

# Is Robert Gagnon, the New Glue for Linking “Conservatives” in ELCA and LCMS?

Colleagues, Pastors both in the LCMS and ELCA who consider themselves conservative are rallying around Robert Gagnon as their theological guru to fight the liberals in both churches on the hot potato of homosexuality. And Gagnon isn't even a Lutheran. Even more amazing is that his lenses for reading the Bible are anti-Lutheran. But he knows that God abominates gays and lesbians, and he's written a big book to show that this is precisely what the Bible says. His pitch to his allies who happen to be Lutherans is: “Even though I am not a Lutheran, you people are, and you always rest your case on what the Bible says, right? Well, then . . . .”

ELCA folks are being sucked in. Gagnon has been a major speaker for at least 3 large ELCA gatherings that I know of. He must also have a following in the LCMS, because he's the featured speaker on “The Use of Scripture Concerning Homosexuality” for the upcoming symposium at Concordia Seminary (St. Louis), Missouri Synod's largest seminary. The topic: “The Challenge of Homosexuality – The Church Responds.” And Gagnon doesn't come cheap. For an ELCA appearance two years ago his fee was \$1000. Maybe that was just for Lutherans, and now that US Lutherans really “appreciate” him, I wonder if the fee's gone up or down.

I've not encountered Gagnon live, though friends have. But I have read the book which makes him a hero both in the ELCA and apparently also in the LCMS. It was back in the spring of 2002 when a local ELCA clergy conference discussed it and I was asked to respond. The specs are: Robert Gagnon, THE BIBLE AND

HOMOSEXUAL PRACTICE – TEXTS AND HERMENEUTICS. Abingdon, 2001. Gagnon is professor of New Testament at Pittsburgh Theol. Seminary. He is Presbyterian.

Some of my words to that clergy conference were posted as ThTh 205 (May 16, 2002). Here are a couple of paragraphs:

9. *At our last meeting we were instructed from Robert Gagnon's book [The Bible and Homosexual Practice – Texts and Hermeneutics]. Gagnon is gaining popularity in the ELCA among the folks who know that homosexuality is wrong. At least one ELCA synod featured him a few weeks ago, and later this year the LUTHERAN FORUM has him as their keynote speaker for a big get-together in Kansas City. That is not good news – in more ways than one. Gagnon claims no Lutheran heritage, and he shows that to be true. He has no clue about Lutheran hermeneutics, about reading the Scriptures with law/promise lenses – nor of the theology of the cross, nor of hidden/revealed God, the building blocks of our heritage. Augsburg-conscious Lutherans need to instruct Gagnon, not be instructed by him.*
10. *Gagnon reads the Bible with scholastic hermeneutics, the same hermeneutics of those who declared the Augsburg Confessors heretics. Those scholastics critiqued the Augsburg Confessors for “ignoring the Bible” – especially in those places where the Bible clearly commends “works.” Their hermeneutic reads the Bible as a codex, a canon of God's teaching – what to believe, how to behave, how to worship. Apology IV calls that hermeneutic destructive of the Gospel. If that's right, then Gagnon is wrong. “Augsburg” hermeneutics reads the Bible as God's X-ray pictures and God's therapy for the patients. In its particulars it's a “patient chart.”*

11. *Thus Luther can say that Leviticus – all of Leviticus – is irrelevant for Christ-followers. It's the hospital chart of some other patient. It's no more relevant for a Christian than the chart of the person lying next to you in the hospital. ML's label for Leviticus was "Juden Sachsenspiegel." What their own civil code–called "Sachsenspiegel"–was for Saxons, so Leviticus was for Jewish society. Yes, he could even say that Leviticus was GOD's civil ordinance for Jews, but it still had no divine jurisdiction in Saxony. In Saxony, God (with the left hand, of course) had given Saxons their own civil law, the "Sachsenspiegel." Here's a clear either/or: Leviticus provides key texts for Gagnon in the homosexuality hassle. Ditto for his Lutheran disciples. Luther, by contrast, said Leviticus was irrelevant.*
12. *Another item: Gagnon's notion of sin ignores the new definition for sin that came with Jesus. "Sin is that they do not believe in me," says Jesus in John. Or in Paul's words: "Whatever does not proceed from faith is sin." He seems to have no clue on this. Or that with the coming of Jesus anything cosmic has changed.*

Since Concordia Seminary (St. Louis) is my alma mater (Class of 1954) I thought it proper to write to the current seminary president and warn him about Gagnon. Many times in Ezekiel (e.g., 3:18) God urges such intervention. Here are some of those paragraphs:

*Dear Mr. President, Today I received the Summer 2004 issue of the seminary magazine FOCUS. Although many of the pages are cheering, page 9 is not–not cheering for me (and doubtless not cheering for many other alums) to hear about our alma mater.*

*Your invitation to Robert Gagnon as "major presenter" for your September symposium scandalizes 801-alums who learned*

confessional theology within your walls. Not only is Gagnon an admitted non-Lutheran, he is explicitly anti-Lutheran (anti-Augsburg Confession & Apology) in his fundamental theology. Starting with how he reads the Bible. In Augsburg terms Gagnon's allies are the scholastic Confutators whose critique of the AC—using as they did zillions of Bible passages—pushed Melancthon to articulate the classic Lutheran hermeneutics of Apology 4. And you know how roundly he condemns the hermeneutic of the Confutators in that article. "They bury Christ" is one of his "milder" critiques. Gagnon is in their train.

For Gagnon to be giving the essay on "The Use of Scripture..." on this hot topic at any Lutheran seminary, let alone at Concordia St. Louis, is—to use one of his favorite words in his now (in)famous book—an "abomination."

I know he is becoming the hero of the ELCA folks who abominate homosexuals, but with your own crisper vision (so I thought) on the law-promise center of Augsburg-hermeneutics, I didn't think you'd go for Gagnon. His hermeneutic for reading the scriptures is de facto that of Karlstadt at the time of the Reformation. Since Karlstadt finally had to leave the Wittenberg seminary because his gospel was an "other" gospel that undermined law/promise hermeneutics for Biblical exegesis and preaching, why would you want to re-instate one of his latter-day pupils to a seminary podium?

As an alumnus of Concordia Seminary, I suggest you dis-invite him despite the consequences. The consequences of leaving him on the program are even grimmer—for the Gospel and for Lutherans who think that's of some import. He can not be expected to bring "Anothen to phos." [=the seminary's motto: Light from above.] His way of reading the Bible sheds darkness, especially on the Gospel-core of the scriptures. Your presidential calling is not to aid and abet that, but to

*prevent it.*

*Sincerely yours, EHS*

I'm not trying to kill Gagnon. I'm in Ezekiel's train warning my fellow Lutherans not to get tangled in Gagnon's ganglions. Unless he no longer reads the Bible the way he did in his book. Might his increasing presence at Lutheran (?) venues have given him the Augsburg Aha!? I'm not optimistic. But it could be that Gagnon has changed, that, like Paul after Damascus, he's now promoting a Gospel that his book opposes. However I've heard nothing of that sort. The invitations he's getting from Lutherans unhappy about homosexuals testifies that what he said in his book is his theology still. And that theology is bad news—not just for Lutherans.

Ironies abound. LCMS voices criticize the ELCA for cozying up to the Reformed in church fellowship, but take instruction from a sturdy Calvinist, instead of Luther, on how to read the Bible. Another irony is the “fellowship” Gagnon, a Calvinist, generates between ELCA and LCMS folk when gay/lesbian is the issue.

Gagnon allies are multiplying in the ELCA. Besides the WORDALONE Network with its firm “no” to gays and lesbians, there has recently arisen the “Durado Covenant” in the ELCA. Durado covenanters are pastors of “beeeg” congregations voicing their own “no” in advance of the anticipated “yes” coming on this issue at next summer's ELCA assembly. Might these ELCA folks and their LCMS confreres (no women pastors there, of course) find their way to each other over the Gagnon bridge?

Comes now the recently completed Missouri Synod convention where the “moderate” conservatives successfully resisted the “immoderate” conservatives—the mild ones fending off the wild ones—from top leadership positions. Concordia Seminary St. Louis

is Missouri's "moderate" seminary, doubtless pleased to see the wild ones put away. But Gagnon is the featured Biblical guru for Concordia's upcoming symposium on "the" issue. He's already got a big fan club in the ELCA.

How about this? Might he eventually be persuasive enough to have "moderate conservatives" (more precise: Biblicist Lutherans)—in both LCMS and ELCA—currently on different sides of a denominational wall, but in full consensus on the gay issue, finally "tear down that wall" and embrace each other? Wouldn't that be an ecumenical supernova! A new configuration in USA Lutheranism, perhaps called Conservative American Lutherans—Albeit Moderate in Their Yearnings. And guess who just might get chosen to lead CALAMITY? Who better than the one who brought them together, a Presbyterian professor from Pittsburgh! Is that possible truth, or patent fiction?

Either way, Christ's peace and joy!

Ed Schroeder

---

## **Some Reverie Brought on by Renate Bethge's Bonhoeffer Book**

Colleagues, Reviewing Renate Bethge's book last week got old tapes turning. Here's some anecdotage to go along with my dotage.

## Reverie #1

Renate is a personal friend. We met her and her late husband Eberhard when they visited Seminex a quarter century ago. Both of them were guest lecturers. Eberhard, as you may know, catalyzed the Bonhoeffer boom with his publication shortly after WWII of DB's "Letters and Papers from Prison." That title was apparently chosen for English-language marketing purposes, but didn't at all say what the German title said: "Widerstand und Ergebung." [Something like "Resisting and Being Defeated." I.e., we tried, but we didn't succeed.]

Possibly because we could "schwaffel" with the Bethges in German on that occasion—though both spoke excellent English—Marie and I got invited to visit them "the next time you're in Germany." Which we eventually did as guests in their home in Wachtberg near the Rhine. We saw the Bonhoeffer originals—took in hand and read some of the famous ones. Also paged through Bonhoeffer's copy of the Lutheran Confessions [The Book of Concord], and turned to his marginal scribbles at Formula of Concord Article 10, which so fascinated Bob Bertram. The Lutheran lingo about "status confessionis" comes from FC 10. It talks about "a time for confessing." During our days at Seminex Bertram helped us see our own slice of church history as such a "time for confessing." [The second full book Bob never got out of his computer before death carries that title. There's a full chapter on Bonhoeffer. Mike Hoy is working on exhuming it for us all.]

FC 10 was central for Bonhoeffer in the Church Struggle [Kirchenkampf] of his day. Confessing was the core concept of the "Bekennende Kirche," the Confessing Church, that arose in protest against Aryan theology invading the "Evangelisch" [Protestant] churches during the Hitler era. "Confession" has always been a big word for Lutherans ever since Augsburg (1530). The Aryan addenda that Naziism urged upon the German churches snapped that time-for-confessing trip wire. For Lutherans that

revived study of FC 10 and its language about situations in church history that force Christians into a “status confessionis.” Such a situation (status) is one where you are called to make public confession of the “true” Gospel contra the “Gospels-with-addenda” that are regnant in the church. The Aryan addenda made that “perfectly clear” to some Lutherans (DB included), but not to all. Hence the “Kirchenkampf” was first of all within the church itself—and not just with Hitler.

N.B. this “time for confessing” (tempus confessionis) in Germany 1933-1945 was not a time when you stood up and told Hitler off. Instead FC 10 defines times for confessing as inner-churchly—a time to stand up to fellow Christians, usually church leadership, and ‘fess up to the genuine Gospel in the face of the phony Gospel-with-addenda that the leaders are hustling. Confessing is tough talk because false Gospels finally merit the apostolic anathema—and somebody’s got to tell them. Consequences, of course, can be serious, sometimes lethal. No wonder that making such witness (martyria in Greek) can lead to martyrdom.

Well, Bob learned all this with an assist from Bonhoeffer and taught it to the rest of us, helping us see the wars of Missouri in the 70s as such a time to confront a Gospel-cum-addenda with a Gospel “pure” from such add-ons.

Just how important the Lutheran Confessions were in Bonhoeffer’s theology is a current hot topic in the Bonhoeffer Society. Bob was one prominent yea-sayer in the society in this debate. The accepted wisdom has been that Karl Barth, DB’s friend and sometime ally, was more his mentor than Luther was. I’m an outsider to the Bonhoeffer Society, but from what I hear the debate continues, now with some of Bob’s former students prominent players at work to “save Bonhoeffer from the Barthians.” It’s not a turf war, but a substantive effort to



show and tell the Gospel-grounded character of DB's theology and then use it for Gospel-confessing today.

### **Reverie #2 (shorter)**

I think it was at a 50th anniversary celebration of the Barmen Declaration (the charter document of the Confessing Church from 1934) that someone asked Eberhard Bethge to reminisce about the Confessing Church's underground seminary at Finkenwalde in Pomerania. Bonhoeffer was the director, Bethge a student. Here's where the two of them bonded in a freindship so solid that Bethge began to show up regularly in the Bonhoeffer family home back in Berlin. So often was he there that he finally noticed DB's niece Renate next door . . . and . . . and . . . and eventually Eberhard did indeed become a member of the family.

Bethge electrified the audience with his memories of Finkenwalde at this 1984 Barmen anniversary conference. Then someone asked if he'd ever encountered anything close to that since those days. "Only once," he said, "at Seminex. Especially in the chapel. The singing, the singing!"

### **Reverie #3 (not so short)**

Seminex granted four earned doctorates in systematic theology in the course of its 10-year history. One of those was to a Korean Presbyterian pastor, Keun Soo Hong. Keun Soo went back home and got into trouble for his own kind of confessing—much of it in the public arena that impacted actions by the South Korean national government. Like Bonhoeffer, Keun Soo finally wound up in prison. After he served his two year sentence, he was released and returned to his pastoral work. Somehow his congregation juggled things so that Marie and I could actually visit him in prison when we were in Korea in 1992 together with a bunch of Crossings folks from St. Louis. Here's Marie's journal entry for that incredible day, a "Letters and Papers from Prison" entry with a Korean twist. Yes, Bonhoeffer does

figure in. Read on.

*April 30, 1992 – We two went with Prof. Jong-Sun Noh and Pastor Kim from Hyang-rin church (Keun-Soo Hong's congregation) by train to Kun San prison, where Keun Soo was being held. It's almost a 3-hour train ride south of Seoul.*

*Prof. Noh talked about possible reasons why Keun Soo was arrested and not he, though he holds the same opinions and has said the same things. He said that Keun Soo was in the U.S. for 18 years, during the worst years of persecution under S. Korean president Park Chung Hee. When he returned, he had become Americanized enough to think he could say what he wanted anywhere and everywhere, whereas those who had stayed in Korea knew almost instinctively how to choose both their words and the places they could say them. When Keun Soo said some comparatively good things about North Korea on a popular late-night call-in radio show, the government really had to go after him.*

*When we arrived at Kun San we took a taxi about half an hour to the Kun San correctional institution. At the prison we walked inside to the first building, where we waited in a waiting area until the man in charge of such special visitors returned from lunch and could deal with us. We sat and waited, watching the young guards behind the counter do their paper work. The official returned and ushered us into the room on the other side of the counter, past the young guards, and into his office. There we sat and waited again.*

*Eventually we were ushered out of the first building, through another very smelly building where guards had to unlock steel gates for us, to a third building which lay across the exercise area. Up on the second floor we sat on vinyl stuffed chairs around a coffee table. An older guard sat at a nearby desk with*

pencil and paper, ready to take notes, and two young soldiers sat against the wall by the door. We waited a few minutes again, and finally Keun Soo came in the door and walked over to us. I got tears in my eyes watching him and Ed hugging each other. He was very surprised to see me there, too. We sat down on the chairs and talked.

Keun Soo explained that when special visits are arranged like this, it has to be for some educational reason, so we would have to sound educational somewhere along the line. We showed him pictures of children and grandchildren, and a picture of him and his wife with Ed and our daughter Anne when we were in Seoul four years ago. He told us about a poem he's been writing about the dead depending upon the living: when Jesus was in the tomb he was completely dead, completely dependent on the living God to raise him. In the same way he, Keun Soo, though not dead, is completely dependent on others; he can't even open his own room. Others have to unlock the door, others determine when he can eat, exercise, read, write. But he says he is really treated very well, especially by some Christian guards who honor and care for him. In return he is able to minister to them and to fellow prisoners. In fact, some have begun calling him "Honghoeffter," echoing Bonhoeffer's similar ministry in prison in Nazi Germany.

When we had first written to Keun Soo to see if we could visit him, he wrote back asking us not only to come and see him, but also to bring the English translation of Bonhoeffer's biography written by Eberhard Bethge. So there in the prison Ed brought it out of his briefcase. But before Keun Soo could take it, it had to go first to a guard, who gave it to the man at the desk. Keun Soo explained that the official would have to check it over and make sure nothing extra was put in it, that it was only a book.

*He looks good, even in the loose blue shirt and pants, even with a number (993) over his heart. All of this conversation (well, maybe 30%) Prof. Noh translated for the guard at the desk – he couldn't do it all because the guard wouldn't be able to write it all, and besides, some of the things we said the guard didn't need to know. "I told him the truth," said Prof. Noh. Keun Soo said, for instance, that he is studying Luke in particular right now, because it is "the most political" of the gospels. Well, with all the talk and laughter we overstayed our time, and then Pastor Kim had to ask him about something at church, so we didn't leave soon enough to catch the 3:25 train from town. We rushed to get a taxi and the taxi drove fast, but the distance and the traffic were too much. So we waited at the train station for the next train at 4:06, and got back to Seoul Station about 7:45.*

When this ThTh gets posted—if things go as planned—we'll be in SE Asia for the mission stuff described in ThTh 318. On our way home we intend to visit "Honghoeffler" in Seoul. Keun Soo is now retired, but from what we've heard he keeps on confessing. He says he learned it at Seminex. Perhaps. But some of it was the gift he brought to us.

Peace & joy!

Ed Schroeder

---

# Renate's Bethge's Book on Bonhoeffer – A Review

Colleagues: Here's a new Bonhoeffer book for summer reading—or for any other season.

Renate Bethge. DIETRICH BONHOEFFER. A BRIEF LIFE. Transl. K.C. Hanson. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004. 88 pp. Hardcover. \$12.00. [German original: Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Eine Skizze seines Lebens. Guetersloh Verlaghaus GmbH. 2004]

It's short. It's different. For one thing the author, Renate Bethge (nee Schleicher), is Dietrich Bonhoeffer's niece. Her mother was Dietrich's oldest sister Ursula, her father Ruediger Schleicher. In Hitler's purge at the very end of WWII her father too was executed, along with Uncle Dietrich, Uncle Klaus Bonhoeffer, and two other uncles married to Bonhoeffer sisters. The Schleicher home where Renate grew up was right next door to the Bonhoeffer family home. Both Dietrich and Klaus were arrested by the Gestapo in the Schleichers' house. She's an eye-witness—from the very center of the book she's written.

In these winsome 88 pages she exposes no family secrets, but takes us on a walk through Dietrich's life, nuancing the well-known biographical data as a family insider. It's only an hour's read. Sometimes there's only a paragraph or two of Renate's prose on a page, accompanied by texts from DB's own writings paralleling this stage on his life's way. The photo montages are deftly done, making it almost an art book. More about them below.

The German title uses the word "Skizze." It's a word from the world of graphic artists. A "Skizze" gives you the basic lines, often quickly sketched, yet sufficient for you to get a big

picture, and then—if you're a reflective type—to imagine or remember what might go into the still available open spaces.

Renate's "Brief Life" is like that. It invites reflection—maybe even meditation—especially as you link the text on many of the pages to the two visuals accompanying it. The two are always the same photo (!)—one smallish, crisp and clear with a cutline; the other enlarged, screened into shadow format, and drifting back into the very paper it's printed on. Fascinating technique. Is that a match for Bonhoeffer's own life? Seems so to me. There is nowadays Bonhoeffer's very public profile—crisp and visible—and then the deep interiority that shadowed his public self and continues to give the International Bonhoeffer Society an unfinished agenda.

No surprise, DB's public profile and his interior life were not always in synch. His classic poem "Who am I?" drives that home towards life's end as his prison term goes on and on. Its personal pathos is a classic "simul justus et peccator" self-portrayal. It begins with 12 lines of the public image of a Christian hero: "they often tell me I am . . . calm, cheerful, firm . . . free, friendly, clear, smiling. . ." Then follow 12 more lines of "what I know of myself, restless and longing and sick, like a bird in a cage . . . struggling . . . yearning . . . thirsting . . . trembling . . . weary and empty." You need to read the entire poem (p. 72f.), of course. Even so, I'll copy out the final stanza here—with its faith-alone punchline.

*"Who am I? This or the other?*

*Am I one person today, and tomorrow another?*

*Am I both at once? A hypocrite before others,  
and before myself a contemptibly woebegone weakling?*

*Or is something within me still like a beaten army,  
fleeing in disorder from victory already achieved? Who am I?  
They mock me, these lonely questions of mine.*

*Whoever I am, thou knowest, O God, I am thine."*

If you know Bonhoeffer—or if you don't—you'll cherish Renate's "Skizze."

Peace and Joy!

Ed Schroeder

---

# **Deconstructing Missio Dei "in the Light of the Gospel."**

Edward H. Schroeder

[Presentation given at the International Association for Mission Studies Conference, Balaton, Hungary, August, 2004]

1. Deconstruction is not destruction. I shall use the term as follows to 1) take apart a construct—Missio Dei—to see how it is put together, 2) seek to identify the theology that is the "mortar" which holds the construct together, 3) evaluate the foundations, the groundings, of the construct to see just how "good" it is in the light of the Gospel. In the process I shall propose an alternative construct—God's Two Missions in our One World—and seek to show its value as a better mantra for "The Integrity of Mission in the Light of the Gospel."

2. Missio Dei has been an ecumenical mantra, possibly the most widely acknowledged metaphor, in missiology since the Willingen

Conference in 1952. I was privileged to attend the 2002 conference in Willingen commemorating the 50 years, and my understanding of what the Missio Dei metaphor means was confirmed at that event.

3. An overarching umbrella for Missio Dei is given by Vicedom in his book by that very name "Missio Dei." He grounds Missio Dei in the Kingdom of God, and then gives this definition of that kingdom: "[I]t has to be pointed out here that the kingdom of God embraces more than the saving acts of Jesus, namely the complete dealing [Vicedom's German term is "Handeln"] of the triune God with the world."

4. Vicedom's definition of God's kingdom is the mortar for Missio Dei. I challenge Vicedom's definition of Kingdom of God as impossible to match with the usage throughout the N.T. for the term. Au contraire. Kingdom of God is always focused on "the saving acts of Jesus," and not at all on the "complete dealing of the triune God with the world."

5. Of course, God has other dealings with the world. But in Jesus and the "regime" God is initiating in him, a new "dealing" has entered the world of God's "other dealings." This is the unanimous testimony of the N.T. E.g., John, who contrasts God's dealing in Moses [law] with God's dealing in Jesus [grace and truth], Paul is another example, with his distinction throughout his epistles between God's two covenants—God's two "dealings" with humans. The synoptic Jesus also juxtaposes "mercy" with "sacrifice," both of them God's dealings with his people. The Hebrews writer specifies two authorized priesthoods—both from God. Et passim.

6. Sifting through all this "in the Light of the Gospel," our conference theme, necessitates articulating what the Gospel is—and what it is not. After examining all the N.T. references



to that term (as noun and as verb) I conclude that Paul's summary in 2 Cor. 5 is overarching. Gospel is both a report [indicative] and an appeal [imperative], a Good News report linked to Jesus and an exhortation to appropriate that Good News as one's own. "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself... Therefore, we appeal to you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God."

7. When the Missio Dei construct is measured in the light of this Gospel, it falls short, on two counts. The full spread of God's "other dealings" with the world is diminished (especially God's critical dealings with sinners) and God's dealing with the world in Christ is itself reduced.

8. An alternate metaphor, better than Missio Dei, with better Gospel-groundings, is needed. It must be capable of encompassing, really encompassing, "the complete dealing ["Handeln"] of the triune God with the world." In the light of the Gospel itself a "Two Missions of God" metaphor is needed. Duplex Missiones Dei is the mantra.

9. I will seek to articulate such a construct by examining a Missio Dei document from the history of my own church in the USA. It is the "Mission Affirmations" of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod adopted as the synod's mission theology in 1965. In substance it is a Vicedom model, and Vicedom's own theology factored into its formulation. It has strengths and weaknesses. Both would be improved-the strengths made stronger, the weaknesses repaired with a Duplex Missiones Dei theology as new mortar for a new construct. My thesis is: there is more light in "the light of the Gospel" for constructing a better missiology than Missio Dei.

# DECONSTRUCTION AND RECONSTRUCTION OF THE MISSIO DEI THEOLOGY IN THE “MISSION AFFIRMATIONS” (1965) OF THE LUTHERAN CHURCH – MISSOURI SYNOD.

[There were six affirmations in the original 1965 text. I take them one at a time. The original one-sentence mission affirmation from 1965 comes first. Then comes an “RSV,” a “revised Schroeder version,” a reconstruction grounded in a theology of “God’s two missions” in the world.]

---

Affirmations of God’s Mission Adopted by The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod (1965)

## I. ORIGINAL: The Church Is God’s Mission.

[RSV = Revised Schroeder Version] The Church is Created by God’s “NEW” mission to the world. God’s unique mission in Christ.

The Church is both the product of God’s new mission in Christ to God’s old world, and thereafter its agent. God sends Christ on a MERCY mission to God’s own broken world. The depth of that brokenness signals God’s “other” operation in the world, call it God’s other mission with the human race. That “other operation” was first articulated in Gen 2:17 [“you eat... you die.”], first enacted in Gen. 5 [“...and he died; ...and he died; ...and he died” ad nauseam]. In this old mission, God’s own “old” mission, mercy for sinners is hidden. Instead God “counts trespasses.” No sinner survives such arithmetic.

In Christ God enacts a new mission, a new covenant, as Jesus labels it the night before his death. In Christ’s death &

resurrection God offers these same sinners mercy, call it forgiveness of sins. God re-connects with them as Abba. It defies moral logic, yet that is the Christian claim, “while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” From which follows a simple definition of church: “Church = Christ-trusting sinners.” All talk of “Christian” mission, namely, God’s own mission #2, is grounded here in “the theology of the cross.”

## **II. ORIGINAL: The Church Is Christ’s Mission to the Whole World**

[RSV] Christ sends that church to replicate Christ-trusting throughout the world, where God’s other arithmetic is all-pervasive.

There is no technical NT term for mission as we use that word today. Closest is the language of God’s “covenant,” or again, God’s “serving operation.” The Greek technical terms in the NT are “diatheke” and “diakonia.” But the way that God does covenant-service in Christ is very different from his alternate covenant-service apart from Christ. These two covenant-service projects [hereafter CSP] are grounded in two very different—finally contradictory—words from God. St John differentiates them as God’s “law coming through Moses” vs. God’s “grace and truth coming through Jesus Christ” (1:17).

St. Paul and other NT writers use other contrasting terms for these two CSPs. One of Paul’s favorites is law and promise. As Paul develops the contrasting characteristics of God’s two missions, he asserts that God’s old CSP is as different from God’s new CSP as night from day, as death from life. There is no “generic” CSP that covers both. Thus they must initially be distinguished in order to be rightly related. This is the pattern: God’s new CSP in Christ rescues sinners from God’s old CSP with its bottomline bad-news for sinners. Christ sends those

who trust him out into the world to replicate for worldlings what Christ has done for them. Simply stated: to offer them God's own new CSP in Christ. To wit, to offer them the promise of Christ's own cross and resurrection so that they too might move from God's old CSP to God's new one. Christ-trusters keep the project going: "As the Father sent me, so send I you."

### **III. ORIGINAL: The Church Is Christ's Mission to the Church**

[RSV] Christ-trusters continue to be agents of Christ's mission to fellow church members. Christ-trusters continually need maintenance service-from other Christ-trusters.

Even though Christ-trusters are already "churchified," they need constant nurture. For within their lives they too sense the "old Adam/old Eve" present – and operational. "Lord I believe, help my unbelief is the standard, not the exceptional, admission of all Christ-trusters. In the language of Luther's Smalcald Articles, they constantly assist one another with "mutual conversation and consolation" of the Gospel. In short, they continue to offer the crucified and risen Christ to each other, so that "repenting and believing the Good news" AGAIN AND AGAIN becomes their own daily regimen. [This is perhaps the most important ecumenical phrase in the Lutheran Confessions. There are no barricades of any sort for any Christ-truster to practice this "means of grace" (so Smalcald) with anyone-both to those who claim Christ as Lord, and those who don't.]

### **IV. ORIGINAL: The Church is Christ's Mission to the Whole Society**

[RSV] The Church carries Christ's Mercy-Mission to the Whole Society conscious that God's other CSP is already in operation there. Thus Christ-trusters of every age see society with

binocular vision, and do so lest either of God's two covenant-service-projects gets short shrift.

Apart from Christ, God has from the beginning been at work in human society with his initial CSP. As wondersome as that CSP is—yes, good and gracious—it does not bring mercy to sinners. It preserves and cares for creation, yes. But forgiveness of sinners, no. The sinner's dilemma is healed only in the new CSP grounded in Good Friday and Easter. It is definitely something else. Ask any forgiven sinner.

Articulating that distinction for Christians in society is crucial for both CSP's to be honored. Lutheran language has capitalized on the Biblical metaphors of God's left and right hands. Not two different realms (as territories), but God's two different operations on the same territory in the one and only world there is. Christ-trusters' even before they encounter Christ, already have assigned tasks in God's "old" CSP, God-given assignments as caretakers, stewards, in God's world. Such assignments arise already at human birth whereby God places people into specific spots in his creation. And alone with that placement come multiple callings from God to "be my sort of person in all the relationships wherein I've placed you." When human beings also become Christ-connected they get a second assignment: "Replicate your Christ-connection, offer Christ's redemption, in all the relationships you already have in your initial CSP." A frequently used collect in the liturgy says it thus: We dedicate our lives to the care and redemption of all that you [God] have made." Care and redemption are two distinct jobs, not at all synonyms. They arise from God's own two CSP's. Yet, both care of creation and its redemption come from the same God, and both become the assignments for every Christ-truster.

## V. ORIGINAL: The Church Is Christ's Mission to the Whole Man

[RSV] The Church Is Christ's Mission to the Whole Person – but not forgetting the 2-CSP distinction. Like God's own self, God's human agents work ambidextrously in the world. People not (yet) connected to Christ are still agents of God's left-hand mission simply by virtue of being God's human creatures. Christ-trusters have another assignment in addition to God's left-hand mission which they share with all humankind. Their second assignment is to be agents of God's new CSP in Christ, God's right-hand mission. Their right hand DOES know what their left hand is doing—and vice versa.

Already in New Testament times Christians were engaged in “left-hand” ministries—God's work to care for and preserve God's broken creation. Christians use the language of “social ministry, medical missions, inner mission, development” etc. when they engage in such lefthand work. Such care and preservation is also carried out by those who do not know Christ at all but are deeply involved in this particular CSP of God. They too are God's left-handers. But they are not promoting God's right-hand ministry, viz., getting sinners to trust Christ. If there is some doubt about that in certain situations, ask them.

Designating such missions and ministries “left-hand” is in no way derogatory. Those tasks are divine assignments, godly work. Labeling this “left-hand” is descriptive. It describes what God is achieving there, that is, caring for creation. That is not yet redemption. Left-hand CSP does not translate sinners into Christ-trusters.

In executing God's right-hand CSP, Christ-trusters concretely offer the crucified and risen Christ to the receivers, God's

offer of merciful forgiveness encountered nowhere else in creation. Right-hand CSP is more than just speaking or offering “God’s love.” God’s love is already operating wherever God extends his left hand. Rain and sunshine are gifts of God’s love. Giving up One’s only-begotten Son into death to rescue other renegade offspring is something else. It explodes the “love” category—“scandalously”—as St. Paul sometimes said.

The right-hand CSP is an offer of Christ’s specific mercy-promise to folks who, for whatever reason, do not trust it, so that they may indeed trust it. That offer occurs in concrete words and worded-actions (sacraments) designated as “means of grace.” Luther’s Smalcald Articles specify five such word/actions that offer this promise. They are visible and audible. You can record them when they are happening.

God’s left-hand CSP—also assigned by God to folks who do not trust Christ—protects, preserves, restores human life in a broken world, though it does not heal a sinner’s Godproblem. Christians have no scruples in joining God’s other left-handed workers in this CSP. They see it as their calling.

## **VI. ORIGINAL: The Whole Church is Christ’s Mission.**

[RSV] All Members of the Church are on assignment in both of God’s Missions.

If you are alive at all, you are God’s left-hand missionary. If in addition you also trust Christ, you are membered into another body, the body of Christ. That gives you a second mission assignment beyond the first, God’s CSP number 2. To be baptized is to be a CSP-2 missionary. When the congregation prays that offertory prayer IN UNISON, it is “all of us” who “dedicate our lives to the care and redemption of all that you, God, have

made.” All means all. Working out the strategies in any given place and time for this double mission of care and redemption is a major piece of the agenda when the Christ-connected gather for “mutual conversation and consolation.” The overarching rubric is that none of God’s TWO Covenant-Service-Projects suffer loss.

All members of the church urge people to trust Christ. That finally amounts to urging people who do not trust Christ to switch gods, to “hang their hearts” [Luther’s phrase] on Christ, to abandon whatever their hearts have been trusting before. That is what St. Paul proclaimed to his audience on Mars Hill: “You worship many gods here in Athens. I urge you to switch. Hang your hearts on the one that is still unknown to you, the Christ whom God raised from the dead.” Christians do the same thing on today’s Mars Hills where other gods and other gospels abound. In doing so they do not argue about whose religion is “better.” Rather they simply make an offer. Their claim is that they too received it as an offer, an offer that is Good News. It is an offer both “good” and “new” that they too had never heard before. Nor have they heard it elsewhere on the many Mars Hills of today. They seek to extend the same offer to others. They urge them to trust it.

## **Conclusion:**

This is my argument for a mission theology grounded on God’s own Two Missions in our One World. My claim is that such a mission theology is better grounded in “the light of the Gospel” than the regnant *Missio Dei* of the last half century.

I suggest this “double *Missio Dei*” does a better job in retaining the work of both of God’s two missions. The critical accent in God’s left-hand mission largely disappears in the traditional *Missio Dei* paradigm. The double mission motto restores the reality of God’s judicial role in the old creation



whereby sinners are not only preserved, but also judged for their unfaith: “the wages of sin is death.”

This larger picture of God’s left-hand mission points to the larger picture of God’s right-hand mission in the person and work of Christ. Christ is “necessary” for sinners to cope with God’s judgment. That necessitates not just a “merciful Messiah” but a Messiah so merciful that on the cross “he is wounded for our transgressions... so that we might be healed.” The old Missio Dei model underplays this necessity, and therefore the full Good News of a crucified and risen Messiah is blurred.

“In the light of the Gospel” Christ comes to our world to rescue us not only from our sin, but also from the deadly consequences of God’s mission number one. As the Father sent him, so he sends us.

The two-missions paradigm also gives clearer focus to what faith is all about “in the light of the Gospel.” Faith in the Gospel is always faith in the promise of forgiveness from the crucified and risen Christ. It is not generic belief in God’s goodness or even simply trusting God. Christian faith is always Christ-focused, focused on the Good News he offers to sinners. The sinner’s stance before God is that of the tax collector in Christ’s parable: “God, be merciful to me, a sinner.” Christ’s word to such a sinner is: “Be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven,” not by God’s generic kindness but by virtue of Good Friday and Easter Sunday. Sinners who trust that, which is what faith is, “go down to their house justified.”

Edward H. Schroeder  
St. Louis, Missouri, USA

[DeconstructingMissioDei \(PDF\)](#)

---

# Is There a Hole in the Net of the “Word Alone Network?”

Colleagues,

Is there a hole in the net of the “Word Alone Network?” Seems so to me. Evidence for that are the front and back pages of the recent “Network News” of May-June 2004. Back page is WAN’s Mission Statement; front page is WAN’s April convention resolution on “sexual life.” The texts on these two pages are in crass contradiction to each other. And the issue is fundamental: What is the WORD in the Word Alone Network? Back page says it’s “Jesus the Christ.” Front page says it’s the Bible, and the WORD Incarnate from the mission statement is conspicuous by his absence. Jesus the Christ never ever gets mentioned—let alone “used” to craft the resolution.

The Word Alone Network, as I understand it, is a gathering of unhappy campers within the ELCA, initially galvanized into existence—and action—when the ELCA adopted the policy that a bishop HAD TO have a hand in the ordination of new pastors in order for it to be kosher. Granted, this was part of the package of the ELCA’s friendlier affiliation with the Episcopal Church USA. And if that made them happy, why not?

But some ELCA folks said “Bishops are OK for folks of the Augsburg Confession. That’s no big deal. But when you make them a requirement, something YA GOTTA do or have, then you’ve kicked the trip-wire. Remember Melanchthon’s drumbeat in Apology 4 that REQUIRE is the verb that’s linked to the law, while OFFER is the verb that goes with Gospel.”

The ELCA subsequently opened some crawl space—an “exceptions” bylaw—which softened the YA GOTTA for bishops present at ordinations. WAN is now looking at other items in the frazzled fabric of our ELCA. Homosexuality is a current hot potato. WAN’s annual convention (April 25-27) addressed that. The upshot was their page one resolution adopted “with a unanimous voice vote.”

Read it and weep.

Unanimously they voted for Biblicism.

Thus deserting the “Lutheran grassroots” they seek to preserve, and—worst of all—opting for an “other” Gospel that supplants the genuine Gospel proclaimed in their own mission statement, “the Word manifest in Jesus Christ.” The mission statement says that “reform and renewal of the church” is WAN’s goal. But “other” Gospels cannot do that. Why didn’t somebody tell them at that convention? Were there no “grass roots Lutherans” at that gathering?

Here’s the evidence. See for yourself.

---

***The WORDALONE Mission Statement (emphasis added):***

*WordAlone is a Lutheran grassroots network of congregations and individuals committed to the authority of the WORD MANIFEST IN JESUS THE CHRIST as proclaimed in Scripture and safeguarded through the work of the Holy Spirit. WordAlone advocates reform and renewal of the church, representative governance, theological integrity, and freedom from a mandated historic episcopate.*

---

***The Resolution (emphasis added): Concerning the Gift of Sexual Life and Its Divinely Created Structure***

*Whereas, THE SCRIPTURES TESTIFY that God created the gift of sexuality ( Genesis 1 and 2; Mark 10:6-9; Ephesians 5:28-33); and*

*Whereas, THE SCRIPTURES CLEARLY TEACH that marriage is a lifelong bond of faithfulness between one man and one woman and the context for which sexual intercourse is reserved (1 Corinthians 6:15-20; Hebrews 13:4; Galatians 5:16-19); and*

*Whereas, that BIBLICAL TEACHING about sexual life has shaped and continues to shape the moral fabric of civilization in profound and positive ways; and*

*Whereas, that BIBLICAL TEACHING about sexual life is facing unprecedented challenges in society and the church; and*

*Whereas, a tradition so universal and valuable should not be changed without overwhelming BIBLICAL and confessional WARRANT;*

*Therefore, be it resolved that the WordAlone Network honor and uphold BIBLICAL TEACHING about sexual life and its vision for marriage and urge all Christians to do likewise; and*

*Be it further resolved, that any proposed change in standards and definitions for sexual life or marriage which contradicts this BIBLICAL TEACHING be rejected; and*

*Be it further resolved, that this resolution be conveyed to the ELCA Task Force on Human Sexuality, to the ELCA Conference of Bishops, to the Church Council of the ELCA, and The Rev. Mark Hanson, presiding bishop of the ELCA.*

*Approved by the WordAlone Network Annual Convention Roseville,*

Minnesota April 27, 2004

---

*The difference literally jumps off the page. What happened to the WORDALONE manifest in Jesus the Christ?*

*Previous ThTh postings have rung the changes on Blessed Bob Bertram's classic axiom: "Biblical hermeneutics is at no point separable from Biblical soteriology." In nickel words: How you read the Bible is always linked to how you think people get saved. Differences in one "how" bring differences to the other "how." The Augsburg Aha!—regularly hyped in these postings—links the two "how's" this way: Law-Promise lenses for reading the Bible is the "hermeneutical how," and justification by faith ALONE is the "salvation how." They're Siamese twins.*

*When Biblicism is the "how" for reading the Bible, its Siamese twin for the "how" of salvation is legalism. Here's their joining. The Bible is read as "Biblical teaching," God teaching us what we are to believe, how we are to worship, how we are to behave. Here's the salvation twin that comes with Biblicist hermeneutics: Salvation is obeying the teaching—for doctrine, for worship, for ethics. Even "justification by faith alone" can become a teaching. When you believe it, you please God. God says: You're OK, aka, you are saved. Salvation by virtue of believing and doing the right things is legalist salvation. No matter how pious it sounds. Salvation by trusting Christ's promise is something else.*

*Jesus's constant conflict with Jewish scripture scholars was precisely this. They opposed him with "Biblical teaching." "Biblical teaching says this adulteress ought to die. Biblical teaching says No work on the Sabbath, and you're doing it all the time. Biblical teaching has an escape clause for marriage; it's called divorce. Biblical teaching specifies ritual washing*

and your disciples don't do it. Biblical teaching says that tithing mint & dill and cummin is sufficient. Biblical teaching . . . Biblical teaching . . . Biblical teaching . . . .” We all know what the grand finale of this Biblicist hermeneutic and its legalist soteriology was: they crucified “the Word manifest in Jesus the Christ.” The paradigm persists. Christ gets wasted (so Apology 4) where the Siamese twins of Biblicism/legalism reign.

The ThTh drumbeat has been: you need a law-promise hermeneutic first of all even to find the Christ-Promise in the Bible. If you don't find and then “offer” that promise to folks, there really is nothing salvational in the Bible worth trusting, worth having faith “in.” It is faith in THAT Promise, and in nothing else, which justifies, which pleases God and elicits the verdict: “You too are my beloved daughter, beloved son. You're OK.”

With its commitment to “the Word manifest in Jesus the Christ,” WAN's mission statement is in the ballpark of the Augsburg Aha! WAN's convention resolution is not. It opts for a hermeneutic and soteriology that wastes (ignores) the specific Christic Word hyped in the Mission Statement.

I imagine that a thoughtful practicing Jew could sign the WAN resolution. Since “Jesus the Christ” goes unmentioned, that scandal wouldn't confront him. And on the plus-side for Jewish faith, the resolution is all about Biblical teaching. In Hebrew that's Torah. That's what practicing Jews are all about—learning God's Torah and living according to it.

When St. Paul's opponents in Galatia get labelled Judaizers, that's not a dirty word. Judaizer is a technical descriptive term. Galatian Judaizers are not Jews opposed to Jesus. They are pro-Jesus. They are Christ-confessors—or so they think—and

doubtless baptized. But here's the twist: They are folks who are proposing to legalize the Gospel, "turning Christ's promise into Torah." Of course, that is "moronic" (Paul's actual term)—since you really cannot turn a promise into "teaching." Promises are offered. Torah is taught.

Yet Torah-twisting happens within Christ's church. It happened in that very first generation of Christians—and has been happening ever since. Seems to me it's happening again in the resolution WAN is offering us. The resolution is a flatout testimony to Torah, the clean contrary of the promise. If anybody should know, Lutherans should know that Torah will never bring about "reform and renewal of the church." Au contraire. It's the chronic problem in Christ's church, never the solution.

And that chronic problem is present on both sides of the homosexuality debate in the ELCA today. Both liberals (the supposed ELCA establishment) and conservatives (like the WAN folks) ground their positions on "Biblical teachings." It's a Torah-tug-of-war. Reminds me of Luther's quip about his critics to the left and to the right: "They are like two foxes apparently running in opposite directions, but their tails are tied together." Neither side in the ELCA tug-of-war (so far as I have seen) shows any signs of "grounding our position in Christ's promise." And they all claim to be Lutherans. O tempora! O mores!

I know it's a baaad pun, but the WAN resolution is "wan" in Webster's definition of that adjective—"suggestive of poor health, sickly, pallid, lacking vitality." That's true of every Torah-fight within the Body of Christ. Sick. Yet even that was too pallid a label for St. Paul when he confronted this "other Gospel" in his Galatian congregation. His verdict on Jesus-the-Christ-turned-into-Torah was "anathema" (1:9). Does the Pauline

*pejorative persist?*

*Some of the Word Alone folks are friends of mine—though after this posting that may change! My caveat about their resolution's Biblicism comes as an amicus curiae offering, with this encouraging word: GO back to your Mission Statement. Somehow at the annual convention you were led astray. Sharpen your focus on the Augsburg Aha! about that "WORD Alone manifest in Jesus the Christ." He's God's own Aha!—something new, amazingly new—for Biblical hermeneutics and Biblical soteriology. Our crucified and risen Messiah is not "Biblical teaching."*

*Christ is God offering sinners a new deal. You don't "teach" an offer. Christ "makes" it; we "trust" it. Of course, you know that. OK, then run with it—also in the homosexuality hassle. That will indeed bring "reform and renewal" in the ELCA. Also in WAN. Nothing else does. Better said, nobody else does.*

*Peace & Joy!*  
*Ed Schroeder*

---

## **Faith in EXTREME Daily Life**

In Thursday Theology #310 I invited you to send in a slice of life for us to "cross" as Ed and I had done with a slice of Faith Place life. One person took us up on that offer, Deaconess Patty Silva. Here's her slice of life and my response. Robin Morgan



---

Okay, Robin and Ed—what about this? I'm the chaplain in a Christian-based, rural hospital that is financially threatened. In these times, this is no big surprise. For the most part, our small hospital serves the poor...many are very poor...in this agricultural area. They are migrant farmworkers and their families, the working poor with no insurance, the unemployed, the underemployed, the teenage moms and their babies. Times are hard here, even for the small farmers whose livelihood is based in raisin grapes, for which they can no longer get a fair price per the global markets. Vineyards are being uprooted and the land is being sold. Farmworkers, therefore, have few jobs this summer in the "home of the dancing raisins," where it is only the raisins who are dancing these days. Our hospital takes all-comers, insurance or not. Our busy clinics are open at the crack of dawn and try to serve everyone before the doors close in the evening. Our emergency room subs for a doctor's office, because doctors don't take families without insurance.... standing room only from morning until night, full of people with little or no means to pay for the services. Federal and State law requirements are ever-tightening in all areas of the hospital, and we have dutifully adhered, emerging with flying colors from all their surveys. The costs of these requirements in equipment and personnel have escalated many, many times over in the past few years. And, of course, the State of California is bankrupt, which has been a huge blow on every level of business, industry, and public service.

Our remaining staff (we've made all possible cuts in every area, including staffing) is an amazing conglomeration of people of diverse backgrounds, many faiths, and even within Christianity, represent a great diversity as well. Our mission statement includes the words "following in Jesus' footsteps" and it is basic to our daily work.

*As the only chaplain, I'm becoming somewhat burned out. My office is where angry, fearful employees tend to gravitate. I'm the one who gets questions, such as, "Where is God now? Here we are, doing His work, taking short days and maybe soon short pay, in order to continue to serve his ill and broken, and the bureaucracy is going to cause us to shut down. Some of our sons and husbands are in Iraq where no expense is spared for weapons and equipment. The hospitals there are better off than ours."*

*Rural hospitals are closing all around us. There is no other hospital for 25 miles. When one has no automobile, and there is literally no longer viable public transportation between farm and city, trying to get 25 miles to a hospital is an intolerable situation.*

*The population here is approximately 67% Latino, 30% Anglo, and 3% Indian, Japanese, SE Asian and Middle Eastern. 89% of our children here qualify by federal standards for free lunches, though only a single digit portion takes advantage of those lunches, preferring to use discounted lunches instead. The economically solvent churchly folk around here (of all races) routinely blame the poor for their poverty.*

*So, the upshot is, I do devotions weekly at the hospital, and I need some help with this situation, as far as Gospel Hope and Promise are concerned. Our staff members see the gap between rich and poor every day. Their respective jobs are ministries in the greatest sense. The Christians among them are disciples par excellence. Those of other faiths are able to find common ground and pull together with the rest. Faith and practice in common mission are a reality in this place. I call it the "modern-day Church."*

*But, many are beginning to lose some ground as far as faith is concerned. I see a slippery slope ahead. They are wondering*

*“why God is deserting His poor” as one was put it last Wednesday at a Christian-based meeting for prayer. And this is, again, a diverse group—Pentecostals, Roman Catholics, Evangelicals, and mainstreamers, so the theologies vary wildly. HELP!*

*Dcs. Patricia Silva*

---

*Dear Patty,*

*As Ed and I read through your slice of life again together, we realized that there are two crossings to be made in your writing. The one is you, working and leading in this context; the other is the people with whom you minister. Since I resonate with your position, I’m going to take a shot at offering some law and gospel thoughts to you and your predicament.*

*First, a few diagnostic observations. You say as chaplain your office is where angry, fearful employees tend to gravitate and that you are becoming burned out. “Where is God now?” is a question people ask as they continue to work sacrificially in these circumstances. I can imagine your burn out is a combination of weariness in listening and offering compassionate feedback in what is a deteriorating situation, but also partly about the doubt that comes to your own heart and mind as you hear story after story “yeah, where is God now?” I’d venture to say that your trust in Christ gets overwhelmed by the fear, anger and doubt in the face of so much negative evidence. You may, I know I do at times, give ultimate authority to the bureaucracy that is so indifferent to the individuals caught in its grip. Who can possibly breakthrough such inexorable oppression? Of course we both know the end result of giving ultimate power to anyone/anything other than*

*the God of our Lord Jesus Christ. Idolatry is something our God does not take lightly.*

*On the prognostic side, I'd like to start with a story about a little girl who faced circumstances at least as challenging as yours and mine. She was one of the children in the early 60s who helped integrate southern schools. Every day she walked up the sidewalk of her elementary school flanked by National Guard officers who held at bay the white adults screaming obscenities at this little girl who was trying to get an education.*

*One day a doctor who worked across the street at a military base and had been watching these events occur, walked over to the school and spoke with the little girl's teacher. He told the teacher that if at any time it seemed like the little girl was succumbing to the stress of this extraordinary situation that she, the teacher, should call him and he'd come right over.*

*Not long afterwards the doctor did get a call from the teacher. She told him that the little girl was standing at the window talking to herself as she watched the angry white adults in the street below. The doctor hurried over to the school and when he got to the little girl's classroom, he slowly and carefully walked up behind her. He heard what she was saying in her quiet little girl voice as she watched the angry mob outside, "Father forgive them because they don't know what they are doing."*

*Only someone who knew who she was, who knew WHOSE she was could utter such profound words in that horrific situation. She leaned on the reality and the hope of who God had made her in Christ Jesus. When our lives are surrounded by such dire circumstances, there is no other hope that can carry us through. Christ is already reigning in this place when I lean on Him, trust what He alone can do for me. He alone could bring*

*me into a mercifully, loving relationship with my Creator and give me the strength and courage to follow Him out into the world. Ephesians 2:10 is my mantra, though I change the plural pronouns to singular to emphasize what God has done for me, "I am who God has made me, created in Christ Jesus unto good works which God prepared beforehand to be my way of life."*

*I don't know enough about your circumstances to hazard a guess at what that Christ following looks like for you. Political action? Bureaucratic confrontation? Sharing your Christ centered strength so others can step out in new ways to claim their civil rights? That's between you and your Lord.*

*I do know that hope in Him is the only way to keep going when life around us seems so totally beyond our ability to change. I also know that following Him will pull us out of our comfort zones in ways we never before dreamed of. And yet I marvel at the combination of discomfort, deep peace and sense of purpose that I can carry at the same time.*

*I hope this helps.*

*Peace and Joy,  
Robin Morgan*

---

## **Closure on Singapore—Well, Not Quite**

Colleagues,

This week's posting is the report Marie and I recently sent to the Division for Global Mission of the ELCA on our work in Singapore in March, April, May this year. We served under the "Global Mission Volunteers" program of the DGM. A number of you on the Crossings listserve also "volunteered" to help pay for our plane tickets to get us there and back. For which much thanks. The "not quite" in the topic line above signals that after a few weeks home from our Singapore assignment, we are going back, d.v., to SE Asia for a couple more tasks. First one is the Eleventh Quadrennial Conference of the International Association for Mission Studies [IAMS] meeting at Port Dickson in Western Malaysia for 8 days (July 31 – August 7). I'm presenting a paper there on Luther's Mission Theology.

The week thereafter, also in Malaysia, but 1000 miles toward the rising sun in East Malaysia –yes, a unique country, two parts with 1000 miles of water in between–there's the invitation to discuss the same topic in 4 lectures at a week-long LWF-sponsored seminar at Sabah Theological Seminary in the city of Kota Kinabalu. We said yes.

And after that a few days with Crossings friends (Presbyterian, Baptist, Pentecostal) in Bangkok (Thailand), and then a stopover in Korea with Crossings alums on the way home. Given the recent jump in jet fuel costs our airfares are 50% more this time than they were just 5 months ago. Donations welcomed to the Crossings office for "Crossings-Malaysia." P.O. Box 7011. St. Louis MO 63006.

Here's the report on Singapore.

Peace & Joy!

Ed Schroeder

---

***ELCA Global Mission Volunteering with Luth. Church  
in Singapore [LCS] –  
March, April, May 2004  
A Report by Edward and Marie Schroeder.***

*I. The calling card they printed for Ed read “Theologian in Residence.” The basic paradigm was that we spent 2 weeks in each of the 7 congregations of the LCS. What that meant for daily work was preaching and teaching in each of the seven congregations during our fortnight with them, plus other “church-wide” events during our three-month stay where he was asked to be the speaker. Here’s the list–*

- 20 sermons*
- 8 Monday morning seminars with all LCS pastors discussing Lutheran hermeneutics (how to read the Bible, how to read the world) and the theology of the Lutheran Confessions.*
- 6 teaching sessions at Trinity Theological College, working with Lutheran seminarians in a course called “Lutheran Distinctives.” [This course is the one distinctively “Lutheran” component in the otherwise “general Protestant” seminary education of LCS clergy. Nearly all LCS pastors were educated at Trinity Theological College (sponsored by the mainline Protestant denominations) or Singapore Bible College (the “evangelical” alternative to the mainliners). As far as we learned only two or three of the 20-plus LCS clergy ever attended a Lutheran Seminary–either in Australia or Hong Kong.]*
- 15 sessions in Adult Education, some in local congregations, some church-wide.*

*Topics:*

*Why Jesus in View of Other World Religions?*  
(several times)

*Theology of the Cross and the Modern World*

*Lutheran Theology for Discipleship and Spirituality* (several times)

*Theology of Suffering*

*Living as Easter People—in Freedom, in Hope*

*Christian Callings in a Secular World* (several times)

- *Retreat master for two-day LCS clergy retreat in neighboring Malaysia. Focus: Discipleship and Spirituality According to Luther's Small Catechism*
- *Before and after the three months in Singapore these addenda:*
  - *Guest lectures at the two Lutheran seminaries in Hong Kong*
  - *Guest lecture on Luth. Hermeneutics at the STT Abdi Sabda seminary in Medan, Indonesia (the Batak churches)*
  - *Trinity Sunday sermon at the Int'l Lutheran Church in Hanoi, Vietnam*
  - *3 presentations in Manipur, India*

*II. Some thoughts from Ed about all this.*

- 1. It was a lot of work. Though warned by "old Asian hands" mission veterans that the Asians will load stuff on to you, I was busy but I wasn't overworked. Main reason was that I could draw on stuff archived over my past 45 years of teaching—much of which was on the computer. The sermons were all crafted anew.*
- 2. The LCS pastors and people were super hospitable in their TLC of us, with LCS Bishop John Tan in the*



lead. We lived in a furnished flat that had everything we needed. We received US\$300 each month for food and other living expenses. We were frequent guests of pastors and laity for lunch and dinner. Throughout, "the natives were friendly."

3. A number of LCS pastors, including the Bishop Tan, told us that they are aware of the "thin" Lutheran substance in LCS church preaching and practice, and they expected me to help them improve that. I took that as my basic assignment.
4. From what we learned there are no "liberal" Protestant churches in Singapore. That includes the Methodists, Presbyterians, Anglicans—and especially the Baptists. "Church Growth" ideology imported from America, plus American evangelicalism with its leanings to legalism, plus mega-church mindsets (also from America) appeared to us to dominate the Protestant scene. Over and over again LCS pastors would cite authors from this genre of American church life, and were then surprised when I didn't know most of the names they mentioned. "But, they're from your country!" The "success" of such local congregations teases (tempts?) Singaporean Lutherans. More than one pastor told us of pressure from his lay leaders for them to do likewise, "so we too can grow." Everybody knows that bigger is better. I wonder where they learned that.
5. Some LCS pastors did indicate that these American imports were not "kosher," but "Reformed" in their theological base. Also that a "success" gospel is closer to theologies of glory than to the theology of the cross. Yet how to cope—even with a more solid Lutheran theology (my assignment)—was a frequent discussion topic and continues as a

struggle for some. "Successful" congregations—[we worshipped(?) in one such with 15,000 members]—are regularly linked to "prosperity-gospels." So it was in the service we attended.

6. Because I was almost always the preacher for the LCS Services we attended Sunday after Sunday, on only one occasion did we hear preaching by an LCS pastor. So we don't know about that. After our seminar sessions on Lutheran hermeneutics some pastors "checked" their sermons with me to see how they were doing in using what they learned for their own preaching.
7. It was in Sunday worship where less-than-Lutheran theology and practice surfaced most for us in many of the LCS congregations we got to know. Many Sunday services—even "liturgical" ones—inserted 20 to 30 minutes of "praise music" early on in the liturgy. The texts of those praise songs were uniformly from the American evangelical-fundamentalist heritage referred to above. Decision theology, loving Jesus, hyping God's almighty power—with constant ego-centric references to what "I" want to do for you Jesus ["I just want to thank you, Lord!"] and endless repetition—were the substance of the gospel being proclaimed in these songs. The "genuine Gospel" of God's forgiveness, the fundamental distinction between God's law and God's gospel, Christ's promise as the Gospel-core, faith as trusting that promise, the centrality of Good Friday and Easter, proclaiming what Christ "wants" to do to and for sinners—in short, Lutheran language of the theology of the cross—was basically unknown in those texts, as it is in the American theology where those songs came from.

8. Central to such praise singing, of course, was the song leader, usually a young woman or man, who not only selected the music and led us in singing, but also spoke her/his own sermonettes and prayers into the mike, regularly re-enforcing the less-than-Lutheran ("other") Gospel that we were singing. Such song leaders are dedicated folks, eager to "serve," but seldom helped to improve, yes, to replace, the generic Protestantism they have imbibed with its egoism and legalism. They have no explicit training, and above all, no theological vetting, to credential them for such worship leadership. On some occasions I consciously slanted my preaching in the last half of the service contra the "other" Gospel proclaimed in the first half.
9. Note well, it is not the praise "music" I'm critiqueing, but the theology of the texts of the praise songs. It should not be too difficult to get this under a more Lutheran-i.e., more Gospel-grounded-umbrella, I think.
10. Although I did on a few occasions preach (with interpreter) at Chinese-language services in the LCS, I had no access to the realities of the rest of the worship in those cases. Six of the seven LCS congregations have both Chinese-speaking and English-speaking constituencies—and thus Chinese and English services every Sunday.
11. Conclusion. Marie and I had three happy months with the LCS. I'm upbeat about the LCS and its promising future. Not that they don't have, and won't have, struggles. This is true, not only in the "competition" with the alien gospels of the local church scene, but also vis-a-vis the secular gospels of Singapore, a secular culture strangely

*interwoven with Chinese folk religion and Buddhist beliefs. But then American culture—both churchly and secular—is a strange mish-mash too.*

- 12. We received many tokens of appreciation from the LCS including a “love gift” at the end along with an engraved memorial plate. They uniformly thanked us for the Lutheran resources we’d made available for them. In conversation with a number of them—both pastors and parishioners—I’m confident that many of them did indeed “catch” it, namely, the Augsburg Confession’s “Aha!” about the Gospel. Granted, Chinese etiquette, Chinese demeanor—also inscrutable—is always proper and polite. So we may not have seen the full picture. But the final signal for us that they really meant what they said was at our departure when four of the pastors (that’s 20% of the LCS clergy!) got up at 4 a.m. to carry our luggage into their cars and see us off at the airport for our early morning flight home from Singapore on June 17.*

*Respectfully submitted*

*Marie and Edward Schroeder*

---

## **Two Conflicting Texts on the Fourth of July**

Colleagues, Two contradictory texts got hyped in public in the USA on the Fourth of July. I noticed that out loud to Marie and

she said: "Oh, Oh, I see a Curmudgeon Column coming for this week's Thursday Theology." Well, maybe.

America's Independence Day was on Sunday this year. Of the two "public" texts that got hyped that day one was spoken in church, one in the world. But the subject was the same. In the church were St. Paul's words in the Sunday's Epistle and "I never BOAST of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."

In the world were the words from New York City on that Sunday: "In a ceremony filled with PRIDE . . . officials laid a 20-ton slab of granite Sunday as the cornerstone of a new tower at the site of the WTC." Pride and boasting may not be exact synonyms, but they're close enough. Boasts there were too in NYC. But it was another Lord who was getting boasted.

NY Governor George Pataki interpreted the event: "The terrorists who attacked us hoped to break our spirit, instead they broke our hearts. How badly they underestimated the resiliency of this city and the resolve of these United States."

Well, George, a "broken and contrite heart" is what God calls for in the penitential psalms. Is there any evidence of any of that in the USA since 9-11-01? Of course, there was the required ritual nod to God in the ceremonies—"a bagpipe procession playing 'God Bless America.'" But any awareness of any "word" from God like Jesus's words at the crumbled ruins of the tower of Siloam—"Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish"? Not at all. That would contradict our pitiable puffings of pride. But repentance, though it does crucify pride, is the way to LIVE. Its opposite is the way to die.

Pataki's reference to "they underestimated" elicits reflection too. It's not "they," George, who are our nation's "estimators." The ONE who "estimates" us is the same one who bestowed on us the "inalienable rights" we hype on the Fourth of July. The way

God estimates pride is constant throughout the scriptures—and throughout world history: “You have been weighed and found wanting.” Just for fun I looked up all Biblical references to pride/proud in my Bible concordance. Exactly 100. I counted. And nary a one commends it. 100% of 100 references.

And some of them are very, very tough. Paul puts pride right next to God-haters in his list of vices in Romans 1. Mary’s Magnificat is the standard take: “God scatters the proud in the imagination of their hearts.” James and Peter both quote the same proverb [was it church wisdom or the world’s wisdom? Could have been something that “everybody knows”]: “God resists the proud and gives grace to the humble.”

Of course, Pataki is not the villain. He speaks for all of us US citizens “We’re proud to be Americans.” But if God is agin it, and there are no exceptions . . . .then what? “We’re humble to be Americans?” It sounds like an oxymoron—literally “sharp-nonsense.” Here’s where St. Mary’s “imagination of their hearts” figures in. It’s about images, self-images, and the locale is in our hearts. We’ve got a great family story about the word “imagination.” A decade or more ago Granddaughter Lizzy, not yet in school, was sitting next to “Opa” at a family supper gathering. I engaged her in conversation and in one sentence she used the “big” word “imagination,” which I’d never heard before from her. “And what is imagination, Lizzy?” I asked. Already then a pensive person and not fast to talk—obviously from her grandmother’s genes—she eventually said: “It’s a kind of thinking, Opa. But it’s different. You use pictures.” We all said Wow!

Pride is a kind of thinking. In pictures. Pictures we have in our heart about ourselves. The Bible’s 100 no-nos make it perfectly clear that these are faulty pictures. Reality is something else. How often did we hear that about America’s self-

image in our recent four months away in SE Asia!

A faulty self-image is not automatically theologically lethal, but when such “imagination” moves “into the heart,” it is. For the heart is by Biblical definition God’s turf, God’s exclusive turf—posted with a big “No Trespassing” sign. Paul’s lining up pride with “God-haters” may strike us as harsh, but Jesus used the H-word too in Matthew 6. You cannot serve two masters at the same time. Can’t have two different heart-occupants at the same time. Any claim to be able to do so is self-deception. De facto you love the one and hate the other, cling to the one and despise the other. Pride puts me, my country, my whatever, in the God-box of the heart. All other pretenders to that turf—especially the Rightful Owner—are hated. Jesus said so.

And we are eternalizing our national pride. “Freedom Tower,” a new tower of Babel—1776 feet yet! whatchutzpah! what hybris!—to replace the one(s) that God destroyed. That sounds more like bondage than a celebration of freedom. Bondage to our national ego and our FROGBA. And a set-up for God saying: “Guess I’ll have to do it again, the Babel-breakdown, the Siloam-seismics, since they didn’t repent, but went on even more madly in their national ego-addiction.” [FROGBA = Folk Religion of God Bless America]

And to call it “Freedom Tower” yet. Reminds me of the powerful book that came out after WWII by Milton Mayer about the German people during the Nazi era. Title: “They Thought They Were Free.” An American Jew of German descent (and thus language ability) goes to Germany early after WW II has ended to find who “THE Nazi” really is. And he can’t find THAT one. Instead he finds ten Nazi men—from all walks of life—who become his friends (his term). None of them were bigwigs, but all were committed to Hitler’s cause in their run-of-the-mill daily lives as “kleine Leute” (small folks) in Germany.

And they all “thought they were free.” They were not manipulated by propaganda, for most of them thought Goebbels (Hitler’s PR point man) a fool. Sure Hitler wasn’t perfect either, but he was moving in the right direction. Germany was in real danger. The threatening destroyers (terrorists?) of the day were the Marxists, the misguided democrats of the failed Weimar Republic and the Jews. Something had to be done. Something decisive. Something severe. Pre-emptive strikes made perfect sense. For they are out there to destroy us and our way of life. If we don’t, they will.

Yes, Hitler did some awful things. The first ones were only “mildly” awful, but they didn’t seem bad enough to go to the streets and protest. The next one was worse. But we didn’t protest the last one and this one was only a bit more wicked than that one was. So, OK. And then, the next one, a bit worse . . . And we swallowed hard and went back to work. And then the next one. And then, and then, and then.

And they thought they were free. “Freiheit” has always been a major slogan in post-medieval Germany—possibly linked to Luther hyping freedom in his Reformation rhetoric. And freedom was a big word in Hitler’s rhetoric too. And in the rhetoric of America. It appears in almost every sound-byte of our nation’s current president (with pride not far behind). And “they thought they were free.”

Christian freedom, the sort that Luther hyped, is the freedom to be humble. It doesn’t come naturally. It necessitates evicting my ego (my nation’s ego) from my heart and having God-in-Christ move back in. That’s why Luther can open his classic treatise on “Christian Freedom” with this paradox: “A Christian is a perfectly free lord, master of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly humble servant of all, subject to all.”



To pick up with Paul's words, Boasting in the Lord Christ who has liberated me from all alien ownerships (my own ego one of the biggies) that enslave me, I'm free to be humble. I.e., free to place myself at others' feet—all others—and not lord it over anyone.

But for such freedom to happen hearts need to be purged of alien owners and re-occupied by the Rightful One. Could there be a smidgin of that freedom—to put oneself under, not over, other people, other nations—for a whole nation even if the national heart is pre-occupied by other tenants? No Biblical texts I can think of are optimistic about that. There might be a “left-hand” possibility to gather from the ancient Greeks. A halfway house perhaps. They didn't get touched by Christ's re-occupation program or the prophetic forerunners thereof, but they did learn that hybris-in-humans was dead certain to wind up with dead humans. So moderation (restraint) & wisdom (“street smarts”) were their proposed alternatives to hybris. Sometimes in some people they work, but not all the time for all the people. The tragedies of the Greek theater proclaim that some people never learn—and no one “always” learns.

So as good as Greek wisdom is, we need better wisdom. One that could generate “humility in being an American.” Paul's “boasting in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ” is a place to start. He anchors this in the “wisdom” of the “foolishness of the cross,” and contrasts it with what the Greeks of his day were seeking. So there are going to be oxymorons, paradoxes—between one boasting and another, between one freedom and another, between one servitude and another. It all depends on who the occupation force is—not in Iraq, but in the hearts of Americans.

“Humble to be an American.” Hmm. As Luther regularly asked: What does this mean? If we could articulate that, could Kerry & Edwards campaign on such a national theology? That would really

be a clear choice.

Peace & Joy!

Ed Schroeder

---

## **Singapore Postscript II – Vietnam and Myanmar (once Burma)**

Colleagues,

Why try to re-invent the wheel? Marie keeps a journal on all our mission volunteer junkets. Here's a scaled-down version of her 15 pages on our last two weeks in SE Asia, our visits to Vietnam and Myanmar. For both countries former students, all now pastors, had invited us to come and visit so they could "show and tell." In Vietnam is Ted Engelbrecht, one time Crossings student in Hong Kong(!) and now Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod missionary in Hanoi.

In Myanmar our hosts were two students from my teaching stint (2002) at the Overseas Ministries Study Center [OMSC] in New Haven CT. Saw Noel is an Anglican priest, Mahn Sayler a Baptist pastor.

What follows is all from Marie.

Peace & Joy!

Ed Schroeder

---

## VIETNAM

**Friday, June 4** – At the Hanoi airport was Ted Engelbrecht to meet us. A taxi took us the 30 km. into town, and Ted kept pointing out new buildings going up all over and saying this was all just rice fields when they came eight years ago, and even three or four years ago it was mostly open land. Prosperity has taken hold. Motorbikes all over, weaving in and out, not going fast, just hundreds of them. He took us to the Huyen Trang Hotel on Hang Trong street. After we got settled we went for lunch and then to his office at the National Institute of Nutrition. He says he's doing "mainly Matthew 25 mission work," a wide spectrum of social ministry. He's also pastor at the only Lutheran church in Hanoi. At the NIN we met most of the team he works with and directs with Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod seed money. Dr. Tu Ngu is the physician-genius who founded the project, and he gave us a Power Point presentation of the different parts of the work. The main emphasis is to reduce the mortality rate of infants out in the villages by improving the knowledge of the mothers. They hold classes for "To Be Mothers" who actually are not yet married. The general assumption is that as soon as a girl is married she'll get pregnant. Grandparents are especially keen on that. They learn later on how to prepare good food for weaned infants from the available garden vegetables. The program has a VAC acronym, V for garden, A for fishpond, and C for animals (I think that's right). They get good vegetables from the garden, protein from the fish and the pigs and chickens, which in turn fertilize the garden. The problem in Vietnam's rice-only cuisine has always been malnourishment, they told us, but now with more prosperity it's getting to be overnourishment—much of it from junk food.

The nutrition team divides up the area around Hanoi, and Ted concentrates on villages near the mountains about 3 hours away, evaluating and helping people learn good nutrition. Other members of the team work with other villages in the same way. Another program is ESL, teaching English to villagers to help them get good jobs.

Ed offered to relieve Ted of preaching on Sunday if he wanted, and he readily consented.

**Saturday, June 5** – Ted took us to the Temple of Literature first of all. It's where men in past centuries would study all the prescribed ancient literature in order to become mandarins, the educated ones who could run the country. It has five courtyards divided by walls with different styles of gates, each with up and down steps. As Ted explained the education and the worship of the ancients he found analogies with our Christian worship here and there, most interesting.

One larger building toward the back of the complex had chairs facing a stage, where we got in on a musical performance with old instruments. One had a single string that the performer would pluck here and there to make a melody, and the other hand wobbled a thin curved rod extending up from the end to make the vibrato. Another had a kind of dulcimer, and there were various bamboo xylophones. One instrument consisted of horizontal hollow bamboo pieces of various lengths, and the performer would clap her hands in front of them to make a tone. I sat in the front row to take photos, and at one point a couple of singers holding straw hats came down and put a hat on my head and brought me up front with them.

>From there we went past Ho Chi Minh's tomb, a sterile sort of block, and we saw a line of people, mostly children, standing to get in to see him. His wish was to be cremated, we read, but

the people wouldn't stand for that. Nearby is the presidential palace, but "Uncle Ho" didn't live there. Elsewhere on the grounds he built a modest little cabin where he actually lived. Ted pointed out other government buildings, including the prime minister's house. The taxi stopped at the vestiges of the "Hanoi Hilton," the (in-)famous military prison right in the middle of town for American soldiers during the war.

For the afternoon we were at the Water Puppet Theatre for the 5:15 show. Here a little red house and pond are the stage with the musicians at the side. The people stand in the water behind a screen and manipulate the puppets with sticks underneath, making them move from one side to another and do things with their arms, etc. It's an entertainment that has its origin in farm communities to give themselves something to do when the rice was all planted and they just had to wait for it to grow. It must be very popular, since evidently they do four shows every day.

**Sunday, June 6** – After a continental breakfast we took a taxi to the Hanoi International Church, which worships in a meeting room at the back of the large La Thanh Hotel. Maybe 25 people were there from several countries, including the administrative attaché from the Austrian Embassy. Ed preached. It was Trinity Sunday. He focused the lectionary texts on the Trinity as "the Gospel-way to talk about God," not a mathematical puzzle to "just" believe, but actually Good News to trust. Communion distribution was unusual. Ted celebrated sitting down behind the altar table, and we filed up to take a piece of bread Ted had broken, either dipping it into one of the three chalices of wine, or sipping from the middle one.

For lunch we went to the Engelbrecht house again, then a taxi back to the hotel about 3:00 and we took a nap. Another taxi came at 6:30 to take us to the Nha liang Van Tue restaurant,

where Dr. Tu Ngu was hosting a party for the team and all us visitors. Tomorrow one of his staff, a woman named Quyen, will take us out in the country to see what the Ted and the NIN do.

**Monday, June 7** – There was no hot water for our showers this morning, but the breakfast was good. At 9:00 Quyen came. The “company” car with driver took us north out of the city, past the airport and through the countryside.

We finally stopped at a village in the commune (a commune can have 5 or 6 villages) named Xuan Giang. Our first place to visit was the village clinic, where we sat down at a conference table with the director, the physician and two nurses, with Quyen interpreting for us. Soon three more men came, the president of the local Communist party whose name was Lu, the president of the people’s committee whose name was Liu, and the people’s committee vice president. There are 1000 households, about 5000 people, in the commune, which covers an area of about 561 hectares. Land is divided between the households equally according to need, one sau per person in the family, which is 360 sq. meters in the north part of the country, though it would be only 240 in the south (27 saus = 1 hectare = 2.5 acres). Ed asked a lot of farm questions, explaining his farm background in the states.

Ed asked about global capitalism coming around the corner, whether that is making any difference in their philosophy here. The answer: not really. In answer to another question, we learned that the people’s committee manages the use of land, but the party leaders make the big decisions.

Each of the three officials is about 50 years old, and all of them were soldiers in the “American war.” They acknowledged things were different then, but now they don’t hold much memory of the war. Now they want to learn from the American economy

and benefit from American projects that are so helpful. Ted does not have lots of funds to work with, but his dedication to the folks has made him dear to everybody we met.

We then walked to the farmyard and home of Mr. An and found it probably quite a bit bigger than places we'd walked past – all inside the village walls. That may be because he has more people to feed. The home is long, with a porch the whole length. Doors were pulled back, so in effect the whole front was open. Shoes were left on the porch, as usual.

Shortly after we sat down the women served food. Quyen and I were the only women among all the men eating there; evidently the family's women ate in the kitchen.

Mr. An explained that usually there are two candidates for an official position like people's committee president, and he was elected for about 12 years, I think. Mr. An has three sons. The farm will go to the oldest son, and when the other sons marry they will ask the committee for land for themselves. The oldest also is expected to care for the parents. Ed mentioned that the yields on his two brothers' American farms. The men agreed that would be about three times as much yield as here.

When it was their turn for questions, they asked (as several other people have also asked us) Do you live with any of your children? No, we live by ourselves. Do the children help us? No, actually we have been able to help them. Do families come together often? Are Americans afraid to come to Vietnam? Mr. An said he was in the army six years, but now that's not important, not even the fact that the Vietnamese won against the Americans.

We left the village about 1:00 and returned to the hotel about an hour later. The staff gave us a message that Dr. Tu Ngu and his wife wanted to come as soon as we returned in order to say

goodbye. So we stayed in the lobby until they arrived a few minutes later. They thanked us for coming, hoped we would remember them and their work, and gave us a present of a framed tile painted with a scene of old Hanoi buildings.

**Tuesday, June 8** – The hotel ordered a taxi for us to catch our early flight back to Singapore.

## **YANGON, MYANMAR**

**Thursday, June 10** – We flew from Singapore to Yangon via Bangkok (Thailand). Arriving at our hotel after dark we contacted our friends Saw Noel and Mahn Sayler by phone.

**Friday, June 11** – They joined us for breakfast at our hotel. They're happy to see us. They are both from the Karen people group (now spelled Kayin), but two different branches, so to speak, which is why the title before their name differs. Mahn is "mister" for the Pwo Kayin group, Saw for the Sgaw Kayin group. Sayler is Baptist and Noel is Anglican. What amused us when we first met them two years ago in New Haven, CT is that Baptist Sayler always wore a clerical collar, and Anglican Noel never did.

We learned that Noel is a past executive secretary of the Myanmar Council of Churches. He invited us to his church, St. Barnabas, for Sunday service at 8:00. It will be a special service, being St. Barnabas commemoration day (it's really today), and the archbishop will come to do a confirmation and preach. We agreed to do that, and Sayler indicated he might be able to join us there. Sayler is not pastoring a congregation here right now, but has been sent to a congregation in Bangkok, where he's been for the past four months. He's back in Yangon now in order to get his visa renewed. It's only because he was in Bangkok that he could contact us by e-mail. In Myanmar the internet only reaches as far as the country's borders, no further. I don't know how they can limit that, but they do. The government is very restrictive.



Both Sayler and Noel were appalled that their breakfasts cost us \$8 US each. They said there were lots of other places where a breakfast wouldn't cost so much.

We first went to see the Anglican seminary, Holy Cross Theological College. There we sat down at a table and talked with Mark Sumandu (I think), the principal and later toured the campus. Holy Cross has 12 faculty and 54 students, about 25% of whom are from the Karen language group. The main churches in Yangon are quite ecumenical, though there are also many "paragroups" there. The Lutheran Bethlehem Church, the only Lutheran church in town, has a membership mostly Tamil Indians, from the colonial days when the British "imported" workers from India. Only 6% of the 55 million people in Myanmar are Christian, most of them Baptists living in Chin state, and also among the Karens in the delta area southwest of Yangon.

>From there we went to the Karen Baptist Theological Seminary. There we sat again at a long table and talked with Thramu Stella Min, who got her M.Th. from the Lutheran Seminary in Hong Kong in 2001. She now teaches Christian education and counseling here. There are about 1000 theology students in Yangon now, most of them here at the Karen Baptist Seminary. Instruction is in English, though at other seminaries it's in Burmese.

**Saturday, June 12** – Sayler had left us directions to give to a taxi driver to get to his Baptist compound, and he had marked the location on our map. Unfortunately, as Sayler and Noel admit, people in Myanmar are never taught how to read a map, so showing him ours meant nothing to our taxi driver. And the written address didn't help either. As we passed what we thought was the right place according to the map, a man at the side of the road waved frantically, but our driver just passed him by. So where's he going? With gestures he assured us

there's an entrance around the corner, and it turned out he was right, as far as that goes. But the dirt road wandered a bit among houses and he obviously didn't know where he was to go. He stopped and asked a couple times. Finally we got to Mahn Sayler's house, close to the entrance we were supposed to go to. Quite a run-around. Since we still had no Myanmar money, Sayler's wife paid the taxi driver. Sayler himself was at the compound entrance waiting for us.

Well, finally everything was straightened out and we went into the Sayler home. It's a low house with dark wood walls and a dark rusty corrugated roof. Well, it may have seemed darker than it was, since the tall trees provided shade. It used to be an individual house, Sayler told us, but when the Baptists needed another home for another employee, they added a new section so that it's now a duplex. When Sayler said another family lives next to them, I looked at the dividing wall and realized it didn't even reach the ceiling (which is the roof).

We sat on cushioned wooden chairs in the front room, where the wall we faced had several photo portraits of the Sayler family in various years. Sayler talked about the Baptist history in Myanmar. The American Baptist Foreign Mission Society printed a Karen translation of the Bible as early as 1836, I think. The founding missionary was G.L. (?) Braden. In 1909 this mission compound was established for the Pwo Karen people, separated by then from the Sgaw Karen s because the language is different. It's a large compound, with two churches, some seminary buildings, a conference center, and homes. The umbrella organization is the Association of Baptist Churches in Burma (the name has to change to Myanmar). The compound is about 12 acres, but the government has taken some acres away for the railroad on one side and Ahlone Street on the other. In addition, in 1962 all mission schools were taken over by the government.

Sayler has a son and two daughters that he's supporting. The 29-year-old son and the 27-year-old daughter work for Youth Christian Endeavor, but they get no salary. The 24-year-old stays home and helps her mother.

Sayler's younger brother sat next to him opposite us, and we turned our attention to him. His name is Rev. Saw Thein Aung Htay. He's pastor of the Baptist congregation in Tanggyi, their home village, quite a distance west of Yangon. Sayler's brother is also one of about 90 missionaries the Baptists have sent to Kayin state, close to the Thailand border, and he goes there some months at a time. There are insurgents there who once put him on their hit list, but he went to them and explained what he was doing, thus kept his life intact. Four workers have been killed, though. They give at least four years of education to the children in these remote areas and run orphanages as well. Many have been converted. Peace talks are taking place now, so the situation is cool, he told us. The Chin state used to be peaceful, but now insurgents are operating there.

Their grandfather was a missionary to the Lahu people in the southern state of Shan. Mahn Sayler came from their home town, 4712 feet above sea level, down to Yangon to do his B.Th. at MIT. Back home he became the youth pastor in the mother church for five years. He was chosen to be the state youth director for three years, then youth director for the southern Shan state, and since 2001 he's been here.

There are about 600,000 Baptists in Myanmar, and if you include the non-baptized (remember they have believers' baptism, not for infants) it's 700,000. They are quite ecumenical, exchanging seminary facilities with other denominations, for instance. They have seven Baptist seminaries in Yangon, 35 in the whole country. No European missionaries are left, although some come as visiting professors for short terms.

All this time that we were sitting in the front room the weather outside was sunny and pleasant. Now as we rose to start touring the compound it started to rain. At the seminary building we looked at the library and some classrooms. By then it was raining very hard, so we sat on some classroom chairs on the open corridor upstairs to wait it out and watch. From there we had a good view of the historic church across the way. It's over 100 years old, built of black wood with a corrugated roof (not original). After a while of watching others brave the weather, we left too, to walk over to the church. The sanctuary was on the second floor, and behind the altar was a banner with words in Karen, English, and Burmese. While we were there the choir members came in to start their practice with a student leader. Sayler asked them to sing something for us, and they did, with their loud, clear voices. Ed spoke a couple minutes to tell them about us and why we were there, and then we two sang "Now may he who from the dead."

The rain continued. This was monsoon rain for sure. Downstairs in a meeting room we met the pastor of the church. He told us there were about 6-700 church members, with a Sunday attendance of about 400-500. Right now there is a Youth for Christ leadership training program going on. A woman pastor from upper Burma, widowed about three years, talked with us a while too. She was here with her church's young people for the Singapore-led program. She's been the interpreter, and commented that it's hard to understand the Singapore English sometimes. Don't we know! Her salary is not the usual 5000 Kyat [= US\$5! yes five!] per month, but between 1500 and 2000 per month. Her three children work at jobs, she said, and her sister in Australia sends money, so they manage.

We had a spiffy lunch with the Saylers. Way too much. After eating we toured the house. Down five wooden steps was a room with two woven mats and a TV set, and a kitchen with a one-

burner tabletop stove and three or four electric crock pots. So little equipment made such a feast! Outside, protected from the rain by a big sheet of the ubiquitous woven nylon in red, white and blue, were clotheslines and a new latrine. There are three bedrooms, one for the daughters, a middle one for the parents, and a third for the son. In the hallway between stood a dresser and some other shelves, and a small refrigerator. Sayler explained that the grace of God and OMSC made possible both the fridge and the TV. He had mentioned when we were talking about salaries what a shock it was at OMSC to receive a monthly stipend of \$550 US. He'd never seen so much money. At first he thought it was terrible to have so much, so he gave half of it away. Evidently he either thought better of that or managed to save a lot even with the half he had left.

We finally learned Sayler's wife's name, too, namely, Nancy, "like Reagan's wife," he said. She was a year ahead of Sayler at MIT, and is now in charge of Christian education, especially for children. She's very quiet, but looks completely competent. She certainly cooks well.

It was time to go back to the hotel, but by now the area in front of the house was really flooded and deep. They called a taxi, and when it came it backed up almost to the front doorstep. Still, in order to get into the back seat, we had to step in the flood up to our ankles. My black shoes of course got completely soaked. Na ja.

We'd come to Yangon with logistical help from long-time friend Jim Rimbach, LCMS missionary prof at the Luth. Theological Seminary in Hong Kong. In a sense we tagged along with Jim, who was making his annual visit to LTS alumni in Myanmar. He made local arrangements for us even though we had our own agenda with Sayler and Noel. At evening we went down to the lobby to join the rest of Jim's crew to go out to dinner, Jim's treat.

Finally about 8:00 everyone had gathered from hither and yon and we crowded into two taxis, which took us rather far out to a White Elephant Hotel. We found out when we got there that it's just a hotel, with a dining room for its own guests, but they would fix up a dinner for us. We got drinks right away, but then waited a long time for the food. Once it came we were glad we were there, good and tasty as it was: crispy fried pork balls, sweet and sour chicken that was just right, crispy prawn balls, a dish of mushrooms and baby corn, rice and maybe more that I've forgotten.

With so many gathered there, most of Jim's friends who were LTS grads, plus our guests Sayler and his wife, Jim had asked Ed to give a 10-minute talk on Lutheran hermeneutics, sort of to "sing for his supper." Which he did, standing at one end of the long table. It was quite winsome, and several expressed appreciation for the good insights.

**Sunday, June 13** – We ate breakfast early, and at 7:30 Sayler was at the desk waiting for us. With him we taxied to St. Barnabas Church, where Noel is pastor. He sat us down in the front row, right in front of the pulpit. It's a small brick church, just a simple rectangle with the altar up a couple steps from the floor. The archbishop, whose name was Samuel San Sichtey, was there in his red cope and miter to celebrate the congregation's namesake day—St. Barnabas Day having been on Friday. His robes reached the floor, but when he later knelt we could see he was barefoot, as was everyone else of the robed clergy.

Noel translated the basic thoughts of the sermon to Ed and he passed them on to me in whispers. But the real star of the service, we sensed, was the archdeacon, who was imported for this special service. He did the chanting and all the gestures in what must have been the perfectly practiced way for their

tradition and language.

Following the eucharist we had lunch with the congregation in the church hall. Most people ate on the floor at a big low table, but for the primate and us visitors they set up a regular table and chairs, thank goodness. We met Noel's wife and his two daughters.

Afterwards Noel took us sight-seeing to the National Races Village, an acreage where the seven principal races represented in Myanmar had built typical houses (well, typical for the wealthy, evidently) on stilts, with shops underneath each one selling representative crafts from that people group. Myanmar has seven states which are predominantly one people group, and seven divisions where the peoples are mixed. Since Noel is Karen, we spent extra time at the Karen house, and he bought a Karen cloth bag for me.

It turned out to be a hot sunny day, so the black shoes that had gotten soaked in Sayler's flooded compound dried out nicely. But by 3:00 when we got back to the hotel we were plenty tired. We were on our own for the rest of the day, had dinner at the hotel and played a game of Scrabble. Ed still had the Z at the end, so I won!

**Monday, June 14** – Noel came for us at 8:00 with a taxi and driver. We went first to see the Lutheran Bethlehem Church. A dark-skinned Tamil man was sweeping the courtyard when we came, and he found the pastor's son Luke for us. His father, parish priest Jenson Andrews, was out of town, but Luke could at least open the church for us. It's a real Swedish-looking church, and the list of all the pastors on the back wall had European names till 1886, then Indian names, and finally in 1961 came a "local ordained priest." The sign out front says they have services in Burmese, Tamil, Telugu and English. Almost all the parishioners

are Indian, so some of Jim's friends we've met actually used to think "Lutheran" automatically meant "Indian."

Secondly we went to the most prominent structure in town, the Shwe Dagon Pagoda. Built on a hill, its golden shaft rises high above the surrounding trees and it's lit up at night to emphasize it even more. It's impressive.

Noel instructed the taxi to park close to one of the elevator entrances. The way up for real devotees is by numerous steps, but for the less able they now have four elevators to bring people to the top, one on each side of the square enclosure. We left our shoes at a little stand at street level, then rode the elevator up. Once there, Noel realized I still had hose on and said I had to take them off. Everyone must be barefoot. Thus down to the basics, we entered the sacred precincts and walked around.

The golden giant sits in the middle of the square, a huge inverted bell shape that has nothing inside, just a solid block of stone. Around the bottom are numerous white marble covered Buddha statues and altars, maybe 15 feet high. Interspersed with them are even higher and more elaborate house-shaped structures covering bigger statues, all covered with gold. Noel assured us that it's all real gold, not just yellow paint. The gold mines are in northern Myanmar. People congregated in front of different altars, often the simpler places where there's an open marble statue. We saw several people at some of these places draping flower leis around the statues' necks and pouring water over the statues with hands dipped into a marble basin in front of them. I would guess that each of these actions would improve their karma.

The whole place is immense. Besides the structures at the base of the main inverted bell, there are other large pavilions with



other Buddhas at one end where people can worship. We figure each such pavilion was donated by some family or organization. Some were empty, some had people gathered to worship, in some a few people would be sitting and chatting. At one such building a man was sitting and holding a string of large beads in outstretched hands, most of the string in a coil on the marble floor, a sort of enlarged rosary. It took us an hour just to walk around the central structure. We did pause at one point when Noel mentioned that his whole family is Buddhist, and several of his relatives are monks. When he goes home to visit, he said, he wears his white alb to show that he's just as much a Christian monk as they are Buddhist monks. There's no problem in his family that he's Christian, but he knows many for whom it is a problem. Ed and Noel spent some time discussing how one can approach Buddhists with the offer of the Gospel. Noel says he knows theoretically all the good things to say, but it's terribly hard when it's your family you're talking to.

Back down and in our proper hose and shoes, we took the taxi to the Anglican headquarters compound, where we visited the former archbishop.

Next we went to the Myanmar Council of Churches building, where we visited the office where Noel used to sit as executive secretary. The person we talked to for quite a while was Timothy Pa Hrang. He's the director of mission and evangelism, and eagerly talked about a coming conference where 150 people will be coming together from 13 denominations and 9 cooperating bodies. There are more denominations in Myanmar, and there's hope that some more will join the MCC at some point. But they already cooperate in special programs. As for missions within Myanmar, he told us that the Rakhine people seemed to have the most difficulty in becoming Christian, fearing they will lose their beloved culture if they do. The 52 different kinds of Chin have difficulty too, but there are six church bodies among

them anyway. In October Timothy will have a program aimed at denominational mission secretaries, to help them have good relationships at that level in the hope that no one will steal the sheep of another.

Timothy himself had been pastor in the Burmese Division for three years, and now there are nine Baptist congregations there. Then he became mission director for the Chin diaspora, Chin people dispersed in other states. Now he's been in the MCC for 7 years. We get the impression that Christians of all sorts here know other Christians no matter what their denomination.

At evening Noel took us for a really big farewell dinner to the Karaweik Palace Restaurant. It's on the same lake as our hotel, but actually out on the lake. It's built as if the restaurant sits on the backs of two water birds that look to me somewhat like huge ducks.

As we parted we handed him two of the Christian Art tapestries that Jim Rimbach had brought from Hong Kong for us—the work of China's #1 Christian artist, He Qi—one for Noel or his church, and one for Sayler and/or his church. One was the Lord's Supper and the other was the Good Samaritan. Noel began wondering out loud which should go to whom. His Anglican church celebrates the Lord's Supper often and the Baptists only once a month, so maybe the Lord's Supper one should go to Sayler as encouragement. On the other hand, while the Anglicans are so taken up with proper liturgy, they often neglect the good deeds of compassion, so maybe the Good Samaritan should go to his Anglican church.

We also gave Noel all the rest of the Myanmar money that we had, about \$20 US. That was such a small amount for us, but for him it was about three months' salary.

**Tuesday, June 15** – Departure day. With the purchases Ed had

*made we knew we would probably have trouble getting everything stuffed into our two roll-ons. So as planned we piled the clothes that would no longer fit into our bags on the bed—simply to leave them there. One of the young cleaning women came to check if everything was OK, so Ed explained that the pile was hers if she wanted it. Her eyes lit up and she ran to get a piece of paper and a pen. Apparently to verify that she hadn't stolen them, she said: "Please write your name on this and your room number," and pointing to the badge on her blouse "here's my name." So Ed wrote that the clothes we had left belonged to her, and he signed it with his name and room number. We could only deduce that her exuberance signalled her patent poverty. The hotel van came at 8:30 and took us to the airport. Thai Air took us to Bangkok and then back to Singapore.*

---

## **Singapore Postscript I**

Colleagues, We've been back home for six days. Jet-lag's almost gone. Seems longer this time coping with the eleven-time-zones shift from Singapore to St. Louis. We must be getting old.

Re-entry to the United States is a jolt—even for life-long citizens like Marie and me, now seventy-somethings, and after only 4 months away. It's not just the politics. E.g., we'd forgotten how fat people look (four months ago we marveled at how skinny Asians were). We'd forgotten the all-pervasive addiction to trivia in American culture. Not just junk food, but junk offered—and devoured—that we may have "the American way of life" and have it to the FULL. Hundreds of years ago Pascal

(1623-1662) saw trivia-addiction as a primal symptom of original sin. Unable to cope with death, or with God, “chasing the ball and the hare we waste our substance.” And we haven’t yet turned on the TV.

But I digress. This is a postscript to Singapore.

There have been three postscripty weeks since our 3-month gig with the Lutherans in Singapore concluded at the end of May. During those 3 weeks we took three trips—each one at the invitation of former students who are hustling the non-trivial Gospel in tough contexts. [Which is not to say that America isn’t also a tough, very tough, mission field. Where Christians, surfeited with trivialized Gospels, are even harder to crack open with the cross of the crucified and risen Messiah.]

First one was the state of Manipur in far northeast India (“only” 2300 miles one-way from S’pore) where Roel and Shangthar Moyol, husband and wife, manage a mission center among tribal peoples in that corner of India right up against the border of Myanmar (old Burma). To get there we had a full-day layover in Kolkata (old Calcutta). Our contact there, Richard Chiu (Chinese pastor trained in Singapore in a Chinese congregation in this umpteen million Indian megalopolis—things do get curiouser and curiouser), took us to Mother Teresa’s place. The sisters showed us around. Kids in the orphanage glombed onto us old grandma and grandpa. We stood at Teresa’s tomb. We sat on the floor with the novices for evening prayer.

Next day we flew to Imphal, the capital of Manipur state. Since there’s armed insurgency in Manipur state, tourists need special permits in addition to Indian visas to get out of the plane in Imphal. Roel had gotten them for us, but, he said as we met him, “It’s only for the city of Imphal, and we need to take you tomorrow out to Khukthar, our mission-station village 40

kilometers away, for the big celebration.” Celebration, we asked? “Yes, both for your visit to us and for your speech, Ed, at the graduation ceremony of the 22 graduates in our ‘Leadership and Church Management Training’ program.” I gulped, but it was tomorrow so I did have a few hours to prepare. And we wondered about the sticky wicket of travel to a destination outside the limits of our permit. “Not to worry,” Roel said.

Somehow he “fixed” something—or maybe he didn’t, since he never told us, and we did roll up the car windows every time we passed a government military installation on the way to Khukthar. Anyhow we got there. And when we did, you’d think we were Mother Teresa—or maybe the pope! Our names in a huge banner across the front of the village church at the top of the hill. Church packed, doors and windows open for people sitting around outside, some under an old parachute stretched overhead to give shade. Lots of dignitaries (church and state) on the dais. Additional VIPs in the congregation. The 22 grads—men and women—front and center. Two children’s groups from the mission station doing special songs (all in English). Many speeches before and after mine in more than one local dialect. Prayers now and again. And after the benediction, yet another “prayer for light refreshment,” which we all then enjoyed.

My input – since leadership was the topic – amounted to a Crossings-style walk through Matthew 20 and the “leadership” scandal Jesus commends to his disciples there. Leadership as authority “over” others as the Gentiles do? “It shall not be so among you.” Instead, he says, it’s authority “under,” the sort of authority he exercises, not being served, but serving, and finally “giving his life a ransom for all.” My visual aids were two hastily scissored-and-pasted equilateral triangles (stiff paper)—one with point up and the leader at that point for authority-over, “being served” by the underlings. The other with the leader at point down for Jesus’s upside-down authority—and

ours as well who follow him. People are “up over,” leaders “down under,” serving not being served. And yes, you could get crucified. There’s a precedent for that. But following this leadership style, we’re following Him. And the end of that story is upbeat. So go for it, you soon-to-be-diplomed church leaders.

My words were interpreted into the local dialect, so I had to be succinct. So my 30 minutes were really 15. A challenge for a rambling old prof. But pauses between sentences while the interpreter speaks does give you time to think before you speak the next sentence—a wise rule to follow even when not being interpreted.

Gifts were presented during the ceremony and afterwards as well. We had brought one ourselves, an electronic keyboard that Roel had asked for “if possible.” The village has electricity, but nothing for leading congregational worship. Back in Kolkata Richard had found a music shop, so we bought a Yamaha and took it as hand luggage to Imphal. Our gift was dedicated in the graduation service.

More show and tell around Khukthar afterwards. There are only 14 families in the village. All Christian. We visited the child care center for 17 homeless kids, the school for local children—these constituted the two singing groups at the ceremony. The training center for evangelists and leaders. The mission complex—just one big house—has a day room and dormitory room for the 17 kids, the Moyols’ one room home, Roel’s parents’ one room, the community kitchen outside for Moyols and orphans, the squat toilets (outside of course), the water-supplying stream down the hill, a couple of pigs cooped up, and other sheds roundabout for storage. They do have a phone and a motorbike for transport.

They rented a car and driver to get us there and back from

Imphal. Driver's name was Alexander, to which Roel regularly added "the Great." We soon learned how appropriate that honorific was as he navigated the omnipresent potholes through cattle, rickshaws, trucks, people-people-people, all claiming the rickety road as their own with little regard for two-way traffic protocols.

Back in Imphal for the next two days Roel had us working with Christians there. Friday was a "fellowship" with high school and college students. My assignment: Keeping the Faith in the Modern World. That modern world is all there in, with, and under the lineaments of the old ways that Marie kept recording on her digital camera. It was two days before Pentecost. Roel told me that nobody would note that in the basically Baptist ethos of local church life. Even so, I told 'em, and then did diagnosis and prognosis on the Winds of modernity—where are they blowing you these days?—and the wind who is the Spirit of the Risen Christ, that Holy & Healing Spirit. Common denominator of the other winds: they blow you away from Christ and blow you to curve into your own self. Au contraire the Holy "Gust," as dear Doc Caemmerer liked to call her. Philippians 2 got linked to Acts 2, with the closure that the Gospel's wind is an offer, not an arm-twister, to live from the energy "blowing in This Wind." The dozen-plus students were "educated," so we operated in English.

Next day, day before we left, brought an early morning session outside somebody's house in the shade with 20 folks before they went off to work—such as a customs officer, bank employee, medical person, univ. student, staff nurse, water supply officer, architect, social worker, irrigation project manager. Roel asked for "Word of God and Daily Work." I worked through the paradigm with them of God's double agenda Left and Right hands, and Christians as God's operatives "dedicating their lives to the Care and Redemption of all that you, God, have

made.” At the end before they went off to work came the required “response speech” by the man hosting us. We cried listening to his Holy Gusted gratitude and blessing.

Overpowering were so many encounters we had in Manipur. We still haven’t “processed” it. We many never succeed in doing so.

We flew out the next afternoon after a few hours of being just tourists—Imphal to Kolkata to Bangkok to Singapore—which took all through the night till noon on Pentecost. So we missed church. We did, however, have a semi-secular equivalent at Singapore Symphony Hall that evening: Mahler’s 8th “Symphony of a Thousand,” with wall-to-wall, and floor-to-balcony performers, blending medieval Latin liturgy with Goethe’s epilogue to Faust. That’s a theological crossing!

How did the Manipur connection come to pass? you ask. Two-plus years ago, as some of you may remember, I was doing ThTh postings from New Haven, Connecticut while teaching at the Overseas Ministries Study Center. Roel and Shangthar were our neighbors and my students at OMSC. At term’s end before they and we went back home, they came to us and presented their “Manipur Project.” We got hooked. So for the past two fiscal years we’ve been hustling funds to help them do what we witnessed during our time with them three weeks ago. We currently have 25 state-side partners for the project. The annual tab is US\$15K—for orphanage, school, evangelist and leadership training, church planting, social work—and for these past years just that much has come in. Staff salaries in Khukthar are third-world. Roel is the highest paid. He gets \$2 per day.

We walked/talked our way through next year’s budget with the Moyols and committed ourselves to keep on keeping on with support efforts so they can do likewise.

We’re still too close to know what all these four months have



done to us. It may be that others of you here at home will reveal that to us.

Back to trivia-addiction. Manipuri Christians are not automatically children of the light. They have their Old Adams and Old Eves spooking around inside too. But many of the new siblings-in-the-faith we now have there, surviving with so little and oppressed by the Hindu majority, live from Christ's costly grace. We witnessed faith that was the full opposite of trivial. And they are out evangelizing the neighborhoods—including their oppressors. One former Hindu recited for us his faith journey. We were blown away by his account of the "Holy Gust" in his life story. Though we missed Pentecost Sunday service, we had plenty of Pentecost in Manipur.

Next time our five days in Hanoi, Vietnam and our five days in Yangon, Myanmar (old Rangoon, Burma)—also with former students.

Peace & Joy!

Ed Schroeder