

# **R.W.Bertram on REVELATION (Posted in two parts. This is Part II)**

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## ***Theses on REVELATION.***

### ***Crossing a Modern Theme with its Biblical Original (Part II) [Continued from ThTh 268]***

***Robert W. Bertram***

#### ***IX. Divine Quandary***

*39. God, so to speak, is in a quandary. On the one hand, by keeping the lethal truth of the law veiled, the Creator in the short run spares sinners from immediate nihilation.40. But on the other hand, that very veiledness only deludes them into imagining that the law is survivable and, worse yet, that it is viable, a way to life rather than what it truly is, a "ministry of death." (v. 7)*

*41. Sinners are still doomed to death. But in spite of that they live under the illusion of a wrath-less, fulfillable law. Can God be part to that deception and still be honest, "righteous?"*

42. On the other hand, can God be “open” with us (4:2), unveiled, without destroying us?

#### *X. Christ the Unveiler*

43. It is in Jesus the Christ, Paul declares, that the law’s veil has at last been lifted (3:14-15) but not in the way the bullfighter’s red flag is lifted to let the bull come charging through. 44. Rather, Christ lifts the veil by interposing himself in the law’s line of fire. He absorbs its scorching blast for those who stand downwind of it as a heat-shield absorbs the lethal radiation.

45. In his death, where “one died for all,” sinners now confront the fatal “glow-ry” which was directed against them but from which they have now been spared. In him, their stand-in, “the ministry of death” is executed and, only then, revealed.

46. But simultaneously with this consuming wrath there is revealed the diametric opposite of wrath, the far “greater glory.” In the same Christ “who for their sake died and was raised” there glows God’s surpassing, wrath-absorbing mercy. Indeed, that is the mercy happening, Christ extinguishing our death in his.

47. In one and the same action, as God’s “blessing” overcomes God’s “curse,” both are revealed for what they are: real curse which in Christ, as in none other, succumbs to real blessing.

#### *XI. What is Not Revealed*

48. Notice what the unveiling in Christ does not reveal. It does not reveal that the divine condemnation never was real

in the first place, that all along it was merely a scowling “mask over God’s smiling face,” a tactical fiction. Nor is that what Luther intended by that metaphor.<sup>49</sup> That revelationist fallacy trivializes not only divine wrath but Christ as well. It reduces him to only a revealer, merely a messenger of a foregone conclusion, as if God’s mercy toward us would be in effect with or without Christ’s revealing, except that now we know about it. This is the Christ of the gnostics.

50. And not only does that revelationist fallacy under-employ Christ. It disemploys the Holying Spirit. To put all our christological eggs in the one basket of “Christ the Revealer” evades a prior question, Doesn’t Christ himself need revealing quite as much as God does? If his death is Good News self-evidently, then what need of the Spirit?

## XII. Reconciled

51. What Christ’s lifting the veil does reveal is how mortally real the law’s “ministry of death” is – and apart from him still is – and, moreover, how altogether “new” therefore must be God’s “reconciling to himself” such two utter opposites. (5:17-19)<sup>52</sup>. The opposites are, on the one hand, “the world” which in all honesty God finds infuriating versus, on the other hand, God “himself” who, though he yearns to love this world, yearns to love it not cheaply or permissively but in all honesty.

53. Among revelationists the verb “reconcile” in 2 Corinthians is usually subjectivized. We misinterpret God’s “reconciling the world to himself” as if God were merely getting the world to like him, improving our attitude toward God – as in marriage counseling, “reconciling” the alienated spouse (us) to once again feel love.

54. A more apt analogy from modern life, a more objective one, would be the reconciling done by an accountant, “reconciling” two sets of books which do not jibe, or balancing a frustrating checkbook. Or an investigative journalist tries to “reconcile” – to square, to harmonize – the claims people make with the actual facts.

55. In 2 Corinthians it is God who is reconciling “the world” – an utterly unacceptable, dishonest world – “to himself,” an utterly honest God, who longs to square these two polar incommensurables, yet in all honesty.

56. It is in the history of Jesus the Christ, says Paul, that this infuriating world at last becomes honestly plausible to God, “a new creation.” How so? By God’s “not counting [sinners’] trespasses against them” but instead “for our sake” making Christ “to be sin who knew no sin.” (5:17, 19, 21)

### XIII. Revelation Begs Reconciliation

57. Though this whole change happens “in Christ,” it is exactly to God that it happens. Whatever conflict there is in God is here reconciled, again, in God. What occurs in Christ occurs not outside of God. For it is “God [who] was in Christ, reconciling... to himself.”<sup>58</sup> More pointedly, whose honesty is it which is here at stake? Whose “righteousness” is here in the making – not only which is being revealed but which here and now is in process of coming into being? Whose righteousness? Paul’s answer: not merely ours but the very “righteousness of God.”

59. Indeed, what we are coming to be – we in Christ – is not just righteous ourselves. That is another language, the language of our “justification.” But here the talk is about

*the reconciling of God. So what we are to become, extravagant as that seems, is God's own "righteousness."*

*60. Theodicies ask, Where in the world is God being righteous – notice, not merely being revealed as righteous but himself developing, acquiring, gaining in righteousness? Where? Paul's answer: in Christ and his believers. In that worldly process, as we are becoming, the inner-worldly righteousness of God is becoming.*

*61. It is only when and as the divine opposites, curse and blessing, wrath and mercy, are in Christ historically reconciled that there is any revelation of mercy. Indeed, only then is there any actualized mercy to be revealed. Apart from that and prior to that historic reconciliation, the revelation is at best anticipatory.*

#### *XIV. Being Reconciled*

*62. But God's reconciliation "in Christ" does not conclude with the death and resurrection of Jesus. True, it was then and there (past tense) that "God was reconciling the world to himself." But what still remains is for the world, us, to suffer ourselves to be reconciled – or not. 63. And true, as of God's reconciling in Christ, "everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new." But our seeing that newness is intrinsic to our being included in it. That is why Paul says, "If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation." (5:17)*

*64. To accept that in Christ we are honestly made plausible to God or instead not to accept that and thus to forfeit such plausibility – both possibilities persist. In the one case the God-world reconciliation succeeds and is so revealed. In the other case, there is no reconciliation to be revealed,*

*seeing it is spurned. Effectively so.*

#### *XV. One Aroma, Two Scents*

*65. What prompts some to allow themselves to “be reconciled,” that is to believe, and others not? Paul is frank to admit that the difference lies not in themselves alone but also in the revelation itself. The very idea of God’s unveiling the law in Christ, to his hurt and to our advantage, strikes people differently.66. To some people, as Paul says, the God-world reconciliation in the cross reeks of death and morbidity, hence is obnoxious, and for understandable reasons right within the Christ event itself. Such a reaction, though understandable, reveals the reactionaries – if not to themselves, at least to believers – as “perishing.”*

*67. To others, however, the same original odor, “the aroma of Christ,” comes across as joyous and vivifying, “a fragrance from life to life.” They thereby, in view of their quite different response of faith, are revealed as “those who are being saved.”*

#### *XVI. Revealing Us*

*68. Hence it isn’t only God who is revealed. So are God’s believers. Or as Paul says to the Galatians, “faith [is] revealed” – revealed for what it is, namely, as justifying, as the birthmark of junior deities. (3:23-26)69. This revealing of faith – notice, not just a revealing to faith but of faith, disclosing its wondrous clout – recalls how in the Synoptics the compliments which Jesus pays to faith sound almost idolatrous: “great,” “has made you well,” “has saved you.”*

*70. In 2 Corinthians, faith is revealed as our “accepting” of*

*the world's having been reconciled to God in Christ. (6:1) And therewith, with our accepting, that part of the world which is we is in fact "being reconciled." (5:20)*

## *XVII. Ministry of Reconciliation*

*71. We have saved until last the crucial missing link, what Paul calls "the ministry of reconciliation." (2 Cor. 5:18) Between God's "reconciling the world to himself in Christ," on one hand, and believers' suffering themselves to "be reconciled," on the other, there intervenes that link of love, a "means of grace," the apostolic ministry.<sup>72</sup> Like the incarnate "God in Christ," the apostolic ministry is likewise divine-human. Though it is obviously "we," the all too human Paul, who here and now "entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God," it is no less "God [who] is making his appeal through us." (5:20) So vulnerably does God submit to human mediation.*

*73. The divine plea, "Accept your reconciledness," though that may be rebuffed by many, is meant for everyone. So the apostolic messenger "from now on...regard(s) no one from a human ["fleshly"] point of view." (5:16) In Christ everyone is eligible. Where there is faith there is hope.*

## *XVIII. An Open Ministry*

*74. Apostolic ministers, as the name "apostle" suggests, are messengers. Though they are personally chosen for this messengership, their authority inheres in the Message they bring. Paul's "ministry of reconciliation" is "the message of reconciliation." (5:18, 19) The Message makes the messenger, not vice versa.<sup>75</sup> "We are engaged in this ministry," says Paul, as opposed to what other ministry? The opposite*

ministry – and there is such – is “the ministry of death,” “the ministry of condemnation.” The apostolic ministry, by contrast, is “the ministry of the Spirit,” “the ministry of justification.” (4:1, 3:7-9)

76. However, it is not as though “the ministry of death” has simply been by-passed. It has been fulfilled, remember, in the cross of Christ and only thus superseded. Indeed, the very thing which distinguishes the apostolic ministry, namely, its sheer openness, its unveiledness, lies in its frontal and free dealing with sin, law, death.

#### XIX. A Readable Bodily Letter

77. Moreover, the death and rising of Christ not only marks the Message the messenger brings but even marks those who receive the Message. “We are afflicted in every way but not crushed, ... always carrying in the body the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies.” (4:8, 10) A quite bodily revelation! 78. Thus Paul can picture his readers, the believers, as themselves a revealing message – to the world. “You yourselves are our letter.” The content of the letter is “Christ.” Its verbalizer is the apostle. The One who inscribes it, not on tablets of stone but on the believers’ hearts is the Spirit.

79. This “letter,” which is the believers themselves and whose content is their crucified and risen Lord now bodying forth in their own mundane crosses and easters, renders them legible. To whom? “To be known and read by all humanity.” (3:2)

80. It is into believers’ “hearts” that “the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” has “shone.” Thanks to the mediating ministry of messengership, the original “glow-ry”

*of God's "reconciling the world to himself" in Christ now radiates into that same dark world through the cruciform and paschal lives of the reconciled ones. (4:6)*

*Robert W. Bertram*

*September, 1993*

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### ***THESES ON REVELATION.***

#### ***Crossing a Modern Theme with its Biblical Original (Part I)***

***Robert W. Bertram***

*I. Retrieving "Revelation"1. Theologians since the Enlightenment have so overused the biblical theme, revelation, and often in such sub-biblical ways, that the*

term has become "inflated." It has increased in currency but depreciated in value.

2. So much so that critics seriously suggest declaring a moratorium on the term. That is unlikely to happen soon. The bolder course would be to regain for the concept of revelation its original biblical force, notably as it was employed by Paul.

II. Does Revelation Save? 3. Today's revelationist theologies assume that the only thing the world has ever needed in order to be "saved" is to be shown that it already is saved. If so, we really must not need all that much saving, just a recognition of a salvation which obtains anyway, whether we believe it or not.

4. What we need, presumably, is not that God will love us— that, it is assumed, God does in any case — but only that God would reveal that love to us, persuading us how well loved we already are.

5. If that were true, then, whether we are convinced of God's love or not, whether we accept it or reject it, loved we still are. It is as if the world were unconditionally elected and that grace were irresistible, no matter how resistive the world may appear to the contrary.

6. Beginning from that dubious premise, revelationists are left to busy themselves with only one change, a change of human hearts and minds, an attitudinal change in our relationship to God.

7. Still, within revelationism even that change makes little difference in the end. For in revelationist theologies the only decisive relation is not our relationship to God but God's to us, which allegedly has

*never needed changing in the first place. That relationship is assumed to be fixed – by definition gracious.*

*8. Thus the “revealing” of divine grace seems to be the only project left to promote, though even that makes little difference ultimately. That is why the idea of revelation, though currently it abounds in theologies everywhere, has drastically lost its original cash value. It has become an inflationary concept.*

*III. Getting Loved*  
*9. What this revelationist half-truth forgets is how inter-personal the biblical love is. Inseparable from God’s loving is the part we play in it, precisely as the beloved.*

*10. Consider this biblical view. Just negatively, if those whom God promises to love should disbelieve the Promiser, then they are not in fact “getting” loved. What they are getting – and from God! – is the opposite.*

*11. Conversely, it is exactly in their trusting the Promiser that the promised love comes true. Of course, they do not make it come true. The love is always of God’s making. But neither does God love without the loved ones’ receiving it, without their getting loved – which is what faith is.*

*12. Note the analogy to human promising. A bride promises to love her husband. But suppose he distrusts her. Then, not only is he deprived of her love. Her love itself shrivels to a private feeling, a solipsism. Her conscience may be clear. But is he being loved? If so, only in a way that discredits him. Is that love?*

*13. Grace is like kissing. God does not do it alone. Unilaterally? Yes. Even passionately. But not*

*ineffectually, not without the beneficiaries' receiving it. The kiss is not thrown or forced or slept through. In one measure or another, sooner or later, it is accepted, enjoyed. If not, whatever "kiss" there was becomes instead a reproach.*

*IV. Two Prior Questions*<sup>14</sup>. There are at least two prior questions about revelation which revelationists neglect, though Paul did not. First, as what is God revealed? Only as gracious? Not also as wrathful? Second, is it only God who is revealed? Aren't we as well?

*15. As to the first question, as Paul knew well, there is also a revealing of God which is anything but saving, namely, the revealing of divine condemnation. That revelation, too, must be faced. Yet it cannot be faced except on pain of death.*

*16. As to the second question, Paul reminds us that it isn't only God who is being revealed, whether in wrath or in mercy, but so – in both cases – are we: either as infuriating or as endearing. Indeed, it is only as we heed God's revelation of us that God's self-revelation occurs.*

*V. Divine Wrath*<sup>17</sup>. On the first point, that God is revealed also as wrathful, Paul leaves no doubt. "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against... the wickedness of those who by their wickedness suppress the truth." (Rom. 1:18)

*18. In fact – literally, in actual, observable fact – that is the divine wrath, that God lets them "by their wickedness suppress the truth."*

*19. What is observable, empirically so, is at least the fact of "wickedness" and even perhaps the fact that that*

wickedness functions to "suppress the truth." What Paul discerns in that fact, and that is what is "wrathful," is that God lets us do it. "God gave them up." (v. 24)

20. Human, truth-suppressing wickedness implies not just an absence of God but an absenting of God.

21. That is the hard point, however, which is so incredible, most of all to revelationists, namely, that our suppressing the truth by our wickedness has the active acquiescence of the Creator, who indignantly abandons us to our untruth.

22. That is why, because it is so offensive to piety, that the bitter, suppressed truth about God's wrath has to be "revealed," literally unveiled. Without that revelation we moralize our sin, arrogating it exclusively to ourselves, denying any thought of God's angrily letting us have our way.

VI. Contradiction in God? 23. The starkest theological antithesis is not, as we often pretend, between "sin and grace," namely, between something we do (sin) and something God does (grace.) True, that antithesis would be stark enough.

24. But no, starker still is the corresponding antithesis, as Paul puts it, between divine law and divine promise, between God's cursing and blessing.

25. Notice, that antithesis between God's wrath and God's mercy is real, not merely apparent. It isn't as if God only seems to be wrathful but really is only loving, or as if wrath is just a temporary disguise until it is unmasked, disclosing the kindly God behind it. What is revealed is judgment no less real than its opposite, mercy.

26. Nor is it a matter of two gods, a demonic one who accuses and a pitying one who forgives. Both actions are the doings of one and the same righteous God.

27. But then doesn't this revealed antithesis of wrath versus mercy, law versus gospel, imply a contradiction within God? Perhaps it does.

28. Still, need that be offensive? Might it not be Good News? Isn't it a marvel of the divine mercy that out of love for us God is willing even to incur contradiction? After all, God could have avoided such inner conflict by sticking just to the law and being done with us.

29. And isn't the greater marvel this, that God finds a way, as Paul says, to "reconcile" the contradiction (2 Cor. 5:18-19), and at immense personal cost, even if that entails being triune in the process?

VII. Understandable Denial<sup>30</sup>. Revelationists typically evade Paul's antithesis by construing "wrath" not as God's real self, which for them can only be love, but rather as a passing – stern, yes, but passing – "form of grace."

31. Once the divine wrath has thus been domesticated, it becomes instead a kind of interim "tough love," a merely tactical means for bringing sinners to mercy – and never anything but such a means.

32. Would that The Critical Process were that benign or always that temporary.

33. On the other hand, it must be admitted that the divine wrath is seldom manifest in all its force and fury – and finality. So it is understandable, just on empirical grounds, why revelationists might shrug off Paul's and other biblical writers' depiction of God's

*anger as exaggerated.*

VIII. *Moses' Face Veiled*<sup>34</sup>. Paul senses how extreme his claims about divine wrath must seem, especially to the religious establishment. And he accepts the burden of proof. He appeals to the establishment's own Writings, to the story in the Book of Exodus where Moses descended from Sinai to present his people with the newly revealed law. (2 Cor. 3:7-18)

35. *So blinding was the brightness of Moses' face, having just come down from his encounter with the Lord, that Moses had to don a veil in order to spare his people the withering glow of the law's "glory." ("Glory" might better be spelled glow-ry.)*

36. *With that allegory Paul dramatizes a universal condition that still prevails: the law always comes to us "veiled." Its fierce "condemnation" of us has to be muted, actually belied, in the process of transmission. Else we in our weakness could not tolerate the law's mortifying truth even minimally.*

37. *Moreover, this veiling of the law, a concession to human weakness, is a compromise to which the law's own Author is party. God colludes with our veiled minds and deliberately conceals the full truth of our condemnation.*

38. *The only alternative, it seems, would be for God to lift the veil from the law, as a bullfighter lifts his red cape from the path of the charging bull. But then the price of truth would be the goring of the crowd downfield. Instead, for the moment, the veil stays between and the people's fate remains hidden from them.*

IX. *Divine Quandary*<sup>39</sup>. God, so to speak, is in a quandary. .

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*[To be continued in the next ThTh posting.]*

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# **Bertram's "Heretical"? Theology and the Missouri Synod national convention 1973 in New Orleans. A Reprint.**

Colleagues,

Here's a sequel to the last two ThTh postings about the "war" in the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod 30 years ago. Background: in advance of the showdown convention in New Orleans 1973, the presidents of the LCMS's 35 districts asked the accused faculty members to "tell the church what you really believe and teach." So the accused responded with a 4-page "Affirmation of Faith," drafted by Norm Habel and Ed Schroeder and subscribed by all members of the "faculty majority," plus a collection of "Personal Confessions of Faith" – 45 of them, one from each of the accused. It was titled "Faithful to our Calling, Faithful to our Lord." But it did not satisfy the critics. New Orleans Resolution 3-09 said these affirmations did not resolve, but actually confirmed "the charges of false teaching." Below is what Crossings-founder Bob Bertram said in his personal affirmation. It is vintage Bertram, Bob taking us on "the scenic route," yet bringing us to "shame-less" doxology at the end. Bob went to his grave 19 weeks ago today with the charges never rescinded. Who was the false teacher? The accused or the accuser? You decide.

Peace & Joy!  
The ThTh desk

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**Robert W. Bertram**

**Chairman of the Department of Systematic Theology,  
Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology**

*What could possibly be so important about my faith that I should now be asked to publish it like this “for use in discussion forums”? What is there about my faith that is all that interesting? Certainly not the fact that this faith is mine. That is hardly what makes it important. Then what does? Is it the fact that, being a pastor and teacher, I am in a position to impose my faith on others? True, that influence upon others, which is why I need to be controlled by the church’s ordination, does render what I believe a matter of public concern. Still, all this only pushes the question back farther yet. If what is important about my faith is that it might influence the faith of others, then why is the faith of these others so important in the first place? Why is the faith of any Christian important.?*

*If Jesus our Lord could say to His converts, “Great is your faith,” what was it about their faith that was great? How could He say about their faith that that was the thing which “made you well” or “saved you”? Why do we say of our own faith that it is that and that alone, quite independently of the good things our faith does, which endears us to God?*

*What is so great about faith? Is it the fact that our faith is not our own doing but God’s, by grace alone? But that is not*

unique with faith; that much is true also of our loving, our forgiving and all the other gifts of the Spirit we receive. If that has been our big reason for extolling faith, namely that it is the work of God, then no wonder we sometimes sound so Reformed, emphasizing SOLA GRATIA in a way which deemphasizes SOLA FIDE. Unless the AUGSBURG CONFESSION is mistaken, the only way truly to say SOLA GRATIA is to say SOLA FIDE.

Why is faith special? Is it because faith believes what God says and that way is sure of being right? Of course, that is what faith believes, God's Word, and His Word is always right. But merely agreeing with Him does not make us right. For one of the things God says is that we are all wrong. "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands." "All men are liars." It is tempting to want to disprove that judgment upon us – of all things, by agreeing with it. For then wouldn't we at least be right about THAT: about how wrong we are? But God does not fall for tricks like that. Nor is He impressed with how right we are about Bible history. So what if I do believe (as I do) that the Israelites crossed the Red Sea dry-shod or that Jesus was born of a virgin or that He rose from the dead? That much, says God with a shrug, the devils also believe. So then that could hardly be what distinguishes faith as great, namely, how right it makes us to believe what God says.

But there is one thing which God says, one Word of His, which is different: not His word as law but His Word as promise. That promissory Word does change us from wrong to right if and as we believe it. That, finally, is what is great about faith: in our faith God's promise comes true. He promises to forgive us, but only in trusting that promise do we get forgiven. If His promise goes unbelieved, it goes unfulfilled. A man can promise with all his heart that he loves his wife, but if she disbelieves him, she is not getting loved; his promise is thwarted. With God's other Word, His judging Word, faith makes

no such difference. His judgment that we are sinners applies whether we believe it or not. But not so with His promise. That depends on being believed. Not that faith CREATES the promise. The promise is not something subjective, man-made. The promise is as real as God and it simply stands independently, the way a man's Baptism does or the Body and Blood in Christ's Supper, whether it is accepted or denied. But if it is denied, it stands as judgment and no longer as promise. Still, its original purpose is promise, and the promise is meant to be enjoyed. That is what faith is, enjoying the promise.

The one trouble with faith is not that it isn't great but that it is so scarce, even in the staunchest believers. But isn't that a criticism of us? It is. Then does judgment have the last word after all? Not really. The dear God, bless Him, takes our scarce faith and "reckons it to [us] for righteousness." Not that our FAITH isn't already righteous or that God first has to pretend that it is righteous. Our faith, what there is of it, is indeed righteous. The trouble is, our tiny faith is more than outweighed by its opposite, our unfaith – for example, our worry, which Jesus equates with faithlessness and, in turn, with hatred of God. Yet God "reckons" that tiny faith to me, to all of me, including the unbelieving me, as wall-to-wall righteousness. Which is enough righteousness for a man to live off of for the rest of his life. That is, forever. God treats believing sinners as whole righteous persons, but PROPTER FIDEM. Because of our faith, timid and paltry though it is, God is delighted with us whole and entire. But why? Ah, there at last is the question by which all theology and all theologians are to be tested for their biblicalness. Why does God count us meagre believers as altogether right when in fact we are still desperately wrong? What is it about our faith, even our faltering faith, which prompts Him to pay us such sweeping compliments?

The reason, quite simply, is the one whom our faith is faith in, Jesus the Christ. Either He is the Christ, and in that case our faith in Him is vindicated. Or He is not the Christ, and then are we of all men the most miserable. If it should turn out at the end of history, in The Last Analysis, that Jesus is not Lord after all, then our faith in Him, no matter how sincere, will be exposed as the very opposite of "great." It will be an everlasting reproach to us. All the more so with public teachers and pastors like me, who have in addition led others into this same faith, including our own families. Yet trust Him we do, as the Christ of God and our very Lord, and stake our lives on Him. Because it is in Him that we believe, and not for any other reason, we dare therefore to hope that God finds our poor faith, finds us ourselves, a joy to behold.

This Jesus, whom we believe to be the only-begotten Son of God, is the only man among us who has been truly right. But He has been right FOR US, in our stead and on our behalf, even to the point of being made wrong for us – He who knew no wrong. Because He is for us, we believe that the One whom He called God is the only God there is and, being the Father of Jesus, is therefore a Father to us as well. Though we do not deny that there are other spirits, even spirits who may heal and who impel men to superhuman activity, we do believe that that Spirit by whom the risen Christ and His Father have spirited the Christian community is the only Spirit deserving of the title "Holy."

Because Christ Jesus is "for us men and for our salvation," we do by believing in Him so identify with Him that we take His death to be our death and His resurrection our resurrection. And we believe that God concurs in that identification and will see it through. Believing this, we are liberated as never before to take also the criticism of God's law, killing though that is, and actually have found such dying profitable for

living. We call that the “joy of repentance” or “the dear holy cross.”

In fact, since Jesus Christ is PRO NOBIS, for us, we who believe in Him (though we are originally from many different races and traditions) now take on the very history out of which He came, the history of an obscure and oppressed people, and take the Scriptures which explain that history. That is, we now take that history, though it does not appear to be ours, as having happened for us, and the Word of God which is there recorded as having been recorded for us. All this, again, for one reason only: the great promise which that biblical history shows is finally kept, for us and for all nations, by Jesus Christ. Accordingly, all biblical history, even the history of God’s law, is subordinated to and read in the light of God’s promise-kept, Jesus our Lord. Our one rule for doing that is the writings of Jesus’ own apostles who, like the prophets before them, were inspired by the Spirit of God but who, unlike the prophets, now recorded the history of a NEW covenant, rendering the prior covenant “old.”

It is into that New Covenant and its ongoing history that we believe ourselves authorized to invite all the peoples of the world, who, since Christ was Brother to them, are our brothers as well. Because of our faith, seeing that it is faith in Him, we are confident that none of all those who believe in Him will be put to shame when He comes back.

Robert W. Bertram

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# Missouri Synod / Seminex / Bethel Church In Crisis (Part II – Conclusion)

Colleagues,

Today's posting concludes Arthur Beckman's research project on the consequences of the Missouri Synod Controversy of the 1970s for his own congregation in St. Louis. Arthur had a 46-year career in industrial and construction sales and marketing. Now retired, he is studying theology to get his credentials as a Parish Ministry Associate (PMA) in the Central States Synod of the ELCA. Today's posting, and the one for last Thursday too, represent a research project Art did this spring term in the PMA program. His e-address is <babeckman@juno.com>Peace & Joy!

The ThTh desk

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## ***Beckman Part II. Conclusion***

*On January 21st [1974] approximately 400 Concordia students met to discuss a moratorium on all classes "until such time as the Seminary Board of Control officially and publicly declares which members of the faculty, if any, are to be considered as false teachers and what Scriptural and Confessional principles, if any, have been violated." Later that same day the faculty majority approved resolutions expressing pride and support for the students and considering itself suspended with Dr. Tietjen. On January 22 the faculty majority (46 faculty and Staff) sent*

a letter to Preus condemning the board's actions and challenging him to clear the faculty or dismiss them for cause. Bethel Church wrote a letter of encouragement to the students.

On January 25th the students began "Operation Outreach" wherein they would travel across the country to bring "truth" of what was going on at Concordia Seminary. Preus countered with a 32 page letter dated January 28 to all pastors, teachers, congregational officers, and lay delegates to the New Orleans giving his side of the controversy. Included with the letter was Appendix 6; an unsigned letter purported to be from some 30 seminary students complaining about various harassments by Tietjen and the faculty. No student could be found who "signed" the letter or helped in the writing, and 19 "conservative students wrote a letter refuting the charges." Pastor Alfred Buls of Bethel Church brought to the faculty majority's attention a letter, signed by over 100 St. Louis area pastors, in support of their actions which was read on Sunday January 28.

After four weeks of fruitless non-negotiations, letters written to Preus without answers, purported "deals" offered, meetings that accomplished nothing, charges the students were being "used," and "restatement of Synod positions," the board acted. On February 18th the Board of Control issued a "Document of Dismissal" demanding that "certain members the faculty" agree in writing by 12 noon February 18, 1974 to "resume their functions on February 19th " or their contracts would be terminated as of January 18, 1974. The faculty majority agreed not to respond and began firming up plans for a "seminary in exile."

Acting on faith that God would somehow provide, the faculty majority assumed they were "fired" at 12 noon on February 18, 1974. They had no paychecks, pension plans were paid through

March and it was hoped some arrangement could be made on medical insurance. ELIM (the funding entity) had only \$10,000.00, but a campaign was afoot to raise an additional \$150,000.00. Like Luther, the faculty majority did not want to leave the Missouri Synod and they envisioned the seminary in exile (Seminex) as not a new institution, but as Concordia Seminary in exile. The plan was to work with Eden Seminary and St. Louis University School of Divinity for office space, library and classrooms. Students would be placed as vicars [the term now is "interns"] and pastoral candidates in Missouri Synod Churches per a vote by the Council of Presidents on February 8, 1974. The faculty majority would continue all the programs in which students were enrolled and it was hoped that Concordia Seminary would issue degrees.

Since October 1973 John Damm, academic dean, David Yagow, Concordia Seminary registrar, and Jeanette Bauermeister, Bethel member and Damm's administrative assistant, had been working on plans to work with other seminaries to continue the education of the Concordia students. In November a meeting was held with three local seminaries to confirm their willingness to help and two agreed, but Kenrick Seminary [of the Roman Catholic archdiocese of St. Louis] backed out. Other options were considered and rejected for various reasons and no help was forthcoming from any other Missouri Synod Schools. In January Damm met with the president of the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, a Lutheran Church of America seminary, to discuss issuing of degrees. On February 4 the final agreements were made with St. Louis University and Eden Seminary for completing the education of the students, subject to approval of their respective presidents. Final approval came at 11:15 A.M. [on Feb. 19] as the students were voting their approval of a seminary in exile.

The Concordia students meeting started at 8:30 AM on Feb. 19th

with discussions and questions on vicarages, student housing, accreditation, ministerial certification and more. The questions were answered and Damm read a document outlining the details of the proposed seminary in exile. He explained again some of the background leading up to the firing of the professors and the plans that had been made to continue the students' education. He promised that their degrees would be from an accredited university, hopefully Concordia Seminary, stressing again the faculty majority's hopes for reconciliation. A letter of support for the students from St. Phillip's Lutheran Church, a black congregation, was read. At 11:15 AM the students voted to "resume our theological education in exile, trusting in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Shortly after the vote the students, faculty majority and many staff members marched out of the fieldhouse carrying white crosses. The procession was led by a crucifix and all were singing "The Church's One Foundation." The crosses, each with an individual's name, were planted in the quadrangle as the students and faculty marched toward the seminary gate. "The seminary was turned into a cemetery." The students boarded up the entrance to Concordia Seminary with large wood frames on which was written EXILED. Across the street John Damm was waiting with a representative of Eden Seminary and the St. Louis University School of Divinity.

On February 20th Seminex began functioning at St. Louis University and Eden Seminary. The offices were at St. Louis U. along with the beginnings of a library of borrowed books while Eden supplied some classrooms and student housing. Some students continued to live in Concordia housing after the seminary figured out that empty rooms generated no income. Registration of almost 400 students for the Seminex spring quarter took place on March 10. The University made the Chapel

*in DuBorg hall available and Seminex students met there to pray about the future.*

*Public, church and secular outrage made Concordia Seminary relent on evicting the professors [from seminary-owned housing] and the deadline was extended from February 28th to March 28th. A large apartment building was made available on a "pay whatever you can afford" basis. Volunteer groups from Bethel and other local churches cleaned and painted apartments for the professors and their families. ELIM was strictly a fund raising organization, not a church, although that is what the Missouri Synod called it when they started to "kick out" individuals and churches that "belonged" to ELIM. The professors missed only one monthly check and ELIM paid off the loans some had with the Synod for their off-campus homes. Bethel called several of the professors to positions on our staff to keep them on the Missouri Synod Clergy Roster and keep insurance and pensions in force.*

*About this time Bethel attempted to have a meeting or forum to discuss the goings-on at the Seminary. Dr. Scharlemann, the brother-in-law of Ed Schroeder and of George Hoyer, all Bethel members, agreed to present the seminary's side, but it was a very short meeting. The Bethel members were so upset with what was going on that they could not control themselves and the meeting had to be called off. Dr. Scharlemann had to be escorted from the church for his own safety. He never came back and along with two other professors of the "faculty-minority" transferred their membership from Bethel to other congregations. In March Bethel voted to modify their mission budget and give 50% to Missouri and 50% to ELIM. Two families left.*

*The placement of vicars and graduates was a major concern of the Seminex faculty and students. The Council of Presidents (of*

Synod Districts) worked out a compromise in March 1974 for Seminex second-year students to be placed in Missouri Synod churches [for internships] but the graduates were another matter. Many compromises were attempted, but by graduation time nothing had been worked out. The Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago, an LCA school, agreed to issue degrees of Master of Divinity to the Seminex graduates. Graduation took place on May 24, 1974 in the quadrangle of Washington University. In June, Preus warned the Synod presidents not to place graduates, but by August about 75% had been placed and by the end of 1974 virtually all had been placed. 446 students registered for the 1974 fall term. By the end of 1975 another 75% of that year's graduates had been placed.

There were many calls for reconciliation at the July 1975 Missouri Synod Convention in Anaheim CA, but the 60% Preus majority adopted "courses that required capitulation." 130 of the 131 Preus-approved candidates won election, and the convention reaffirmed Preus' "Statement of Scripture and Confessional Principles." "It urged congregations that had received Seminex graduates to conform to Synod's bylaws or face expulsion." The convention moved Concordia Theological Seminary at Springfield, IL to Fort Wayne, Indiana, and closed the Concordia Senior College, a major supplier of Seminex students. They censured eight district presidents who had authorized ordination of Seminex graduates and threatened them with expulsion.

In August 1974 Seminex had moved to the second floor of a building at 306 North Grand "to relieve serious overcrowding at St. Louis University." A year later they moved again to the University Club Building at 607 North Grand. Jeanette Bauermeister, a Bethel member along with her husband, Rev, Dr. Paul Bauermeister, a psychologist in private practice and part-time Seminary instructor, was in charge of the move. She had

lots of help from Bethel members including Dr. Charles Ford, a St. Louis University Professor of Mathematics and a Dietrich Bonhoeffer scholar. The new location provided office, chapel, library and classroom space. The Seminex Guild, including Bethel members Neva Merzlok, Chairperson and Ruth Scheurmann, treasurer, helped supply furniture, library equipment and more.

On April 2, 1976 the president of the English District (a non-geographical district of the Missouri Synod that had once been a synod of its own) was removed from office by Preus for ordaining Seminex graduates. The district voted to return to its earlier independent status as the "English Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church." On April 14 the Coordinating Council of ELIM voted to form a new church, The Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches (AELC). In September Bethel voted (95 for, 11 against and 7 abstaining) to become an independent congregation in the AELC. Ten families left Bethel, most of them among the big givers. By December 250 churches had formed five synods in the new church. In January 1977, ten more Bethel families transferred out, but five new families transferred in.

Funding and placing graduates were always problems for Seminex, and 1977 added the problem of declining enrollment. Even with declining enrollment the 250 churches in the AELC were not sufficient to guarantee placement of all graduates. Some, including my son-in-law, were assigned to Missouri Synod churches. He went to a small, 40-member church in southern New Jersey where the Missouri Synod mail continued to be addressed to "Pastoral Vacancy." In the fall of '77 talks were initiated about Seminex serving the American Lutheran Church (ALC) and Lutheran Church of America (LCA) churches, but did not get very far. In April 1978 the AELC created a task force to discuss ways of working with the ALC and LCA who were already talking [about merger]. "A Call for Lutheran Unity" was approved by the AELC and LCA conventions but the ALC would only agree to

*include the AELC in the ongoing talks.*

*In September 1979 Bethel received a letter from the Missouri Synod terminating its membership in the Synod effective August 22, 1979. About that time Paul Bauermeister received his letter of expulsion after twenty years as a rostered clergy with no meetings or prior notice. The Synod / Seminex conflict really tore the St. Louis community apart. Church congregations were divided and families split. The situation seemed more than dumb; seminarians that graduated prior to January 1974 were seen as fully qualified for the ministry. Those who were taught the same subjects by the same professors and graduated later were deemed not qualified by the synod. No charges were ever brought against individual faculty members; it was no wonder that people were confused.*

*A Committee on Lutheran Union with seven members each from the ALC and LCA and two members from the AELC had its first meeting on January 21-23, 1979 in New York City.(2-302) The committee met several times during 1979 and 1980 and came up with four organizational options which were to be discussed at the various conventions in 1980. More discussions were held during the early and mid 80's. In the summer of 1979 representatives of Seminex (now called Christ Seminary-Seminex), the ALC's Wartburg Theological Seminary (WTS) and LSTC met in Chicago and agreed to work together in a Doctor of Ministry program. WTS more or less dropped out of further meetings but there was talk in the ALC about a new seminary in Texas. In June of 1980 the president of LSTC officially asked Seminex to consider moving to the LSTC campus.*

*On January 29,1982 the presidents and deans of WTS, LSTC and Seminex met in Chicago and agreed that a major portion of Seminex resources would be united with LSTC and the remainder shared with other Lutheran seminaries. The agreement did not*

sit well with all the Seminex professors, particularly Ed Schroeder and Bob Bertram and some students. A forum was held at Bethel to discuss leaving some professors in St. Louis, but the majority was for deployment to Chicago, California and Texas. By the summer of '82 it was decided who would go where, and only Ed Schroeder remained in St. Louis.

With the deployment of Seminex in 1983, Bethel lost ten professors and Jeanette and Paul Bauermeister. Carl Graesser, Ev Kalin and George Hoyer went to California, and John Constable went to Austin, Texas. Ed Krentz, Fred Danker, Bob Conrad, Kurt Hendel, Ralph Klein and Dave Deppe went to Chicago. Carl Volz had earlier taken a position with Luther Seminary in Minneapolis. Bill Danker retired but later joined the LSTC faculty. Norm Habel went to Australia. Bill Krato, Al Fuerbringer and Herb Mayer retired and stayed at Bethel. Along with losing assistant pastors and Bible study instructors, Bethel lost ten active wives and Bethel School lost several students. It was a time for reflection at Bethel.

During the ten years of controversy Bethel lost about 75 members and a sizable portion of our contributions to Missouri Synod churches. Most of these were old time Bethel members who wanted the congregation to stay as they remembered and didn't particularly like the changes that were taking place. The members who were left, including some old timers and the new members who joined, some from Missouri Synod churches, were a great bunch. They made adjustments and continued to move on. Pastor Buls said: "it was a real joy to be a pastor there."

The Lutheran High School Association [a St. Louis consortium of Missouri Synod congregations] told Bethel we could still be a member and pay dues, but not vote and our students would be considered "non-Lutheran" as far as tuition payments were concerned. This obviously was not acceptable to Bethel and much

discussion followed. As I recall, we never did get to vote, but our students were allowed to pay the reduced Lutheran tuition. That was just one of many situations we had to face while trying to figure out what, if anything, we had changed in our doctrine.

In January '77 the congregation had voted to have contributions to synods designated by individual givers to resolve the problem of determining where the church should send the money. By November 1979 contributions were 8% behind pledges and in November 1982 we were still behind in contributions. In January 1982 Bethel had 668 baptized members, by January 1984 that number had dropped to 641. In September 1983 there were 100 students in Bethel School, down from the normal 115.

A task force was put together to study the effect on Bethel when the 10 Seminex families left. Several adult Bible classes were devoted to the subject, including a review of the mission of the church. A report was published outlining the activities that were going on and listing suggestions and ideas for new activities. A program was initiated to contact inactive members of the congregation and find new people who could fill in for the people who had left. Programs were initiated for every-member visit and training people to witness to the community. Bethel was determined to make the professors' leaving an opportunity for looking for new sources of skill from people within the congregation.

"The bitter battle in the Synod was a terrible negative witness, the very opposite of what God would want, but throughout this adversity the members of Bethel congregation served faithfully and God has done some great things through them. I am always amazed as I think back on Bethel, what a very special group of people this was." (E-mail from Al Buls)

## **EPILOGUE**

*Pastor Buls retired from the ministry later in 1983, because of “burn out” and no small wonder after going through all that. The American Lutheran Church, the Lutheran Church of America and the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches became the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA) on January 1, 1988 and Bethel joined the new church immediately.*

## **REFERENCES**

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- 2. “Memoirs in Exile”, John H. Teitjen*
- 3. “A History of Lutheranism”, Eric Gritsch*
- 4. “The Lutherans”, Lagerquist*
- 5. “Together Into The Future” Bethel Task Force Report, July 1983*
- 6. Interview with Rev. Jeanette and Dr. Paul Bauermeister*
- 7. Interview with Ed Schroeder*
- 8. Phone and e-mail – Al Buls, former Bethel Pastor*
- 9. Interview with Rev. Bill Yancey, Seminex Grad, Current Pastor at Bethel*
- 10. Interview with Charles Ford, former member of Bethel, Professor at St. Louis U.*

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# **Missouri Synod / Seminex / Bethel Church In Crisis (Part**

# I)

Colleagues,

Thirty years ago this week—July 6-13, 1973—at the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod’s national convention in New Orleans, the so-called “faculty majority” of Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, some 40-plus of the professors teaching there, were declared “false teachers.” By a majority vote of 574 to 451 (56% to 44%) the LCMS delegates passed Resolution 3-09 “repudiating the attitude” of that faculty majority and declaring their teaching “false doctrine running counter to the Holy Scriptures, the Lutheran Confessions, and the synodical stance and for that reason ‘cannot be tolerated in the church of God, much less excused and defended’” (Resolution 3-09). A final resolve “turned these matters over to the Board of Control of Concordia Seminary” to execute the synod’s decision. And execute they did. When it was all over, the majority was sacked—all of them—and Seminex (Concordia Seminary in Exile) was born. Three heresies were pinpointed in 3-09, though no individual heretics were ever mentioned by name. #1 was “subversion of the authority of the Bible” by using historical-critical methods for Bible study. #2 and #3 were really about the authority of the GOSPEL, and only secondarily about the Bible. Folks “in the know” could identify heresies #2 and #3 as the specific “false teaching” of Bob Bertram and Ed Schroeder, profs not in the Bible department, but teaching doctrine and ethics at the seminary. False teaching #2 was their claiming the Gospel’s own authority as “authority enough” for Christian doctrine whereby, 3-09 claimed, “the authority of the Scriptures is reduced,” and #3 their claiming the Gospel as “authority enough” for Christian ethics, resulting in the heresy of “denying the third use of the Law...as guide for the Christian in his life.”

This may come as news to some ThTh readers, that only one

“heresy” in the fracas was about the authority of the BIBLE, while two were about the authority of the GOSPEL. And that Bob and Ed were major villains for the last two with their teaching—at that time and ever since—that the Gospel alone was “authority enough” both for Christian doctrine and for Christian ethics. Fifty-six percent of the voting delegates said not so. And with that “alea jacta est.” Remembering the New Orleans convention recently, one ThTh colleague (good guy) said: “Yes, I was there. Worst ten days of my life.” Others say simply: It was a helluva fight.

Today’s posting traces the consequences of New Orleans 3-09 for a local congregation in the Missouri Synod, namely, Bethel Lutheran Church in metro St. Louis. Its author is Arthur Beckman, a member of Bethel in those days. Arthur had a 46-year career in industrial and construction sales and marketing. Now retired, he is studying theology to get his credentials as a Parish Ministry Associate (PMA) in the Central States Synod of the ELCA. Today’s posting, and the one for next Thursday too, represent a research project Art did this spring term in the PMA program. His e-address is <babeckman@juno.com>

Peace & Joy!  
The ThTh desk

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## ***Missouri Synod/Seminex/Bethel Church In Crisis*** ***Arthur H. Beckman***

*Bethel Lutheran Church is located at Big Bend & Forsyth, University City, MO (a St. Louis suburb) just four blocks from Concordia Seminary. At least twenty-one Concordia staff members*

or professors and their families were members of Bethel Lutheran Church in 1974, when the professors left Concordia and formed Seminary in Exile (Seminex). As chairman of the Building Maintenance Committee I was a member of the Church Council and president of the congregation from June 1979 to June 1983 and deeply involved in what happened to these twenty-one families, our pastor, and the congregation in general. My research will explore the background leading up to the split (expulsion), the formation of ELIM, Seminex, and the AELC, and the effect on Bethel Church. I will include some thoughts from my memory, information from various books and interviews with some of the people involved.

The problem actually started some years before 1974, but most of us were unaware of what was going on between the Synod and the Seminary. Of course the professors knew, but they truly believed that they were teaching a Christ-centered pure doctrine. Various professors from time to time would preach at Bethel or present adult education classes and no one at Bethel ever indicated that they thought anything other than pure doctrine was being taught. I had been a member of Bethel since 1965, and during those nine years I certainly did not notice any change in doctrine.

In 1967 our new pastor, Al Buls, came very highly recommended by the Synod from a church in Illinois where he had been a District President. Certainly it seemed that during the mid to late 60's we were doing everything according to Missouri Synod church doctrine. Bethel was not a large church, probably 650 baptized members, but it was well known and respected in the Synod as a good steward of church causes. Our grade school had about 115 students and each year our eighth grade graduating class forwarded a good number of students to the local Lutheran High Schools.

The Missouri Synod seemed to be softening a bit on their firm doctrinal stance. As Fred Danker points out, "on Sept. 6, 1945 forty-two pastors and professors and one layman met in Chicago to discuss a method of 'getting the Missouri Synod into the twentieth century.' Forty-four men actually signed the document entitled 'A Statement' which developed out of the meeting." The 1950 Synod convention voted for "further study." The Missouri Synod official position, however, remained firmly in biblical inerrancy. The syllogism ran:

1. Major premise: the Bible is inerrant.
2. Minor premise: Missouri teaches according to the Bible.
3. Conclusion: Missouri is always right.

Martin Scharlemann was a member of Bethel in 1959 when he was espousing the historical critical method to interpret the Scriptures and congratulating the Catholic Church on their acceptance of this method. The historical critical method is interpreting biblical stories in relation to the time and circumstance of their writing. The Missouri Synod hierarchy did not receive his actions with favor, however, and at the 1962 convention, Scharlemann apologized "over the part I played in contributing to the present unrest within Synod." The convention voted for forgiveness, "not for challenging God, but for discomforting the corporate ego." (Danker's words) At the time, I suspect, this exchange was not of major significance in the life of Bethel Church. Also in 1962, Oliver Harms was elected President of the Missouri Synod and there began a seven-year period of softening on how firm the synod was on interpretations of the Missouri doctrine. At the 1965 Missouri Synod Convention in Detroit Martin Kretzmann, a missionary to India, proposed and the convention adopted "a set of Mission Affirmations that represented a moderate, open attitude toward other churches and concern for ministry of the whole person." Supporters were not considered radicals or even theological

liberals; rather their regard for the Lutheran Confessions was tempered by their concern for the gospel. They considered the Confessions more as a bridge connecting them to other Christians rather than as a fortress keeping out the less orthodox. The same convention moved the synod toward cooperation with the two other large Lutheran bodies through membership in the Lutheran Council in the USA.

When I joined Bethel in 1965 the sermons and Bible classes seemed much the same as when I had attended Carthage College, an American Lutheran Church school, in 1948-50. Some of the member professors occasionally utilized historical critical standards in their sermons and classes at Bethel, particularly as to the role of women, as described by Paul, (Ephesians 5:22,23) as "subordinated to their husbands." This utilization seemed reasonable, as in 1969 the Missouri Synod rescinded its long-standing rule and allowed women to vote [in congregational meetings] and Bethel quickly followed suit.

But also at the 1969 Synod convention other things were going on that should have foretold of changes to come. Jacob A. O. Preus was elected President of the Synod following, according to John Tietjen, "an uncharacteristic political campaign, which included campaign headquarters at a local hotel, slates of approved candidates and convention floor organization." Preus opposed the reelection of the current president [Harms] because of his efforts at fellowship with the American Lutheran Church. Already charges of heresy were being leveled against some faculty members of Concordia Seminary. Bethel and the professors did not seem overly concerned at this time. Earlier in 1969 John Tietjen had been elected President of Concordia Seminary, replacing the retiring Al Fuerbringer, a member of Bethel Church. Martin Scharlemann perhaps thought he should have been given the position, but the Board of Control obviously thought differently. Bethel began to become concerned

about the future of the seminary and the professors who were members in May of 1970 when Preus publicly announced intention to take action on "alleged departures from the Synod's doctrinal position." In April of that year Preus formed a "Fact Finding Committee to investigate the Concordia faculty."

In October of 1970 the faculty formed a Faculty Advisory Committee to serve as a channel for faculty opinion. This committee included two members of Bethel. In November all but five of the faculty signed a declaration concerning their confessional commitment as a way to counter the questions about faculty loyalty. Tietjen and the faculty majority never were able to determine just exactly what was the basis for the charges of false doctrine being leveled. They agreed to go along with the fact-finding interviews so that hopefully they could make their positions clear. In December interviews of the faculty began by Preus' fact-finding committee.

Also in 1970 Martin Scharlemann had complained about Everett Kalin's and Ralph Klein's (both members of Bethel) views on inspiration of scripture and asked for an investigation. In meetings with John Tietjen, it was determined that Scharlemann's problem with Kalin and Klein had more to do with their support of students who were protesting the Vietnam War. Dr. Scharlemann was a Chaplain and brigadier general in the Air Force Reserves and did not take kindly to protests of the Concordia students against the war. This disagreement did not appear to have any affect on Bethel Church.

The 1971 Synod convention reelected Preus to the office of President, but it did not give him everything he wanted. They rejected his "Statement of Scriptural and Confessional Principles" as the confessional commitment of the Synod. The convention also directed the report on his Fact-Finding Commission to the Concordia Seminary Board rather than the

convention floor as Preus had requested. Preus did not give up, however, on his quest to get rid of John Tietjen and at least three faculty members, two of whom were members at Bethel. Now Bethel and the professors were concerned, but Bethel felt no need for a defensive plan of action.

The seminary Board of Control met on December 13, 1971 with president Preus present to interview three of the seven faculty members whose contracts were up for renewal. Preus was concerned that these seven would ultimately receive tenure if reappointed to the faculty. The three to be interviewed were Arlis Ehlen, Ralph Klein (both members of Bethel) and Robert Smith. "Preus asked Smith about his views on the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture. He asked Klein his position on predictive prophecy. He asked Ehlen about the existence of angels and a personal devil and the historicity of the Genesis account of Adam and Eve." The board voted not to renew Arlis Ehlen's contract and "chose not to give a reason for its action."

In January of 1973 the Concordia Seminary Board of Control, after considerable study during October and November and finding no teaching of false doctrine, voted to commend all the faculty and approve Dr. Tietjen as President. The vote was close (6 to 5) on five faculty members, including four who were members at Bethel: Carl Graesser, Herb Mayer, Ralph Klein and Norm Habel. Bethel was apparently a hotbed of dissent, but we did not realize it. President Preus, however, did not give up, blasting the Board in his April 13 News Letter for finding against the "weight of evidence presented by the Fact Finding Committee." The Board and the Faculty Advisory Committee offered to provide information to the forthcoming convention floor committee but were turned down.

Prior to the 1973 Convention Herman Otten, editor of "Christian

*News” and “unofficial director of the Synod’s decision making process,” defined hard-core heresy as maintaining the following:*

- Moses did not write the first five books of the Bible.*
- Isaiah did not write chapters 40 to 66.*
- ‘Almah’ in Isaiah 7:14 need not be translated ‘virgin’ and does not refer to the Virgin Mary.*
- The Book of Jonah does not relate to historic fact.*
- The sixth-century prophet Daniel did not write (the Book of) Daniel.”*

*No professor was ever specifically charged with these false teachings, only the vague and unsubstantiated charge of “teaching and dissemination of doctrine contrary to the Scripture and the Synod’s historic confessional stance.” The use of historical criticism (reading the Bible in relation to the time it was written) was the main problem, but this was never mentioned officially by name. Historical criticism came under attack in Preus’ news letter “Affirm” but was not mentioned by name in any of the official convention documents. The July 6-13, 1973 Synod convention in New Orleans was the beginning of the end for Tietjen and the majority of the Concordia faculty, and was to affect Bethel Church greatly as time went on. Al Buls, Bethel’s pastor, lost his bid for a seat on the Seminary board to a Preus-recommended candidate, giving the Preus people control of the board. Preus had published an “Election Guide” and 143 of 147 Preus-recommended candidates were elected to various offices and committees. The Committees on Theology and Church Relations were “stacked” with Preus supporters. The convention voted 562-459 to accept Preus’ Statement of Scriptural and Confessional Principles as binding, after changing the rules on “calling the question” contrary to Roberts Rules of Order.*

Resolution 3-09 declared that the "position defended by the faculty majority of Concordia Seminary, St Louis, Mo. is in fact false doctrine running counter to the Holy Scriptures, the Lutheran Confessions and the synodical stance and for that reason can not be tolerated." Tietjen responded that "the faculty of the St Louis seminary did not regard the descriptions of their position given in the resolution as accurate." Three professors, Edgar Krentz (a Bethel member), Robert Bertram and John Damm, represented the faculty and explained from their perspective what actually went on at Concordia Seminary in terms of theological instruction. Eventually the resolution passed and was turned over to the (Preus-controlled) Seminary Board of Control [for implementation].

Resolution 3-12 calling for the "resignation of Dr. Tietjen" was changed to "To Deal With Dr. Tietjen Under the Provisions of Synod's Handbook." This meant turning the matter over to the Preus-controlled Seminary Board of Control, which was fine with the right-wing Preus majority. The moderates voiced their objections by following the example of Jesus Christ and remaining completely silent. The final vote was "513 against Tietjen and 394 for justice." After the vote Tietjen said that he "had been grievously wronged by the publication of matters relating to overtures for his resignation" and he forgave the convention because it "did not know what it was doing." Minority members gave him a five-minute standing ovation.

On July 24th the faculty majority published "A Declaration of Protest and Confession," protesting "the convention's judgement that we teach false doctrine," and the convention's violation of the procedures for "evangelical discipline." They "confessed" a longing for peace and unity in the church and acceptance of "the scriptures of the Old and New Testament as the written Word of God and the only rule and norm of faith and

of practice.” They appealed to “our brothers and sisters to join in a common movement of protest and confession within the Synod.” 53 faculty and staff including 15 members of Bethel Church signed the declaration.

Reactions to the events at New Orleans came swiftly. On August 8, 1973 concerned members of the faculty of Concordia Teachers College, River Forest, Illinois sent out 25 invitations to a meeting to discuss an appropriate response. This followed an Aug. 1 letter from the former President of the English District and the Pastor of Grace Lutheran Church inviting 1000 clergy and laity to a “Conference on Evangelical Lutheranism” on August 28, 1973 in Des Plaines, IL. On August 28-29, 1973 a total of “812 concerned laity and clergy” met and formed EVANGELICAL LUTHERANS IN MISSION (ELIM). This “gathering in Chicago issued a statement that protested ‘errant actions’ of the New Orleans convention and pledged ‘spiritual concern, financial support and a share in the risks involved’ for any who found themselves in jeopardy because of their opposition to convention actions.” Bethel was an early supporter of ELIM.

Rev. Sam Roth of St. Louis, an “articulate spokesman for the moderate cause,” was elected President of ELIM, and Elwyn Ewald, a returning missionary from New Guinea was designated general manager. “The new board of ELIM recognized that communication was a top priority and authorized the publication of a newspaper.” Beginning in October 1973 “Missouri in Perspective”, a biweekly newspaper, began circulating throughout the Synod, informing its readers of the latest actions of the Preus administration and presenting the opinions of the leaders of the “movement of protest and confession.” The faculty majority was taking its case to the people of the Missouri Synod, hoping to arouse them to action.

On August 17-18, 1973 the Preus-controlled Board of Control of

Concordia Seminary held a specially-called meeting to take up the matters referred to it by the New Orleans convention. After two prearranged and fruitless meetings between Tietjen and his accusers, the board voted to suspend Tietjen as president of the seminary. Acting on advice of legal counsel, Tietjen advised the board that their action was "illegal and ultra vires (beyond the scope of legal authority)." After additional private discussion the board voted to delay implementation of its suspension. The Synod Commission on Constitutional matters recommended that the board revert to the first step and allow Tietjen "reasonable" time to answer the charges. The board met on September 29 and proposed that Tietjen's accusers meet with him "no later than October 15, 1973" and, after considerable discussion, voted to vacate the suspension.

At the November 19th meeting, the board voted to change the seminary retirement age from 72 to 65, effective February 1974, thereby giving seven majority faculty members three months notice of retirement. In a surprise move, they voted not to renew the contract of Paul Goetting, a member of Bethel, whose trip to India [as guest professor to Lutherans there] had been approved a month earlier. And finally, they directed the chairman of the Board of Control "to attempt to deal, to the satisfaction of all concerned, with the matter of the charges against Dr. John H. Tietjen." Tietjen met with the board chairman and his accusers on November 28, 1973, but nothing came of the meeting. On December 5 the Concordia students met to reflect on the problems and appealed to the board to "reverse its actions concerning Goetting and the retirement policy."

The next meeting of the board was scheduled for December 17, but was canceled because of the death, on the 13th, of Arthur Piepkorn, a highly respected member of the Concordia faculty. Piepkorn had written to the board that he would "not accept

*honorable retirement as long as the blot of the New Orleans convention resolution smeared his good name." Piepkorn's death had a profound impact on the Concordia Seminary community and on the subsequent course of events. The board met at a special meeting on January 7, 1974, but took no action. At the regular meeting on January 20-21, 1974 the Preus-majority board voted to suspend Dr. Tietjen as president and professor. Martin Scharlemann was named interim president.*

*(Part II, conclusion, follows, d.v., in the next posting of ThTh)*

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## **A Crossing from Psalm 118: What Makes Those Rejects Sing?**

Today's posting is a reprint from a Festschrift presented to Ed Schroeder when he retired as Crossings' executive director ten years ago. We hope to post a half dozen more of these essays in the weeks ahead. The bibliographic specs are: A CROSSINGS CELEBRATION. 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>) Preface to ThTh 264. From 1983 until Ed's retirement at the end of '93 Crossings offered semester-long courses in St. Louis. Each course in the curriculum had a Biblical text (taken from the church lectionary) for its "Grounding." We then "Tracked" that Biblical text, first through a slice of church history and then in samples of contemporary theology. Each course concluded with students writing an essay "Crossing" some

slice-of-life today with the law/promise theology of the earlier “Grounding” and “Tracking.” Vivian Hauser was a student in “Crossings from the Psalms,” a course “grounded” in Psalm 118, the ancient Psalm for Easter.

Central to that text is the Resurrection hype that “the stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone” leading to “glad songs” on the part of other rejects. “What makes those rejects sing?” was the course’s constant question. Here is Vivian’s answer—case-specific for rejects she lived and worked with in Washington, D.C. Ten years have passed since she wrote this. We have her permission to post it to you now. Vivian now is semi-retired, working with Guardianship Services, Lutheran Social Services of Minnesota. If you wish to contact her, here’s the e-address: <vivian.hauser@att.net>

Peace & Joy!  
The ThTh desk.

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### ***WHAT MAKES THE REJECTS SING?***

***“The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone” (Psalm 118:22).***

*Course Description: What makes the rejects sing? Psalm 118 says: Though patently rejected by the builders among whom they live—sometimes wrongfully rejected, sometimes rightfully, but always necessarily in view of the building program(s) of the builders—the stones have an ally in Yahweh, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and the Father of Jesus, the Christ. This God rehabilitates rejects into his new building, a project whose future is so bright that these rejects already now sing and do*

their TODAH (Psalm 118's Hebrew term of praise, tough to translate, most often rendered "thanksgiving"] in response to God's CHESED (Psalm 118 term also tough to translate, variously rendered "mercy, steadfast love, lovingkindness").

This is my experience, in Crossings sequence, among rejected stones, the homeless at N Street Village, the shelters of Luther Place Memorial Church in Washington, D.C. I had the privilege of spending a year there in the Lutheran Volunteer Corps working at Sarah House, a residential shelter for women.

### **Diagnosis, step 1: Rejected, future interrupted: The Stones**

No Whispering Way or Country Estates—Road's End, perhaps, faraway country certainly. This is 14th and N, a point on a grid. These once-elegant rowhouses are only a few blocks from the White House, embassies, and posh hotels, but this is the wrong side of the street, the subcity. This is home to those with no other, home in its most basic form—shelter.

The seasons are exaggerated here. Winter is dreaded, survival the only issue. In spring and fall the ubiquitous trash bags become raingear and bushes clo theselines. But summer is the worst. While living may be easy somewhere, here it's just hot. Fans push the air, but it is hot, humid air, filled with smells—food, exhaust, garbage, cigarettes, booze, and the sweaty perfume of people living too closely together.

In the mornings a sister from the night shelter, crowned with greens, lustily welcomes "Day-o, day-ee-o" (not to the delight of neighbors). Another calls "Taxi, taxi." None stops, except when a manic Marilyn-Monroe type involuntarily waves. In the evenings people fill the streets, waiting for the shelters to open, waiting for the clinic to attend their pain—just waiting.

The volume is loud. Radios boom. Sirens scream. Buses hiss to

*their stops, and cars never seem to.*

*About the only choice here is to stay alive. That's what Cora does. Cora is 42, looks 62, and weighs 82. She makes mid-night trips to the hospital—diabetes, arthritis, strokes, heart attacks. On a waste-of-time trip to get an ID card, Cora told me she had been married, had a decent job and money in the bank, but she got sick. When she came home from the hospital, her husband was gone—and her furniture, money, and savings. She couldn't keep a job because of her health; she couldn't keep an apartment because she didn't have a job; etc. etc. "Hard luck," she says. A social security check came for Cora Sandberg; her name is Sanders. She couldn't cash it anyway—no ID.*

*Some are young. Petite Maria is still in high school, running from abuse. She won't stay long; too many rules. Maria has gonorrhea. Maria breaks my heart. Freckled Nancy, 19, has her own special brand of jive. Her parents were addicts, and she had her father's baby when she was 13. She trained to be a nurse's aid, but she took off just before graduation. She came to the emergency shelter once or twice more, and later we heard she had had an abortion. She is HIV positive. What future?*

*The old come too. Iola, barely able to climb the stairs, came when her abusive son took over her house to sell drugs. She waited while the courts did their work. The stories she could tell! Senior-citizen Pat, widowed, recovering from a stroke, frantically applies for jobs. Her bookkeeping skills are obsolete, and she is terrified that this will be her last stop.*

*Many are mothers, but there are no facilities for children here. Veronica cries for her baby, who knows only his foster mother. How will she support him and two others on wages from McDonald's? Once in a while she finds comfort. Soon she'll have another baby to cry over.*

*Pregnant women need special shelters—like Mother Teresa's. (I was there one day AFTER Mother Teresa!) Cute, sweet Bonnie, a rounded, 19-year-old, black woman who had already had 3 abortions, didn't go to high school, can't hold a job, and doesn't much care what happens, was pregnant—for the 5th time!! When she had to leave our shelter (for stealing) we went to Mother Theresa's. Sister Suma Rani, in the white and blue habit of the Sisters of Mercy, met us at the door. (It's disconcerting to have Mother Teresa's order caring for our poor.) The shelter is convent-like, very clean and very strict—compulsory prayers, meditation. I watched girls-just-want-to-have-fun Bonnie listening to the rules and despaired, but Bonnie's little-girl voice said, "Well, I guess I can try." Regrettably, she only tried one night.*

*The sisters of Mary Magdalene walk a few blocks south, against a backdrop of X-rated movies. Traffic is bumper-to-bumper, and the women walk between cars. Drugs are free to women, but eventually they have to pay. A few get out; Tammy didn't. Black, blonde, and sexy at 18, Tammy was full of life. She stayed a few nights, but cooking, cleaning, and curfews were not her idea of fun. She was seen again later, walking the street—stoned.*

*Becky almost made it. Rebecca Margaret Carpenter, former prostitute and recovering addict, lived at Sarah House for three months. She was loud, emotional, erratic; she laughed and cried and complained, correctly accusing that I did n't know anything about her life. She had friends, went to GED classes, looked for work, attended Bible Class. She had plans. At night, she sobbed out her pain to Michael, who assured her that Jesus cared. Becky loved Jesus, the one she knew by an actor's soft eyes in an old movie. One Friday Becky was found in a dumpster, face-down, half-dressed—Jane Doe #8-88. It's hard to know when the homeless are missing. She had been gone two days when the*

morgue called. The family of homeless mourned. Connie played the organ (not too well), a volunteer and Eliza sang Amazing Grace (barely heard), and we read Psalm 23 and the Resurrection texts. Then we buried Becky's ashes in the churchyard. The women were quiet and withdrawn. They felt vulnerable and disposable—no families, or homes, or graves, either.

Care-less Becky walked the streets,  
Bleached blonde hair; clothes too tight.  
But her sisters in the shelter  
Heard her crying late at night.  
Victimless they say her crimes;  
I don't see it quite that way.  
Men and drugs abused her body,  
And when done, threw it away  
in the dumpster  
where we found her—  
Just the city's poor white trash.

In the emergency shelter, life is routinely bizarre, and some, like Ellie, cannot cope with the voices within, much less the voices outside.

Safe within the church's shadow  
Ellie wrapped herself in white  
Clapped and danced and sang her praises,  
None but birds within her sight.  
In the city, strange and homeless  
Can't escape the birds of prey.  
Now her feathered congregation  
Marks her final resting place.

Ellie was found one morning, an umbrella stuffed down her throat. Becky and Ellie had met the final rejecter—death.

*Oh, Christ, can you still pray  
As we crucify anew,  
Father won't you please forgive them?  
They just don't know what they do.*

*Wendy knew about death, too—living death—imprisonment. Wendy, very young and not very intelligent, lived with two children in an unheated apartment. When her mother died, Wendy could no longer cope, and when the baby wouldn't stop crying, she hit him. Now she was serving 5-15 years for involuntary manslaughter. After two years, public defenders asked us to take her. I went twice to prison and once to court on her behalf. Now she is one of us.*

***Diagnosis, step 2: These are the stones. What could anyone build with these? Builders reject these stones, ex officio, and so do I.***

*Why must there be shelters? Where are the families? Where are the government programs? Why don't they work? (The public wants to know why the people don't work.) The problem is so large and so complex there seems no solution. It's understandable. Landlords can't keep tenants who can't pay rent. And moving-in costs include 1 month advance rent, 1 month security deposit, a deposit on the utilities. Then there's furniture, and food, and . . .*

*Employers can't depend on employees without reliable child-care and transportation, and few use the unskilled and uneducated. (When you have a baby at 14, you probably don't finish high school.) Those that can—fast food, hotel service, janitorial—offer minimum wages and erratic hours. They don't offer sick leave, vacation days, insurance, benefits, or security.*

And the ill? Since de-institutionalization a few decades ago, mental health providers work to move people out, but not many hospitals could be worse than the streets! So patients are stabilized and sent where? To shelters? Out on their own? Then medication isn't taken, and soon it begins again. Some estimate that 1/3-1/2 of the homeless are mentally ill. And they are difficult to care for. Prescriptions are hard to get, and even harder to administer. Psychotic behavior cannot be tolerated in a room of women sleeping bed-to-bed. The police will come—when they get around to it—and remove the patient, but the next day she is back.

Improperly clothed, inadequately fed, without haircuts, barely able to keep clean, wrong sex, wrong race. We would rather not see them. And they know it. Lily Tomlin's Trudy says, "I don't mind. No matter how much contempt I have for society, it's nothing compared to the contempt society has for me." For one year, I shared their neighborhood—a stone of sorts too. But I can leave. I am white, educated, and respectable.

And I am the establishment. To build, maintain, and protect this community, I must reject the people I came to help—ex officio. Stoned, drunk, abusive, violent—they can't stay. Women who can't keep the rules or care for themselves don't belong here. Sarah House takes the cream of the crop, those able to work or go to school—those most likely to get out. My job is to select them, and reject them, and remove them when they don't fit—those like Bonnie and my namesake, Vivian.

Vivian was my favorite, an oversized woman with a mouth to match. She could never be ignored, and she never ignored anything. I let her push at the rules, but she pushed once too often and was sent one notch down the continuum of shelters. The next night she was in the kitchen, screaming at me. I warned I would call the police if she didn't leave. She didn't,

and I did.

Yvette had to leave. As quiet and gentle as Vivian was loud, she was streetwise and tough, living in an abandoned building without electricity and heat—with rats and drug dealers. I took her in because she was afraid and I was afraid for her. She had to be up at 3 A.M. for her hotel job—more rule bending. Denise, however, wouldn't bend, and one evening pulled a knife. In a flash, Yvette had her pinned to the floor. We restrained them until police removed them—both. I never saw Yvette again. Denise showed up from time to time, but was not admitted to the shelters—even under another name.

Another decision, made without much thought, caused 2nd, 3rd, and 4th thoughts. Dawn, white, in her late 20's, was pleasant and bright, a school teacher running from a fundamentalistic sect. I liked her and waived the waiting period. The first day she worked to get her teaching credentials. She was calm, but the shelter was tense. The second day she antagonized several residents, all black. On the third day she had to be restrained from attacking a black woman, and on the fourth I asked her to leave. She stood outside ranting that the place was "run by niggers."

The isms operate among the homeless too. The women have their own pecking order—shades of color, degrees of illness, levels of coolness. Phyllis, black as night, hates black men most, then black women, then white men. As a white woman, I am her closest friend. When she first became ill, her husband locked her in the house—for 1-1/2 years. When the authorities were alerted, they found her emaciated and catatonic. After a year in a hospital, she came to us. She did well for awhile, but in spite of lithium, deteriorated before our eyes. The women, fearful, isolated her further. She ate cups of sugar; piled mountains of food on her plate, eating none of it; sat on

napkins; hid in the bathroom. Her anger was tangible. We begged mental health workers to help. She wanted to stay, but we couldn't let her. She couldn't make it on her own, and she couldn't live with others.

**Diagnosis, step 3: I am a builder—and a rejecter. God says yes to rejected, no to rejecters—and that's me**

Now the problem is God-sized. I am part of the action and inaction of society, and on a one-to-one basis, I do no better. I don't have the power or skill to fix lives. Most often I don't even want to. And I have an "attitude." I have more; I know more; I know what's best; I could not be where they are. But these are God's people, of his creation and his love, people for whom Christ died. Phyllis and Yvette and Dawn are his, and he hears their pain. My role now separates me from him. Now I must face my inability to build and look at the rough edges, the distortion, the ugliness that make me an unsuitable stone for God's building.

St. Vincent de Paul, the 17th-century saint known for his work among the poor, is reported to have said on his deathbed, "We must be very humble and ask forgiveness of the poor, because we have given them charity." God, forgive my charity.

The rejected can be rejecters too, rejecting God's offer and finding their own gods in alcohol, drugs, and easy money. Or finding nothing, they sink into despair and hopelessness. God forgive their refusal.

And he does. Forgives us all.

**A New Prognosis, step 4: God uses rejected stones to build when Christ is the cornerstone**

Bad news becomes good news. Throughout history, God identified

with the oppressed and rejected, from the Hebrews in Egypt to the Samaritans of Christ's time. Who else but Christ would have associated with prostitutes and tax collectors and started a church with fishermen? And he knew homelessness—no room in the inn, nowhere to lay his head. His words and ministry identified him with the poor—in money and in spirit.

Christ's message to the women of N Street is this: His story is their story, and his story has a future guaranteed by his final rejection, on the cross. When God sees the rejected, when God sees me, he sees stones worthy of his building plans on earth and his home in heaven—because he sees us all through Christ, the cornerstone that can bear the burden of all these strange stones.

That good news is told on N Street in countless acts of caring—when it is not always clear who is helping and who is being helped.

It is told, too, when the women gather one Sunday each month for Word and Sacrament—and food. The church serves breakfast, not coffee and doughnuts, but sausage, bacon and eggs, french toast, hash browns, fruit, homemade breads, coffeecakes, juices, milk, and coffee. The tables have tablecloths and flowers. After the meal, chairs are rearranged, and worship begins with this strange congregation. Vicki, in strapless, sequined top and beret (donations!!), who can't say two intelligible sentences, reads the first lesson flawlessly, and Florence, who barely raises her eyes to speak, reads the second and returns to her chair, grinning. The "choir" sings "Jesus Loves Me" with the heartfelt sincerity of 3-year-olds. Iola belts out "Amazing Grace" in the richest alto imaginable. The pastor tells that God loves them (and me) and sent Jesus as their Savior. Their attention is riveted. The Lord's Supper is offered, and only I am reluctant. I share their daily bread. Do

*I share this meal too? Common cup? My body and blood given for you Florence and Connie and Jewell—and Vivian. Go in peace. Serve the Lord.*

***A New Prognosis, step 5: There is courage and hope, appropriated from a loving God***

*There are victories. Sometimes we are a community; sometimes this is a home and family—the first to many. The women learn skills, gain self-respect, and assume responsibilities. They help each other. June patiently helps Connie with her homework every night, Pam washes dishes for Pat, and Mary fixes Theresa's hair.*

*Some are empowered. Pam, stranded in D.C. and depressed, finds health, a job, a place of her own, and plans her return to Hawaii. Michael holds a job and is content in her own tiny space. Debbie draws and writes and sends resumes. Iola has her house back and shares it with her grandson. Connie graduates from secretarial school, finds a good job and a safe place to live. Sometimes we give more than band-aids to these wounded. Sometimes this sisterhood of the oppressed is home.*

***A New Prognosis, step 6: And there are songs from the rebuilt—todahs for God's chesed.***

*The women need to give. I don't know why, but I take it as evidence of God, the first and best giver, within them. Eva, the stereotypical bag lady, gave me a lipstick for my birthday. The thought of her, lugging her trash bags, into a store to spend her panhandled quarters on lipstick makes me cry. Cora insisted I take earrings from her box of treasures, and twice Vivian gave me pins she was wearing. When the year ended the women gave me a surprise party. I was so pleased—and so proud of them.*

Michael taped Gospel music to remind me that I am never alone, and added her own encouraging message (and I had come to help her). Debbie sat on the steps one long hot day and drew the rowhouses. "Love Street" she wrote on the street sign. Her story is a miracle, and she wrote affectionately to say thanks. Jewell lives in her own room, paid for by work in a motel where the rates are by the hour and the rooms littered with needles and condoms. She struggles to stay dry. Still, Jewell claims all the women as her family. She calls occasionally, long-distance, from a pay phone, to see if I'm OK.

Two women defy categories, their spirit transcending their circumstances. Eva epitomizes the rejected and the rejecting. Of indeterminate age, Eva is the senior resident. No-one knows where she came from or why. She was coaxed in when the shelter first opened. She panhandles during the day, cigarette in hand. She has a tic, vaguely twirling her fingers in front of her nose. She hallucinates and talks nonsense much of the time, often abusively, but she can be incredibly gracious, noticing and appreciating every kindness. She washes, shampoos, and changes clothes only when required. She arranges pictures of farm animals and flowers beneath her covers, and sleeps on top. Eva is conscientious and a good cook, but others are skeptical. They are less nervous when the food is cooked, but Eva likes tuna salad and potato salad. Once when we had neckbones and beans over rice, a favorite of the women, laughing and gagging sounds came from down the table. Finally, someone explained. Eva had gone to the stove behind me, dumped her chewed-on bones back into the pot, and refilled her bowl. No-one would eat more. Poor Eva didn't know what was wrong (and neither did those who ate later). Somehow though, Eva is everyone's favorite. The first revulsion turns to love. The determination to make her conform resolves to let her be.

Because I'm thankful that Michael listened to Becky, I want to

tell about her too. Although named for a wished-for son, I think Michael is more than nominally linked to the archangel. Michael, almost 50, is an attractive black woman (caramel, she says). When children ask about her birthmarks, she tells them God gave her special coloring—like a leopard. Although Michael dresses like a Muslim—caftans and draped head (covered in the presence of men), she is Coptic Christian and calls Jesus "Master." She is spiritual advisor and resident guru of Sarah House, but not pious. Earthy laughter comes from her toes. She's unique—a genius, I think. When I reached for a pan on the cabinets, Michael helped and told about playing basketball. When the talk was self-defense, Michael demonstrated karate. I thought it grandiose thinking, until one day when I was trying to read in French to Eliza (who had the grace to laugh only occasionally), Michael took the book and read fluently, apologizing that time had dulled her French. When someone pointed out that Siddhartha (a local restaurant) was named for Buddha, Michael elaborated on its Sanskrit roots. She cooks like Julia Child (vegetarian, of course) and sings like an angel. She works in a group home for terminal AIDS patients and gives them nursing care and emotional support. I treat Michael with sincere respect, and she responds in kind. Why is she there? I don't know exactly, but there's something vaguely paranoid . . .

I will always be grateful for the privilege of being on N Street. I don't pretend to have shared the lives of those women; I was a visitor. I have no solutions to the problem of homelessness. I have little understanding of the causes. I have no illusion that my year diminished the problem.

But I have stories, and they are my way of giving thanks. Someone said the best part of Scripture was the genealogies. If God thought it important to write down those names, he must remember mine, too—and theirs. Their names are my todahs.

*Oh give thanks to the Lord for He is good  
And his lovingkindness endures forever.*

*Vivian E. Hauser*

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## **Timothy F. Lull – In Memoriam**

Colleagues,

There were giants in the earth—also in our own days. And one more has fallen, Timothy Lull. Tim was an internationally renowned and much published Luther scholar and president of Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary (Berkeley, California) when he died last month at only 60 years of age. We pass on to you Richard Koenig's sermon from the memorial service for Tim held two weeks ago in the New England Synod of the ELCA. Richard E. Koenig is an ELCA pastor (ret.), living in Massachusetts. Koenig was campus pastor when Lull was a student at Williams College, Williamstown, Mass, and later his colleague in the ministry of the New England Synod of the ELCA beginning in 1972. Following Lull's departure from New England, the two continued collaborating on various theological projects. The last such joint venture was Lull's convocation lectures on Luther for the New England Synod in the fall of 2002. For those wishing to respond Koenig's e-address is [RKo4551788@cs.com](mailto:RKo4551788@cs.com)

Peace & Joy!

The ThTh Desk

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***In Memoriam***  
***Timothy Frank Lull***  
***John 21: 15-19***

*(Sermon preached at Grace Lutheran Church, Needham, Mass., June 11, 2003)*

*Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my Strength and my Redeemer.*

*Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*

*Dear sisters and brothers in Christ, especially you, Mary Carlton, Tim's beloved life partner and other members of Tim's immediate family.*

*The Word of God on which this sermon in memory of our dear brother, pastor, friend, teacher Timothy Lull is based is the Gospel chosen for this day, the final words of the Risen Christ as recorded in John's Gospel.*

- 1. We are gathered here this morning to remember Timothy Frank Lull and give thanks to God for "giving us him to know and to love as a companion in our pilgrimage on earth," as is said in the Burial Service. And difficult that is. He was such an amazing person, so full of life, of deep faith, dazzling scholarship, profound insights, delightful humor, incredible energy, infectious enthusiasm and unquenchable hope, whose compassion ran as far as his interests. Encounters with Tim were always interesting. You never knew what he would come up with or what new project he was undertaking. In all my life I have never known anyone whose instructions for his*

funeral service would begin with a request that at the collation afterwards only a quality brand of coffee be served. But that was Tim. He was one theologian who was fun to be with. When Christopher Lull called me with the news late the night Tim died I, like all of you, was stunned. I couldn't believe. I still find it difficult to grasp. His departure has left us all feeling empty. He was to preach my funeral sermon, not I his. Nevertheless, "dennoch," as Tim's teacher and conversation partner Martin Luther would say, we give thanks. In the mystery of God's leading it was on June 11, 1972, in this very church that Tim was ordained into the Holy Ministry of Word and Sacrament of the Lutheran Church in America. He lists his vocation as one of the special gifts he thanks God for in the remarkable personal confession of faith he left us. It is that vocation and the way Timothy carried it out that I would lift up today as the ground for our thanksgiving as well as a source of renewal and strength for all Christians and fellow ministers of the Gospel with Tim.

2. In the Gospel for today the Risen Christ three times asks Peter "Do you love me?" The questions are painful for Peter as the one who had denied the Lord and deserted him. But the Lord puts them to Peter not to cause him pain but to rehabilitate him, restore him once again to the circle of his 12 disciples and make him a leader of apostolic mission. He had been called as a disciple on the shores of Galilee. Now he is recalled at the same place. But note what the Lord sees as the principal qualification for his call. It is his unqualified and undying love for the Lord Jesus. At one time he had said to Jesus, Depart from me for I am a sinful man, O Lord, but Jesus did not depart but drew Peter to himself and held to him in forgiving love. Peter never forgot it. It

*is no wonder that the Epistle that bears Peter's name has this message for first century Christians in Asia Minor:*

*"Although you have not seen him, you love him, and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy . . . . (1:8)"*

3. *I am tempted to say that Timothy Lull could have written those lines. In the sparkling conversations one had with him, one frequently heard testimony to his unabashed love for his Lord. It was a love engendered in him by the kind of home into which he was born, the son of Raymond and Ruth Lull, two devout Lutheran parents; a love that was taught him in the ministry of his home church, a congregation representing the faith and piety of the old Ohio Synod of the American Lutheran Church; and its pastor; a love instilled in him by the devoted Sunday School teachers to whom he often paid tribute; a love that he derived from Luther as Luther taught it in passages like the Explanation of the Second Article of the Creed in the Small Catechism. Tim did not speak of this love frivolously or in the manner of a cliché. It was foundational to his life and to his vocation. It carried him as a pastor. It continued on in his vocation as teacher of theology. He could master vast stretches of academic theology with ease. (The speed with which the man read dazzled me.) Yet his work was never mere academic exercise done in detachment from his personal faith—or the church! You can see his love for the Lord Jesus in the hymns, Scriptures, and prayers of this, the Service he himself drew up. Now that he has died, God is holding him up to us, all five-feet-two- inches of him, as one whom the Spirit led to say: Lord, you know that I love you. And when the word came to follow him to become*

*a minister of the Gospel, he was one who responded yes as a pardoned sinner who loved that Lord.*

- 4. Upon the Apostle Peter's rehabilitation and re-vocation, the Lord confers upon him special responsibility to shepherd the flock of God. Of course this passage became a battlefield for Roman Catholic and Protestant theologians in the sorry history of the Church. We don't hear much about this controversy today, which is a blessing. That allows us to think of Peter's ministry with less distraction. What the Lord says to Peter here leads us to recall what he says to Peter at the last Supper in Luke 22. There Jesus forecasts his betrayal and death. The disciples are confused and protest. Jesus tells them ominously that Satan will sift them like wheat. Then Jesus turns directly to Peter and says:*

*"Simon, Simon, I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail, and you, when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers. (22:31)"*

*Strengthen your brothers? What did the Lord mean? Surely his words portended the time of persecution and discouragement that were to beset the early Christians and put them in desperate need of encouragement and hope. And encouragement and hope are what Peter gave them. His Epistle is known as the Epistle of Hope:*

*"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead . . . . In this you rejoice, even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials. (1:3, 6)"*

*Again and again 1 Peter rings the changes on the theme of*

*hope, hope for the brotherhood, as the KJ version has it in 2:17, in the NRSV, the family of believers, the Church. Peter is an apostle of hope to the Church.*

- 5. A messenger of hope for the Church? Can anyone here fail to recognize Timothy Lull in that description? How he loved the Church, specifically and concretely, the Lutheran Church. Many of us found and still find it difficult to transfer our love for the branch of the Lutheran church in which we grew up to the ELCA. Who of us would say he or she loves the ELCA? The question might give us pause. Not Tim. His home was the old American Lutheran Church, but he was at home in whatever new configuration the Lutheran Church gave him to live and serve in. He loved the brotherhood, the family of believers. It seems that everyone he met in it became an instant friend. At times when I became discouraged or fearful about the Church and its future, I would call Tim. His take on events was never platitudinous or superficial. He saw the difficulties, yet never was ready to give up on the Church. I believe he never lost confidence in the Church because he never lost confidence in the Church's Lord and his promises.*
- 6. His trait of hopeful realism was evident from the start of his ministry here in Needham. After he left to teach systematics at Philadelphia, from time to time he returned to speak to us, always as an apostle of hope. In 1993 the New England Lutheran Clergy Association invited Tim up from Philadelphia to address us on "American Lutheranism's Calling in the Present Crisis." (The title has a familiar sound to it, doesn't it?) Later he went around the Church with a message on "The Vocation of Lutheranism" in which he calmly looked at the possibility of a smaller Lutheran church, yet a church ever and even*

more vigorous and fruitful in mission. He came to us last year again to speak on Luther. He portrayed for us a resilient Luther who followed severe trials with incredible bursts of creative energy. From his study of Luther Tim fashioned the vision of a resilient Lutheran Church, the title of the series he was writing for The Lutheran magazine. Rather than finding Luther a wooden hero and Lutheranism an ethnic artifact and its confessions historical baggage, to be trashed, ignored, or discarded, he saw Lutheranism in possession of "the ability to bounce back even from very severe troubles," drawing on its powerful themes like Law and Gospel, the theology of the Cross, the doctrine of the two kingdoms, along with justification by faith. Tim is the sufficient model for what our Presiding Bishop Mark Hanson has called for us to be: faithful yet changing.

7. Tim's Lutheranism provided him with the center for his ministry. In 1981 I asked Tim to write an article for PARTNERS magazine which I was editing at the time. We discussed a problem that we both felt was plaguing the church as it faced vigorous challenges by Fundamentalist forms of Christianity on the right and radical revisions of Christian faith by churches on the left or translations of the Gospel into various forms of therapy in attempts to make the Gospel "relevant." Among the ranks of the clergy there seemed to be confusion over what we were finally about. In his article Tim wrote:

"In these days when so many religious groups have learned to be assertive, I am often challenged as to whether I have any real center to my ministry. . . . Yes, there is a center. I am chiefly a minister of Word and Sacrament. I am one who above all else is charged to bring the Gospel of Jesus Christ to all who receive it. I am a bringer of forgiveness. And I know where

that vision of my ministry comes from. Its major source is my own life experience within the Lutheran Church . . . [from] the Augsburg Confession . . . . [and] Luther.”. . . People may not be asking for forgiveness . . . . But it is what we have. And it is clear to me that we have nothing better--and perhaps nothing else--to offer to the pain of the world in our day.”

The forgiveness of sins. Not an undifferentiated or abstract “God’s love,” or even “introducing people to Jesus Christ.” Those terms by themselves do not cut it. God’s love, yes, but love as grace from God for the undeserving. Jesus Christ, yes, but Christ as the one who suffered and died on the cross for the forgiveness of sins of a humankind that has gone astray (1 Peter 2:24 and 25).

8. The mysterious scene of Peter’s rehabilitation ends on a shocking note. What will Peter get in return for his love, for his willingness to follow Christ, for his shepherding of the flock, for his strengthening of his brothers? He is to be taken prisoner. No longer allowed to go where he wills to the churches of Asia Minor. No longer to preach. Be led away to be put to death. He was crucified, tradition has it, head down because he did not think he was worthy to be crucified in the same position as his Lord. Some Lord! It is an appalling scene. Yet, the text says, Jesus says this to Peter “to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.” Death by crucifixion a way to glorify God?
9. It’s a baffling, sometimes terrifying, God we have to believe in. Although not taken and made a martyr, Tim died a nasty death, cut down at the peak of his career. What a way to be dealt with! One could make a case that

as horrifying as Peter's death was, there was a glory to it. It was a death made as the result of a confession of faith in Christ before the world. But Tim's death came as the result of a blood clot, in a hospital, practically alone. Did Tim glorify God in that death? Yes, says the Scripture and Christian tradition. The death of every faithful believer in whatever form it occurs glorifies God. For in the believer's death, faith triumphs over death as it claims a portion in God's deed in the raising of Jesus Christ, the inheritance that is imperishable, and undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for us, as 1 Peter declares. That is why Christians can greet death as did Tim. Look at this Liturgy. There is no whining or hand-wringing. There is only joy, a joy born of confidence that by the amazing grace of God a poor sinner would be granted the joy of seeing God face to face. Once again Tim's word would be Luther's word, "dennoch," nevertheless, I will continue to believe and set my hope in Christ in spite of all. And God is glorified.

10. Timothy Lull's life and work summon us to give thanks to God and elicit from us thanksgiving to God for all that he was for us and all that he continues to give us in his legacy as a person, pastor and professor. Nathan Soderblom [Patriarch of the 20th century Lundensian school of Luther scholarship] once said that Christians are to be people who make it easier for other people to believe in God. Timothy Lull's life and work make it easier for us to believe and trust God, centered as they were in Christ and the promise of God. Timothy Lull's life and work challenge us all, especially pastors, to live by our confession, to let our ministries flow from it, to be loyal to it in a time of testing as we are going through, to articulate the forgiving grace of God clearly and convincingly, to lift the hungry heart and

*maximize the grace of God in the face of sin and sorrow.*

11. *"O God, it is a fearful thing to see the human soul take wing," wrote Lord Byron. And that is true as we see it from the outside, as it were. Death cannot be prettified or painted over by human contrivance. But seen from the perspective of the Risen Christ we can speak even of that fearful moment differently. One of the greatest hymns from our Lutheran heritage, "Jerusalem, Thou City Fair and High," speaks our hope as it pictures the soul of the Christian in these beautiful lines of the third stanza. By grace we can imagine Tim's sudden passing this way:*

*A moment's space, and gently, wondrously,  
Released from earthly ties,  
Elijah's chariot bears her up to thee,  
Through all these lower skies  
To yonder shining regions  
While down to meet her comes  
The blessed angel legions  
And bid her welcome home.*

*Thus it was, we are sure, for Timothy Lull. Rest well, brother Tim, confessor and teacher of the Church, and thank you. Thank you, Mary Carlton, for sharing him with us. Thank you, dear Lord Jesus Christ. In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

*Richard E. Koenig*

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# **ELCA                      Publication                      on Homosexuality       –       Short       on Promise, Long on Law**

Colleagues,

This week's offering is a book review by TIMOTHY HOYER. Timothy is a graduate of Christ Seminary-Seminex. He now happily serves as pastor at Gloria Dei Lutheran Church in Lakewood, New York. His email address, if you want to respond to him, is gloriadei@alltel.net .Peace & Joy!

The ThTh desk

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## ***Faithful Conversation: Christian Perspectives on Homosexuality***

***Edited by James M. Childs Jr.,***

***Published by Fortress Press, Minneapolis 2003 132 pp., \$7.20***

*What constitutes a "Christian perspective?" Even more, what makes any Christian perspective a "Lutheran perspective," which this book claims to offer? There is no agreed-upon answer among Lutherans today on this. The several writers in this book make that perfectly clear because of their differing perspectives.*

*The Lutheran Confessions propose a specific "perspective" for church life and theology. Perspectives are stand-points. When you stand here, you see this. Stand over there and look at the*

same thing and you will see something else. A Lutheran perspective is a statement saying, "Here I stand" when one looks at the Bible, at the world, and at God. In Lutheran code words that original Lutheran perspective was bifocal, a "Law and Promise" perspective.

That bifocal Lutheran perspective has two perspectives by which we are to view God. They are the same two perspectives by which God views us! The first perspective is Law; the second is the Gospel's promise.

The perspective of the Law makes us see our disobedience to God and God's wrath against us. The Law is never a moral code by which we please God. The Law is there so that no human has an excuse before God.

Thanks be to God there is also now the perspective of the Promise, the good news that "we receive forgiveness of sin and become righteous before God by grace, for Christ's sake, through faith, when we believe that Christ suffered for us and that for his sake our sin is forgiven and righteousness and eternal life are given to us. For God regards and reckons this faith as righteousness" (Augsburg Confession, Article 4).

The book "Faithful Conversation" says that it gives a Christian perspective, which, of course, means the perspective of the Promise of Christ. However, that Promise, which can be summarized as "justification by faith in Christ alone," is named a few times but never used. Worse, the Promise of Christ is destroyed by making it the same view as the Law.

The forward states, "All of these authors are seeking to be faithful to the witness of Scripture" (p. vii). What is that witness? For Lutherans, the witness of Scripture also has two perspectives-Law and Promise. Only by reading Scripture with the perspective of Law and Promise can the Scriptures witness

to the defining event of Christ AND be heard as good news that gives us faith, the benefits of Christ, and comforts our conscience. But that perspective of Law and Promise is melted into the right-sounding phrase of "the witness of Scripture" throughout the book. When the Law and Promise are melted together into "the witness of Scripture," both Law and Promise are lost and some weak alloy is formed, an alloy that can be called morality. The Law is lost as that which makes us guilty before God. Instead it becomes a guide that we are to try and follow with Christ's help. God's wrath is lost because God is now seen as trying to help us do our best by giving us Christ. The Promise is lost as that which has saved us from God's wrath and that frees us from the Law's accusation. Instead, the Promise-maker is changed into someone who helps us do our best to please God by obeying the Law.

When we read "Only God's Holy Spirit joins righteousness and mercy in Christ Jesus" (p. viii), that may look like a Christian perspective, but it does not clearly proclaim that our righteousness before God is faith in Christ. Therefore it fails to give us the Promise, which is the only Christian perspective.

The introduction talks of being faithful. "First of all, our discourse must be faithful to the mission of the church to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ to all the world" (p. 1). That gospel of Jesus Christ is not defined. Without that defining moment actually proclaimed, that Christ suffered for us and that for his sake our sin is forgiven and righteousness and eternal life are given to us when we believe that Christ suffered for us and that for his sake we are forgiven (AC 4), then the gospel of Jesus Christ remains unheard, and unheard it cannot give the faith which God regards as righteousness.

The introduction tries again to speak of faithfulness. "Second,

*faithfulness means faithfulness to the Scripture, the Word of God, through whom we meet the Word, Jesus, the Christ, who is the grand finale of God's revelation in history" (p.1). Faithfulness to the Scripture, in Lutheran language, is to rightly distinguish between the Law and Promise so that the benefits of Christ are clearly heard and faith can hold them. That kind of faithful perspective is never told to the reader. Also, this second attempt does not make Jesus Christ good news, only a revelation, as if Jesus was only a clearer view of how God wants us to behave better. That makes Jesus a morality teacher, not a mediator and propitiator on our behalf before God.*

*"Being faithful, then, means maintaining continuity with Christian teaching in general and with our Lutheran theology in particular" (p.2). Christian teaching, so varied throughout the centuries and so diverse presently, is usually equated with values, which is again, morality, not Promise. Lutheran theology can be presented as legalism or Biblicism instead of as Promise. That is the perspective on page three, "So Scripture and tradition bulk larger than the rest, for they are the repositories of authority in the church's teaching." To say that Scripture is authority, without referring to the good news that faith in Christ alone is our righteousness before God, leaves out the very message that makes Scripture an authority.*

*Childs, on page four, writes, "the two basic doctrines of the Bible are the Law and the Gospel, which flower fully in the person and work of the Christ. Given this orientation to the Bible, it is clear that the paramount themes of Lutheran theology drawn from the Scripture, will, in turn, guide Lutherans in their approach to understanding the Bible." Law and Gospel (Promise) are not two "doctrines." Instead Law and Promise are the two distinct perspectives that Lutherans use to read the Bible. And to put Law and Promise together in Christ*

does not keep them distinct as one of the first witnesses to Christ does, "The law was given through Moses, grace and truth through Jesus Christ" (John 1.17). Without keeping them distinct, the good news of Christ as our righteousness cannot be proclaimed clearly in order to give us faith.

Then the "premier doctrine of justification by grace through faith" (p. 5) is mentioned. But immediately justification is said to be derived from the correlation of law and gospel. By no means is justification derived from a mixing or an equaling of law and gospel. Justification is through faith in Christ alone. The Law cannot be correlated to the Promise any more than death can be correlated to life. Law and Promise are not being kept distinct, so that the real Christian perspective of Christ as our righteousness is lost like a pair of misplaced reading glasses.

"Culture is the lens through which God's revelatory message is viewed and understood" (p. 6). That revelatory message of God comes in two perspectives-Law and Promise-and cannot be lumped together. Childs has again mingled Law and Promise so that God's message is muddled. The mud is said to be made clear by calling the mud "norms." Norms are general rules and people like rules because by them they think they can do what is right to God. So with his mud of norms, Childs continues with, "We fear that without agreed-upon norms all will be relative to different cultural biases and prejudices" (p. 7). The norms here refer only to rules or customs and make no reference to the Christian norm of righteousness by faith in Christ alone. When Christ is given as the perspective by which God views us, then other norms should not be followed because then Christ is no longer being trusted to lead us. He is made unnecessary and we lose the benefit of his cross and the benefit of consciences that have peace with God.

Childs continues to play in the mud. "Placing the vexing issues of the day in the framework of meaning and values at the core of the Christian faith is central to the church's engagement in moral deliberation" (p. 9). That sentence equates the Christian core with meaning and values, as if a Christian perspective is morality. When the Christian core is morality, then the Christian life becomes how to live right according to certain prescribed morals, often labeled "Christian values." People are urged to live trusting that their conformity to those rules is how they are doing what God wants, as in "It's the Christian thing to do." Thus, trust is placed in people's actions and not in Christ. Consciences are agitated by not knowing for sure what God's will is, as the two sides on any issue prove. Consciences are also troubled by not conforming completely to those values or by not knowing if they have done enough. To put Christ as the only value God desires gives all the honor to Christ, makes Christ's suffering for us good news, and then consciences can be at rest with God because of what Christ has done for all people. That is why Luther and the Reformers insist that the Christian core is that we are right with God "by grace, for Christ's sake, through faith, when we believe that Christ suffered for us and that for his sake we are forgiven and righteousness and eternal life are given to us" (Augsburg Confession, Article 4).

To say "and how the moral principles derived from our faith should be applied" (p. 12) makes Christianity another legal system instead of something new and good given to us by the suffering of Christ for our benefit.

The center of a "Christian perspective" is God's promise in Christ. There is absolutely no Christian perspective of God's promise in Christ in the forward and introduction to the book. That absence of Promise continues in the first author's essay. Powell on "The Bible and Homosexuality" begins with a mention

of justification by faith in Christ alone but ends up with only condemning questions. In Powell's list of principles for interpretation of Scripture on page twenty, Powell adds justification by faith in Christ as just one of several points more important than other points. Thus, he starts using phrases such as, "The Bible indicates" (p. 29). That makes the Bible an authority without the Christian perspective, without the Gospel of justification by faith in Christ as witnessed to by Scripture. Powell urges, "the church must think carefully about whether it really wants to require people to live in a manner that its Scriptures and its confessions maintain is displeasing to God" (p. 31). To "please God" is a big theme in Lutheran theology and in all people's lives. God has proved that the only way to please God is to have faith in Christ as the one who makes us pleasing to God. God has proved this by raising Christ from the dead! That is the view the Law and Promise perspective gives us. Powell's urging statement uses Scripture and the confessions as rule books, rules that have to be followed in order for people to be pleasing to God. That is a complete forsaking of faith in Christ as the only way to be pleasing (justified) to God.

Powell keeps using terms such as "Scriptural teaching," and "The goal is to be faithful to all of Scripture" (p. 37). Scripture is here again being made to be an authority without the Lutheran perspective of distinguishing Law and Promise, which is necessary so that the Gospel's own witness to Christ as the one who suffered for us to make us right with God is clearly heard. At his conclusion, Powell asks his two big questions that are completely without the Christian perspective of Promise, for they have no reference to Christ and give no honor to Christ. "For me, the question becomes: Do we require homosexual people to sacrifice the experience of sharing life intimately with a partner in order to fulfill God's standards

of holiness as perfectly as possible? Or do we allow a merciful exception to those standards in the belief that God would not want such sacrifices imposed on people in burdensome and harsh ways" (p.38). "The question, rather, ought to be 'How can I please God, whom I love and want to serve?'" (p. 39). The question of "How can I please God?" is the salvation question, not a question about morality or what is right to God. To be concerned about pleasing God through morality was what the Reformers denounced in the Augsburg Confession. If morality pleases God then Christ is not needed, his death and rising as the pleasing act of God become unnecessary, and Christ then died for nothing.

The perspective of the second author, James Nestingen, "The Lutheran Reformation and Homosexual Practice," is better. But it could be even better yet. Nestingen defines sin very well. "The desire to justify the self, to gain control of the sources of life and bend them to personal purpose, to become one's own project determining one's own significance and value" (p. 44) is the opposite of being justified by Christ. It is trusting another instead of Christ for righteousness before God.

The next step for Nestingen is the Two Kingdoms, but he has the death and resurrection of Jesus regaining God's rule over people so that people are not ruled by sin, death, and the devil. Nestingen has not prognosed his own diagnosis that "the law works wrath" (p. 43), as in God's wrath against us. The death and resurrection of Jesus overturn God's own judgment of death against us. That puts the kingdom of God's law in its proper place, the place of not only order, "making the provisions necessary to approximate justice and peace," (p. 45), but to preserve and protect people so that the promise of Christ by his death and rising can overturn God's judgment of death for all people. Nestingen's omission of the law's purpose to preserve and protect people so that the Gospel can be given

them results in his implication that the law “still has a word about the shape of life” (p. 47). He had just quoted Romans 14.23, “Anything that does not proceed from faith is sin.” Yet he wants the law to shape the lives of Christians. He wants Christians to follow the law instead of following Christ. This is called the Third Use of the Law, a use that the Law cannot perform because of its accusatory nature that God gave it to hold us all accountable and guilty to God. The Third Use of the Law fails the Lutheran hermeneutic of distinguishing between Law and Promise because the Third Use of the Law is not based on Christ, makes Christ’s death mean nothing, and it gives no comfort to consciences and instead troubles them. So Nestingen’s Christian freedom is limited to the Law’s ordering of society. He describes that in having tenderness break “through the hostilities that have divided people, for example, or in a quiet reassurance granted amid suffering” (p 55). He has Christians working in the realm of the law, bringing order, but neglects to give them the freedom to make people right with God through Christ, which is the real Christian freedom.

Thus Nestingen concludes by echoing Wolfhart Pannenberg that “a church that rejects the traditional teaching on homosexual practice can neither be evangelical nor Lutheran, no matter what it calls itself” (p.57) That conclusion makes the church of Christ and its traditional teachings to be only a moral dictator that people must follow as the means of righteousness instead of faith in Christ. The Reformers also practiced the Law and Promise perspective on “traditional teaching” in Augsburg Confession 28. They said that certain traditional teachings, actions, ways of life, “new fasts, new ceremonies, new monastic orders, and the like were invented daily. They were fervently and strictly promoted, as if such things were a necessary service of God whereby people earned grace if they observed them or committed a great sin if they did not. Many

harmful errors in the church have resulted from this. In the first place, the grace of Christ and the teaching concerning faith are thereby obscured. The gospel holds these things up to us with great earnestness and strongly insists that everyone regard the merit of Christ as sublime and precious and know that faith in Christ is to be esteemed far above all works. For this reason, St. Paul fought vehemently against the Law of Moses and against human tradition so that we should learn that we do not become righteous before God by our works but that it is only through faith in Christ that we obtain grace for Christ's sake" (Augsburg Confession, Article 28.2-5). The Reformers insisted that what makes people and their behavior right with God is the Gospel of Christ. To make a person's righteousness dependent upon following traditional teaching makes Christ unneeded and just burdens consciences and causes them to despair of ever being right with God. That is not the Gospel's mercy but the Law's condemnation.

The third essay by Martha Stortz, "Rethinking Christian Sexuality: Baptized into the Body of Christ," though it talks of baptism, uses Scripture only as a law book. "Scripture guides us in what to do and what not to do" (p. 61). "Sometimes biblical counsel requires that we examine the contours of a parable and shape our own lives accordingly" (p. 61). Here Scripture is being used without its connection to the gospel of Christ being our righteousness by his suffering for us. Scripture is being used as an authority or guide or counsel as if it had authority on its own without the gospel. Stolz uses baptism into Christ as our new identity, that we are owned by Christ, but she does not differentiate between ownership by Christ's mercy and ownership by God, even God's grace in the law.

Richard Perry Jr. and Jose Rodriguez use culture as that which reflects "their condition in life" (p. 81). "Culture serves as

a way of organizing the world" (p. 83). "Culture, we suggest, is a meaning-giving system created by a particular group of people that expresses, forms, and transmits, in culturally specific forms, how the people and all living things are connected to God" (p. 83). That is the same as Nestingen's law is for order and provision. In Lutheran hermeneutics, culture is totally in the realm of Law. So whenever discussing culture that distinction must be kept clear to be done in the Lutheran way of giving glory to Christ and comforting consciences. Perry and Rodriguez do not make that distinction between Law and Gospel when they correlate Christ and culture: "Christ and culture are authorities the Christian is called to obey" (p.84). "We can all agree, as Christians, that universal ethical wisdom is shared through the Ten Commandments, biblical proverbs, the person and work of Jesus Christ, the Sermon on the Mount, and stories about biblical heroes and heroines" (p. 85). Here the two authors have made Christ another guru of ethical wisdom, and so have crassly not kept Law and Promise distinct. They have made Law, as in culture, the means of righteousness, which is only the work of the Promise. Christ's death and rising are not even mentioned, are of no consequence, and are not good news for us in how we are connected to God. Christ connects us to God in mercy, mercy for disbelievers who use culture to justify our lives, as Perry and Rodriguez do.

Lastly, even in the Authors' Forum, the use of Scripture as only Law is stated several times, "the great majority of people in the ELCA want to do the will of God on this matter. They want to know what the Bible does say" (p.129). "As Lutherans our authority does not lie in our experiences or the experience of others but in Holy Scripture, the Word of God" (p.132). The will of God is seen as Law, right behavior, and in no way is the will of God seen as mercy given through the death and rising of Christ as how we are justified and so please God and

do God's will. To believe in Christ as the one whom God has sent is how we do the works of God, as the gospel writer John says (6.29).

*The "Christian Perspective" is completely missing in "Faithful Conversation: Christian Perspectives on Homosexuality" because it views Scripture as Law and ignores the Promise, which is the real Christian perspective. To recommend the Law as people's perspective on God makes them guilty and condemned and so is of no comfort. Only that which gives peace to the conscience is gospel. People are comforted and given peace with God when the Promise is proclaimed: We are right with God by grace, for Christ's sake, when we believe that Christ suffered for us and that for his sake our sin is forgiven and righteousness and eternal life are given to us. That is finally the only Christian perspective, for it is based on Christ whom God raised from the dead for us.*

*Timothy Hoyer*

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# Reader Response to the

# Wine/Wineskins of Contemporary Worship

ThTh #261 comes from SHERMAN LEE. Sherm is a long-time Crossings veteran, both as student and workshop facilitator. By day he is an information technology architect for a financial services firm; by night he is husband, father of two, amateur musician, tinkerer, student of pop culture, and has a keen interest in wherever the abstract meets the concrete, that is, where the rubber meets the road.

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## RESPONSE TO THTH 258: DON'T JUDGE A WINE BY ITS WINESKIN

Ed,

As always, I appreciate your insight and comments. Your analysis reflects what you do best: applying the litmus test for Gospel content.

Keeping in mind the limitations of analyzing a phenomenon from afar – that is, a story presented through the eyes and ears of a reporter, whose words were then filtered by an editor – the phenomenon is still ripe for study.

It is not interesting just to see church organizations trying to cultivate their congregations – this is an age-old problem. It is however fascinating to see attempt at growth on such a scale in an age of declining (mainstream Protestant) attendance/participation. It is mass (pun intended?) marketing and seems awkward – desperate times call for desperate measures?

Does growth become simply a numbers game to the exclusion of

the Gospel?

There is nothing inherently wrong with these “new” measures/methods. Different people resonate with different styles, of worship, of music, of praise and prayer, of communicating. But these ways of attracting and sustaining interest and participation address only the question of HOW.

The more salient question is of WHAT: what is being presented/shared at such services? At best, it’s the Gospel; at worst, hopefully none of it fosters/sustains destructive behaviors.

Theologically, the worst case scenario is if the church advertises Gospel but then falls short and presents something else – like candy-coated Law or just candy-coated feel-good platitudes. The biggest growth success story in the world means nothing if the consumers are being sold a bill of goods (or good news).

But I would submit that many a (traditional) congregation does this on a regular basis but with lower notoriety and much lower growth (and possibly even decline). Sometimes I wonder if the Gospel is propagated not because of the church-as-institution but rather in spite of it.

The afore-mentioned litmus test is actually the journalist’s question of WHY! Why do (should) we even bother gathering, be it at high church or at mega-church? Because of the WHY God-in-Jesus died for us on the cross and WHY he rose for us – for God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever trusts in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

It beats me how anyone, be it a journalist or a marketer, could omit such a fantastic WHY, but they do. Everyone loves a mystery or a drama, gets hooked by whodunit, but it is always

unsatisfying without understanding WHY. And in this case, the WHY is not only curiosity-sating but heartening, uplifting, pull-you-from-the-depths kind of good news!

Maybe, just maybe, the “Gospel-deficient services” play a role as well. I did not grow up “churched” but among my most “religious” lifetime moments came during my annual secular-Christmas tradition of watching “A Charlie Brown Christmas” in which Linus quotes the Lukan Christmas story. Amidst the din of holiday marketing, Linus speaks simply and directly about the angel bringing good tidings of glad joy, of God coming into the world for us. Contrast this with another childhood favorite – Davey and Goliath – which was full of morality but low on Gospel. Even then, as an unchurched teenager, I was able to sniff out not only goodness and morality, but also of Gospel, of promise, of God’s gift.

It would be years before I developed the theological awareness to more fully appreciate its meaning – by going to Luke and other texts and reading with my heart, not just watching a 30 minute holiday special each year. For me, the initial draw was being part of a mass audience and wondering about the messages both Godly and secular and then scratching my head about the motivation to so openly quote Scripture, and why underscore that particular passage in the Charlie Brown special. And along my journey I was baptized as an adult and have spent much time in trying to spread this Good News in a diversity of forms and forums.

I’ve kind of wandered from my original intent which was to state that no one should judge worship services by their trappings, but rather by their content. It’s no secret that I not only enjoy different musical settings and styles (from traditional to folk to reggae to...) for worship but that I like to participate as a musician as well. But I’m not an “either-or” kind of person

– I appreciate diversity in most things but mostly I marvel that the universal message of God’s promise and promise fulfilled can come in so many forms – as long as that message is The One being transmitted in the myriad of presented forms.

Shalom!

Sherman Lee

PS – Obviously I was touched by your last column – both the topic and your take on it. It stirred in me many of the touchpoints in my spiritual journey – adult convert, mass media savvy, gospel-content of any form/forum, diversity of musical styles.

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## **RESPONSE TO THTH 259: ANOTHER GOSPEL LITMUS-TEST FOR ANOTHER LUTHERAN MEGA-PHENOMENON**

I composed my response to ThTh 258 mostly to ensure that critical analysis did not condemn any worship based solely on its “wineskin.” And again Ed, you raised the crucial (pun intended) issue regarding contemporary worship: “Where is THE Gospel in all this?”

### **Another Quantity vs. Quality Challenge**

I have not experienced any Lutheran Mega-Church first-hand and therefore cannot speak even naively of the ELCA Mega-Church phenomenon, nor its St. Louis “mini-me” cousin as described in your analysis. (Is it just me or does “mega-church” sound so much like “McChurch?”) But I can cite additional data that may offer another perspective of current church movements facing quantity vs. quality issues, and possibly, hope for the Gospel-

centeredness of the Church.

As I type this response I am listening to the advance release of the music for the 2003 ELCA Youth Gathering (late July in Atlanta) entitled “Do Life! Ubuntu I am because we are. We are because Christ is.” (For more information, please refer to <http://www.elca.org/youth/gathering.html>.) ELCA Youth Gatherings are near and dear to my heart; immediately after my baptism, I began serving as a youth counselor for 13 years, and have attended all such Gatherings (starting in 1988) as a chaperone and volunteer. As a late bloomin’ Christian, I have had to play catch up to all aspects of church going, including separating out the cultural aspects from the theological. As an Asian-American in the midwest, I have proudly adopted the German- and Scandinavian-American Lutheran church culture – because that is the dominant local cultural church pattern. It’s fun to understand and be part of the “in-jokes” that Garrison Keillor tells about the Lutheran Church. But that is a secondary concern – the Gospel is what matters. And the Gospel speaks to far more than just those of German and Scandinavian descent.

The ELCA Youth Gatherings have been a product of the ELCA merger, and in the two main predecessor ELCA church bodies, there were different youth ministry cultures with differing philosophies on how best to serve youth. I’m no expert on the predecessor youth ministries nor have I been privy to the transition process, but the evolution of the triennial gathering has not been without a few bumps. These Gatherings have been at the ELCA forefront of how to make Christ relevant to today’s youth – and a huge part of the Gatherings has been the choice of music – wineskin and wine.

## WHAT OF NEW WINESKINS?

This is tough road for the ELCA, or any mainstream Protestant church. For all the talk of the “medium making the message” consider this paradoxical co-evolution: in the artistic side of the current music scene, the main goal is to be new, different and hip; the business side immediately mimics and cashes in on the new sound and the artistic side responds by devising newer, different-er and hipper – and so on and so on. And mainstream churches are even further behind than the business side of the music scene.

And what do young people want to hear? What “gen” are we up to – from baby boomers to baby busters to Gen X to Gen Y to whatever? Do the young people know or even care that they are part of the post-me generation? Do they want to hear organs and strings and brass, or do they want to hear guitars and drums and amplifiers? What should a Gathering expect when they commission original music and contract with songleaders and musicians? These are among the questions that the ELCA-as-merged-entity has had to deal with since 1988.

They are no easy answers to these questions – and ironically the challenge has only increased since 1988 when the initial Gathering attracted about 20,000 participants – and the most recent one hosted in St. Louis (2000) was divided into two five day sessions in order to accommodate a larger total attendance greater than 37,000. (These numbers are far from exact and are from my own recollections.) The audience grows (quantity) but what about the quality (Gospel litmus test)? In addition, teenagers experiment in everything, including and especially musical tastes. Who’s to say which “contemporary” style can attract the entire audience, or even how does one calculate the modern musical lowest common denominator? And in calculating that lowest common denominator, what of the youth most

comfortable with the “non-emotive-sit-in-your-pew-without-moving-let-alone-standing-and-clapping-style?”

The best that any organization can do is to offer and invite, just as God-in-Christ offers true wine and bread, and invites us to share in the Holy Feast, to exchange our badness for Divine Goodness. This year, the advance release of Gathering music offers a panoply of rhythms and styles, from African to Gospel to rap to neo-baroque/traditional to hip-hop. Again, these are only wineskins but they are an important part of God’s invitation – they can and do access emotional portals – and the Gathering is offering a palette of “different strokes for different folks.”

## AND WHAT OF THE WINE?

Check out the song list (<http://www.elca.org/youth/tag-songs-list.html>) and lyrics (<http://www.elca.org/youth/tag-songs-lyrics.html>) for yourself.

The usage of “We/Us/Our” far outnumbers the usage of “I/Me/My” but the first person singular does appear several times. But as you look for yourself, even the first person singular in the lyrics reflects Ed’s reminder of Luther/Elert: “It’s really not that complicated. The Good News is not what we are doing for or about God, but what ‘God in Christ’ is doing to, for, with us—in past, present, and future tenses. ‘Christ HAS died. Christ IS risen. Christ WILL come again.’”

Here are some sample lyrics from a rap song, “Do Life”:

*Bishop Tutu says it like this  
The man on the cross gave us a big kiss  
Yeah Christ flung his arms out open wide  
For everyone and everything, makes me teary-eyed  
‘Cause it’s about unity, community, it’s harmony and humanity,  
like divinity, like the trinity,*

*Yo, can't you see it's about you and me  
'Bout life and living right where you're at  
'Bout friends and neighbors and folks like that  
'Bout everybody getting their fair shake  
'Bout giving more than you take  
'Cause God's reaching out, not holding back  
He's calling for a spiritual love attack  
It's time to join the cosmic embrace  
And start spreading God's love all over this place*

There is a strong reason for Gospel-centered theology in the musical liturgy and worship songs: the theme of the Gathering.

I had the great blessing to hear Archbishop Desmond Tutu speak at the St. Louis ELCA Gathering, and he provides the theological foundation for this year's event. Taking the first few paragraphs from the Gathering's webpage on theme (<http://www.elca.org/youth/tag-theme-ubuntu.html>):

**DO LIFE! UBUNTU I AM BECAUSE WE ARE. WE ARE BECAUSE CHRIST IS.** The theme for the 2003 Gathering is Do Life! Ubuntu. "Ubuntu" comes from the Bantu group of languages spoken in sub-Saharan Africa. It literally means "humanity." It is a gift from the African culture to our North American Christian culture, for through the lens of ubuntu we can see a way to do life in such a way that God is glorified in and through our very humanness.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu embraced ubuntu and shaped a theology around it in rebuttal to the Christian faith taught in his South African context of apartheid that said one's skin color was an indicator of one's value as a human being. Tutu pointed to the person of Jesus through whose ministry, death and resurrection God claimed all people as valuable in God's sight. It is in and through this community of the claimed, that we

*find our identity and worth as humans.*

*In Tutu's worldview, in order to understand yourself, you do it through someone else. This is difficult for Western Christians to grasp. We may even resist it. We have been socialized into and through a worldview where personhood centers on the lone individual whose essential characteristic is that of self-determination. Our very faith is often tied to this reverence of individuality.*

*Youth are especially aware of the pressures to achieve, stand out in the crowd, be unique, succeed, prosper and to make something of themselves. In contrast to this, the African view of a person comes through interdependence with others. For Tutu, the practice of ubuntu grows out of God's relationship with us in Christ Jesus, who sets us free from sin, thereby making it possible to know each other. Our true human identity, he says, comes only through absolute dependence on God and neighbor, even when that neighbor is named enemy or stranger or uncool or old, or... (you fill in the blanks).*

*In baptism we are brought into a community that shapes who we are. It is in that community that we learn how to think, walk, speak, behave and how to be human together on this earth. The way we understand and view life and community is through the life of Jesus Christ whose sacrifice on the cross reconciled all people to God. We invite you to join the community of faith at the Gathering and learn through the lens of ubuntu how to "do life"... to imagine another way of living abundantly together.*

This theology may not cleanly follow the Crossings model, that is, of the problems in our relationship with others, with ourselves and with God (and God's problem with us – change of subject!); then God providing the solution on the Cross to heal

God's relationship with us and therefore overflowing with goodness as to see us through our relationships with ourselves and then also with others. If anything, Ubuntu theology defers our self-relationships to our relationships with others – it absolutely smacks down any possibility for me-ness without the context of we-ness. Regardless, the Gospel-litmus test is positive: we are nothing without the God-in-Jesus on the Cross for us. This is True Wine for us when we accept this holy, healing invitation – and the wineskins, although important in fanning out that invitation – are secondary.

In fact, The Wine is so powerful that it makes and/or adopts its own wineskins. This year will be the first time I will not attend the Gathering in person. But I will be participating vicariously – through our local youth, before and after the event with the Gathering music as incorporated in our local worship – and also in a new wineskin: streaming live video of the Gathering via the Internet in real-time, that is, as it occurs in Atlanta we can see and hear what our youth are experiencing. (See <http://www.elca.org/gathering/med-strm.html>) I look forward to hearing the Gospel as it is offered to tens of thousands of impressionable, hungry-for-substance, searching-for-meaning-in-a-post-9/11-world young (and not so young) people, as it is presented to them in a myriad of ways – wineskins made worthy by The Wine. I hope you (and all who read this response) look forward to this as well, with hope in Christ, for Christ's church and for the world.

Shalom!

Sherman Lee

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# Schroeder Summer Sabbatical

Colleagues, Today's ThTh posting is number 260. That is 5 times 52 Thursdays—5 full years of ThTh. I don't remember that we missed any Thursday, but it could have been. Five full years suggest that it's time to take a time out, especially for a guy who's been retired for a decade already. So I propose NOT to write anything for ThTh for the next three months. It'll be hard to desist. But encouragement to do so has come—of all places!—from Teresa of Avila. Imagine that. In morning devotions at our breakfast table recently one of her prayers was designated for the day. Here it is.

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.

When I prayed that out loud—it was my turn—Marie looked at me. But I'd already gotten the message. "Teresa's talking about me."

Ergo, three months self-imposed silence with ThTh postings. Well, sortuv.

Silence from EHS, but still postings (maybe) for most of the Thursdays of summer 2003 in the northern hemisphere—June, July, August. All from other theologians. Anticipated are a couple of book reviews from co-editor Robin Morgan, a Tim Hoyer review of the ELCA's "preliminary study" on homosexuality ["not Lutheran,

despite its claim"]], some responses to recent ThTh postings on looking fro the Gospel in "Entertainment Evangelism," possibly some words from Chris Hedges, author of "War Is a Force That Gives Us Meaning," and some articles from the "Ed Schroeder Festschrift." And what, pray tell, you ask, is that? It's a desktop-published book presented to me by Crossings colleagues on my retirement as honcho at the Crossings office exactly ten years ago. All 20 of these Festschrift tributes are gems. We'll use as many as we can in the coming weeks. The Festschrift was not widely distributed, so most of you have seen none of it.

One of the longer pieces we hope to post—most likely in segments—is Bob Bertram's "Theses on Revelation. Crossing a Modern Theme with its Biblical Original" of September 1993. The almost-finished book by the same title was still in his computer when he died last March. There is a good possibility that we can coax it out of the computer and into the hands of a willing publisher. We're working on it—as well as on a couple more of his book-length manuscripts hiding on the hard disc.

But I digress.

Input from others is the intended fare for the next 12 Thursdays. Deo volente I'll be back in September. In the meantime I'll be working on praying Teresa's prayer and seeing where God leads me. If the results are communicable, I'll tell you in September. If not, I'll tell you that too.

Besides the good counsel from blessed Teresa, there is also the counsel of my spouse of 48 years:

Ed has been somewhat of a Jeremiah in many of these Thursday Theologies (I know. I'm the proof-reader), and sometimes his words sound like Lamentations. It brings to mind one of the most startling verses I came across in my daily Bible reading some time ago, namely Lamentations 3:20f. Jeremiah has been going on

for page after page about his troubles and afflictions, like v.17, "my soul is bereft of peace; I have forgotten what happiness is." And then all of a sudden comes this gem: "But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness." In, with and under everything Ed writes is this certainty, sealed by the cross of Christ. He'll never get over it. I thought you'd like to know. Marie.

[Ed here again.] With these two feminist theologians as counselors I'll surely be a more edified Ed at summer's end.

And now in closing, one more thing. This Crossings listservice survives by contributions. Crunch the numbers for yourself. Five years for 52 weeks equals 260. To suggest a dollar per posting would be brazen. Some may not have been worth a buck. But there were others. How about 25-cents each—or at least a dime? Place to send your 5th anniversary contribution is The Crossings Community, PO Box 7011, Chesterfield MO 63006-7011.

Peace & Joy,  
Ed Schroeder