole source and norm for what the church does, the written apostolic witness needs no supplemental additions from other witnesses. The “sufficiency” of scriptures needs no filling-out from “tradition.”

8. THE OBJECTIVE AUTHORITY OF THE OT: Before Gentile audiences the apostles did not make the validity of their witness to Christ depend on any previous acknowledgment of the OT. This fact is significant

even today for Christian mission to other peoples in the world.

9. For three reasons the Christian church acknowledged the OT as a normative word of God.

A. The God of the OT is also the Father of Jesus Christ and thereby also our Father.

B. In its promises the OT too is testimony to Christ.

C. The OT (not in the Mosaic law, but definitely in the prophets) is not merely witness addressed to the ancient covenant people, but also witness about all peoples and addressed to all peoples.

10. For the first two reasons (A & B) the authority of the OT in the Christian church can only be understood from the authority of the NT; its content can only be understood from the content of the NT.

11. CANONICITY OF INDIVIDUAL NT BOOKS: The opinion that the post-exilic church is the guarantor of the NT canon is misleading, since the church as far as she was concerned stood uninterruptedly under the apostles' authority—at first that of their oral testimony, and after their death, under the authority of their written testimony. Instead the reverse is true: it is the church which received the canon from the hands of the apostles; she did not create it.

12. Concerning the canonicity of the vast majority of the NT documents there never was any doubt in the church. They are the "homologoumena" (agreed-upon texts).

13. The decisive factor for their canonicity was and is the bond between their content and their origin.

The criterion of content is that all the homologoumena engage in what Luther called “Christum treiben.” They “push” Christ. In contrast with all later witness of the church, of which the same “Christum treiben” would also hold true, the homologoumena are original witnesses—derived from no previous source known to us. Wherever earlier sources are drawn in, as in Luke 1:1, these are nevertheless available to us only via the mediation of the canonical homologoumena.

14. The question of the canonicity of the “antilegomena” (books spoken against by some) still confronts the church today just as it did the church of the fourth century.
 15. For interpreting the scriptures two fundamental axioms apply. Their classical Latin labels are a) *perspicuitas* (*scriptura scripturam interpretes*) [[transparent clarity, with scripture interpreting scripture], and b) *analogia fidei* [the yardstick of faith]. In practice that means: “dark” passages of scripture are interpreted with the help of “clear” ones to get clarity. “Clear” passages are clear Gospel (=promise) proclamations. Since faith is always faith-in-the-promise, these two Latin mottoes are correlative: the “yardstick” of faith means faith in the “clear” promissory Gospel of the scriptures.
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Another Look at the “ELCA Study on Sexuality: Part Two”

Colleagues,

Response to ThTh 275 (=my own examination of the recent ELCA study of sexuality a fortnight ago) was modest in number. The opinions expressed varied from one ELCA pastor slapping my wrists for breaking the 8th commandment in my critique of the Task Force’s work, to another’s: “Hooray!!! Yes, yes, yes!!!” Another sought to give the Task Force more credit than I did and then cheered my heart by concluding: “I want to thank you for being a reasonable voice in this discussion.” From another: “Thanks for this ThTh – very helpful.” And from a retired ELCA seminary prof this restrained kudo: “Great Thursday Theology today. Made my morning, at least.” Most extensive response is the one I’m passing on to you in its entirety today. Not only extensive, but intensive is Timothy Hoyer’s probing–deeper than I did two weeks ago–to what he finds the Task Force doing, namely, “veiling God’s law.” He borrows this expression, of course, from St. Paul (2 Cor. 3) and rings the changes on it as Paul does with the Corinthians. The veiling goes with a specific way of reading the Bible–in that day “reading the old covenant.” Paul’s angle is that despite their love affair with the law, Bible-legalists are compelled to “veil” the law. Why? For self-preservation. Lest in facing the law’s full force they would have to confront their “Terminator” (as folks in California might say these days). Needed, of course, is You Know Who to terminate the Terminator. “Only in Christ is the veil set aside.” From which follows this result: “Wherever the Spirit of [this] Lord is, there is freedom.”

Timothy says it better than I do. So read on. You may remember him from previous ThTh postings. He’s an ELCA pastor in upstate New York. His e-address is <gloriadei@alltel.net> Timothy is not

timid. But he is on target.

Peace & Joy!

Ed Schroeder

THE TASK FORCE ON SEXUALITY VEILS THE LAW; CHRIST UNVEILS IT BY HIS DEATH AND RISING

The crucifixion of Jesus teaches us what the law does—it puts us under God’s condemnation of death. Or, as St. Paul says, “The law brings (God’s) wrath.” The law is understood as such only because of the resurrection of Christ Jesus. The resurrection removes the veil from the law so that its full power is seen. The veil can finally be removed because the resurrection of Christ overcomes God’s judgment of death. With that remedy we can face the law’s lethal force. The Apology of The Augsburg Confession puts it this way, “However, the law always accuses us; it always shows that God is angry. Therefore God is not loved until after we grasp God’s mercy by faith. Not until then does God become someone who can be loved” (Book of Concord, Kolb/Wengert, 141.129).

When the law remains veiled, the law is defined with its lethal force hidden, as is done by the Task Force for ELCA Studies on Sexuality: Part Two, “Journey Together Faithfully.” “God uses the law to reveal our sin, our estrangement from God and each other. The law also provides norms that govern life in this sinful world” (p. 8). “God’s laws are grace filled, manifesting a basic concern for the life, health, and good order of the community” (p.15). “The concerns that generated the law in the first place” have to do “with the life and health of our

communities and not individual rights" (p. 15). "We see the law not simply as judgment but as revealing God's loving will for all creation and for our own lives as God's children" (p. 23). "The law is good and points to God's will for humankind" (p. 24). In the Glossary, law is defined as: "God's goodness experienced as demand upon us, showing us our need for grace; rules that guide our living together harmoniously" (p.49).

The Task Force's understanding of the law is veiled. The crucifixion of Christ is not seen as God's wrath against us that Christ took onto himself for our sake. When the law is veiled it is limited in its power because it does not put us under God's judgment of death. When the law is limited, then the gospel has less to save us from, which obscures the glory and honor of Christ. A limited, veiled law makes Christ less necessary.

When the law is veiled, the law is used to say certain acts are according to God's will and certain acts are against God's will. That implies that Christians are to follow the law so that their lives are "pleasing to God" (p. 14). "Things that are morally wrong and sinful are a violation of the command to love God and the neighbor" (p. 25). From this veiled use of the law come the squabbles and bickering about what is or is not God's will. "Homosexual marriage is wrong. No, it's not. Divorce is wrong. No, it's not. Blessing same gender marriages is against the Bible. No, it's not." Such concern about discerning God's will in order to be in compliance with God's law shows a complete disregard for Christ's death, resurrection, and his new commandment to love one another with his love that makes people right with God. The veiled use of the law makes people think that if they do what is right then they are right with God, that they please God, and that they do God's will. That is simply to trust the law, which is idolatry at worst, works-righteousness at second worst.

The veiled use of the law makes us think that some things we do please God and some things don't. The Task Force almost, almost overcomes this veiled thinking when it writes, "Luther said that sin is unfaith" (p. 25). Luther understood that the law does not say some things are right and others are wrong to God. Rather, the law damns us by showing us that all we do is wrong to God. "All that is done without faith is sin" (Romans 14.23). "Scripture consigned all things to sin" (Galatians 3.22). "The law gives knowledge of sin" (Romans 3.20) by saying that everything we do must be done in faith or it is done in rebellion against God. The law then shows us that we do not have faith, we do not love and trust and fear God above anything else (the meaning of the First Commandment in Luther's Small Catechism). Without faith we are against God. And, as is unknown to the Task Force, God is against us. "This same innate disease and original sin is truly sin and condemns to God's eternal wrath all who are not in turn born anew through baptism and the Holy Spirit" (Augsburg Confession, Article 2).

When all we do is sin because we do not have faith, there is no hope in quacking about what is right or wrong to God. Everything is wrong. And we cannot become right to God by doing things according to God's law, for they are still wrong. We cannot overcome God's judgment of death by having Christ help us keep the law. Christ and the law are opposed to each other. The law brings wrath, Christ brings mercy. The law states all who sin shall die. Christ promises all who believe in him will never die. To say that faith in Christ enables us to keep the law is the same as saying that Christ wants us to damn others to hell. This we do when we say that certain actions are wrong because they are against God's law. Those who have a veiled use of the law think that if the person would only not do that specific sinful action, they are then okay with God, which makes Christ totally unnecessary.

A veiled use of the law is to use the Bible in ways described by the Task Force as “consistent faithfulness to the Bible” (p. 20). “We humbly seek to understand God’s will for our lives as it is expressed in the Bible” (p. 8). Although the Task Force writes, “That experience of justification by grace through faith guides Lutherans’ attempts to understand God’s Word” (p.8), their veiled use of the law makes the Bible, not a witness to Christ and faith in him as our righteousness, but a rulebook to understand.

When the law is veiled it cannot tell us which actions are sinful. If a person kisses their spouse, is it a sin? A veiled use of the law would say it is not a sin because there is no specific objection to it in the Bible. So a person, by the veiled use of the law, does not need Christ. They have not sinned, God is not against them, and Christ’s crucifixion was a useless act. That veiled use of the law does not look at our hearts and whether we have faith or not. But the unveiled use of the law would say that without faith in Christ kissing one’s spouse is a sin. Thus, God is against us, Christ is needed, and his death and rising are what make God merciful to us.

In the same way, the veiled law cannot tell us what God’s will is for us or what is right. If parents are to be honored (The Fourth Commandment) and a child is obedient, has that child done God’s will? A veiled use of the law would say that the child has done God’s will. An unveiled use of the law would say that if the child does not have faith in Christ then the child has not done God’s will. So a veiled use of the law cannot define what is good because it does not get to the heart of the matter, namely, faith.

The Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article 4, states that if our works are acceptable to God because they are in accordance with the law, then the promise of Christ is

destroyed. "When works are commended, we must add that faith is required—that they are commended on account of faith. For one has to distinguish the promises from the law in order to recognize the benefits of Christ" (Book of Concord, Kolb/Wengert, 149.184). "For good works in the saints, as we have said, belong to the righteousness of the law. They are accepted on account of faith, not because they satisfy the law" (Book of Concord, Kolb/Wengert, 159.252). Thus, to look to the law or to the Bible as a rulebook to figure out what is God's will is to not trust Christ that he is God's will for us.

Lastly, the veiled use of the law, with its confusion about what is right or not, cannot give peace to the conscience. When Biblical scholars differ about meanings of words, when theologians differ about interpretation of verses, when some say an act is sinful and others do not, how is anyone to be sure that what they do is pleasing to God? Not by following the law in its veiled use, and definitely not by looking to the unveiled use of the law that brings God's judgment of death. Thus, a veiled use of the law will keep consciences worried about whether they are doing the right thing and whether or not they are pleasing God and get eternal life. The Reformers determinedly dismissed a veiled use of the law to say what was right to God and what was sinful. "Only that which brings peace to consciences justifies before God" (Book of Concord, Kolb/Wengert, 146.179). "However, we have shown with sufficient clarity that good works do not satisfy the law of God; that they require mercy; that God has accepted us on account of Christ by faith; that good works do not bring peace to the conscience" (ibid, 170.358). "In all of these passages, in which works are praised, it is necessary to return to the rule given above, namely, that works are not pleasing to God without Christ because Christ as the mediator must not be excluded" (ibid, 171.358).

A veiled use of the law excludes Christ. So we are not to use the veiled law.

Faith in Christ is what makes our actions pleasing to God. So let us live in Christ's Spirit and give his love and mercy to others. The giving of Christ's love and mercy is the guide that will keep us helping our neighbors, keeping them safe and healthy, and surpassing the law's demands. Rules will still be used to order society so that people are cared for as much as humanely possible, thus, protecting them that they may be given Christ's mercy. And when we are in Christ's mercy, we live, not by the law, but by his mercy and love.

Timothy Hoyer

September 25, 2003

Andrew Weyermann in memoriam

Colleagues,

Andy Weyermann was my seminary classmate, my seminary roommate, my Seminex teaching colleague, and we both did doctoral work with Helmut Thielicke during his heyday at the University of Hamburg in Germany. Summa: Andy and I were buddies—even though a sophisticated New Yorker and an Illinois farmboy in the same dorm room at Concordia Seminary in the early 1950s often led to situations too humorous to mention. Some of that humor recurred—mixed in with Gospel goodies—when Marie and I visited Andy at home a fortnight before he died. We flew back to Milwaukee a week ago Saturday for his funeral at Capitol Drive Lutheran Church. It was a celebration that Andy had choreographed himself—especially

the music—in advance.

There were three tributes to Andy during the liturgy – from Richard Koenig, Paul Thielo, and Andy's son James. Dick Koenig had a prepared manuscript. I have his permission to pass it on to the ThTh readership.

Peace and Joy!

Ed Schroeder

Andrew Michael Weyermann
January 4, 1930 – September 6, 2003

Friends in Christ, especially members of the Weyermann family and Lois, his faithful wife and companion, God's peace.

In the course of negotiating this mysterious yet wondrous journey we call life, we encounter people of all sorts and conditions. Some we know for a long time, others for just a brief while. A few of those along the trail become friends, not merely acquaintances but friends. Such persons are gifts of God and such a person was Andrew Weyermann for me. I have often thanked God for that gift and could speak long and fulsomely about Andy as a kind and patient friend. In these few moments, however, I'd like to share with you some of the things about him that led me not only to love him but admire him.

For most of his career as an ordained Lutheran minister, Andy was a teacher of homiletics, the art and discipline of preaching. Under Andy's tutelage the sermon escaped all moralism, religious cliches, gaseous emoting, pious rambling, or institutional tub-thumping to emerge as an event that

effected a real difference in the real lives of real people. And what was it that made him the teacher of preaching and the preacher he was? In a 1978 article he wrote in tribute to Dr. Richard Caemmerer, his mentor and ours as preachers, Andy described preaching as “autozoography.” Auto-zoe-graphy. It was a word he coined to denote the source of the preacher’s proclamation: our spiritual life (zoe) in distinction from our physical life. Dynamic proclamation of the Gospel, he said, emerges from the region of the preacher’s own personal encounter and traffic with God. In making such a statement Andy was in fact talking about none other than himself. He could teach preaching the way he did and communicate the kind of insights that made his publications so popular because he was the person he was.

Andy was a person who inveterately strove against all self-delusion and inauthenticity in a relentless pursuit of truth. This was clearly evident in his ongoing dealings with God. For Andy as a committed–yet postmodern–believer, God was experienced as both hidden, even absent, and revealed. Again and again he would ask himself and others how we can speak of God’s goodness or presence in the face of the suffering of the innocent and the horrific evil that scars the human story. Or how can we flawed and fallible creatures presume to claim God’s beneficence in the light of God’s critique of our actions even when we are at our best? In short, in his relationship to God, Andy always stood aware of the God of mystery, awe, even terror. But, and this is the wonder of Andy’s faith, it was engagement with this God who always confronts human beings as a problem that drove him to Christ, God’s own answer to the problem he poses for mortals by suffering for us and with us in the Cross of Christ. There grace and love abound for us. Grace can only be grasped by faith, but that faith is enough to bring life from death, hope from despair, see beyond the darkness and

mystery and behold God as Father and Friend. That is what made him the great preacher, great teacher of preachers, and the great colleague he was for all of us who strove to believe with him and work with him in the cause of the Gospel.

Andy Weyermann's rigorous honesty and integrity were qualities which illumined the dark days of the controversy which broke over the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod in the late 60's and early 70's. He harbored no illusions as to the cost that the struggle would entail. Yet, I never witnessed Andy sanctifying his stand or demonizing those who were bent on removing him and his colleagues from the positions to which they had been called. I always thought of him in these days as embodying St. Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 13, 8: "We cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth," the truth of the Gospel of the glory and grace of God.

Along with his commitment to truth, I think no one who knew Andy could fail to perceive his commitment to the radical, even extravagant, practice of love in all areas of life, even the most commonplace. The frequent references to St. Francis of Assisi, one of the Church's most luminous exemplars of love, in his writings witness to his preoccupation. His compassion for the suffering and the oppressed sprang from the love which dwelt within him and always searched for expression. It was love which fueled his passion for justice in the social and political order, love as the signature of the new order for the world that God has inaugurated in Christ.

I said Andy's faith made him a great preacher, a great teacher of preachers, and a great colleague in the cause of the Gospel. It also made him a great human being. I never ceased to marvel over the breadth and depth of his appreciation for music, for poetry, for film. My visits with him would always end with his handing me one or more CDs or records with a comment like,

"Here, Dick, on this one you'll hear how the work should be played." After conversations that probed and analyzed some ecclesiastical or theological problems for hours, the talk could and often did shift to such monumental questions as prospects for the New York Knicks or the Milwaukee Bucks, or which Milwaukee restaurant might be chosen to serve the best in German cuisine.

Andy's humanity was also evident in his home life. He was deeply devoted to his first wife Wilma and suffered great grief when she died. I worried about him at that time and wondered whether he would find his footing in life again. He did, thanks be to God, largely by virtue of the life and love he was given by Lois who was of great help to him as he continued his ministry as a parish pastor and an author. (The guy for all his gifts never did learn how to use the computer—or even the typewriter. He left that up to Lois.) All of his friends know how deeply devoted he was to his children, each one of them singular and different, all of them productive of accomplishments that gave him quiet joy and pride. And it goes without saying that the love he had for his children extended in like measure to the grandchildren who lightened the darkness even up to his last days.

This was, as our Jewish friends would say, a real Mensch.

In the period following the doctors' final report on his illness, friends and colleagues from all over the country traveled to Milwaukee to say their good-byes, a tribute to him and the love that many had for him. These were beautiful but emotionally wracking occasions, never to be forgotten by us who experienced them. Then to our utter amazement Andy was granted nearly nine months more of life, a wonderful gift in spite of the discomfort and fatigue that he experienced at times in this period. I am glad for the chance to say how much I loved him

just before he went into hospice. Had I had the chance, I would have said to him again, as I did last December, and so say now, "Andy, thank you. It's been a privilege to know you, a real privilege." With that I believe I speak for us all.

(Still) In Bondage to Biblicism – “ELCA Study on Sexuality: Part Two”

Colleagues,

LET THERE BE LIGHT

“It’s better to light a candle than to curse the darkness.” That was the motto of a Roman Catholic organization, whose mailings somehow came my way years ago. I think they were the Christophers. Perhaps they still exist. I no longer remember what they did. But their motto I’ve not forgotten. So here’s striking a match—if not to light a candle, then to see if we can find where the candle is in the darkness of the ELCA’s homosexuality hassle. And darkness there is. Also in this just-published (September 2003) “ELCA Study on Sexuality: Part Two” [ESSP2]. It consists of two booklets [hereafter B1 and B2]—24 and 49 pages respectively.

Tim Hoyer reviewed an earlier publication from the ELCA task force in Thursday Theology #262 (June 19, 2003). [Archived on the Crossings website: <www.crossings.org>] He called it “short on promise, long on law.”

ESSP2 brings no relief. And that is doubly painful, since “law and gospel” are hyped over and over again in B2 of the publication as Lutheranism’s treasure—but never used to bring light into the homosexuality hassle.

B1 is a “Background Essay on Biblical Texts.” Two senior ELCA Bible scholars (one “traditional” on the homosexuality issue, one not so) conduct the survey.

They review the scholarly literature on the “hot potato” passages in the Bible, the ones that speak (or maybe they do not) about homosexuality. And there are only a few such passages—three at most in the OT (the major one in Leviticus) and three in the writings of Paul in the NT. None of these six references is a “discussion” of the topic. Two of the OT texts are stories of male gang-rape. In the other four texts same-sex activity is one item in a roster of wicked behavior. In Leviticus the penalty for all items on the list is the same: “they shall be put to death.” In the NT lists “Gentile” same-sex behavior signals that God has already “given them up” (Romans). In the other two lists the sanction is “no inheritance in the Kingdom of God” (I Corinthians), and in I Timothy they are “contrary to the glorious Gospel.”

B1 is a marvelous piece of work. It covers the waterfront—and does so with nickel words so we all can understand what’s going on in these “hot potato” texts, and also how tough it is to get at the “real” meaning of the key terms.

But B1 does not answer the question it poses for itself at the very beginning: “How is it that biblical scholars, studying the same texts and using comparable methods of interpretation, come to different conclusions?”

In their 4 “final observations” the two professors conclude:

1. Homosexuality as a sexual orientation is unknown in the Bible.
2. Where the Bible does speak of same-gender sexual relationships, some interpreters say this, others say that.
3. The “fault line” between these interpreters is not liberal vs. conservative. [Even Luther’s own translation of the Bible on these texts comes out “liberal” on one passage and “conservative” on another!]
4. Although “the Bible is the primary place to which Christians turn to discern God’s will,” decisions concerning homosexuality “cannot be arbitrated by Biblical scholars alone.” There’s no one answer in the Bible. So, as strange as it may sound, the Bible’s “help . . . remains modest.” Those who “seek the mind of Christ in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit” on homosexuality, say these two professors—remember they are on opposite “sides” in today’s debate—need to look elsewhere for help.

The “how come they come to different conclusions?” question is left unanswered. Look elsewhere, we are told. Such counsel, “look elsewhere for help,” may come as a jolt to folks who claim to take their signals from the Bible, but it is perhaps the best directive in all of ESSP2. Look elsewhere. But then where? B2 does, in one sense, look elsewhere by examining other data about homosexuality—historical, psycho-social, “scientific.”

But that’s looking in the wrong place for how to read the Bible. The fancy word for that is hermeneutics. Looking in those places does not bring light, the needed light, to these Biblical texts. It does not light a candle, does not lighten our darkness.

It has been the frequent claim (a.k.a. Ed’s one-string banjo) in these postings that the “Augsburg Aha!” about how to read the Bible does indeed lighten our darkness. So “look elsewhere.”

yes. First of all look at HOW you actually are reading the Bible, and if you're doing it wrong, then "look elsewhere" for a better way to do so. And for the ELCA task force, that factors out like this: since you are the ELCA., look to the "CA," the Confessio Augustana, the primal Augsburg Confession (1530) for what "L" means. And in doing that you see that the "L" is all about the "E"-vangel, the Gospel. Capitalize on the "Augsburg Aha!" about reading the Bible with lenses that distinguish law from gospel.

ESSP2 could have done so. But it does not. Perhaps the task force wants ESSP2 to show us the wide diversity in ELCA opinion. Also that such diversity comes from serious folks of good will and faith—not from screamers to the left or to the right. That it does indeed do. But will the next production, ESSP3, finally USE Lutheran hermeneutics to lighten our darkness? If so, why wait so long—to be Lutheran in reading the Bible and wrestling this one to the ground?

THE DARKNESS OF BIBLICISM

Another quote/anecdote. Way back when (possibly during my grad. studies in Germany half a century ago) there was this famous German professor, of whom it was said: "With every brilliant lecture he sheds darkness on a wide variety of subjects." ESSP2 brings no new light to the subject. There is still darkness. And that is sad, of course. For the people of good will and good heart on the task force want to illuminate, want to light candles. Why then darkness? The fundamental reason—so it seems to me—is expressed in the topic listed above for this posting: "(Still) In Bondage to Biblicism." Biblicism is the way the Bible is used in ESSP2. And that's darkness, not light.

Calling it "Biblicism" will doubtless raise hackles within the task force whose hard work is presented here. Yet this is not an ad hominem evaluation, a smear word. Some of the folks I know.

They are good people. Biblicism is an objective predicate, not about a person, but a term for a specific way of using the Bible. It's finally a bad way, because, to use the most critical word in the Augsburg Confession, it's short on Gospel, and thus "buries" Christ.

Biblicism IS a dirty word—across the board of the theological spectrum. Even conservative theologians object to being tarred as Biblicists. They don't "worship" the Bible, they say. [Agreed.] They worship Christ. [Agreed.] And then on the rebound from Christ they go "back to the Bible, [allegedly] taking it just as it is, and reading it for what it actually says" and then "doing all that the Bible says we should do." Aye, there's the rub—doing what the Bible tells us to do. See below.

But, folks will say, ESSP2 can't possibly be biblicist. It's an ELCA study, not one coming from the Missouri Synod! True enough. But Biblicism is just as much at home in today's liberal churches as it is in conservative ones. There may well be debate between the left and the right on "just what the Bible says," but once that is determined, Biblicists both left and right are all committed to obeying what the Bible says. But that's not the Gospel's candle. As an "-ism" biblicism is darkness. It's an "other" Gospel. Like the demons in Jesus' parable about empty houses, it finds easy access when THE Gospel hasn't moved in to manage the store.

[When THE Gospel hasn't moved in to manage the store—that's the problem. Past ThTh postings have discussed that—also in the ELCA. Also postings authored by others than yours truly. See, e.g., ThTh 250 (March 27, 2003) by Kevin Born and Tim Hoyer: "Your Gospel is too Small. A Look at Two Recent ELCA publications" (on ethics and evangelism).]

The test question for Biblicism is: How do you USE the Bible?

The “use” word is the biggie. HOW do you use the Bible on the rebound from faith in Christ? Biblicists regularly answer: “we go back to the Bible, take it just as it is, and read it for what it actually says and then do what the Bible tells us to do.” And what does the Bible tell us to do? Answer: What we are to believe (teachings) and how we are to behave (ethics).

It sounds so kosher. How could that be an “-ism,” let alone an “other” Gospel?

Well, for starters, that is the Bible-use of the originally “kosher” folks who found Jesus to be teaching and acting contrary to the Hebrew Bible. If there was anything clear in that Bible it was “don’t work on Saturday.” Jesus behaved contrary to that clear word of the Bible. And then when he had thechutzpah to claim “No, this is really the work of God I am doing on Saturdays,” the verdict against him was the super dirty word “blasphemy.” He’s claiming to be equal to God. Commandment #1 says that’s a no-no—a super no-no, the primal no-no “in the Bible.”

Kosher (=doing the right thing) according to Jesus’ critics was “going back to the Bible, reading it for what it really says and then doing what the Bible tells us to do.” Jesus failed that kosher-test. For which Christians say: Hallelujah!

What’s really so bad about Biblicism is its impact on justification by faith, another Lutheran shibboleth recited regularly in B2. Bertram’s ancient axiom, “Biblical hermeneutics is at no point separate from Biblical soteriology,” proves true in B2. [See his essay “The Hermeneutics of Apology IV” in the Bertram archive on the Crossings web site.]

B2 doesn’t offer any alternative hermeneutic to the kosher-test that Jesus failed. Its on-going drumbeat is a pious, but mis-focused, drumbeat of Biblicism. Here are signals of that malady:

1. We “are confident that God’s word will be a lamp to our feet and a light to our path.” This opening confidence in B2 comes right after the Bible scholars say the opposite in B1 when it comes to the tough texts.
2. “The Bible is authoritative for the faith and life of this church.”
3. “For Lutherans the meaning of Christ’s life, death, and resurrection is spelled out in the relationship of law and Gospel.” And then, as though this were in synch with that statement “we seek to follow God’s will as revealed in the commandments of the law.”
4. “We are a community of faith around the scriptures, the source of the church’s teachings.”
5. ESSP2 is pursuing a “biblically based Christian ethic.”
6. More than once we hear that we are concerned about “what the Bible teaches us.”
7. Whatever be the church’s decision on homosexuality, it shall not “strike at the foundation of biblical authority and church teaching.”
8. The overarching motto for the entire ELCA project on sexuality is “Journeying together FAITHFULLY.” Faithful to what or whom? “Faithful to God, the Bible, Christian teaching, and who we are in the body of Christ and what God calls us to do.” Missing in that list is the one proper object of faith (and thus faithfulness) according to the Augsburg Aha! – Christ’s Gospel promise. If that were the basis, the grounding, for being faithful in ESSP2—as simple as that sounds—everything would be different. Especially the dead-end street we ran into with the survey of biblical scholars (B1). And the dead-end street throughout B2. Over and over again throughout the 47 pages of B2 we learn that “some in the ELCA say this; others in the ELCA say the opposite.” We are never given any help for discerning which alternative is “better” than

the other. Since both can usually be argued “from the Bible,” we are hamstrung—[Is the task force itself is hamstrung?]-since “faithfulness to the Bible” is the final yardstick. More on this below.

LIGHTING A CANDLE

If some of the rhetoric above sounds like “cursing the darkness,” here are some candles.

To #1 above, a candle

God’s word is indeed a lamp to our feet and a light to our path, when touched to the right match. Christ offers a specific match to light the candle for reading the scriptures, different from the one his critics used, different from the one struck in ESSP2. Both Christ and his critics honored the scriptures and gave it authority. Yet their USE of the Bible, so he claimed, was darkness, and its promoters blind. He claimed that his was real light, and theirs real darkness, specifically when “you search the scriptures.” Both Sts. John and Paul make this light vs. dark reading of the Bible fundamental to their proclamation. Is it any different today?

A candle for #2

Bible’s authority. That’s a big one. That was at the core in the Wars of Missouri 30 years ago. It’s at the center of ESSP2 too. To put it bluntly, ESSP2’s view of Biblical authority is cheek-by-jowl with the one in Missouri then—and possibly still now. More on this in subsequent ThTh postings. Possibly I’ll just pass on to you what I learned 50 years ago (Summer Semester 1953 at the University of Erlangen) about Biblical authority after the Augsburg Aha! It’s been the Biblical hermeneutic of Crossings since its beginning.

A candle for #3

“For Lutherans the meaning of Christ’s life, death, and

resurrection is spelled out in the relationship of law and Gospel.” Not wrong, but not right either. At best misfocused, at worst mis-used. “The distinction (not relationship!) between law-and-Gospel” is the hermeneutic proposal of Augsburg for how to read the Bible, how to read the world. It’s not a “teaching.” In the Augsburg tradition it’s lenses for reading texts, not the texts themselves. ESSP2 never ever uses these lenses for reading either the Word or the World. B1 is reading the Bible; B2 is reading the world. Neither ever comes close to USING the law/gospel lenses for doing the reading.

At Andy Weyermann’s funeral in Milwaukee on Saturday last [My 6th funeral in 6 months. Memento mori’s abound in more ways than one], many of the “ancients” gathered for the celebrative liturgy. One of those veterans, Dick Koenig, in conversation thereafter said: “Ed, the ELCA knows all the Lutheran jargon and recites the epigrams regularly—Christ the center of the Scriptures, Law and Gospel, justification by faith alone, faith active in love—but in stuff coming from the headquarters, there’s no signal that anyone knows how to USE them.” My sentiments too. Especially knowing how to use the Augsburg Aha! about Law and Gospel for reading the Bible. Exhibit A is ESSP2, especially when this howler “we seek to follow God’s will as revealed in the commandments of the law” is the ethical maxim linked to the solid Christ statement cited in the previous paragraph.

For reading Word and world on homosexuality with these lenses, see candle #8 below.

A candle for #4

Not the Bible, but the Gospel is the source (=fountain head) of Christian teaching. So says Augsburg. And Augsburg is even feisty enough to say that at that fountainhead there is only ONE teaching, namely, the “doctrina evangelii,” the doctrine of the

Gospel. “Doctrina” is the singular. There is only one doctrine. “Evangelii”, of the gospel, is the subjective genitive for what the one doctrina is. The one teaching IS Gospel. Why then 28 articles in the AC? Good question. Bertram’s ancient answer: The 28 articles of the AC “articulate” the one and only Gospel as it links to the 28 topics of the AC. Thus AC Article 1 = Gospel-grounded talk about God; AC 2 = Gospel-grounded talk about sin, etc., all the way to #28.

To designate the Gospel as the one and only “teaching” could still mislead if the “learner” didn’t “hear” the Gospel’s own grammar. Gospel is not something to learn (like the ABCs), or something to accept as true (the earth is round) but an “offer” to be trusted. A freebee tossed our way by Christ. “Here. Catch. Your sins are forgiven. Trust me.”

The Lutheran “community of faith” circles round the Gospel, not the scriptures. Such language recalls the Wars of Missouri from 30 years ago. But the fight then—and seemingly now both in the ELCA and the LCMS—is the biblicist one: is the Gospel or the Bible at the center when we circle the wagons?

A candle for #5

You guessed it. Instead of a “biblically based Christian ethic,” the candle for the darkness is a Gospel-based ethic that “properly” distinguishes law and gospel.

A candle for #6

“What the Bible teaches us.” There are many “teachings” in the Bible. Augsburg claimed there was really only one “doctrina.” So how to read those many teachings? It’s the same as “how to read the Bible?” Augsburg answers: with a law/Gospel hermeneutic. Without that hermeneutic there is no way to read the teachings and have them come out gospel-grounded. Especially on the homosexuality hot potato. The 28 articles of the AC are the

primordial Lutheran “How to” for reading the Bible this way.

A candle for #7

“The foundation of biblical authority and church teaching.” You fill in the blank: “The foundation of biblical authority and church teaching is_____.”

A candle for #8

“Faithfully” doing anything in the Augsburg tradition is constantly bouncing everything off the center of faith-in-Christ, which is faith in Christ’s Gospel-promise. That is the way, that is the only way, to be “faithful to God, the Bible, Christian teaching, and who we are in the body of Christ and what God calls us to do.” “Faithful to the Gospel” is the constant dipstick proposed by the Augsburg Aha! for testing everything in the life and work of the church.

ESSP2 has not yet done that job, has not yet shown the way. The ELCA’s study is still under way. More light may come. But so far it’s under a bad star, which unhappily is the literal meaning of “dis-aster.” Not good news at all. But the resources for hitching the ELCA wagon to a good star, a bright star are there. They are in the Lutheran firmament. Take and “use.” And if you need some how-to assistance on this, past ThTh postings could help, such as Tim Hoyer’s earlier review listed above and now posted on the Crossings web-page <www.crossings.org> Once you get to the website you can find more postings that address homosexuality with law/gospel lenses. They are listed in the ThTh roster under these dates:

- 1999
 - Jan. 28
 - Feb 4
 - May 27
 - June 17

- 2001
 - June 28
- 2002
 - Jan 17
 - Jan. 24
 - Feb. 7
 - May 16

Peace & Joy!

Ed Schroeder

What's in a Name?

We're starting a new ministry in the city of St. Louis. It's the first new Lutheran (any flavor Lutheran) ministry in the city in over 50 years. The neighborhood architecture screams working class German, but the faces on the street belie that masonry evidence. The name of the ministry is Faith Place.

I'd like to say that the name was inspired, maybe even transcendent somehow – written across the sky in purple neon. But in reality it was the name that no one in our organizing group (local lay leaders and clergy) objected to. After all the brainstorming and arguing, Faith Place was our default name.

In these first months of on-site work, I'm starting to think that maybe in the midst of our arguing there was inspiration. Especially after I found this definition of faith: "Faith is nothing else than longing for mercy."

Longing for mercy is such a universal human need. Anyone who's lived long enough to have fallen headlong over their youthful

arrogance knows this longing. We want a place that's judgment-free. We need someone who knows exactly who we are and yet still looks at us with open, warm, loving eyes. We crave a place where we can live in peace without reprisal. Who isn't looking for that?

Unfortunately, faith is also a word like grace and spirituality that's been absorbed into various parts of our culture much to its detriment. Like the crosses that hang around the necks of fashionable young women and men who have little concern for its symbolism, the word faith has become devoid of much meaning in many places.

Yet thinking of faith as nothing else than longing for mercy gives us two marvelous places to start when talking with anyone about the subject. As I said before, longing for a place/a relationship where forgiveness is key, opens a multitude of doors for conversation. From the individual who can't forgive their abuser, to the person who knows that their crimes are beyond hope of forgiveness, to the middle manager who is measured day after day by some corporate yardstick, speaking in terms of longing for mercy can be a powerful way to carry our words into deep and meaningful places.

Secondly, "faith as nothing else than longing for mercy" sets in bold relief what God has done for us in Jesus Christ. From such a universal human need without any merit on our part, God changed the course of our lives through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Longing for mercy isn't much of a "work." I don't see how you can squeeze much self righteousness out of such a need and yet it is how God makes us whole. When we turn to Jesus with this longing, God moves heaven and earth on our behalf.

When I started thinking about this definition of faith, I looked

up mercy in the Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church and was directed to "corporal works of" and "spiritual works of." The dictionary said that traditionally, the corporal works of mercy are 1) feeding the hungry, 2) giving drink to the thirsty, 3) clothing the naked, 4) harboring the stranger, 5) visiting the sick, 6) ministering to prisoners, 7) burying the dead. The traditional spiritual works of mercy are 1) converting the sinner, 2) instructing the ignorant, 3) counseling the doubtful, 4) comforting the sorrowful, 5) bearing wrongs patiently, 6) forgiving injuries, 7) praying for the living and the dead.

I'm not sure I'd phrase some of the works quite that way. But I am sure that I see the results of having that longing for mercy satisfied by Jesus in the lives of many of our Faith Place volunteers. Their longing for mercy is transformed into a longing to offer to others that same mercy they've received. It's not about earning their way into heaven or following some set of rules that has been handed down for generations. It's about wanting to, needing to give what they've first been given.

People walking the streets of a city neighborhood talking to strangers about their faith, inviting them to come and be part of this new ministry that's being born in the community. People with important jobs in the metro area sitting on kindergarten chairs washing Legos in disinfectant so area children have a safe and nurturing environment for the after school program. People committing to responsibilities to help this new ministry get established that go beyond their own personal needs and their home parish responsibilities. That's faith in action.

It's amazing to me to see how God takes something so simple, so universally human and embedded in our fallen-ness as our longing for mercy and through it makes us new people, both individually and collectively, so that we can help bring wholeness to the world.

Faith Place is the right name for this new ministry.

Robin Morgan

11 September 2003

PS – For those of you wondering where I got that definition (is it really Lutheran?) look on page 369 of C. F. W. Walther's "The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel."

How I Spent my Sabbatical

Colleagues:Thirteen weeks ago—after five years of weekly Thursday postings—I declared “enough already!” and took a time out. Since I have no de facto boss, self-bestowal was the only way to get a sabbatical.

I told you then that I found encouragement to do so in a prayer from Sister Teresa of Avila:

“Lord, you know that day by day I am getting older—and one day I’ll simply be old.

Protect me from the compulsion to HAVE TO say something on every occasion.

Save me from the great passion to straighten out the affairs of others.

Teach me to be reflective and helpful, but not yearning to be in charge.

Teach me the marvelous wisdom that I might be wrong.

Keep me as lovable as you possibly can.”

And I did recite that prayer during the interim. As I get back

into the saddle, you'll have to decide if it was answered.

"How I Spent my Sabbatical" may be of less interest for you than for me as I chronicle what I did during the past three months, but I'm tabulating it here initially for my own information. And to remember in print what I hope not to forget.

June

Jury duty. Taught final session in Lutheran Confessions for Luth. School of Theology in St. Louis, read papers, turned in grades. Collected and posted five bags of books to our mission venture in Manipur, India. Flew to Chicago for the annual meeting of the American Society of Missiology. Listened to Roy Blount Jr. introduce his book on Robert E. Lee at the Art Museum. Joined Audrey Vanderbles at "Old Trinity" (Walther's church) to celebrate her 40 yrs of deaconess ministry. Helped stuff the Corssings summer newsletter.

July,

Sermon and liturgy at St. Paul's UCC church in Marthasville, Missouri. Attended Crossings board meeting. Watched son Nathan play a Nazi role in a local production of The Diary of Anne Frank.

Then three weeks and 5000 miles by car. First via Omaha (where we crashed with former student now LCMS pastor) to Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada for some days in the gallery as guests at the 10th assembly of the Lutheran World Federation. Many many happy rendezvous with earlier mission-connections from all over the world. Hosted for our six days there by Canadian Mennonite friends from 48 years ago, the time when they and we were grad students in Hamburg Germany, we learned of Mennonitism first hand, worship included. Then on to Saskatoon, Saskatchewan for a weekend with former deaconess student now chaplain in a Lutheran home for the aged (one of her two Sunday services we attended

was in the Alzheimers unit). Then to rural eastern Montana to visit a Seminex alum (treats were a day at the county fair, riding high in the combine cabin with one of her farmer members harvesting mustard with his mega machinery on his 12,000 acre ranch, and finding a rattlesnake—live—on the front steps when she went to show us her country church).

All the way west across Montana (it's big) to the town of Polson on Flathead Lake beyond the continental divide. Stopped off on the way at Little Big Horn National Park (Custer's Last Stand) and the Park at the Headwaters of the Missouri River (since we live at its other end in St. Louis), and the creme-d-la-creme dinosaur museum in Bozeman. Weekend stay and Sunday services in Polson with another Seminex alum. Spent Saturday morning picking cherries—some of which we actually got all the way back to St. Louis a week later.

From Polson—with 3,000-plus already on the odometer—we finally started heading home. Via Yellowstone National Park, the Beartooth Highway, Big Horn mountains, finessing our way for days through the hundreds of thousands (sic!) Harley-Davidson motorcycles heading to the annual pow-wow in Sturgis, South Dakota. Last place for crashing before we got home was a ranch in Sundance, Wyoming with another former student, who had spent just one year at Seminex back in the 70s. Something triggered a faith-crisis then, so he went back to Sundance where he now carpenters and manages the family ranchland. He wanted to talk, and so we did, late into the night—and then again at breakfast before we said farewell. That'll will have to be a topic for a ThTh posting before I forget it all.

It's already August by the time we get home. We're here for a week—dentist appointments, granddaughter's birthday party, monthly luncheon with Seminex goldie-oldies, car rejuvenated—and then off for another fortnight. This time a mere 2K miles north

to Wisconsin, ferry across Lake Michigan, back south and west through Michigan, Indiana and Illinois.

Starts with 55th reunion of my Coal Valley (Illinois) High School class plus visit to the farm where I was born (my dad too), and where my youngest brother now manages it in its second century as "the Schroeder place." Then a weekend visit with relatives in Kenosha, Wisconsin. Sunday liturgy at St. Mary's (sic!) Lutheran church there. Visit (quite likely, farewell visit) with Andy Weyermann in Milwaukee, colleague and co-conspirator for fifty years, as his affliction does not abate.

Our northernmost destination is the Door County (Wisconsin) peninsula—the "Cape Cod" of the Middle West, we are told. There in the resort town of Ephraim (once a Moravian settlement, with the Moravian church still there cheek-by-jowl with the Lutheran one) we settle in for a week's freebie at the Lutheran parsonage. Well, not quite freebie. I do the Sunday liturgy and sermon, and then it's ours for free.

The Sunday is St. Bartholomew's Day Aug. 24. Though the day is named after him, there's nothing about him in the New Testament other than his listing in rosters of the apostles. But that's only in the rosters of Matthew, Mark and Luke. John doesn't know him. In his place John puts Nathaniel (who is never mentioned in Mt. Mk. or Lk.). Somewhere in the tradition the two were declared to be the same person. So St. Bartholomew, his day burned into church history with the mass murder of French Huguenots on the night of Aug. 23-24, 1572, gets a Nathaniel text as the Gospel for his day.

And in that Nathaniel text (John 1: 43-51) Jesus amazes Nathaniel by seeing him under the fig tree ever before they meet (possibly a reference even farther back to Nathaniel's infancy where the fig tree designates a mother's place for nursing her

child). But Jesus relegates that marvel to insignificance by telling Nathaniel that in following Jesus he'll see "heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man." I glombed onto "heavens opened" as the fundamental image for the day.

So with unopened tin-cans (yes, two of them. See below.) and can-opener in the pulpit, borrowed from the parsonage kitchen, the preacher presented Jesus as the "heaven-opener." Access to God "as Father" being closed apart from Jesus—especially in John's Gospel (e.g., 14:6)—the proclamation parsed out as follows:

BAD NEWS: Heaven Closed. Cans closed. No Opener.

- 1. Daily life under "Heaven Closed." The O.T. reading for the day, Exodus 19:1-6, spells out the "heaven closed" option: "IF you keep my commandments, THEN you are my people." Living daily life by "If ... Then..."*
- 2. Worse yet, Trusting "If, then," and not the Heaven-Opener. Also trusting "if/then" in day-to-day life with others. Being closed cans ourselves.*
- 3. Worst of all, both cans—the God-can, and the me-can—stay closed. No possibility for the "me-can" or the "God-can" to be opened. Incurvature into oneself concludes in incarceration into oneself. Canned for eternity.****GOOD NEWS: Life with Heaven Opened.***
- 4. Christ the Can-opener. Opens the God-can to expose God as "Father" and not as If/then evaluator. He also opens the can of human self-incarceration. What it all cost to be that can-opener—both cans—to cope with the if/then realities of closed-can life under the law.*
- 5. "Follow me." First of all to God as Father. Call it faith. Take no detours.*
- 6. "Follow me." Second into our life in the world with other*

canny folks. Take no detours. Living as opened cans, as can-openers. "As the Father sent me, so send I you." Opening for others the closed cans of their lives—both the closed God-can and the closed self-can that vexes us all apart from Christ the Can-Opener. Second lesson (1 Cor. 12:27-31a) specs out the multiplicity of opened cans operating as the Body of Christ. [Possible puns too humorous to mention. It's uncanny.]

Here endeth the sermon outline.

The "free-bee week" passed before we got used to doing nothing. Well, not quite nothing. With a whole parsonage available we invited relatives to join us for the standard Door County musts: a fish-boil evening feast, a pontoon boat cruise on Green Bay and the de rigeur Swedish pancake breakfast at Al Johnson's where real goats graze on the real grass that grows on the restaurant's roof. In and around Door County are three Seminex-alum pastors, so that brought three invitations out.

For the final days of August we crossed Lake Michigan on the ferry, visited Indonesia missionary colleagues (from 1999) now retired in Holland, Michigan. Sobering and celebrative at the same time was last Thursday's memorial service for Walt Rast in South Haven, Michigan. Walt was my seminary classmate, my Valparaiso University colleague of many years, a world-renowned Biblical archeologist and Old Testament scholar. Walt has a permanent exhibit in the Smithsonian (Washington D.C.) from the ancient site of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Then came our first-ever visit at St. Augustine's House (Oxford, Michigan), the only Lutheran monastery in the USA. Besides the liturgical life we enjoyed the extras of a community hymnsing, the annual Fellowship Day lecture, and the celebrative dedication and raising of the bell for the new chapel.

Couldn't resist stopping off at Valparaiso University for a Saturday soiree with colleagues and the Sunday liturgy in the Chapel of the Resurrection. And home by sunset that evening.

That may be more than you really wanted to know. Marie's handwritten journal of 100-plus pages is the real narrative that puts the flesh and sinew on the skeleton I've just sketched.

Upcoming ThTh postings may add more meat to the bones above. To wit:

1. The Lutheran World Federation (I rejoiced that my brightest and best student in the Lutheran Confessions during our 1997 gig in Lithuania, Milita Poskiene, got elected to the LWF Council. With her on board there may be hope for the LWF after all.)
2. The memento mori of the deaths of 3 dear buddies: Tim Lull, Dick Jungkuntz and Walt Rast. Plus the news awaiting us when we got home that the family in that car swept off the Interstate just last Saaturday night by a flash-flood in Kansas, with only the father/husband surviving, were relatives of folks near and dear to us.
3. Some thoughts about the Mennonites.
4. For the umpteenth time a return to "the law's third use," Lutheran lingo for using God's law as resource in living the Christian life. That hobby horse of mine resurfaced both at the Crossings board meeting where dissent in the Crossings Community from the "party-line" was discussed, and in the too many legalist sermons I heard during my galavanting sabbatical. To adhere to the counsel of St. Theresa, I'll not merely moan about the third-users, but make a pitch instead for the "second use" of the Gospel as the only power-pack for living as God's new creations. One of you has given me a new image for that: The Energizer Battery Bunny never stopping to beat his drum for his

cause. One scheme I have is to do an RSV (revised Schroeder version) of the Epistle to the Galatians. I'm growing in my conviction that Galatians is the first-ever apostolic word to "third users" in the church's history. Paul's angle in Galatians, so it seems to me, is to say: You wish to re-appropriate the Law for living the new life in Christ because your Gosepl is too small. Or even more vividly: Your Christ is too small. Magnify the Lord, and you'll see not only that you don't "need" Moses, but that Moses can't has no fuel to energize what Christ creates and where the Spirit leads.

5. Atheism. Reflecting on the discussion at the ranch in Sundance, Wyoming, where I blurted out: "Seems to me that the God you don't believe in is one I don't believe in either."
6. Items raised by the 12 ThTh essays posted during my time away are also worthy of some attention. Especially Bob Bertram's classic on Revelation.
7. And the anniversary of September 11, 2001 just around the corner with repentance unknown in the American Empire as it plunges forward into Apocalypse Now.

Enough already.

Peace and Joy!

Ed Schroeder.

Rescue from the Darkness of Captivity

A selection from: A CROSSINGS CELEBRATION (Festschrift for Ed Schroeder). Edited by Irmgard Koch, Robin Morgan, Sherman Lee. St Louis: Greenhorn Publications & HomeLee Press, 1993. 129 pp. \$5.00. (Copies available at <robinjmorgan@hotmail.com>)

Jim Squire, software engineer and long-time Crossings student, asks hard questions and gets profound answers – both scary and, ultimately, gracefully freeing. In this essay Jim “crosses” himself using the six-step matrix of a Crossings semester-long seminar he attended. It was centered in the prophet Isaiah’s Suffering Servant poem, 42: 1-9. Jim uses the “code language” of Isaiah 42 for both the increasingly grim diagnosis of his problem—Babylon, Blindness, Blame—and then for the increasingly Good-News generous prognosis offered to him in the Suffering Servant—Birth Pangs, Beholder, Brilliance.

CROSSINGS FROM ISAIAH 42:1-9 MY RESCUE FROM THE DARKNESS OF CAPTIVITY by James Squire

Introduction: Garden of Eden revisited

So it came to pass that I cast aside my security blanket, and opened my eyes to the world of beliefs. It was going to be

somewhat like choosing from a menu: I get to decide what tastes good. I decide what fits. God certainly had a leg up over humanism, since he had been a “part” of my life for so long. But others were watching so I felt I had to make my choice as objective as possible.

But something happened on the road to the choice: God sent one of his faithful messengers to inform me that a certain part of that choice was not free at all. I was willing to accept that I could not reach God’s level on my own. But I insisted that if I didn’t choose God on my own, the choice didn’t mean much. “Oh.” he said, “So you’re still not free. You must choose on your own.” I did not feel like this was a fair fight. I expressed my frustration by saying, “This kind of God scares me.” Interestingly enough, I was not scolded for this attitude. Instead, God’s servant invoked Martin Luther to console me: “Whenever God is encountered apart from Christ, scared is the proper response.” Then since the same arguments had already been made 400 years ago, he pointed me to the Augsburg Confession so that the discussion on Free Will could continue. As I examined this document, the topic slowly changed from Free Will to Babylon.

Babylon is the place of captivity for the Jews at the time of Second Isaiah (chapter 40 and beyond). After Israel was defeated as a nation, its people were taken against their will from their “devastated land” (49:19) to a hostile environment where they “fear continually all the day because of the fury of the oppressor.” (51:13)

But this can be applied metaphorically as well. Babylon is not so much a geographical place, as it is a description of my relationship in and with the world. And that relationship is one of captivity to someone or something.

Diagnosis Level 1: Babylon

The first order of business is to agree on the nature of my Babylon. I begin by declaring my total innocence and demanding justice. I accuse the very Reformers who founded the denomination I belong to of oppressing me on the subject of Free Will. Their authority as Lutheran forebears makes this feel very much like captivity. If they didn't hold such authority for me, I could just ignore them. This is my view of Babylon.

As you might expect, they have a different view of my Babylon. In their Augsburg Confession, they point me in a different direction: "Our churches teach that man's will has some liberty for the attainment of civil righteousness and for the choice of things subject to reason. However, it does not have the power, without the Holy Spirit, to attain the righteousness of God—that is, spiritual righteousness—because natural man does not perceive the gifts of the Spirit of God; but this righteousness is wrought in the heart when the Holy Spirit is received through the Word." In other words, the Holy Spirit walks right in, uninvited, and says, "zap!!!" This, I must protest against. How can it be true that I don't even have the capacity to desire fellowship with God? I don't want the Holy Spirit invading my heart and placing a desire for God inside me, against my will. I want the right to desire God myself. Otherwise I feel like a robot. People have the right, I think, to decide whether they want God in their life. Now God doesn't have to answer such desire. But such desire should come from within the person involved or it seems to lose its meaning.

Yet, the more I think about this, the more I realize I don't do the things which I can plainly see make a lot of sense. Things like taking care of myself, and my apartment, for example. Even though they make sense, I resist doing them. Why? Because I

resist anything that means taking advice from someone else, and putting aside the way I want to do things. I hate the idea of following their advice, because if I follow it, I might lose control over my life. If I find, in my own way, a reason for self-sacrifice, that's different. But I don't like other people, like my Mom especially, telling me what is good for me. It occurs to me now that I felt she was invading my turf. I was afraid of giving up control, and as a result, I perceive now that I lost out on a lot of good wisdom. I am still like this to a certain extent, only now my Mom is replaced by good friends – peers. People who are harder to brush off. Harder to frustrate. I want them as friends, but I still don't want to sell out my control. Could it be that all this time, I've been saying the same thing to God?

Now that my eyes have been opened, I can see my Babylon for what it truly is. I can see gadgets that entertain me, such as the TV and the VCR. I can see the mess that develops after weeks when papers are just left lying anywhere instead of being put away. I can see how the TV pacifies me, as if the TV could really command me to be a couch potato for hours on end. But I also feel the absence of justice, and I long for its return. Interestingly enough, I long for that which I used to have under Mom. Things got taken care of. I got taken care of. There was something about those days that now looks good to me.

But today I live in Babylon, where nobody and nothing ever gets taken care of, unless someone holds a gun to my head, figuratively speaking. That is what Babylon is for me, and I do feel held captive by it.

Meanwhile, I can just hear the Augsburg Confessors whispering to each other behind my back, "Hey, was that the Holy Spirit that just walked by?" How silly it seems now to claim the right to desire fellowship with God! That was just a smokescreen on

my part. I have not the slightest interest in exercising that right, even if I did have it.

Diagnosis Level 2: Blindness

To take matters one step deeper, where do I turn for help from Babylon's injustice? Now I also see something else I didn't see before: My Babylon is not different from the world "out there." There is one fundamental similarity between the two, and I have already expressed it in my claim of Free Will: Freedom of Choice! We live in a choice-oriented society. I have been taught, apparently by that same society (I don't think Mom was big on Freedom of Choice), to value the freedom to choose, as if I am "the boss." So, like the Jews in captivity during Second Isaiah's time, when I seek help from Babylon's injustice, I seek help from Babylon! In Babylon, they worshipped Marduk. I worship "free choice!" To value "free choice" is fine, but when one worships "free choice" one has no need for things like "responsibility." And obviously if I see God simply as a choice, I certainly don't see him as rescuer. For me rescue comes via "free choice." Second Isaiah calls that "blindness."

The Augsburg Confessors put it this way, "... through the fall of our first parents man is so corrupted that in divine things, concerning our conversion and salvation, he is by nature blind and does not and cannot understand the Word of God when it is preached, but considers it foolishness; nor does he of himself approach God, but he is and remains an enemy of God until by the power of the Holy Spirit, through the Word which is preached and heard, purely out of grace and without any cooperation on his part, he is converted, becomes a believer, is regenerated and renewed." Enemy of God? Well, if I think of him as merely a choice, yes I am an enemy of God.

Diagnosis Level 3: Blame

For enemies of God, Babylonian injustice becomes justice. Once more, my feeble claim of Free Will is a symptom of what I have trouble seeing: How Babylonian injustice is also God's justice toward me. And why would I ever think of God as my rescuer, if I can't see him as my punisher?

The Augsburg Confessors have the answer: "If a person will not hear preaching or read the Word of God, but despises the Word and the community of God, dies in this condition, and perishes in his sins, he can neither comfort himself with God's eternal election nor obtain his mercy. For Christ, in whom we are elected, offers his grace to all men in the Word and the holy sacraments, earnestly wills that we hear it, and has promised that, where two or three are gathered together in his name and occupy themselves with his holy Word, he is in the midst of them. But if such a person despises the instruments of the Holy Spirit and will not hear, no injustice is done him if the Holy Spirit does not illuminate him but lets him remain in the darkness of his unbelief and be lost, as it is written, 'How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not!'" A rude awakening, indeed.

What's scary here is I still feel like I am a good person. It's hard to know exactly where I went wrong. And yet, I am blind to God. Because I am blind to my lost state, and my total need for God (I said I desired God, I never said I needed him), I remain where I am, and the Holy Spirit, if he happens to wander by, finds me asleep. Meanwhile, God knows that deep down inside, I want to be in control. I mean in control of what is right and wrong. Good and Evil. Sound familiar? I don't often think of it in those terms. They seem weird even now as I am writing them. It's because they are scary words. But they seem to be true.

All of what I have discerned in the depths of my soul to this point tells me they are true. And so, without ever realizing it, it was I who took the bite of the apple in the garden of Eden, and it was I who then turned and hid. God knew where I was all along, and though I wasn't listening, he was saying to me, "Jim, what is this that you have done? ... Because you have ... eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth to you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return."

(Recently – here in 2003 – I discovered an especially vivid way in which the final diagnosis manifests itself from Psalm 85 verse 4 (NRSV): 'Restore us again, O God of our salvation, and put away your indignation toward us.' In this case I find the RSV much more meaningfully translated for my situation: 'Restore us then, O God our Saviour; let your anger depart from us.' The most concrete way in which 'Babylonian injustice becomes justice' in the life of a condemned sinner is when, as the Psalmist suggests, God's 'anger' actually takes up residence in us and we feed off it. God being angry with us can actually become a way of life, as depressing as that may sound. And there is no way for us to get rid of that 'anger' ourselves, nor – in keeping with the theme of this paper – are we even inclined to. That is truly Bad News!)

I have been blamed, and now the sentencing begins. I watch from afar, in secret, as Jesus is nailed to the cross. Interesting. As they drive the nails in, I feel more and more of my absolute control slipping away. As I see those nails going in, situation after situation in my life is held up for my benefit, then individual judgment is exacted. It is hard to watch this scene

unfold. I want to plead for a second chance, but God knows I am evading the issue. Like the Jews of Second Isaiah's time, what I plead for is a new Nebuchadnezzar or a new Cyrus. A new instance of the same old rescuer. Ultimately that rescuer is Marduk, and God is rendered irrelevant in my life, even as I seem to be reaching out to him. That is the ultimate kiss-off, and fittingly that very kiss-off becomes my ultimate punishment: (42:24-25) "Who gave up Jacob to the spoiler, and Israel to the robbers? Was it not the Lord, against whom we have sinned? So he poured upon him the heat of his anger and the might of battle."

Prognosis Level 1: Birth Pangs

Look again. See the suffering servant spoken of in Second Isaiah hanging on the cross. He is in a darkness worse than mine, for he has done nothing wrong. Moreover, he is going where I cannot go: to the grave, then even further, to Hell. Notice the silence with which he suffers the nails which are my Sin, suffering the punishment that is rightly mine. In him, God's final diagnosis ("you blind", "you deaf") is being silenced. And then when he emerges from the tomb, this provides God's seal of approval on this Suffering Servant and what he has done for us. In effect, God says, "Sounds Good to me!" All of which means that those nails going into Jesus' body are Good News for me, not Bad News.

(2003 again – Notice how God's anger has truly left us all and taken up residence in the Suffering Servant. His darkness may be worse than mine – because he has done nothing wrong – but it surely engulfs mine. God's anger toward sin has been lodged squarely within the bosom of the Suffering Servant, and strangely enough, that is in line with his very purpose on this earth! But what threatened to swallow us in hell is crushed by him there, and he returns to bestow on us God's love in our

salvation. By his suffering sacrifice, there is no longer any room in our 'Inn' for God's anger!)

To some it might seem cheap, and certainly not just what he has done for me. But to me it is entirely just. God is the one who sees through my Free Will facade. He is the one who turns my Babylonian injustice into justice. And ask the Suffering Servant himself if the price of my salvation was cheap! Isaiah 42:14 – “For a long time I have held my peace; I have kept still and restrained myself; now I will cry out like a woman in travail, I will gasp and pant.” And indeed, he did cry out on the cross: “My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?” No, the price was not cheap, not in the least. Who am I to argue? And in my position, why would I want to?

Prognosis Level 2: Beholder

Isaiah 42:1 – “Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him, he will bring forth justice to the nations.” Isaiah 52:13 – “Behold, my servant shall prosper, he shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high.” Why does the writer's soul delight, and why will this servant be exalted and lifted up? Behold what the servant will do (fulfilled in the person of Jesus)! Isaiah 53:4-5 – “Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed.” This is what was talked about in Prognosis level 1, but the writer's plea is heard in the word “Behold!” It sounds like a command! Actually, it is called an imperative, which means an instruction pertaining to the receipt of something by the other person. Normally, we are used to “law” imperatives which are of the form, “IF you do this, THEN I'll give you that.” The

imperative “Behold” doesn’t seem to fit that pattern, not in the way the writer uses it. No! What the writer is saying is “Behold the suffering servant, and by doing so, receive the justice that he has brought for you.” Isaiah 42:2-4 – “He will not cry or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not fail or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his law.” The unmistakable pattern of this “Behold” imperative is that of a “Gospel” imperative, which is of the form, “Because I did this for you, you are then able to do the following.” Note the reverse orientation here. The law imperative sets us up for failure, especially when the imperative comes from God. The Gospel imperative is more like a gift to us in which success is already guaranteed and fulfilled and failure is not even part of the equation.

Therefore, I am rescued from my Blindness by Beholding the suffering servant who turned out to be Jesus (thank God!). I get justice (undeserved, but given nonetheless) by feasting my eyes on his suffering servanthood and gazing at what he did for me. I am, along with the writer of Isaiah 52:14-15 – “...astonished at him – his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the sons of men – so shall he startle many nations; kings shall shut their mouths because of him; for that which has not been told them they shall see, and that which they have not heard they shall understand.” Oh, what beauty to Behold!

Prognosis Level 3: Brilliance

So, what of Free Will? What of Babylon? How does it look to me now? It still looks the same, and sometimes I look the same in it. But look again! I have been made anew. I have not been

rescued from a place called Babylon, but rather I have been rescued from the captivity of Babylon. For now I inhabit Babylon, looking like the Suffering Servant – mainly because I now fix my gaze upon him. My beholding of the Suffering Servant as opposed to Marduk has to have some kind of effect on those who “run the asylum.” The reason is that as a Beholder, I no longer seek Babylon’s way of escaping captivity. In fact, I may sometimes choose not to escape at all, all the better to shine the Light of the Suffering Servant on those who sit in darkness. Looking good no longer means looking glamorous, like Marduk. Now it means looking like the Suffering Servant, and it means gentle treatment for the bruised reeds and dimly burning wicks, rather than tooting my own horn. And I have Second Isaiah’s (and God’s word for it: (42:16)) “And I will lead the blind in a way that they know not, in paths that they have not known I will guide them. I will turn the darkness before them into light, the rough places into level ground. These are the things I will do, and I will not forsake them.” I am so happy to be associated with such an agenda; it’s exactly what those who sit in darkness need.

Postscript: The Suffering Servant who found me “sitting in darkness”

Some might get the idea that a Suffering Servant would not have confronted me the way I was confronted at the beginning of this paper. On the surface, it would seem that more gentle handling would be called for. That would’ve been too bad in this case. Happily, I was confronted. What makes it fit with the Suffering Servant model is that I was confronted “right in the place where I was at.” He listened to me, heard my own description of where I was coming from, and pointed out to me my unfreedom. It seemed a bit blunt at the time, but then again, he wasn’t operating alone. The Holy Spirit was active in my life, so that I wasn’t turned off by his “assault,” but rather examined

myself to check out what he was saying. Lucky for me I did, because I discovered the assault was not against me, but Marduk. Jesus reached out to Peter, hoping to save him, by saying, "Get behind me, Satan." (Mark 8:33) Something similar took place here. Because of this servant (and others), I have been able to Behold my true rescuer from Babylonian captivity, and am now able to play the same role myself with those around me. All praise be to God that this one risked my anger enough to save me from the darkness. What a great freedom we have shared ever since.

Crossing Workplace Slavery with Freedom in Christ

A selection from A CROSSINGS CELEBRATION (Festschrift for Ed Schroeder). Edited by Irmgard Koch, Robin Morgan, Sherman Lee. St Louis: Greenhorn Publications & HomeLee Press, 1993. 129 pp. \$5.00. (Copies available at <robinjmorgan@hotmail.com>)

Susan Eigel is a member of Gethsemane Lutheran Church in south St. Louis county where one of her favorite tasks is coordinating and occasionally leading the Sunday morning adult Bible class. She still works as a high school librarian at Mehlville Senior High School and still prefers the transformational style of management (=good) although the current administration seems to lean toward the transactional style (=not so good).

The summer before I experienced the course "Crossings from Galatians: Jesus Means Freedom," I took a course called "Group Processes in Organizations." There to my surprise I learned that I, a high school librarian with a staff of two besides myself, was a manager. Further, I learned I was a transformational sort of manager in a basically transactional sort of organization. So I came to the slavery and freedom of Galatians steeped in discoveries and insights from the earlier class. It was very easy to see the slavery of the law within the transactional management style; the two quotes at the beginning of this paper I have heard used at work more than once. The second example is my experience. I was well aware of the slavery to the law of the group inherent in the transformational style when I wrote this paper, but recently it has been made more vivid as I work with a planning committee for whom the transformational style is law.

It takes hindsight for me to realize that the freedom of the Spirit of Christ is at work in our office. Again, the paper's second to the last example is my own experience during the earlier class. Reflecting now, I realize that a recent office crisis was not dealt with transactionally or transformationally, but with the loving concern God's children have for each other in Christ.

SLAVERY AND FREEDOM IN THE PYRAMID OF POWER "Well, that's why they pay us the big bucks, to make the hard decisions." "We're not expected to win popularity contests you know." The cliches from the other division supervisors followed him into the elevator. The rumors had been right. The company continued to feel the effects of the recession, and drastic cuts were needed in its expenditures to pull it out of the red by the end of the year. Each division was required to cut

its expenditures by the same percentage, and it was his task to decide where those cuts would come in his division. He wanted to protest that the work his people did was essential to the long term survival of the company, and these cuts could cripple the company's competitive edge for years to come.

But surrounded by his fellow supervisors and before his superiors who had determined this action he remained silent. Almost all the others could make similar claims, after all. Having reached his position on the corporate ladder, he thought it unwise to risk its loss by antagonizing those who could keep him there or help him climb further. The current crisis would not last forever and he must protect his position. Still, he had hoped that this position would give him the power to further the welfare of everyone under him. Instead, many people under him would soon be without jobs, and which ones was his decision. Right now he wasn't feeling very powerful at all. Rather, he felt like a puppet whose superiors held all the strings, a tool of the powers above him just as those below him were seen as his tools. He felt a slave to the system.

Hot tears welled in my eyes as I walked away from that senseless interview. I needed answers and, trustingly, I expected to have them at last. Instead, I had received rebuke and insult. I had become a librarian less than a year before when my predecessor resigned under the pressures of the upcoming move to new quarters and what she described as lack of support from the administration. Students and teachers depended on the availability of the materials our library housed. It had been an awkward and frustrating year trying to operate in the cramped temporary quarters, and the staff was determined to move to the new facility with as little disruption to service as possible. But to do so I needed to

know when the move would take place and what assistance would be available and for how long. Repeated requests to my principal were answered with I-don't-knows. The central administration staff were not giving him any information. This, rumor said, was not unusual, for the principal was not too popular with the higher powers. Teachers claimed he had taken their part too often.

In frustration the principal sent me to talk to the administrator who oversaw all the new building projects. This gentleman informed me that since he was only weeks away from his retirement and a replacement had not been named, I should make an appointment with the assistant superintendent to find my answers. I did. I had gone to the interview feeling that at last I would be talking to someone who knew what was happening and when and how. At last here I could find the information I needed to plan our move. Instead, the man scolded me for bringing my questions to him and said the principal should supply that information. He went on to imply that the principal's lack of the needed information reflected his basic incompetence.

I left the interview with my questions still unanswered, feeling like a pawn in someone's cruel game and angry at myself for letting myself be so used. Fuming, I reviewed what I had learned. I had learned that my principal needed support. I had learned never to vary from chain of command. I had learned never to trust anyone in central administration. The traditional management style in this country is the transactional style. Its basis is legalistic. Its language, "if you do this, then I will do that" employs the same terms as legal contracts. The manager has agreed to be responsible for the accomplishment of some task involving the combined efforts of others for completion. For the transactional manager, this implies controlling the actions of others in

order to reach the desired end. It is in this need to control that the enslavement within the system can most easily be seen. It is generally much easier to control things than to control people.

Therefore, the temptation to think of people in terms of things or categories rather than as individuals may become a convenience for the transactional manager. This is by no means a conscious decision on the part of the manager, but a trait of human nature and of the management system that can be enhanced under pressures of deadlines and distractions until it becomes habit. For example, it is easy to ignore a valid protest when it comes from a chronic complainer, and a good idea can be overlooked because it came from "just a janitor" or "just a clerk."

The focus on the work itself leads the manager to ignore the needs and concerns of the people who must accomplish it. So those people become objects rather than persons. Meanwhile, the manager herself becomes a slave to the task. She cannot think of others as tools for the task without suffering the same fate herself. Rather than an individual she becomes the manager for whatever is at hand and the title becomes her identity. This is how she is seen by her superiors and how she comes to see herself. If she retires or loses her position, she finds herself bereft of any identity, at a loss to know who or what is left without the work.

A further temptation is to rely solely on the power of authority to one's control. The manager was put in charge so things will be done the manager's way, and anyone who disagrees can find work elsewhere. Likewise, the transactional manager must honor directives and decisions handed down from her superiors whether or not she is in full agreement. So to retain or advance her position she must bow

to the same power of authority she invokes, trapped within the system.

The transactional manager risks confinement in the world of self. Attitudes and habits exercised at least eight hours every working day on the job become ingrained and carry into life outside work. If people at work exist as tools for a task, people outside work can be seen in a similar light. They are identified by the task they perform rather than as a person performing a task, such as mailman, taxi driver, or checker. Even in social relationships people can be viewed in light of being either assets or detriments to the manager's social position or network of work related contacts. Both social and work-related associations are viewed by the standard of what benefit they can hold for the manager. The legal obligation to perform the task subtly shifts to the sacred duty to perform "my holy task, do my job" above all else so that I am seen as more than worthy of all consequent rewards. The work becomes an object of worship around which the manager's life revolves and "my ability to do that work well" becomes a justification for existence. "Without me that place would fall apart" becomes the manager's creed. There is no room for other gods in this little universe, even a real one. All others, be they family, friends, fellow employees, or even the employer, exist only to serve the dual god of work-self and its entrapping law that work comes first.

Even the law of work is too demanding to be met by its worshiper, and the god of work-self cannot stand against its own standards. Deadlines are missed, important memos are mislaid, meetings must be rescheduled, and items are forgotten. The manager cannot perform even the basic duties perfectly and therefore, truly is not entitled to the contractual rewards. Beyond that are the other direct commands of a very real and jealous God, the first of which

is violated by the mere existence of the work-self god. The manager by placing work-self first has divorced herself to a twin god that leads only to destruction. The real and just God tolerates no such objects of worship and seals the divorce by pronouncing the manager cursed. [As St. Paul understands that term in Galatians, that means] standing in the wrong place in relation to God and destined to stay so forever.

There is no way the little god of work-self can overcome the curse of the real God. It takes a real God to cancel such a curse, a real God who knows what it means to be in the right place with God, to be blessed. The real God knows the right relationship is not seen in one of servant or slave to master, or employee to employer, but in that of child to parent. Only the real God can rescue the manager from her curse and at the same time show what it is to be a child of God. This He did when Jesus Christ, the Son of God, placed Himself under the law and took its curse on Himself and suffered the total alienation from God that is the rightful place of the manager, and all managers and all who are managed, and all created life that had been cursed by sin. Jesus canceled the curse by His death and triumphant resurrection and restoration to the blessed, right relationship with the Father. No longer under the law in any sense, He is free to show what it is to be an heir in God's kingdom.

Having taken our place, Jesus makes that same freedom available to all who trust Him to supply it, even the manager. As an heir led by the Spirit of Christ, the manager is free of enslavement to work and self, free to put the real God first in all things and free to see others as fellow heirs in God's kingdom. It is in her relationship to God that the manager finds reason for existence and the purpose for

actions. The work becomes opportunity to express that relationship. Others are no longer tools to be used, but fellow redeemed to be encouraged, loved, and brought to understand the freedom that is theirs also through faith in Jesus. People become individuals performing their own tasks: Walt, the mailman; Henry, the taxi driver; Shelly, the checker. They are important to the manager because they are important to God, important enough to die for.

The transformation management style encourages all members of a group to work together for a common goal. Since the manager has been transformed from slave to law to heir of God, she also is free to choose a management style appropriate to her God-centered existence. The transformational style may be useful with the knowledge that she is not bound by it. But she is free also to use a transformational style even in the midst of an organization where the transactional form is expected. She is free to accept advice from Mike, the janitor, or Debbie, the clerk, and even to seek it and give them credit for it. She is free to listen to Claude, the complainer, or not to listen, as the Spirit of Christ leads her. She is free to acknowledge the needs and concerns of others. She no longer needs to control people. She is free to move beyond even the transformational style where the welfare of the group or organization is given priority to consider the welfare of individuals within the group. She is free to assign her task high priority or to acknowledge the task of another as of greater importance. The basis of her task is no longer merely the legal agreement; the basis is found now in her freedom to be God's child in the given time and place in which she finds herself. Her language has become that of freedom, "because God has redeemed me, therefore I can..."

The move was a disaster. All of the alternative plans composed by the library staff were swept away with orders to

move within two days just before the start of school with the “help” of college students hired for summer work on the last days of their jobs. The task of settling into the new quarters, which should have taken less than a week, took over two months.

Some years and two superintendents later, I again sat in the office of a central office administrator. To fulfill an assignment I was to interview an administrator (not my immediate superior) about group processes and leadership. Following the instructor’s advice, I interviewed the superintendent. He was a bit late and apologized. We sat at a conference table in his office, not with a massive desk between us. He listened to my questions attentively and answered candidly, giving examples from his experience. He spoke of the strategic planning committees composed of individuals from the community, as well as parents, teachers, administrators, board members, and students working together to determine direction for the district. Decisions made by those committees would be honored even if he disagreed with them. He noted that he will listen carefully to what another has to say even if the other obviously dislikes him, because what is said can have value.

He extended the time of the interview slightly until I had exhausted my questions, and then added a bit of district background that became essential to my paper. This time as I walked away from the administration building, I felt encouraged for the future of the district. A transformational leader was at work transforming a formerly transactional organization.

There is still a long way to go in reconciling old factions and breaking the bonds of old habits, but there is hope that these things can be done because the superintendent is not

only a transformational leader but a man who has been transformed from slave to heir by Christ.

As the elevator rose, he clutched the proposal more firmly. It was a risk. He could lose his position. He had decided not to make the decisions on what and who must be eliminated without input from those affected. He had told his managers what reductions were required and instructed them to find ways to cut expenditures with minimum reduction in production for the division. Further, he had insisted that they involve as many of the workers as time allowed to help in making the determinations. Meanwhile, he had followed his own instructions talking to those who knew the requirements best, being open and honest about what he needed. Now the results were in his hand. He had discovered ways to cut costs he never would have considered on his own. It was not the conventional way of doing things in the company, but in Christ he found the freedom to be unconventional. In what he believed was a Spirit-led decision, management in his division had agreed to a temporary cut in pay, himself included.

Now it remained to be seen if the proposal could be accepted. The door opened at the top floor.

L. Susan Eigel

Book Review by Robin Morgan

"Holy Terrors: Thinking about Religion after September 11"

Bruce Lincoln, University of Chicago Press, 2003

Some of you probably saw the review of this book in "The Christian Century" – that's where it caught my eye and sounded like a piece worth reading. I'll give you a basic overview of Lincoln's work and then I'll discuss how his analysis might be particularly useful for those of us who are law/gospel theologians.

Lincoln, Caroline E. Haskell Professor of Divinity at the University of Chicago and a historian of religions, offers his readers six chapters. Chapter one, "The Study of Religion in the Current Political Moment," lays out his basic analytical matrix. He begins by quoting Clifford Geertz's definition of religion which has been taught to a generation of grad students: "A religion is (1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men [sic] by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic."

Lincoln follows this with Talal Asad's critique of Geertz. First, Asad observes that Geertz's definition focuses on interiority (symbols, moods, motivations, conceptions) while leaving "embodied practice, discipline and community" outside the pale. Asad says that this works well for Protestantism, but marginalizes Catholicism and Islam, for example, because of their orientation toward action rather than belief.

Secondly, Asad attributes Geertz's mistake, not to individual error, but to the whole project of defining religion, which "presumes a discrete object that can be identified in contradistinction to others [which] implies a model of 'religion' that emerged only with the Enlightenment." Lincoln goes on to say that the Enlightenment was essentially "the long struggle against the regime of truth that was centered in and championed by the medieval church."

It's from these two points of critique that Lincoln develops his view of the two basic ways religion gets lived out today. The first is the maximalist perspective, which sees religion permeating all aspects of culture. The second is the minimalist perspective, which comes out of the Enlightenment and relegates religion to "an important set of (chiefly metaphysical) concerns, [thereby] protecting its privileges against state intrusion, but [also] restricting its activity and influence to this specialized sphere."

Inside these two points of view about religion are four domains in which any religion functions. The first is a discourse, which is concerned with transcendent issues and claims some degree of transcendence for itself. "Discourse becomes religious not simply by virtue of its content, but also from its claims to authority and truth." Second is a set of practices, which grow out of the above discourse. Though no practice is inherently religious, it becomes religious by being imbued with meaning from the discourse. Third is the community, which develops around the discourse and the practices: people worshiping, living and working together. Even in their disagreements, they share a common set of assumptions about life that set the boundaries around their conversations and practices. Fourth is the institution, which helps perpetuate the religion from one generation to the next through formal and semiformal structures and officials.

From these basic building blocks of understanding, Lincoln goes on in chapters two through six to analyze a variety of situations on the political screen today. In chapter two he looks at the speeches of Bush and bin Laden on October 7, 2001 the day U.S. troops invaded Afghanistan. Using the above tools, Lincoln shows the similarities between the basic structure of their speeches and how they each used religious language to make the point that their cause was of God: in bin Laden's case overt maximalist language, in Bush's case overtly minimalist, but covertly maximalist for those with "ears to hear."

Chapter three, "Jihads, Jeremiads, and the Enemy Within" illustrates a Christian version of the maximalist approach to religion with a particular focus on Jerry Falwell's comments on the 700 Club on September 13, 2001. He blamed the events of 9/11 on pagans, abortionists, feminists, gays, lesbians, the ACLU and People for the American Way. All of these people "have attempted to secularize America, [and] have removed our nation from its relationship with Christ on which it was founded."

Chapter four expands on the two approaches and how they play out in a culture. According to Lincoln, in the maximalist society, religion is the central focus of culture, permeating and stabilizing all aspects of it. Religious authorities are responsible for keeping order. For the minimalist society, the economy is the central focus of culture and religion is relegated to the private sphere and metaphysical concerns. Here cultural preferences are a matter of fashion or market fluctuations and economic expansion leads to wealth and power. For the maximalist, the minimalist is seen as powerful and intrusive. For the minimalist, the maximalist is seen as a quaint throw back or as a threat capable of reactionary counterattacks.

Lincoln addresses the consequences of the minimalist approach

which has been adopted by Europe, North American and Japan: "Chief among these [consequences] were the expansion of economic wealth, state power, and industrial technology facilitated by diminished religious constraints on greed, violence, and scientific inquiry. Their increasingly minimalist stance toward religion was hardly the sole factor that enabled the Euramerican powers to colonize the rest of the world, but it is hardly insignificant. And where they did establish control, liberal as well as Marxist regimes attempted to disseminate minimalism as a – perhaps the – constitutive feature of 'modernity' and the necessary precondition for 'progress.'"

The last two chapters, "Religious Conflict and the Postcolonial State" and "Religion, Rebellion, Revolution," build on this understanding of imposed modernity and the way in which post-colonial states as well as marginalized groups within Euramerican cultures fight against minimalism and the modern world's moral malaise. For many colonized people the imposed minimalism seemed merely a matter of dismantling their indigenous culture rather than as a tool to build a modern society. In cultures that have never experienced the European wars of religion, which tore apart the continent, the population in general "saw no need for minimalizing initiatives, which they experience as a Western imposition threatening to the stability, dignity and integrity of their culture."

I find Lincoln's categories of minimalist and maximalist useful in thinking about how we, the church, function in this political climate, which is so highly charged with religion. The first way I find his categories to be useful is in raising awareness that religion is playing a huge role in the politics of the day. Those of us steeped in western minimalist thinking may not expect to find religion in the public square quite the way it's being presented these days. We may not know how to respond, but I am convinced that it's critical that we do. Especially those

of us who live and work using the law and promise hermeneutic as our primary theological touchstone, can't afford to stay only inside the functional structures, which have served us in the past. The academy and the congregation have ongoing importance to us, but we need to be willing to take our hermeneutic "to the streets." Though our intra-Lutheran theological arguments are important, I believe that the future of our tradition is in engagement with the world.

Many people, from a variety of faith traditions, are looking for moral and ethical shape to their daily lives; they are embracing a maximalist approach to religion in culture. Whether you have trained in one of Al Qaida's camps or sit in your living room watching CBN, people want guidance in making decisions about all aspects of their lives. Our minimalist penchant for claiming article seven (the church "is the assembly of believers among whom the gospel is purely preached and the holy sacraments are administered according to the gospel...this is enough for the true unity of the Christian church that there the sacraments are administered in conformity with the divine Word.") and leaving everything else in life to other institutions and individuals has given us a variety of labels, "quietist" being the first that springs to mind. Though I'm as loathe of prooftexting using Luther and the Book of Concord as I am of prooftexting using the Bible, it seems to me that even a cursory reading of Luther's life shows a man fully "Christ-intoxicated" and yet fully engaged in the world as well.

Why is it that Lutherans who are passionate about theology tend to ignore social justice issues and Lutherans who are passionate about social justice issues tend to ignore theology? Is justification tainted by justice? Is justice undermined by justification? Though the technological and economic advances of modernity have caused unprecedented strides in drawing our world together, now that we are so interconnected, how will we live

together? We know that it's neither the maximalist nor the minimalist approach to religion that will effect the changes that need to be made. Jesus Christ's work on our behalf, in spite of our sinfulness, is what will, in the end, bring about the peace and security we all crave. And if those of us who have some understanding of God's law as well as God's mercy in Christ don't wade out into the muck, how will this amazing good news we've been given become part of the mix that is the political scene today? Of course we're going to disagree, so what? I am more likely to get some insight into why anyone could think George W. Bush is doing a good job from a brother who shares my faith in Christ and basic theological understanding, than I am from another person with whom I don't share that faith and theological bond.

It's going to be messy. There will be times when we are theologically confused and even vulnerable as we try to make sense of what's going on around us and how we fit or don't fit in. If keeping our theology pristine and invulnerable to attack is our goal, then this is not the course for us. If sharing the good news of our Lord with the world and carrying out our responsibilities as human beings charged by the Creator with the care of creation is what we're about...sin boldly.