

Hospice Reflections on John 11

Marie here. No apparent changes in Ed's symptoms. Headache remedies working most of the time. Double vision and weakness persist. Steve Krueger offered Ed this piece for ThTh posting. Although the hospice note seems not to be our situation, the good gospel that Steve offers is good news indeed. Steve Krueger currently serves as a chaplain for LifePath Hospice and Palliative Care, the largest not-for-profit hospice program in the United States. LifePath Hospice currently serves almost 2,300 patients in the counties of Hillsborough, Polk, Highlands, and Hardee, Florida. The listed counties are in the area of Tampa.

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Hospice Reflections on John 11 ***Stephen C. Krueger***

Shortly before his death, Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote a brief poem from Tegel Prison in Berlin. It's entitled, "Christians and Pagans." It seems to be Bonhoeffer's mature thoughts about who cries out to God for help in their need.

Men go to God when they are sore bestead,

Pray to him for succour, for his peace, for bread,
For mercy for them sick, sinning, or dead;
All men do so, Christian and unbelieving. Men go to God when
he is sore bestead,
Find him poor and scorned, without shelter or bread,
Whelmed under the weight of the wicked, the weak, the dead;
Christians stand by God in his hour of grieving.

God goes to every man when sore bestead,
Feeds body and spirit with his bread;
For Christians, pagans alike he hangs dead,
And both alike forgiving.

[Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, ed.
Eberhard Bethge. (New York: Macmillan, 1971), pp. 348-349]

This essay is about death as we experience dying in hospice care in America today and the Promise. Its thesis is that while hospice care offers an extraordinary set of medical, psychological and even spiritual supports to assist the dying to die, linking the terminally ill and their care-givers to the Promise still is the needed ministry from the confessing Christian community. In recognizing that, hospice is important new ground for the church's mission but a ministry that can only be done with compassion, sensitivity, insight and care.

In order better to discuss the thesis, I will try to enlist the Fourth Evangelist's story of Jesus' encounter with his friend Lazarus whose problem goes far beyond the help requested of the Lord. The problem requires a Promise of something utterly new.

1. The Summons

"So the sister sent a message to Jesus, 'Lord, he whom you love is ill'" (John 11: 3). It has been my experience in ministry in hospice care that the summons which goes

out to surround the dying with care, doesn't normally begin that way. The summons usually goes out first as a summons to cure.

Mary sends word to Jesus to come in order to cure. More than likely, had Mary and Martha lived in our time, they would have not only called for Jesus to come but would have summoned the vast resources of modern medicine with its many promises to provide treatment, medications and procedures which have cure as the goal. Certainly in an illness, healing and cure are what everyone wants from the medical community and from God. We have long known that the Latin root of the word for "salvation," *salus*, has far less to do with one's eternal destiny than it does with "healing, wholeness," the very thing we pray for when we lift up our sick to the Lord in prayer.

What makes the Lazarus story so unique, however, in the Gospel of John is that it is not about illness as the core problem. Jesus has successfully cured the ill as a lame man walks (John 5: 1-18) and a blind man's sight is restored (John 9: 1-41). That Jesus can cure illness is not the issue. What Jesus is going to do about dying is the issue. Extending a summons to Jesus to cure the sick is quite different from crying out to the Lord to break the hold of death.

In 1948 a British nurse named Cicely Saunders, in noticing how helpless modern, western medicine seemed to be in caring for the dying, began a movement which we know today as hospice. Saunders saw the medical community operate with a model which made curative, hospital care the only alternative for the terminally ill, much to the defeat and the agony of the dying. Under the medical model, death was seen as an enemy to be conquered through

resolve, better science and cure. Thus, physicians treating the dying would withhold medications, such as morphine, because they were seen as too addictive and too defeating of curative treatments. Patients would be kept alive at all costs even if it meant being kept alive in great pain and discomfort. It appeared as if the collective ego of modern, western medicine were on the line in its treatment of the terminally ill.

Saunders eventually was able to convince enough people in the medical community that it needed to accept the reality of dying and that other, palliative procedures for the humane treatment of the terminally ill were ethically and medically necessary. Thus, in 1967, St. Christopher Hospice was founded in London with an entirely different approach for the care, not cure, of those at the end of life. Included in this approach was the patient's own control over the treatment.

The hospice movement required a realistic and fresh look at death and dying. It was widely received; although not without substantial criticism. By 1974, in the wake of Dame Saunders being invited to teach at Yale, the movement was transplanted into the United States through the organizing of the first American hospice program, Connecticut Hospice. Today, one in three Americans dies in accredited hospice care, enabled by legislation Congress enacted in 1982 to make hospice care part of the benefits of Medicare.

Still, in the Lazarus story, Jesus is initially summoned to Bethany probably prior to Mary and Martha checking out Lazarus' Medicare options for hospice. No doubt the expectation was for Jesus to cure in the same way we seek out help from the medical industry today. Our culture

probably is, if Ernest Becker is right, even less ready to deal with dying than most others, so insulated from it we have become. [Becker, Ernest, *The Denial of Death*. (New York, The Free Press, 1973)] Cure from a promising medical community is still the prevailing operative word. Even today the hospice option, which requires accepting the reality of death for the individual patient, remains difficult for the medical community and for the general population to embrace. Hospice requires an uncommon care far beyond customary expectations to cure.

2. The Consultation

"After saying this, he told them, 'Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him.' The disciples said to him, 'Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right' (John 11: 11-12). After the summons to come and deal with the terminally ill often comes the consultation among the dying and their family and friends which will try to make some sense out of it all. The human species is like that. We all need to believe that life is not an arbitrary series of events which ultimately do not matter but that there is a plan somehow, somewhere to make what happens to us meaningful. Confronting death is no exception.

When a patient enters a hospice program, the staff is prepared to assist the patient and care-givers in a variety of ways. The most important way is that the patient is led to acknowledge that he will no longer seek curative treatment and wishes, instead, the palliative, holistic care hospice can provide. If the patient is eligible for Medicare and if his primary physician agrees that his life-limiting illness will bring about his demise within six months or less, the patient can invoke

his Medicare hospice benefits for two 90-day periods, renewable after re-certification at 60-day intervals thereafter.

To accept all that is quite an emotional jump for a patient and his family. Even with a sensitive hospice staff consisting of physicians, hospice nurses, social workers, chaplains, bereavement counselors, home health aides, hospice homemakers and trained volunteers, a terminally ill patient and those who love him still face all the confusing, disheveling emotions which accompany anticipatory grief and separation. Unlike the strict medical model which has as its goal cure, hospice care shifts its goal to a plan of palliative care which stresses the quality of life until the patient's death. Yet, lingering is the underlying meaning of death itself.

The hospice staff will do a great deal of consulting with the patient and his family as a patient is admitted into hospice care. The progression of the illness will be discussed by hospice physicians and nurses. The patient will be given choices about pain medication. He will decide how lucid he wishes to remain at various stages of his illness progression. He will be monitored closely for comfort issues, including side issues which result from his environment (like bed sores, personal hygiene, etc.). He will have a choice of whether to be resuscitated or not. He will be helped through the host of end of life decisions about wills, funerals, living wills and the like. Further, most all accredited hospice programs will come to him, whether he is living at home or in a nursing home or assisted living facility or comes to a hospice house where his family will always be welcome.

In spite of the excellence of modern hospice care,

however, the persistent issue of “why death at all?” is something which hospice, even with its required chaplaincy, may not be able satisfactorily to address. Chaplains are mandated to be part of America’s accredited hospice programs. Their purpose is, to be sure, a valuable one. They are asked to explore with a willing patient his own interior self and his feelings about dying. Chaplains will further seek sensitively to enter the spiritual reality of the patient and to enable the patient himself to enlist his own spiritual resources to face what he is experiencing. Further, chaplains are available to help connect a patient with the faith community of the patient’s choosing, even and especially if the patient has lost touch over the years. Nevertheless, the chaplain is obligated never to impose his/her own religious views on a patient; although, if asked (which not infrequently happens in a trusting relationship), the chaplain may share his/her faith if so invited.

When Jesus, in the Lazarus story, tells his disciples that Lazarus has fallen asleep, his meaning is obviously not to sound glib about his friend’s death. Obviously, Jesus is beginning to talk about a new reality, where death is defeated and has lost its power to hold. The disciples, on the other hand, are ready for the simple, glib solution to Lazarus’ illness. “So, Jesus,” they say, “what’s the problem here then?” And, indeed, glibness is not unusual in the hospice setting, either. It frequently is part of the consultation of family and friends between themselves to deal with the beloved’s terminal illness by keeping it at a safe distance, especially when they know in hospice care that the patient’s physical suffering is being kept in bounds. Yet, such “making light of” does

not come close to the meaningful and important business to be done with the terminally ill. There frequently are relationships which need reconciling, sins to be forgiven, hopes to be shared, and love to be put into words which had never found adequate expression before. Death calls out the urgency of making true what should have been true all along.

Even more important is the matter of making sense out of death itself.

3. The Anxious, Hard Reality

"Then Jesus told them plainly, 'Lazarus is dead'" (John 11: 14). At some point the reality of dying descends from the head into the heart. Bereavement counselors refer to this as anticipatory grief. For the terminally ill and her loved ones grieving begins when the meaning of the loss begins emotionally to hit home and death becomes far more real than just an intellectual concept.

In hospice care the process of grieving which accompanies the acceptance of death is seen as therapeutic, normal, natural and good. While more discredited today than it was when it was the rage among grief counselors several decades back, Elizabeth Kubler-Ross' *ON DEATH AND DYING* still is something of the operating model with her delineation of the stages of the grieving process.

Nevertheless, if death is talked about, as it often is in hospice care, as a natural part of life, something merely to be accepted as part of the created order, then something precious in the Biblical faith has been lost. The question remains unanswered, "Why does God give us life only to take it back again?" The problem is compounded when a sanitized view of death as natural

fails to cry out for a Promise where death and its meaning is ultimately defeated.

Paul Tillich insisted that there is an honest anxiety which must accompany the realization of one's death. The problem ultimately is that death implies judgment (something the modern age eschews) and, thus, loss of ultimate meaning to one's life because death means "estrangement" not only from life itself but from life's ultimate Ground of Being, God.

Estranged from the ultimate power of being, man is determined by his finitude. He is given over to his natural fate. He came from nothing, and he returns to nothing. He is under the domination of death and is driven by the anxiety of having to die. [Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology: Volume Two. (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1957), p. 66]

In my experience with hospice care, it is here that the hospice model must yield to something more. While providing an excellent way to support the process of dying, it cannot minister to this essential anxiety about the meaning of death itself.

Perhaps this dose of reality was what Jesus had in mind for his disciples when, after discussing the significance of Lazarus having fallen asleep, Jesus reinterpreted what he meant and said, "Lazarus is dead." Death moves the human dilemma beyond the sphere of cure and even benign acceptance. It requires something new in which to believe.

4. Religionists

"Martha said to Jesus, 'Lord, if you had been here, my

brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him.' Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again.' Martha said to him, 'I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.' Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?'" (John 11: 21-26). As one trains for chaplaincy in the American hospice setting, there is a customary hard and fast distinction which is drawn between religion and spirituality. Modern hospice programs have a need to distinguish, as do their post-modern counterparts, between religious bias, on the one hand, and the more authentic interior life of human spirituality, on the other.

In my opinion the distinction is not particularly a brilliant one in that it fails to notice that the word "religion" is really an innocuous word, not necessarily laden with all the divisive connotation often associated with religion. "Religion" comes from the same root that the word "ligament" does and merely means that which holds a body together. In the case of religion, one's "religion" is that set of symbols, beliefs and values which seek to form a coherent whole and allow its adherent to interpret life. Still, it is thought to be a great insight by some to extricate one's spirituality from one's religious bias.

So, okay. Those are the rules when you interact in the hospice setting and they do, in fact, make a point. Religion can be a problem in the pluralistic, American setting where the personhood of each is to be respected. Manipulating toward someone else's religious bias through

proselytizing and the like can defeat therapeutic, spiritual care. Hospice chaplaincy has as its goal to explore deeply with the patient his own interior life, feelings and values so that the patient can enlist those as resources to confront his dying. That having been said, the question is, "Where exactly does that leave us?"

Still, it's true, religion is thought to be today more of a problem than a solution and not without good reason. The interaction at the death of Lazarus between Jesus and Martha is something of an encounter between Jesus and someone with all the stock, pious answers which can stand as a roadblock in entering into the deep reality of the grieving. Martha begins by challenging Jesus authentically, perhaps with anger. "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." Yet, rather than let the honesty stand, Martha quickly glosses it over with something suspiciously overly pious, "But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him." Surely Jesus must have had his reasons for failing his friend and her brother. "It is God's will. God must have wanted your child for himself in heaven to be one of his angels. It is really a blessing in disguise." Those stock religious answers to the overwhelming questions of the grieving are, in fact, singularly unhelpful and even destructive for those who are in active bereavement.

As the confessing, Christian community enters the hospice setting, it needs to be sensitive both to the biases against religion it will encounter and also to its own religious biases. It will need to ask, "Just whose needs do we hope to meet here, ours or theirs?" If there is a meaningful Promise to be articulated, it will have to be out of the deepest interior questions the grieving trust

to reveal in themselves. In the Lazarus story, even as Martha, perhaps the quintessential religionist, responds to Jesus' promise, "Your brother will rise again," with "Yes, sure, I know...there is that doctrine going around about resurrections," she yet, in her own grief, needs to hear the Lord's new Promising offer, "I am the resurrection and the life." Even then, it remains debatable whether Martha truly hears a Promise and makes it her own. "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world," may be as much about doctrinal agreement with Jesus as anything else.

5. The Honest Encounter

"When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died'" (John 11: 32). In the Lazarus story, I picture Mary, out of her relationship of trust in Jesus and out of her high expectations of one who would be in every way her Lord, to be the honest one. Kneeling at Jesus' feet, the sign of her absolute regard and trust, she pushes her Lord with the core question of all. "Why were you absent? If you had been here, after we had sent for you, my brother, your friend, would still be alive today."

The reality of death is, finally, about somebody's failure, as there is something elemental in our bones which knows that death is not natural at all. Who ought to take the rap for our dying? Who holds the responsibility for not showing up when we cry out to him to save us?

Of course, while seemingly irreverent, almost blasphemous in fact, to ask such questions of God, they would stand

alongside of the very same questions as they emerge from the pages of the Bible itself. Certainly, it was not a strange question for Jesus either. It was his own from the cross, as the words of Psalm 22: 1, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" come from Jesus' own lips. Is it an angry question? Perhaps. Does it describe the true, unmasked reality of death and dying? Yes. What else is death, really, except utter forsakenness by God, or with Tillich, estrangement from the Ground of our being?

There is probably another time and place in caring for the dying to ask, "Why is this all so?" Of course, we know, death is the "wages of sin," and all that. Nevertheless, its underlying sting is very real and to experience death's meaning at its core is as honest as it gets.

What is striking, however, in the Lazarus story is that Mary does not shrink from asking of Jesus the question of "Why were you absent when we needed you?" From her, there is no glossing over the seriousness of the honest encounter.

In all spiritual care of the dying, it is the question many persons of faith spend their lifetimes preparing to give answer and, sometimes, the best answer is born in patient, quiet listening, refusing to fill in easier answers before awesome questions have yet had their full say.

6. The First Answer: the Divine Solidarity

"Jesus began to weep" (John 11: 35). There are, as most readers know, thousands of words in recent literature written about those who are most beneficial to the grieving and the dying. They are those who enter into

solidarity with those who mourn and share in their experience of pain and sorrow. From Rabbi Harold Kushner's *WHEN BAD THINGS HAPPEN TO GOOD PEOPLE* to many other salutary works about human caring, it bears repeating that the most meaningful helping comes in the form of genuine empathy. [Harold S. Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*. (New York, Schocken Books, 1981)]

What is less common, although it, too, is a theme in contemporary theological literature, is the portrayal of God who weeps with those who mourn. Juergen Moltmann's *THE CRUCIFIED GOD* has become something of a classic study of the tradition known as the theology of the cross among other great works on the subject. [Juergen Moltmann, *The Crucified God*. (New York: Harper & Row, 1973)]

Nevertheless, the view of God as one who suffers our pain and our dying with us, is an incredible insight and one which is born in the words from the shortest verse in the Bible: "Jesus wept."

Yet, as comforting as the notion is that even Jesus shared our human fate of grieving and joined the rest of the human race as an empathic friend, still leaves us in our tears and sorrows, and, as yet, without hope. It is not so strange that in response to Jesus' own tears in the Lazarus story, his critics still complained, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" (11: 37).

7. The Second Answer: Death's Defeat...

"Take away the stone" (John 11: 39). Of course, in the confessing Christian community, that Jesus can take away gravestones goes right to the core of our Easter faith.

What is often overlooked among us is the Lenten solidarity with a broken and dying world which gives to Jesus the authority to call out the dead to life again. That is why simplistic Easter proclamation to the dying and the grieving without having gone the distance of being fully present with those who mourn can readily fall on deaf ears.

Still, the Easter Promise when it is compassionately administered, is precisely the Promise needed and there is no way, even under the conditions of hospice care, Christians can ignore the grand acclamation, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die" (John 11: 25).

What is so powerful about the Easter faith is that it is precisely because it sounds a Promise that hefty, death's defeated in Christ, which enables confessing Christians to go the distance with compassionate care for those who mourn.

Robert Bertram's poem, "Pardon My Dying: A Sequel to Ash Wednesday," captures why, with a Promise as strong as is Easter's, Christians can enter the nighttime of their dying and their grieving as boldly as they do. The exchange in the poem is between a husband and a wife, both beloved to the other, where the last things which need to get said are getting said. The wife asks one more favor of her husband, that he pardon her of her dying:

"All right," said he, "you win. What is there to forgive?" "Forgive my dying. Pardon this damned mortality."

"Your dying? Pardon that? But girl," said he, "that's

something you can't help. Dying is...only natural."

"No, it's not natural at all," she said. "Life wasn't meant to die. Neither were we. We both know that. We've known that ever since we've known of Easter. Death isn't natural at all. It's a downright dirty, dastardly, demeaning defeat. We're not meant to 'accept' it, not even with dignity. We're meant to trump it, as we shall."

"But then," said he, "if death is conquered anyway, if we outlast it (and we shall) why do you still think dying needs forgiving?"

"Does that," she asked, "disturb you so, for me to say that death is what we've brought upon ourselves, what we've got coming to us? Does that strike you as morbid, despite the fact that I'm not afraid? Despite the fact that it's my hope and not my fear which frees me to admit the shame of dying, do you see that as merely clinical escape? Come, Adam, can't you deal with that? I believe you can."

"I wouldn't say," said he, "that it is morbid. Still, it does seem-how shall I say?-a bit too self-important for us to take credit for so vast a thing as death. Are we, for all our guilt, really that influential?"

"That does seem hard to believe," she said, "unless we manage first to believe that God is interested enough to judge because he's still more interested in resurrecting and forgiving. For him to let us die is judgment, not contempt. And there's a difference. Ignore us? That he never does. But deal with us he does. That important are we all."

"But then," said Adam, "why do you ask now to be forgiven by me? Forgiveness, yes. But why from me? I'm not the one who judges you."

"But you're the one I hurt. For, Adam, dear, I do hurt you by dying. You know I do. It hurts me, too, of course. Death hurts even my vanity. Death isn't pretty and, as you know, I've always liked being pretty. But worse than that by far, it hurts to have to liquidate the fondest love affair that any wife could want. It's for that, for interrupting that, that I do say I'm sorry."

[Robert W. Bertram, "Pardon My Dying: A Sequel to Ash Wednesday." (St. Louis: The Crossings Community, 1972), https://crossings.org/archive/bob/pardon_my_dying-1972.shtml]

When death's defeated in the Promise, the things between us which need to happen most can be entered into without fear. Reconciliation, forgiveness, restoration all presuppose Easter because with ultimate hope, all things matter.

8. The Third Answer: Death's Defeat through a Death

"Christ the Life of all the Living, Christ the Death of Death, Our Foe." It was over a decade ago when my brother and his family were involved in a fatal car accident outside Buffalo, NY where they were headed for vacation. My niece, 10 years old at the time, was killed. My brother, his wife, and my nephew were terribly injured but survived. As I entered my brother's hospital room all I could say was, "I don't have the words. All we have is a God who had a child who died,

too."

As the Christian community seeks to minister to the dying and those who grieve around them, it is important to remember what we have. Words are often far too feeble a thing to bear the reality of what is going on. All we have is a God who had a child who died, too.

Yes, of course the Father does something about it. He doesn't abide his child's death. Instead, God pulls off Easter, for his child and for all found in that child. But Easter does not come cheaply or easily. It is born in tears.

As I began this essay, I used a poem by Dietrich Bonhoeffer which has always struck me as what Christians have among all the human family. Yes, it presupposes that God's love and forgiveness are meant to reach all for the sake of God's Son. The divine love's universal embrace stands, for me, in the realm of a mystery, the mystery of redemption, and none of us has the wisdom to play God in the face of the vastness of death and new life. What is striking about the poem, even in its meaning for those who were Bonhoeffer's enemies, is that there is only one distinction between Christians and all others, as all finally call upon God. Christians are those who stand by God in the hour of his grieving, as if the Body of Christ in the world is comprised of those who join God as God empties himself in the person of his Son who gives up his life redemptively for the salvation of the world.

It is a good picture to keep in mind as Christians seek to enter the world of hospice with its dying and its grieving: that God is already there in the person of his Son, bearing up the tears and sorrow and pain and the dying we find around us.

9. Meanings

It is likely that hospice care will become the preferred context for the nation's dying. As noted above, it already embraces in its care one in three Americans today with its numbers growing steadily.

Accredited hospice care is what it is: society's answer to better approaches in caring for the terminally ill. In more classic Lutheran language, it is, with all its ambiguities, a "kingdom on the left" phenomenon. In that sense, it is part of God's creative, continuing care for God's fallen-but-yet-still-loved creation. Hospice brings to bear some of the best palliative care for the dying the secular has to offer.

Yet, even with its spiritual overtones, hospice in itself is not a conveyor of the Promise. That witness needs to come from the outside, from among the confessing Christian community. As discussed above, however, Christians must be prepared to enter the hospice context humbly, with compassion and a willingness to actively listen, and with a caring heart which discerns deeply the time for the Promise.

Hospice can provide a new context for the church's mission today. Indeed, it ought to. There are few opportunities better suited for the Promise to be administered than with those at the end of their lives. But the calling will be for an uncommon sensitivity to the needs of the dying and the grieving. Establishing relationships of trust will be the watchword for effective ministry.

Typically hospices will be open to the Christian community as long as trust is won. The religious who come to hospice with hidden agendas will not last long.

Patients who experience manipulation rather than someone truly interested in their personhoods will not abide false friends for very long. Time is of the essence for them. There is an urgency felt by the dying for whom illusions of immortality have long past. Still, inherent in the human soul is a hunger for hope found only in God. Augustine's observation still applies: "Thou hast made us for Thyself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee."

Churches can approach hospice in a variety of ways. Chaplains are always interested in connecting patients in their care with the pastoral care structures of a patient's faith community. Oftentimes that means welcoming back the many who had fallen through the cracks over the years. Now is the time. Accredited hospice programs are extremely eager to find volunteers willing to be trained to bring their many gifts to the side of the dying. Hospice volunteering takes a special breed of people. Persons who are secure in their Christian faith make excellent hospice volunteers. The blessing, of course, is that those volunteers will bring back to their faith communities a wisdom and a growth which will only strengthen their local churches, having lived the questions of the dying and sought to minister to them.

Hospice ministry is among the new shapes of the culture. If anybody ought to be there, the confessing Christian community in intentional mission to the terminally ill needs to be at the top of the list.

Sin and Forgiveness: How Bad the First One, How Good the Second?

Friends,

Marie here. There seems to be no significant change in Ed's health. Stronger headache medications make that pain almost go away. Double vision and weakness persist. Several of you have told him he could take a rest from these postings for a while. He agrees with that, so there may be a pause if the health doesn't improve. But in our morning devotions yesterday, we came across the following from one of Luther's sermons on John 6-8, as translated in the book Day by Day We Magnify Thee. Luther's equation here (Kingdom of God = Forgiveness of Sins) has been Ed's drumbeat for a good long while, as many of you know, especially among our friends in missiology. His thesis is Kingdom of God equals God's regime change with sinners. That happened in Christ, and it equals forgiveness of sins. So when he heard me read Brother Martin's selection below, you can imagine how he brightened up. His latest article on this theme is in the August 2006 issue (33:4) of the journal Currents in Theology and Mission, entitled: "A Second Look at the Gospel of Mark – Midway in the Year of Mark." In a day or two it should be available on the Crossings website: <www.crossings.org> Click on "Works by EHS" and scroll down to this title.

Luther says: "The Kingdom of Christ does not consist in condemnation. 'I have not come to condemn but to forgive sins. For no one can enter My Kingdom unless his sins are forgiven. My Kingdom is not barren. All who are called and have entered it

are sinners. And as they are sinners they cannot live without forgiveness of their sins.'

"Thus, none but sinners can enter the Kingdom. Such is the Kingdom of Christ. He admits no saint, He sweeps them all out. And if anyone wants to be a saint, He thrusts him out of His Church. But if sinners enter His Kingdom they do not remain sinners. He spreads his cloak over them, saying, 'If you have fallen into sin, I forgive you and cover your sin.' It is true that sin is present, but the Lord of this Kingdom will not look upon it. He rather covers it over, forgives it and does not count it against you. Thus you are made a living saint and a true member of Christ."

That reminded Ed of correspondence that passed between Ed and a dear Roman Catholic brother, a frontline missiologist, this past August. Perhaps it might be helpful to you too.

Peace & Joy!

Marie

Letter to Ed: *I wonder if resistance to seeing the Gospel as a message about "forgiveness" doesn't stem from an inadequate view of what forgiveness means. The sin Jesus comes to forgive is not disobedience to formal statutory law but blindness to our true state and our need for God. I wish I knew better the etymology of "forgiveness," because I think part of our resistance to seeing forgiveness as a constitutive element of the Gospel lies in reading the word in univocally juridical terms. [Ed: even worse, moralistic terms.] We rebel against that, but may be missing its deeper dimensions just as we typically forget the deeper resonances of being blind or lost*

or missing the mark that stand behind the Greek word *harmartia*. Whaddya think? Can you do a quick exegesis of “forgiveness” for a struggling Roman?

Ed's reply:

Re: Forgiveness.

Rather than “exegesis,” my first thoughts go to the two traditions in which you and I grew up.

Substantively methinks you're absolutely on target about the “being blind or lost or missing the mark” getting subverted when it comes to sin, and thus forgiveness of sin reduced to small change.

My hunch is that the RC ethos in which y'all grew up, esp. such practices as your regular presence at the confessional booth (and pastoral conversation thereunto appertaining), might well have been more formative for the concept of sin y'all interiorized (and also the forgiveness thereof) than the formal instruction you may have received from the Baltimore catechism. And possibly that catechism – I don't know what it really says – may just have confirmed that laundry-list concept of sin. Namely, that sins were the rule-infringements that you recited to the confessor, the naughty thoughts, deeds, and words you could remember (or fabricate) from the past week. And forgiveness – at least, subliminally understood – amounted to wiping away the blemish of those bad marks on one's religious report card. Such a notion of sin as naughty stuff is, as you say, a long way from “being blind or lost or missing the mark.” In other words, sin was viewed as the stuff of peccadillos – serious, but not a biggie. Rather a collection of “littlies.”

We Lutherans were catechized to see sin as just ONE thing: breaking the first commandment. Not “fearing, loving, or

trusting God above all things” as Blessed Martin told us in his one-sentence explanation of that first decalog word in his Small Catechism. All of the nine subsequent commandments are but repeat performances of numero uno in nine specific cases. So we were taught. [Whether we interiorized it or not was another thing.] Thus ML begins his “What does this mean?” for each of the remaining nine with “We should fear and love God, so that we may . . .” do what the two affirmative commandments – #3&4 in our numeration – call for and NOT do what the remaining 7 prohibit. But sin is ALWAYS first commandment stuff, analogous to your words from the Scriptures –BIG words – “being blind or lost or missing the mark.”

[This is not to say that we Lutherans escaped the peccadillo notion either. First of all it’s very much the fabric of American religion, and we all breathed that willy-nilly as well. But there are also theological reasons for being drawn in that direction. To wit, the old Adam in us also liked to minimize sin – and we also learned that – to make it “manageable.” Which it is not, when understood as “being blind or lost or missing the mark.” “Mint and dill and cummin-tithing” stuff, but NOT the biggies.]

If we wanted to go deeper, Luther’s Large Catechism on the First Commandment was perfectly clear and articulated the depth of first-commandment breaking. [The Large Catechism was intended for the clergy who, though many of them grads of Wittenberg Univ, were often still stuck in the sin = peccadillo paradigm.]

The classic controversy twixt the medieval scholastic tradition [largely peccadillo-ism, the Reformers thought, and as folks themselves catechized/educated that way, they were insiders to the tradition] and the Lutheran crowd on both terms – sin and forgiveness of sins – comes when you lay side-by-side the

Augsburg Confession, the Confutatio Pontifica of 1530-31, and then Melanchthon's reponse to the Confutatio with his Apologia [defense] of the Augsburg Confession.

The whole controversy focuses in AC II, Confutatio II and Apologia II on original sin as the core malady of the human race, and then AC IV, Confutatio IV, and Apologia IV as the Christic remedy thereof. The AC/Apologia caption to Article Four is Justification. But the substance – and the Reformers' rhetoric – is all about the "Work of Christ as Forgiveness of Sin." To wit, healing the first-commandment-breaker's malady of "being blind or lost or missing the mark." I.e, big stuff, not peccadillos. And that's where sola fide comes in. The only way to become a forgiven sinner is to trust Christ's word that we are.

When I taught Reformation era theology at the seminary, students had in hand the AC, the Confutatio, and the Apology. We proceeded article by article with all three texts side-by-side. We were eavesdropping on the 16th century disputants—and then stopping again and again to ask ourselves: What's the real debate about at this point? What's at stake? What's gained or lost if AC/Apology has it right? If the Confutators have it right? What are the warrants invoked as the argument proceeds? It was a fun way to do historical theology. And we soon saw that controversy was still going on, not just between you folks and us folks (see below), but within our own Lutheran churches.

Come to think of it, that's also near the center of my ongoing "dialogue" with your dear friends who wrote the current best-seller in missiology, Constants in Context. My two-part review of that book is at <https://crossings.org/thursday/2005/thur070705.shtml> and <https://crossings.org/thursday/2005/thur071405.shtml>

Under separate cover (snail mail) I've sent you today an article of mine just published by CURRENTS IN THEOLOGY AND MISSION. Although I don't mention their names, it is really my next volley to the Constants in Context authors on what the Kingdom of God is and isn't. I waltz my way through the Kingdom texts in the pericopes of the remaining half of this lectionary year, the Year of Mark.

My real gritch against Constants/Context is that they never address the malady of "being blind or lost or missing the mark" as anything important for mission.

Back to the Augsburg Confession Article II. Here's how sin is described: sinners "are without fear of God, are without trust in God, and are concupiscent." [And here concupiscent = curved back into oneself and into one's own agenda. If that's not "missing the mark," what is?]

Sin how bad? Forgiveness how good? I referred above to the Augsburg/Confutation standoff as persisting today, also within Lutheranism. Here's an item from almost 50 years ago, during my first years of teaching at Valparaiso University. Ted Hesburgh, legendary president of Notre Dame University, just 40 miles away from us, and our own university president, equally notorious in our circles but not so well known in yours, O.P. Kretzmann, arranged to have some home-and-home dialogue between their respective theology departments. And this was a couple years before Vatican II! Bob Bertram was chair of our department, Bob Pelton, C.S.C. (I think) was chair at Notre Dame. The first dialogue topic was sin. Pelton started out telling us what your tradition said about sin. Bertram then trotted out Augsburg Article II with Apology Article II's expansion thereof. I can still see and hear Pelton's first response, "Bob, it can't be that bad, can it?" And I can almost as clearly hear Bob Bertram's response, "If it were not that

bad, Bob, why did it take the crucifixion of God's own Son to get sinners forgiven?" That's how bad sin is. That's how good forgiveness is.

Reply to Ed: *Lieber Edward, Your response is a real treasure trove, for which, unbounded thanks.*

Mission Impossible?

Colleagues:

Asked many weeks ago to preach for a Mission Festival at two rural congregations in southern Illinois this coming weekend, Ed planned (as is his wont) to base the sermon on the gospel prescribed for the day in the Revised Common Lectionary. It was a bit of a jolt for him to discover the incongruity of that Sunday's gospel with a Mission Festival. So he thought of the title above. The text is Mark 10: 2-16. The first part shows the Pharisees trying to stump Jesus by asking about the lawfulness of divorce. Moses allowed men to divorce wives if they put it in writing, they told Jesus. Jesus replies that Moses wrote that because of their hardness of heart. But it wasn't that way from the beginning. After the Pharisees left Jesus had more words about divorce for his disciples, saying whoever divorces a spouse is involved in adultery.

But suddenly the scene changes, and the second half of the pericope shows Jesus welcoming little children and blessing them, fussing mightily at the disciples who had tried to shoo them away. These children, Jesus said as he took them in his arms (you can just imagine him with several of them on his lap), are right smack in the middle of God's new regime.

So what does any of that have to do with Christian mission?

It didn't take a lot of study (thanks, Holy Spirit) to realize there's good material there after all. What follows is the sermon he typed with his impaired vision when he thought he could still preach it himself. Given his present condition, of which you've probably seen my recent update, that's no longer possible. But it might be useful instead as a Thursday Theology posting.

Peace & Joy!

Marie

How can you get to a Festival for Christian Mission from this text?

MISSION?

IMPOSSIBLE!

But maybe not.

In John's Gospel there is a mission command from Jesus right at the end of his book. It comes on Easter Sunday evening when the disciples are all behind locked doors for fear. Jesus tells them: As the Father sent me, so I send you.

The Father sent Jesus into the world of the first paragraph of this Markan text in order to do the job of the second paragraph, namely, to get all of us onto Jesus' lap.

Yes, for us grown-ups that's childish sounding. But even we goldie oldies can remember our good feelings when it happened to us years ago.

And especially in John's Gospel, being on Jesus' lap is even better still. For John often locates Jesus on the Father's lap. Many times Jesus himself says that he's "in the bosom of the Father." Yes, father with a bosom. Well, if God is holding Jesus like this, then Jesus must be on the Father's lap. And if we then get onto Jesus' lap, look where we're sitting!

Christ's mission is to help people move from the first paragraph of this text to the second. Jesus says to us (in his lap): Well, that's your mission too. As the Father sent me to get you onto my lap, I send you to get other folks who are still stuck out there someplace onto my lap alongside of you. And in those words on Easter Sunday evening in John's Gospel, Jesus says how such a transfer happens. "If and when you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven. If you don't do it, it won't happen."

Clearly the folks outside there are sinners. To get them to become forgiven sinners is to put them into Jesus' lap. To help them stay there is what Christian faith is all about: letting Jesus hang on to you – maybe even hanging onto Jesus with your own hands, especially since you know who's hanging on to him, whose lap he's on.

And for that you don't have to go to Africa or Asia. Wherever paragraph one is happening, that's a mission field. This county, your town, is a mission field. At this very moment the four walls of this church are the borders of a mission field. If sinners walked through that door into church this morning, then we are a mission field. I know of at least one who walked into church like that, your preacher. Marie and I have been protected from divorce now for half a century, but we know it in our families: two of my brothers, one of her sisters.

And in this first paragraph of the text, it doesn't even need

to get to divorce, Jesus says: We can be suffering from hardness of heart – that simply means NOT forgiving – and we all know what that is, maybe even with the person you're sitting next to in the pew.

We've got a mailman up in St. Louis whose marriage is in trouble. He's told us. There happen to be three retired ELCA pastors in our condo bldg. He sees the mail we get. He knows we're preacher-types. So he's talked to at least two of us when we happen to meet him by the mailboxes. Both he and his wife are Christians and want to stay that way. "Forgiveness" is the hardest part, he says. "I know that's the answer, but it's so tough."

This is a tough text about divorce. True. But divorce is not some super sin. It's just a sharp example of God's old creation falling apart. That's why God sent Moses with the emergency legislation about it. Sometimes folks haven't noticed that Moses with his rules for divorce was sent as God's agent for temporary relief. Moses' rules for divorce are not contradicting God's blueprint for marriage way back there in the beginning in Genesis. Not at all. The original blueprints came with the specs for non-sinners. When you get sinners into the world it won't always work. So God's Moses is authorized BY GOD to cope with the new situation. Don't cure it, just make it possible to carry on without even more chaos and hatred, or even more people killing each other.

So what's the "IT" that Moses doesn't cure? The deeper diagnosis that Jesus himself points out. The hardness of hearts.

Divorce is surface symptom.

Heart-disease, thinking "I won't forgive – or, even though I want to, I can't" – is the deeper sickness.

And the heart in Bible language is the God-box, God's turf within us. That's an even deeper diagnosis of sickness than just having an unforgiving heart: a heart that's hard toward my spouse – or toward anybody else.

That's a God-sclerosis, and none of us can fix our own God-sclerosis.

There is a choice in the matter. Regularly the NT says: "If you choose to live by unforgiveness with your fellow-sinner, then you are inviting me (God) to act the same way with you." In the Bible that's called Hell. Who can rescue us from such a pronouncement?

You know what it took to get US into Jesus' lap. It was Jesus himself who died and rose again for us. He rescued the hard-hearted from our God-sclerosis (and remember, that's every one of us who has ever said – or is saying it right now – "It's so hard to forgive").

Climbing onto Jesus' lap is listening to his word of forgiveness and trusting it. We all know that forgiveness is a word of life, in contrast to the death that always happens when you don't forgive. If you admit that you are a sinner, then it's just plain stupid NOT to grab onto God's forgiveness for yourself and to pass it on to the folks who sin against you. We probably often don't think what we're saying in the Lord's Prayer: Forgive us our sins, AS we forgive those who sin against us. We're saying: God, the alternative is Hell. Don't deal with us THAT way. Crack open our hearts so we don't live that way either with the folks near and dear to us. Keep us in Jesus' lap.

Now back into the real world where divorces happen, where Moses' rules apply. Where hardness of heart keeps popping up – also in me and in my spouse, and our kids, etc.

Well, one thing at least is different, when we've come this far. We've got a new location for living out our marriage – and for other things we do or say. We're managing our lives from Jesus' lap.

And when you're in Jesus' lap, what two parts of the two of you are almost touching? The two hearts! I can't give you the specs for your marriage. Finally, that's not my job. Mine is to get the specs for my own. But you can do it for yourself – and if you need help, check with the fellow Christian you're married to, to see if you get similar messages. Since you are "one flesh" with Christ's heart pounding just inches away, the new reality is "one heart." Sounds like one conversation. I know it's maybe embarrassing for grown-ups to talk about being in someone's lap, but if Jesus is not ashamed to say that he (as a grown man) was sitting in the Father's lap, why should we?

There may still be turmoil in the marriage, but if hard hearts have been replaced, that's a quantum leap away from the first paragraph of today's Bible text.

Oh, yes, almost forgot.

It's Mission Festival.

I bet you could add the last couple paragraphs to this sermon yourself and do the mission part.

1. The mission field is anyplace that looks like the first paragraph of today's text.
2. Christ's mission – ours too – is to get people back in the Father's lap by getting them to sit on Christ's lap. Remember what happened there: HE BLESSED THEM. "Blessed" in the Bible means to be put back in the right place. He didn't give the kiddies candy. He got them back to the Father from whom they had strayed far, far away.

Wherever folks are far away from the one Jesus called Father, there's the mission field. We've seen that it's right inside the place where we are this morning. And it goes to the four corners of the earth.

There is no place that is NOT a mission field on the face of the earth. That goes especially also for our country – which is so full of religion.

The issue is not: Are people religious? Nor even: do they call themselves Christian? But listen to how they talk, how they act. Do they show that they are sitting on Jesus' lap? That's the simple dipstick.

And if not, they too are mission field. And if you are somewhere near and they can hear you – and they are willing to hear you – tell them what we just went through these past 20 minutes. You may be inclined to say: What, ME a missionary! No way! But hang on a second.

Marie and I were in Ethiopia 11 years ago as ELCA global mission volunteers. There we learned that everybody in the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (it's a Lutheran church) knows this: If you're baptized you're a missionary. Who's the best person to help someone get onto Jesus' lap? Someone who's already sitting there. As the Father sent me, so I send you.

Mission is that simple. But you've got to start doing it at home to really get hooked on it, and then you'll be energized to pitch in to make it happen all over the world. It happened that in all the places where we were in our years as global mission volunteers, we rarely had the opportunity to talk to non-Christians. But we found that our fellow-Christians in the congregations were the ones in need. Just as you here in your own county, or on the farm, may be surrounded by fellow-

Christians, but you might be able to see that they are the ones in need. With your help, Jesus may be able to pick them up, too, and bless them.

Remember how simple the specs are: Christian mission moves folks from the first paragraph of this text to the second paragraph: away from hard-heartedness into the lap of Jesus. When it's happened to you, you can offer it to others. That's Christ's mission strategy for the whole world. As the Father sent Jesus, so Jesus sends us.

Can Rome be Home? Yes and No Answers from 2 Canadian Anglicans.

Colleagues,

[Marie here. Ed's pretty sick. He's had erratic blood sugars, headache, nausea, developing into double vision and weakness. Blood tests, CAT scan, ophthalmological examination for intraocular pressure are all normal. No one knows what's up. Duration now 12 days. Will see a neuroophthalmologist, but not for another 8 days. And with no diagnosis, there's no treatment. Suggestions welcome. Ed says: Even before that, you know what to do. Ed had this one put together before he got sick.]

A handful of Canadians get these ThTh postings. Some must even read them, for they respond now and again. Wayne Holst, who has supplied ThTh posts of his own in the past, told me the other day about the recent move to Rome by well-known Canadian Anglican Ian Hunter. I downloaded

Hunter's story.

From what I've learned, Ian Hunter is Professor Emeritus in the Faculty of Law at Western University in London, Ontario. He has written a biography of Malcolm Muggeridge, and a number of newspaper articles for national papers. One source told me: "His conversion from Anglicanism to Catholicism won't have the effect John Henry Newman's did in 1845—when 150 Anglican clerics followed Newman to Rome—though in Hunter's circles he would cause ripples."

The only other person I know in Canadian Anglicanism—and a ThTh reader—is Archdeacon Michael E. Averyt, Diocese of Saskatchewan. I asked him to give me—and also to you on the listserve—his evaluation of Hunter's move and his "apologia pro vita sua" for why he did so. [Today happens to be the Eve of St. Michael's and All Angels, so hearing from a Michael today is liturgically in order. Why not read the pericope for the day as well? It's proper too, Rev. 12:1-7, the christological cornerstone of that whole bizarre book. Clue: "Mi-cha-el" is a riddle question, expressed in Hebrew: "Who is like God?" The persecuted believers addressed in Revelation knew the One-Word answer to that code-word question. To wit, Whoever that was who threw out the accuser of sinners before the heavenly judge.]

Herewith Hunter's article and then Averyt's thoughts about it.

Peace & Joy!

Ed Schroeder

This Summer, I Swam the Tiber **by Ian Hunter**

[This article first appeared in the September 2006 issue of Catholic Insight.]

This summer I swam the Tiber. Not literally, of course – but theologically, spiritually. I was received into the full communion of the Roman Catholic Church.

Why?

Well, all such stories are long ones, and just as aspects of one's human birth remain mysterious, so also do aspects of one's spiritual rebirth, perhaps opaque beyond human explanation. One does not readily find language appropriate to such experiences. But here is what I know.

In terms of the mechanics, since last year I have taken instruction from a discerning and compassionate priest, to whom I owe much.

As a result of his instruction, and a growing personal conviction that there is no viable Protestant alternative, I am returning – definitely not to the religion of my father (a Calvinist Presbyterian) – but to the religion of my father's fathers.

Who can relate all that impels such a step? Three factors for sure: Rome's authority, historicity, and universality. But more even than these considerations, I have come to believe not just that the truth is to be found within Rome but – something quite different – that in a unique way, the truth is Rome. Incidentally, from within Rome's embrace I do not expect modernity to appear any more comely, but perhaps more bearable.

Unlike much of Protestantism, Rome is innately suspicious of

feelings and enthusiasms; still, I can report that my predominant feeling was of a home-coming, of responding to a bell I had long heard toll, of taking my place at a table that had long been set, of finding spiritual companionship among those unashamed to profess the faith of the fathers.

Fifty years after his conversion to Rome, Maurice Baring wrote that it was the single decision about which he had experienced never a moment's regret. I pray that it may be so for me.

I leave the church of my adulthood – the Anglican Church – with mixed emotions; the Anglican ideal, which sought to incorporate the best of the Reformation into Catholicism, still seems to me a worthy – if today largely unnecessary – goal.

Spiritually, I have been nourished by Anglican liturgy, particularly the Book of Common Prayer which, alas, Anglicans have almost completely abandoned. The trouble is that the more one becomes immersed in the Book of Common Prayer, its 39 Articles, its history, liturgy, and theology, the more inexorably one is led to Rome. This is why John Henry Newman memorably described Anglicanism as “.the halfway-house on the road to Rome”.

I loved, too, the splendid Anglican hymnody, and would be sorry to leave it had it not today been “revised” almost beyond recognition.

I leave with nothing but contempt for what passes for Anglican “leadership”, particularly its Bishops, and many of its clerics, those without seeming conviction about matters of faith or doctrine, although erupting regularly with predictable pronouncements about a handful of social issues; clergy without eloquence or spine when it comes to defending the Christian faith, pathetic creatures, really, who have depleted their spiritual patrimony in the vain hope of looking progressive. By

contrast, I have noticed that Rome does not alter its message to suit shifting fashions, nor tailor its doctrine, however persistent or clamorous the public outcry against it may be.

I discovered too that I had grown to believe that only Rome can trace a direct line to the church's rock, St. Peter. It was to St. Peter, after all, and to his descendants, that our Lord promised that the gates of hell would not prevail. Against most contemporary churches, the gates of Hell seem to be prevailing very well.

When Christians say (in the Nicene Creed) that they believe in ".one, holy, catholic and apostolic church", they are making apostolicity a cornerstone of belief. I no longer comprehend how denominations which have severed themselves from the apostolic succession they profess, manage to recite the creed. Nor is this some arcane objection: if the Anglican experience teaches anything, it is that a Church cut off from the apostolic succession, without a real (not a "Let's Pretend") hierarchy, and without the sacred magisterium to guard against heresy, cannot be expected either to preserve or to proclaim the faith once delivered to the saints. Only the Roman Catholic Church, the repository of teaching and traditions that date to our Lord's first disciples, ".the unmoved spectator of the thousand phases and fashions that have passed over our restless world" (Ronald Knox's phrase), has the guts, the inner wherewithal, to survive. Rome's claim to speak with authority in matters of faith and morals is the last refuge, or so I now believe, against the all-corrosive acid of postmodernism.

"Rome, sweet Rome, be you never [Ed. should that be "ever"?] so sinful, there's no place like Rome". So, mockingly, wrote the wisest man I ever knew, Malcolm Muggeridge. A few years later, on November 27, 1982 to be exact, and nearly 80 years old, Muggeridge knelt and was received into the Catholic Church.

When I asked him why, he said: "The day will come, dear boy, when you must decide whether to die within the church or outside the church. I have decided to die within the Church." A few years later, he did. And so may I, I pray, when the silence of eternity beckons.

That doughty old warrior, Hilaire Belloc, once wrote to a friend that the Catholic Church was like a landfall at sea, at first glimpsed hazily and only through the mist: ".but the nearer it is seen, the more it is real, the less imaginary: the more direct and external its voice, the more indisputable its representative character . The metaphor is not that men fall in love with it: the metaphor is that they discover home. 'This was what I long sought', they say. 'This was my need'."

I am conscious of a special debt that I owe Catholics, some virtually unknown to me, who have told me that they had prayed for this day. Such prayers flood the universe with light. I also acknowledge a Christian reading group to which I have long belonged; since all of us admire C. S. Lewis and since none of us is getting younger, we call ourselves "The Wrinklins". In those long droughts when my own Church provided little or no spiritual nourishment ("The hungry sheep look up and are not fed", I used to mutter through clenched teeth on innumerable Sunday mornings), I was invariably fed by these – my Christian brothers.

But above all, first, last, and always, Deo gratias.
Ian Hunter

A Response to 'This Summer, I Swam the Tiber'

There are many legitimate reasons for leaving the Anglican Church and being received into the Church of Rome. I doubt that

a week-if not a day-goes by without my considering that action, and open letters such as this one keep me from hiding from the question as to why I, a conservative Anglo-Catholic churchman, continue sunning myself on the banks of the Thames with its garbage polluted waters. But if I do decide to brave the Tiber, I want to be sure it is for the correct reasons.

Mr. Hunter raises several issues in his open letter explaining why he has left the Anglican Communion and been received into the Church of Rome. Obviously much thought has gone into this decision, although the logic is not always clear in his statement.

There are two separate concerns. The first is the decision to leave one ecclesiastical body; the second is to be received into another. One might assume the reasoning behind the two decisions would be mirrored in the two, but such is not the case.

The apparent cause for leaving the Anglican communion has to do with 'what passes for Anglican "leadership"...those without seeming conviction about matters of faith or doctrine...clergy without eloquence or spine when it comes to defending the Christian faith...in the vain hope of looking progressive.' He continues with the claim that 'Rome does not alter its message to suit shifting fashions, nor tailor its doctrine, however persistent or clamorous the public outcry against it may be.' That may indeed be his experience of Rome, but a cursory examination of church history as reported by such 'conservative' Roman Catholic historians as Eamon Duffy should disabuse him of that fiction. It is a temptation at this point to engage in some hearty Rome-bashing by citing specific examples, but that is neither appropriate nor helpful, and only one without sin dare cast a stone. What is of concern here is that Mr. Hunter seems to be looking for a perfect institution,

whose clergy and leadership are perfectly orthodox in faith, morals, and conduct. As long as there are human beings involved in the institution, this is an impossibility, and one wonders what will happen when Mr. Hunter discovers this in his own experience.

Anglicanism, like Rome, condemns the Donatist heresy: the efficacy of the proclamation of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments according to the Gospel is not hindered by the unworthiness of its ministers, and in that condemnation both Communion recognize the need for this to be clearly stated, because each knows their clergy to be fallible, human beings. Perhaps what really concerns Mr. Hunter is that Rome has a more effective and efficient way of dealing with errant clergy, whereas the Anglican machinery for exercising discipline in such matters has become so rusty with disuse as to be unusable-a legitimate point.

Lack of discipline may be the reason for leaving Canterbury, but the reason Mr. Hunter opts for Rome is its 'authority, historicity, and universality...Rome is Truth.' 'Only Rome can trace a direct line to the church's rock, St. Peter.' Again, we have an expression of the desire for the perfect institution. Just what is that direct line? A hand on pate succession? An institutional continuity? A consistent apostolicity of teaching? Again, a study of history will demonstrate the logical difficulties here in making such a claim.

It is curious that nowhere in his letter does Mr. Hunter state that the Anglican Church in its formularies (the Book of Common Prayer or the Articles of Religion) has abandoned or contradicted the faith. In fact he speaks positively about them as leading 'inexorably' to Rome. They may lead one to the catholic faith, but to think they lead to Roman Catholicism is erroneous, as may be seen in the Article relevant to this

discussion.

Article XIX of the XXXIX Articles of Religion carefully does not bind the visible church to any ecclesial body, institution, or polity: 'The visible Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men, in the which the pure Word of God is preached and the Sacraments be duly ministered according to Christ's ordinance in all things that of necessity are requisite to the same.' In other words, the visible Church is dynamic, it comes into being as a result of a particular activity, viz. when the Gospel is proclaimed and heard and when the Sacraments administered and received according to that Gospel. The operative authority behind this activity is the promise and command of Christ, who chooses to work through the Holy Spirit in the proclaimed word and the administered Sacraments.

I wonder if the authors of this article were thinking about the story of Moses and the seventy elders. Two didn't show up for their ordination service, but God's Spirit fell on them anyway. Anglicans admit that God might very well be working in other ecclesial bodies with different polities and formularies than its own-and working just as effectively 'outside the camp' as within. This is not simple charity, but a theological principle. Like the Eastern Orthodox Churches, we can state with confidence in certain instances that 'This is church,' but we are more reticent to say of others, 'This is not church.' Even conservatives in present day Rome are reluctant to repeat baldly the claims of the Medieval Church that outside of the church which has the successor of Peter as its head there is no salvation. The church's rock is Christ, not St. Peter: Truth is Jesus, not Rome. The church does not exist by the 'authority, historicity or universality' of an institution, but by virtue of our Lord's promise attached to the proclamation of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments. Unless Mr. Hunter can demonstrate that the Anglican Church does not in its

polity and official teaching proclaim the Gospel in its purity and rightly administer the Sacraments and therefore unable to witness to the Truth, there is no reason to swim the Tiber because 'Truth is Rome'. Scholars tell us that several forms of church polity can be identified in the New Testament. Who can say definitively that only one is *de Deo*, and the others are false? At the first council, recorded in the Book of Acts, it was St. James that presided, not St. Peter, and the resolution in the conflict between Ss. Peter and Paul in the latter's favour puts paid to any concept of Petrine infallibility.

In summary: to leave a communion in search of a perfect leadership and clergy is to doom oneself to a never ending search and inevitable disappointment, if not despair. To tie the authority and efficacy of the Gospel to a particular polity or institution or anything less than the very promise of Christ is to construct an idol: our faith is in Christ, not an ecclesiastical institution.

What then would be legitimate reasons for leaving the Anglican Communion? Certainly official repudiation of its understanding of the Gospel as outlined in its formularies would be grounds to leave (assuming those formularies to be true expressions of the Gospel). Yes, there are those in its hierarchy who do contradict its teachings, but that does not of itself destroy the whole. Those who see the truth are obligated to witness to that truth, identify hypocrisy, and work for the reformation of discipline of such individuals rather than running away from the church in its hour of need. Such are also called to suffer the blows for remaining steadfast in their witness to the truth. A mark of the church has never been success, but suffering. Prof Schroeder can say more here about the triumph of the *theologia crucis* over *theologia gloriae*. Being thrown out of the church for one's witness to the truth would also be a legitimate reason for leaving a particular communion.

Another reason for leaving has to do with the human condition. Because of our fallen nature, we are not always able to see and perceive the Gospel in the proclamation and sacramental ministrations of a particular situation. In these circumstances God works through the scandal of denominationalism to bring all types of personalities and tastes within His saving embrace. But to leave one body for another for this reason is not to pass a judgement on the former's Gospel witness, but merely on one's capacity to overcome certain adiaphoristic barriers to apprehend it. And sometimes individuals in an institution-who might even be acting in the name of the institution-have hurt us so badly that we can no longer hear its Gospel proclamation and we feel the need for our own salvation to separate ourselves to avoid the sins of anger, uncharitableness and the unwillingness to forgive, so that we can still receive the Gospel proclamation and administration which will eventually, in God's time, transform us and empower us to forgive.

For such in these circumstances Rome may indeed be the place for them-not because she possesses an infallible hierarchy with an unbroken papal pedigree-but because in her preaching and sacramental ministry one is better able to hear God's word and receive the grace one needs to grasp hold of Christ's promise.

In closing, a parenthetical, personal note. In the words above I've tried to be impersonal, sticking to theological principle and reasoning, though I am aware that understanding is not easily separated from the affections. Having personally experienced a major schism in another ecclesial body and subsequently left it for the Anglican Communion for very specific reasons, I am greatly pained by what is now facing the Anglican Church. I know firsthand the damage this does, not only to personal relationships and family, but also to one's faith and spirituality. For those like me, to whom the church means so much, it is a crucifixion to have to give up our

desire-our lust-to belong to a 'perfect' institution. But if Christ calls us to give this up, it is only that by entering more fully into the mystery of His passion and cross we might come to rely only on Him, and nothing else.

Archdeacon Michael E. Averyt, Diocese of Saskatchewan

Letter to President Bush

Colleagues,

Only two of you responded to last week's "poofed" piece. One to tell me (much thanks) that it was Schiller who said "Die Weltgeschichte ist das Weltgericht." The other asked if President Bush were not in fact following Luther's adage in the "Secular Authority" treatise that the prime calling of the prince is to "protect" his people. Hasn't that been his mantra ever since Nine-Eleven? But the issue in the poofed piece returned on Sunday in the Adult Sunday School class at our congregation here in St. Louis. In class the week before we'd studied Luther's essay "On War Against the Turk" and made "crossings" to our own slice of life in the USA today. Last Sunday it was Luther's words in "Secular Authority." When we'd checked the specs on that, we placed alongside it President Bush's "Nine-Eleven-Fifth Anniversary" message and did that old college-exam bit: "Compare and contrast"

What transpired—some of these folks (maybe all) are thoughtful people—was so good that I reported it the next day in a letter to President Bush. FYI here it is.

Peace and joy!

September 18, 2006

Dear Mr. President,

At yesterday's Adult Sunday School Class (Bethel Evangelical Lutheran Church, St. Louis, MO) about 40 of us members studied the text of the "sermon" you gave the nation on the 5th anniversary of Nine-Eleven. We had the full text (from the NYT) and from that text we looked at twenty-some key statements in your message. They are appended below.

We talked about it as a "sermon" remembering Teddy Roosevelt's famous word about the "bully pulpit" of the US presidency. You were indeed preaching to the nation Monday evening. We found no fault with that. 'Fact is, that is what we set as limits in discussing your message. We ruled out any discussion of the sermon's politics, confining ourselves just to your religious message.

And that is where we have some unhappy news for you—as it was for us when you commended it to us on Monday evening.

In that religious message we heard two heresies—as heresies are understood in Christian language—coming up again and again. And you were urging us to adopt them. We have no choice but to say no. We're "evangelical" Lutherans. You are an evangelical too. Evangelicals of every stripe say no to these two religious heresies.

One has the classical label from early church history, "Manichaeism," and the other is often called the "Pharisee

heresy." Here's what they look like:

The Manichaean heresy

is named after a Christian teacher Mani from the third century A.D. He taught that the world was divided between good people and evil people, that supernatural forces—good and evil—were allied to the respective parties, and that the calling of the good folks was to conquer the axis of evil. In your statements 3, 5 and 18 below you are speaking exactly as Mani did. "They" are evil, and "we" are good. They "hate freedom." We love it. They want "to destroy our way of life" (is that another name for our religion?), so we must destroy them before they do it.

When the early church labelled Mani's teaching heresy, they labelled it a false teaching about God, not just about people in the world. Mani's notion of God contradicted the Biblical message about God. Even worse, it replaced the central role of Christ—and for Christian believers that was and is an absolute no-no. Given your personal faith confession, it has to be a no-no for you too.

The Pharisee heresy

also surfaces throughout your sermon to us last Monday. And what is that one? Jesus himself identifies it with the words: "They think they have no need of repentance." By the total absence of any note of repentance in your sermon you encouraged us to believe the Pharisee heresy about ourselves. And, of course, that is not just in this anniversary address of last week. None of us in the class could recall that you have ever used this "re-" word in speaking to us since the WTC cataclysm. Someone in class noted the ominous parallel of a 9/11 in Jesus' own day—the Siloam tower falling and killing 18 people. When people asked Jesus how to respond, he said: "Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish."

Granted, repentance is a dicey business. Both for individuals and for nations. But Lincoln, our first ever Republican president, succeeded in calling for a national day of repentance in the darkest days of the Civil War. Congress even went along and passed legislation to support it. It actually happened. Sure, the Union leaders thought they were “right” in executing the war. But Lincoln knew—even if he didn’t go to church, he did read his Bible—that self-righteousness is always in the mix in every righteous human endeavor. Even the righteous are still sinners. Simply stated: the Bible says so.

The Pharisee heresy takes pride in its self-righteousness—as the Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax-Collector shows. When you are sure that YOU are righteous, it’s a piece of cake to find evil tax-collectors who are not.

Here’s where the two heresies intersect. No human being is ipso facto good. All are flawed. There’s an antenna for evil in every one of us. Put in other words, there’s a God-disconnect in all of us—both the nice guys and those not so nice. With such humans populating the entire world, evil has equal access into humans consulting in the Oval Office as to those in Muslim madrasas.

Another spot where the two heresies connect is that WE are clearly the ones who will win in the battle against evil. We hear that from you many times. Statements 9, 10, 11, 14, 15, 16, 17 and 21. It’s the sermon’s constant drumbeat. Some of us in the Sunday class wondered: Isn’t that a 21st-century form of Goliath boasting of his clear military superiority, which was true? Yet with one slingshot God’s adolescent agent brought him down. You know what Goliath’s fatal flaw was. It wasn’t deficient body armor.

Before we studied your sermon in last Sunday’s class we had in

earlier sessions read two essays by Martin Luther. In each of them Luther addresses a segment of "secular society." One was on war, the other on political leadership. The first was his treatise on War against Muslims, as Suleiman, the Ottoman emperor, was laying siege to Vienna in 1529. The other was his Handbook for a Christian Prince from 1523. So this was the immediate context in which we studied your sermon. It seemed clear to the class that you would be helped by both of these, although they urge a strategy for political leadership quite different from the strategy you are urging us to follow under your leadership. That is especially so in his "War Against Muslims."

Just a couple such instances.

A. Who the enemy, the threat, is—and Luther's 1529 essay. You refer to our enemies in statements 5, 9, 10, 11, 12, 21 and 22. In Luther's 1529 essay about War against Muslims he tells his readers that there are two enemies outside the gates of Vienna. Suleiman, for sure, but also God. Taking an image from the prophet Isaiah, he says God is using Suleiman as the "rod of his anger" against a phoney Christian Europe where "self" is the real God worshipped, despite all the trappings of its being a "very religious" society. Yes, Suleiman—like Nebuchadnezzar in Isaiah's day—is a murderous villain—not a good-guy at all—but for the moment God is using one villain to punish another. The "'way of life" of the Holy Roman Empire was not God-pleasing, he said. So to "preserve our way of life," no matter how plausible that was to them, was the problem, and God was saying no.

So when God is your enemy, you don't say all those nasty things about "our enemies" in the statements below. Nor do you boast that "we will defeat our enemies." Put bluntly in language a Texas rancher knows, that's "bull"

coming from the bully pulpit. When God is ticked-off at a person or a people, there's only one way to "fight"— and come out alive. It's the way Lincoln chose in 1863. Why don't we follow in his train? For those who keep on fighting this enemy—to use your own words—"their fate will be the same as those who tried before." The maxim Jesus give is "Unless you repent," your fate is not pretty.

At the conclusion (#22) you refer to our nation being brought to our knees 5 years ago, but "not in the way the terrorists intended." The same is true when God brings people to their knees and they do NOT repent. That is "not in the way that God intended."

And that brings #8 into focus.

"We didn't ask for this war," you say. It all depends upon who you are facing. If God is using our enemies as the rod of his anger, then he's telling us: "Oh, yes you did ask for it. How can you be so blind as to say you didn't?" It is not simply that we must "meet the test that history has given us," we are now confronting the One giving the test. Lincoln saw that and acted accordingly. You refer in your last sentence to our "faith in a loving God." True, but when confronting the rod of God's anger it's tough love. It's critique. "You have been weighed and found wanting." The only appropriate response is the "re-" word: repent. If you want something to be "confident" about—and confidence was a prominent term in last Monday's sermon—then do what Lincoln did. He analyzed the "American way of life" on both sides and saw that "we did indeed ask for it." Have one of your staff check it out. A Proclamation Appointing a "National Day of Fasting, Prayer and Humiliation." Washington, D.C. March 30, 1863

B. *The Folly of Warfare for coping with religious/ideological conflict—and Luther's 1523 Treatise for a Christian Prince.* In items 6 and 7 you make it perfectly clear that a "perverted" religion, an "ideology" [secular term for religion], is in the mix, possibly at the very core of the conflict. In this address, and in your words to us before, you have articulated but one strategy for such a conflict. Namely, find the people of the perverted religion, the ideologues who "hate freedom" (your constant drumbeat) and kill them. And in your call at the end of your message, you urge us to draw on our own American religion—"trust, confidence, faith"—and use this "source" to eradicate the folks of the perverted religion. We will win, you tell us. Not so, says Luther. You will lose.

Luther has clear words about the folly of such a strategy in such a conflict. "What about heresy? False religion? It cannot be stopped by any sword or coercion. Here God's Word must do it; if that does not accomplish the end, it will remain unaccomplished through secular power. It is a spiritual matter. God's word alone avails here. In fact both true faith and heresy are never so strong as when men oppose them by sheer force, without God's Word."

Applied to us at the moment, it's dumb, dumb, dumb to cope with a religion, even a perverted one, using military force. For our Sunday class, the un-success of our five years of such strategy was as plain as day. Luther had even harsher words: For the prince who nevertheless tried to do so, he said "let him rave, fool that he is. He will meet his judge."

Luther has other caveats. One is jurisdiction. No nation has jurisdiction over other nations. That has been standard Christian political theology all the way back to

St. Augustine. Even “wicked” rulers in other nations are no grounds for a preemptive strike by anyone to “liberate” the oppressed over there. Regime-change is legitimate only in your own country. Lord knows, lots of things in the commonweal of America are falling apart. Here’s where we need regime-change. But it could be too late. When Pharaoh pursued the liberated Hebrew slaves at the time of the Exodus, the Bible says “God took the wheels off their chariots.” Sure it was faulty engineering for crossing the Red Sea. But Who engineered the engineering? The wheels are falling off of lots of American chariots here at home. Isn’t it your calling to attend to that? But you think “the war” is the real threat. Some of our enemies in that war tell us that it would be over if we simply followed their request “Yankee, go home.” That’s what our forebears told the British in 1776—“just go home.” And when they (finally) did, the war was over. Perhaps it’s already too late.

However, it never is too late to “do what Lincoln did” and God has been known to do wonders for those who do that.

Which leads to one item from Luther that you yourself affirm as your calling: “we will protect our people.” That is Luther’s constant mantra as he counsels the Christian prince: “You protect those entrusted to you.”

Luther knows how tough it is to be a decent “prince” at all, and even tougher to be a “Christian prince.”

His counsel: “Remember, land and people do not belong to you. You belong to the land and people. Your concern is how they may be protected and defended in good peace. Authority does not mean privilege, but service to the governed, just as Christ exercised his authority. Who then would want to be a prince?

That's the worst job on earth, full of trouble, labor & sorrow."

He says it again in his closing words:

"A Christian prince's duty is fourfold: 1) to God it's faith and trust, plus sincere prayer 2) to his subjects it's love and Christian service; 3) to his counselors and governing agents it's an open mind and unfettered judgment, never trusting anyone absolutely; 4) to evil-doers it's proper zeal & firmness that justice be done. But never rectifying injustice in a manner that even more harm be done. Then his state is genuinely righteous, outwardly and inwardly, pleasing to God and to the people. But he must expect much envy and sorrow. The cross will soon rest on the shoulders of such a ruler."

Yet that's a much better fate—for a president and finally even for a nation (for you know who hallowed the cross)—than the fate of those who go forth believing the Manichaeian and Pharisee heresies. Having "trust, confidence, and faith" in such perverted religions, is a deadend, primarily because it ignores God our critic. Ignoring that critic, nobody gets to freedom.

*Sincerely yours,
Edward H. Schroeder
St. Louis, MO*

President Bush's Address to the Nation Fifth Anniversary of the Sept. 11, 2001 Catastrophe.

- 1. They made war upon the entire free world.*
- 2. [On this anniversary] I want to discuss the nature of*

the threat still before us.

- 3. On 9/11 our nation saw the face of evil.*
- 4. Yet on that day we saw courage . . . courage . . . courage.*
- 5. Since 9/11 we've learned a great deal about the enemy. We have learned that they are evil.*
- 6. Driven by a perverted vision of Islam – a totalitarian ideology that hates freedom.*
- 7. The war is more than a military conflict. It is the decisive ideological struggle of the 21st century.*
- 8. America did not ask for this war. It is not over, and it will not be over until either we or the extremists emerge victorious.*
- 9. On Sept the 11th we resolved that we would go on the offense against our enemies.*
- 10. "Osama Bin Ladin . . . America will find you and we will bring you to justice."*
- 11. The world is safer because Saddam Hussein is no longer in power.*
- 12. Our enemies in Iraq are tough . . . the worst mistake would be to think that if we pulled out, the terrorists would leave us alone.*
- 13. Bin Laden says that victory for the terrorists in Iraq will mean America's "defeat and disgrace forever."*
- 14. We will not allow this to happen. America will stay the fight.*
- 15. We can be confident that our coalition will succeed. . .*
- 16. We can be confident in victory . . . because of America's Armed Forces. . . nearly 3000 have given their lives.*
- 17. . . . and we will never back down.*
- 18. America has confronted evil before.*
- 19. Throughout our history America has seen liberty challenged . . . and every time we have seen liberty triumph.*

20. *Winning this war will require . . . a unified country. We must put aside our differences and work together to meet the test that history has given us .*
21. *We will defeat our enemies, we will protect our people, and we will lead the 21st century into a shining age of human liberty.*
22. *[Final paragraph] Dangerous enemies have declared their intention to destroy our way of life. They are not the first to try, and their fate will be the same as those who tried before. Nine-Eleven showed us why. The attacks were meant to bring us to our knees, and they did. But not in the way the terrorists intended. Americans united in prayer, came to the aid of the neighbors in need, and resolved that our enemies would not have the last word. The spirit of our people is the source of America's strength. And we go forward with trust in that spirit, confidence in our purpose and faith in a loving God who made us to be free.[ehs Sept. 17, 2006]*
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The Theology in President Bush's Fifth Anniversary "Sermon" for Nine-Eleven (But all in vain)

Colleagues,

Just minutes ago this was ready to go. Or so I thought. I had

just gone back to the Crossings webpage for one more tidbit—to copy in the following reference to Lincoln’s actually pulling off a National Day of Repentance from the ThTh archives
– <https://crossings.org/thursday/2004/thur112504.shtml>”Proclamation Appointing a “National Day of Fasting, Prayer and Humiliation”
Washington, D.C.
March 30, 1863

I copied it, came back to my intended posting piece, put the cursor in the right spot, pressed “paste” and it all went poof. Even though I’d saved it as I went along, that was poofed too. I hollered for Marie, x-times more computer-savvy than I. She tried all the tricks she knew. No luck.

So it wasn’t sposed to be. You weren’t s’posed to see it. So what was it? I’d taken Bush’s core kerygma in his 5th anniversary address to the nation, called it a sermon remembering Teddy Roosevelt’s notion of the “bully pulpit” of the American presidency, and then with verbatim quotes laid it alongside contrary quotes of Luther’s two essays—“War Against the Turks” and “On Secular Authority: to What Extent it Should be Obeyed.” Granted, I also did some glosses of my own. To juxtapose one of the president’s claims I even quoted “Die Weltgeschichte ist das Weltgericht” [World history is the world’s tribunal for judgment.] by a famous German historian of yore, whose name I can’t remember. Well that’s exactly what happened to me, I got my Gericht! So I shouldn’t be surprised. Weltgeschichte right at my desk passed a sentence on my work and “gerichtet” it. Poof.

It was longish. I don’t have the gumption (and it is 9 p.m. Thursday evening) to try to reconstitute what took all day to concoct. And I might not be able to do it, even if I did have that gumption . Marie is into conspiracy theory. It’s Patriot

Act surveillance finally infiltrating our condo. Forget about the Rio Grande border! Apparently a long arm extends from the Oval Office right to Russell Blvd. to dis dissent, to guarantee what this bully sermon calls for: “put aside our differences, [create] a unified country. [Then] we will defeat our enemies.” Big brother IS watching.

However, I can’t be content with just telling you this tale of woe, and then signing off. So second prize is a 4 pp. condensation of Luther’s 40-page treatise “On Secular Authority” that I was using in what went lost. I was asked to prepare that for the Adult Ed class at our congregation this coming Sunday. It’s the middle piece of a three-week series about “Luther on the Secular World.” Last Sunday it was war. Final Sunday it’s marriage. Key texts, his letters to Katie.

Here the Readers Digest version of “Secular Authority.”

Peace and joy!

Ed Schroeder

Secular Authority (Weltliche Obrigkeit): To What Extent it Should be Obeyed

Martin Luther 1523

[Dedicated to John, Duke of Saxony, next in line to become the Elector of Saxony. “Elector” = one of the 7 princes in the Holy Roman Empire who elect the emperor.]

The Argument

1. “Secular law and order (the coercive authority of the

“sword”). . . . is in the world by God’s will and ordinance. Ever since the beginning of the [fallen] world.” There is a long string of Bible passages . . . that say so, from the OT and NT.

2. But “there seems to be a powerful argument on the other side. Christ says: Don’t engage in retribution at all.” Many NT passages say that. “It appears as though in the NT there should be no secular sword among Christians.” Now what? Don’t resolve the dilemma the way the medieval church did: Christ’s no-no words apply only to perfectionist Christians (monks/nuns); the retribution-is-OK passages are for run-of-the-mill Christians, who can’t achieve perfection. Christ’s words are “counsels” for super-achievers. The retribution-is-OK passages are “commandments” for all the rest.

3. That’s the wrong way to resolve the dilemma. Right way is this: Divide all the children of Adam into two classes: the first belong to the kingdom of God [K/G], the second to the kingdom of the world [K/W]. Those belonging to the K/G “are all believers in Christ taking their orders from him.” He’s “king” in that kingdom. His “Gospel . . . teaches, governs, contains the K/G.” K/G folks need no secular coercion or law. “If all the world were composed of real Christians, no prince, king, lord, sword, or law would be needed.” They wouldn’t “find any work to do among Christians, since of themselves they do much more than secular authority can demand.”

How so? A good apple tree needs no instruction, no coercion, to bear apples instead of thorns. An interior “program” in the tree produces the fruit. Thus Christians, with Christ’s spirit and faith as their “interior” program, “need so far as they are concerned no commandment or law.”

Why then all God's commandments? Answer: "No one is by nature Christian, but every one sinful and evil, so God places the restraints of the law upon them all, so that they may not dare give rein to their desires & commit outward, wicked deeds." St. Paul says: "The law is given for the unrighteous, that those who are not Christians may be externally restrained from evil deeds."

That's job #1 for God's law. Restrain innate human wickedness, preserve life on the earth.

Job #2 for God's law. "Paul also gives the law another function: "To teach everyone to recognize their sin, that they may be made humble unto grace & unto faith in Christ." Christ does that [job #2] also "when He teaches that we should not resist evil, and thereby He glorifies the law and teaches how a real Christian ought to be." [Even as Christians, when our knee-jerk response is to "get even," God's law "humbles" us. We need to run back to "grace and faith in Christ."]

4. God's other Kingdom, K/W.

Christians are scarce throughout the world—even in 1523 Europe where (almost) all are baptized. God manages that vast majority of the human race—the "world"—with his other kingdom, the regime of law, coercion, restraint. So God has two regimes going: God's "spiritual regime" where Christ's Holy Spirit animates Christians. [Note: "spiritual" does not mean nebulous, immaterial, spooky, but wherever Christ's Spirit operates. Nitty-gritty down-on-the-ground "new" apple trees, bearing new fruit.]

. . . and God's "secular ["welt-lich" in German, "worldly"] regime. . . which restrains the unchristian and wicked so that they must needs keep the peace outwardly, even against their will." So Paul interprets the secular

sword: "not a terror for Christians, but for evil-doers." St. Peter says the same.

Suppose you attempted to rule that world with the Gospel of the spiritual regime—no coercive restraints. Chaos would result. Want to try this? OK, first fill the world with real Christians. "But this you will never accomplish; for the world & the masses are and always will be unchristian, although they are all baptized & are named Christians. Real Christians are few and far between."

Both of these regimes must be sharply distinguished, and both be permitted to remain. One to produce faith and its fruits, the other to bring about external peace and prevent evil deeds. The "program" of one regime won't work in the realm of the other. Many Bible texts document this "right" way to resolve the dilemma of the Bible's conflicting "Yes & No" on retribution.

5. Should Christians pull out of the secular regime with its law, sword, coercion? No. You don't need it for yourself, but your neighbors need it for their preservation—and need you there to implement it on their behalf. "Because the sword is a very great benefit and necessary to the whole world, to preserve peace, to punish sin and to prevent evil, the Christian submits most willingly to the rule of the sword, pays tax, honors those in authority, serves, helps, and does all he can to further the government. . . . Although he needs none of these things for himself and it is not necessary for him to do them, yet he considers what is for the good and profit of others."
6. But can a Christian actively "bear the sword and punish the wicked?" Yes, not for yourself, "but only for the

good of your neighbor and for the maintenance of the safety and peace of others. . . . In what concerns you and yours, you govern yourself by the Gospel and suffer injustice for yourself as a true Christian; in what concerns others and belongs to them, you govern yourself according to love and suffer no injustice for your neighbor's sake; this the Gospel does not forbid, but rather commands." Then comes a hypothetical situation. May I, a Christian, in some matter where I've been wronged use the sword with the intention of "not seeking my own interest, but just the punishment of evil?" Luther: "Such a miracle is not impossible, but quite unusual and hazardous." Self-deception is almost inevitable. The Bible says Samson was able to do that—no self-interest, just God's agent of retribution—when he pulled down the temple on the Philistines. Says Luther: "OK, first become like Samson, and then you can also do as Samson did."

PART TWO

How far does Secular Authority Extend?

"Here's the main part of this treatise. Secular authority . . . we must learn how far does its arm extend, lest it extend too far & encroach upon God's kingdom and rule." Remember the "two classes of Adam's children, one in the K/G under Christ, the other in the K/W under the state." They have two different kinds of "laws and regulations." Two different jurisdictions. Worldly government is limited to "life & property & what is external upon earth." But not the soul. That's the K/G turf. When world-rulers do go beyond their rightful jurisdiction, "what fools they are seeking to coerce the people with their laws & commandments into believing one thing or another." In "soul" matters (=our God-relationship) "nothing but God's Word shall have jurisdiction."

Everyone is responsible for his/her own faith or unfaith. That cannot be delegated to any other authority to decide for you. Besides that, external authority has no access to the human heart, conscience, soul. No levers of coercion can touch that. Augustine: "No one can be coerced to believe." Lots of biblical texts show how to distinguish jurisdictions between K/G and K/W.

That is, however, the opposite of what is happening in 1523. Both churchly and worldly "princes" are coercing people to believe what they prescribe. Scripture has many passages indicating that such days will come. "If your prince commands you to believe this or that, you should say: 'Dear Lord, I owe you obedience with life and goods; command me within the limits of your power on earth, and I will obey. But if you command me to believe, I will not obey; for in this case you are a tyrant and overreach yourself and command where you have neither right nor power.' If he takes your property for this, and punishes you, blessed are you. Thank God that you are worthy to suffer for the sake of the divine Word, and let him rave, fool that he is. He will meet his judge."

"From the beginning of the world a wise prince is a rare bird indeed; still more so a believing prince. They are usually the greatest fools or the worst knaves on earth."

What about heresy? It cannot be stopped by any sword or coercion. "Here God's Word must do it; if that does not accomplish the end, it will remain unaccomplished through secular power. It is a spiritual matter. God's word alone avails here. In fact both true faith and heresy are never so strong as when men oppose them by sheer force, without God's Word."

"But should you ask: Since there is to be no secular sword

among Christians, how are they to be ruled outwardly? There certainly must be authority also among Christians." Not at all. Paul & Peter tell us: "Each shall count the other his superior" (Romans 12:10) and "All of you be subject one to another" (1 Peter 5:5). "What kind of authority can there be when all are equal and no one desires to be the other's superior, but each the other's inferior?" "But where there are no such people, there are no real Christians."

How about clergy and bishops, aren't they authority figures? "Their governance is not one of authority or power, but a service, as Christ's envoys; they are neither higher nor better than other Christians. They should not impose anything on others without their consent. Their 'rule' is to work with God's Word, leading Christians by it and overcoming heresy by its means."

PART THREE

Now that we know the limits of secular authority, how should a Christian prince—of whom there are very few—use it? [Remember, Duke John, for whom ML is writing this—himself a Luther-fan—is going to be the next "Elector" of Saxony. It happens 2 yrs later in 1525.]

- A. "Normal" are princes who rule to serve their own self-interests. Not so a Christian prince. He governs "in love," not for his own profit, but for the "profit, honor and welfare of others."
- B. That means he must be wiser than the "jurists and the law-books." "It is not sufficient only to follow the written law or the legal advisers; more than that is required." "A prince must have the law in hand as firmly as the sword, decide in his own mind when & where the law must be applied strictly or with moderation, so that reason may always . . . be the highest law & rule over all

laws.”

C. But if you are not that wise, then you have only the jurists and the law books to go by. That is perilous. How to proceed? Follow Moses and Solomon. Ask God for “a right understanding, above all books and masters, wisely to rule their subjects.” I can’t add anything to that. “But will simply counsel a Christian prince what the attitude of his heart & mind ought to be . . . so that God will empower him to carry out all laws, counsels, and actions in a proper and godly way.”

Counsel #1. Land and people do not belong to you. You belong to the land and people. “Your concern is how they may be protected and defended in good peace.” Authority for a Christian prince does not mean privilege, but service to the governed, just as Christ exercised his authority.

“Who then would want to be a prince? That’s the worst job on earth, full of trouble, labor & sorrow.” Where is all the dancing, hunting, racing, gaming etc.? Remember, I’m not talking about a worldly prince, but a Christian one, “It is enough for me to point out that it is not impossible for a prince to be a Christian, though it is a rare thing and surrounded with difficulties. If princes did “conduct their work in love toward their subjects,” God would not begrudge them some of their frolicking. But if they did attend to serving others, there wouldn’t be much time for all that.

Counsel #2. Beware of the high and mighty and of your counselors. Don’t despise any of them, but don’t trust anyone to leave everything to him. “One must not implicitly trust any man—unless he be filled with the Spirit and be a good Christian.” Beware of flatterers. David learned that the hard way. His best and wisest counselor betrayed him and plotted his death. You have to trust and take risks with your subordinates,

but do not expect perfect loyalty. "You must watch with unfailing vigilance."

Counsel #3 "Deal justly with evil-doers. Be wise& prudent. Mete out punishment without injuring others. Where wrong cannot be punished without greater wrong, waive your rights."

How about going to war? First of all for the prince "That's a tough one." My thought: A Christian prince will not wage war against his overlord, e.g., the emperor. But if your opponent is your equal, your inferior, or of a foreign government, then: Step one: offer him justice and peace. Step two: if that fails, defend yourself by force against force—not for the sake of your own interests or to keep yourself in power, but the interests of your subjects, their safety & protection to whom you owe this deed of love. When your entire land is in peril, "you must make the venture, so that by God's help all may not be lost. As a consequence some will become widows and orphans. Yet you must prevent it that everything go to ruin and there be nothing left but widows and orphans."

How about for the subjects?

When your prince is in the right, "you are in duty bound to follow & risk life & property for the sake of others." In such a war it is a Christian act to kill the enemy. Only, one must beware of sin, not violate wives and virgins & when victory comes, offer mercy & peace to those defeated.

But when the prince is in the wrong, then don't go to war. God commands no one to do wrong.

If the subjects can't tell whether their prince's war is right or wrong, "they may obey without peril to their souls." In war God brings judgment on both sides—regardless of who was right, who wrong. If you do win, don't take pride in your righteousness "but leave the matter to God."

Counsel #4. Finally what's really foremost is a Christian prince's relation to God. Subject yourself to God in confidence and pray for wisdom to rule well.

Conclusion. "Christian prince's duty is fourfold: 1) to God it's faith and trust, plus sincere prayer 2) to his subjects it's love and Christian service; 3) to his counselors and governing agents it's an open mind and unfettered judgment; 4) to evil-doers it's proper zeal & firmness that justice be done. "Then his state is right, outwardly and inwardly, pleasing to God and to the people. But he must expect much envy and sorrow. The cross will soon rest on the shoulders of such a ruler."

Footnote. Adjudicating cases of restitution—recompense for the injured. If one or both parties in a case are Christians, it's easy. A Christian deserving restitution will forego it. A Christian owing restitution will not hesitate. In all cases, decide it this way: If the debtor is poor & the plaintiff not poor, let love prevail and acquit the debtor. If the debtor is not poor, then let him restore as much as he can, provided you leave him enough to assure economic welfare for himself, wife & children.

If neither party will settle in this way—following the "law of love and the law of nature" [for Luther those two are the same. God's Love commandment, "Love your neighbor as you love yourself" is identical with the law of nature:"Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."]—then "ask them to call in another judge, and announce to them that they are acting against God and the law of nature, even though they may obtain absolute justice through existing legislation."

"Love and the law of nature" often contradict the "law books and the jurists." When they do conflict, go with the former. The latter "will only cause you to err, the more you depend on

them. A good and just decision must not and cannot be given out of books, but must come from a free mind. Such a free mind is given by love and by the law of nature.” A concluding example: Duke Charles of Burgundy’s brilliant use of “love and the law of nature” as he by-passed “law books and the jurists.”

“A certain nobleman took an enemy prisoner, whereupon the prisoner’s wife came to redeem her husband. The nobleman promised to give her back her husband provided she would lie with him. The woman was virtuous . . . so she went and asked her husband what to do. The husband desired to be set free and to save his life, and gave his wife permission. After the nobleman had lain with the wife, he had the husband beheaded the next day and gave him to her a corpse.

She put the whole case before Duke Charles, who summoned the nobleman and commanded him to marry the woman. When the wedding was over, he had the man beheaded, put the woman in possession of his property, and raised her again to honor. Thus he punished the crime in a princely way.”

Bonhoeffer, “German Christians,” and American National Religion

Colleagues,

Preface (a tad long) “Terror Threat Remains, Bush says.” That was Wednesday’s newspaper headline here in St. Louis as we

approach the fifth anniversary of the World Trade Center inferno. But in those five years the US president seems not to have learned much about the source of the terror. Yet he should. Not because he's got the CIA working for him. But because he professes to be an evangelical born-again Christian. It's in his Bible too. The Bible tells who the Ultimate Terrorist is that people and nations MUST face—and why that threat, to use Bush's term, REMAINS.

"Terror" appears 40 times in the old KJV of the OT, only three times in the KJV of the NT. The NRSV has reduced terror. Only one of the three in the NT remains [Rom. 13:3]. Of the OT's forty, 33 are still there. The author of the terror is finally (gulp!) God. Here are some samples.

Lv 26:16 I will bring terror on you.

Jer. 15:8 I have made terror fall upon Jerusalem.

Job 6:4 The terrors of God are arrayed against me. [Four diff. Hebrew vocables are translated "terror" in Job.]

Gen. 35:5 Terror from God fell upon the cities.

Ez. 32:32 I spread terror in the land of the living.

Jer. 32:21 You brought your people out of Egypt . . . with great terror.

Jer. 17:17 O LORD, do not become a terror to me.

Is. 10:33. The LORD . . . will lop the boughs with terror; the tallest ones will be cut down.

Job 31:23 I was in terror of calamity from God, and I could not have faced his majesty.

Given that last statement out of Job's mouth, I wish they would have let stand one more of the excised 2 terror passages in the NT. It's 2 Cor. 5:11. The old KJV has St. Paul saying "Knowing the terror of the Lord, we therefore" Paul had in the previous verse just said that we all "MUST appear" before the judge on judgment day "so that each may receive recompense . . .

whether good or evil.” The place where it is appropriate to be terror-stricken is when standing before THIS Judge, “facing HIS Majesty,” as Job said. Paul is remembering those OT terror-texts as he composes this sentence to the Corinthians. When the NRSV gives us “knowing the fear of the Lord,” it’s much too tame for what Paul clearly wants us to hear. Standing before this judge is terrifying. Even more important, unless you “know” the terror of the Lord, you’ll miss the good news coming just a few sentences later. Namely, this Good News: When you are standing before The Bench, but are now “in Christ,” this Judge “does NOT count trespasses.” Such acclaimed Good News is ho-hum if you don’t “know” that you’re standing before the Judge, that all life transpires “coram deo,” vis-a-vis with God—in short, if you don’t “know” the terror of the Lord. It’s that simple.

The Biblical witness doesn’t fudge. When terror comes upon us, God’s at the other end of it. No matter which creaturely agent he’s using to bring it to us. And that’s what Bush has not seen for lo, these past five years. But then he speaks for all Americans, even if we didn’t vote for him. The masses haven’t seen it either. Nor is anyone giving voice to it in other branches of government. Even worse, much worse, that’s also true in the Christian churches. Blind, not benign, neglect. There is no wall of separation in America on this one. In both church and state the blind lead the blind.

But it’s in the Bible, Bush’s Bible too. And you don’t even have to go to the “Hebrew scriptures” to find it. It’s patent in the NT—even in an NRSV with terror “reduced” and “fear” favored over the term “terror.” Just take Luke, for instance, 12:4&5. Right out of Jesus’ mouth: “I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that can do nothing more. But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him!” And who, pray tell, has that sort of authority? The divine majesty

who induced Job's terror.

What might you say to that judge when he confronts you with his terror? Again Jesus in Luke's next chapter (13:5). When towers fall and slaughter abounds "I tell you, unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did."

Repentance has become somewhat of a broken record, a one-string banjo, in ThTh postings since OUR towers fell five years ago. I didn't invent the proposal. It comes on much better authority. But there's blessed little evidence that the visually impaired national leaders, along with the general populace, along with church leaders, see the connection between Bush's "Terror Threat Remains" and the Bible's "Terror of God" message. Thus they also don't hear—they see no need to hear—Jesus' "I tell you, unless you repent" Here's the Biblical axiom: until repentance comes, terror does remain. And then the obverse: when repentance does come, terror no longer remains.

But you've heard this before on this channel.

So for the fifth anniversary, another voice—much less shrill than mine, but not at all namby-pamby.

It is the voice of H. Gaylon Barker, a major voice among Bonhoeffer scholars today. Gaylon is parish pastor at Zion Lutheran Church in Stamford, Connecticut, Adjunct Prof at Molloy College (Rockville Center NY), board member of the International Bonhoeffer Society and editor for the English language edition of Bonhoeffer's works. He was one of the keynote speakers at the July Bonhoeffer conference in St. Louis. His paper was titled: "Bonhoeffer and the Church Struggle."

Here's his own condensed version of what he said there: "During the 1930s German Church Struggle Bonhoeffer fought to protect the integrity of the church's proclamation from the outside

influences of Nazi ideology. Drawing on Luther's theologia crucis, Bonhoeffer clearly distinguished between the true church of Jesus Christ—which takes its life from sola scriptura, solus Christus—and the heretical teachings of the German Christians, who had compromised the church's very existence by wedding Nazi ideology to Christ."

At the end of his conference presentation Barker signalled some parallels between the "German Christianity" of DB's day and the "Folk Religion of God Bless America" [FROGBA] in our times. But he didn't elaborate. So I asked him to do just that for a future ThTh posting. He said yes. Here it is.

Peace and Joy,
Ed Schroeder.

WHAT WE BELIEVE – MATTERS!

What we believe—matters! What we believe matters because it shapes our understanding of the world as well as influences our life and actions in the world. If the 9/11 hijackers who flew the airplanes into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, for example, had not believed what they believed, would they have done what they did? Even if we think their actions were depraved, were they not the result of their faith—a distorted faith, to be sure—but faith nevertheless? And simply because their actions were the result of a misguided or falsely conceived faith does not mean we should dismiss it as an aberration. It needs to be taken seriously—and it needs to be responded to. By the same token, the faith of the 9/11 attackers is not the only example of an ill-conceived use of

religious faith.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the 20th century Lutheran theologian, was convinced that “what we believe matters,” not only in terms of our church faith and practice but also in relation to our lives in the world. But he was not alone. Luther, too, whose *theologia crucis* [=theology of the cross] was the greatest influence on Bonhoeffer’s thinking, found proper belief of such importance that he spelled it out clearly in his explanation to the first commandment in his Large Catechism, which for him was the foundational commandment upon which all the others rested: “A ‘god’ is the term for that to which we are to look for all good and in which we are to find refuge in all need. Therefore, to have a god is nothing else than to trust and believe in that one with your whole heart. As I have often said, it is the trust and faith of the heart alone that make both God and an idol....For these two belong together, faith and God. Anything on which your heart relies and depends, I say, that is really your God.” Anything in which we place our faith is our god; likewise, any ideology, not just those limited to religion, can become idolatrous and lead us away from God.

Such an acknowledgment points out that not all expressions of religious faith are necessarily healthy or helpful—nor should they all be accepted at face value. As a matter of fact, such a statement acknowledges the need to discern the true God from all false gods, a true, saving faith from all misguided faiths.

The Confessing Church Struggle in 1930s Germany is one example of such a struggle over the nature of faith and our understanding of God. When Hitler came to power in January 1933, the churches of Germany were confronted with a crisis. On the one hand, many in the church throughout Germany welcomed Hitler’s promises of national and moral renewal and the return to traditional values. As a result, they were willing to

overlook his inflamed rhetoric, believing it would either pass or could not be taken seriously. On the other hand, there were those who perceived danger ahead for the church that came with any compromise made with Hitler and the Nazi state. Members of the Confessing Church believed that the German Christians, by lending their support to Hitler and integrating Christianity and National Socialism into a racially pure "people's church," were distorting the Gospel. For those in the Confessing Church, the German Christians had accommodated themselves to the political winds of the day and, as a result, had watered down or in some cases even altered the biblical message.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a leader in the Confessing Church movement from its inception. In place of the German Christian's "positive" Christianity, Bonhoeffer's theological agenda in the 1930s was meant to free the church from the false gods of nationalism and its implicit racism. He saw the Nazi confession of "blood, race, and soil" threatening the church's very life. As he stated at the time, "The question is really whether Germanism or Christianity," "either National Socialism or Christ."

His theology, which follows a continuous trajectory, is a response to that. Drawing on Luther's *theologia crucis*, he was able to offer a clearly articulated critique of National Socialism and the church from a scripturally-informed perspective. But in addition, his words stand as a corrective to any theology that seeks to find a point of contact between the Church's proclamation of the Gospel and any pseudo-religious nationalistic claims.

For example, as a co-writer of the 1933 draft of the Bethel Confession, Bonhoeffer offers a clear alternative to the theology of the German Christians. At its heart, the confession affirms the classic Christian teaching about Jesus: He is the

"Son of God and Son of David, true God and true man;" he is "the end and fulfillment of the law," without whom the world would be lost under the wrath of God. He is "through the unbelief and for the sake of all people crucified" (DBW 12: 384). Therefore, Bonhoeffer insists that the church reject all false claims that seek to present Jesus in a "nordic fashion" or his cross as a "general symbol of religiosity or human truth" or "anything whatever." In response to the German Christians who sought to present Jesus as a "nordic type," Bonhoeffer stresses the Jewishness of Jesus. And rather than accepting the widespread assumption that the Jews were responsible for the death of Jesus, Bonhoeffer, by stressing Jesus' own Jewishness, preferring to call him the "Son of David," concentrates on the sinfulness of all humankind, implicating not the Jews but all people in the death of Jesus. In contrast to any attempt to equate Christ's cross with general religious sentiments, Bonhoeffer says Jesus is the Son of God and Son of David "sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" and his cross is the "unique revelation of God" that brings reconciliation with God.

Three years later, in a 1936 letter to his brother-in-law Rudiger Schleicher, Bonhoeffer writes what is both a confession of faith and summary of his theology. He says:

"I know about the God for whom I am searching either out of my own experiences and understanding, from my own interpretation of history or nature, that is, from within myself—or I know about that God on the basis of God's revelation of God's own word. Either I determine the place where I want to find God, or I let God determine the place where God wants to be found. If it is I who says where God is to be found, then I will always find a God there who in some manner corresponds to me, is pleasing to me, who is commensurate with my own nature. But if it is God who says

where God is to be found, then it will probably be a place that is not at all commensurate with my own nature and that does not please me at all. This place, however, is the cross of Jesus....It is not at all a place that we find pleasant or that might be a priori clear, but a place alien to us in every way, a place utterly repugnant to us. But precisely that is the place at which God chose to encounter us.” (Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works 14 [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, forthcoming], 146)

Bonhoeffer's theology is an expression of the *theologia crucis* in that everything we know about God we know in and through Jesus Christ. And the key to understanding Jesus Christ for us lies in the cross. At the cross all human schemes and plans are brought to naught. No longer can it be assumed that we can work our way to God. The cross is a clear indictment that we can no longer even try. What is quite clear in the cross is that this is God's way to us. If we want to find God, we must go to where God has chosen to place himself. By contrast, religion in America, from conservative to liberal, evangelical to mainline protestant, is quite often based on a god of our own choosing, one who affirms us, and one who promotes triumphalism both in the church and society. Such a faith is by-and-large a *theologia gloriae* [=theology of glory. Luther's term for the opposite of theology of the cross], shaped more by a god that reflects ourselves than by the God revealed in scripture. Unfortunately, far too often the god we invoke is usually that of a god who mirrors our values, affirms our positions, and justifies our actions. The problem with such a religion is the assumption that God is on our side, that God confirms us in our goodness.

In many respects, much of what passes for religion in America today is the extension of the marketplace; we preach what

sells, we give people what they want. What better security can the government provide than to wed religious language to the political agenda, for it certainly can lead to a "God is on our side" mentality and that we are doing the right thing. It lends justification to our form of violence, giving us the ammunition to perpetuate injustices in the name of national interest, which happens to be good for the world as well. The problems we are facing have nothing to do with us. The problem is out there, coming from others who are threatening our "God-given" way of life. Perhaps when political leaders enlist God to bless America or insist that God is on our side, they are referring to a god of their own choosing.

So it is that while many praise the return of religion in both the public and private spheres, Bonhoeffer provides a word of warning: not everything that passes as religion is equally the same—nor is it all good. In the same way that Nazi ideology worked its way into the language of the church and was embraced by the church because of its pledge to restore traditional values, today's religious language, both in the church and in society, can just as easily be promoting a false god. Religion, when falsely interpreted, can be a harmful element in society. When religion is informed by factors other than scripture, it can lead to idolatry—worshiping a god of one's own creation.

Granted, 21st century America is not Nazi Germany. At the same time, however, we should be alarmed when we witness the welcome admixture of patriotism and religious fervor, all meant to support America's vision of the world. We have infused a wide stream of images and ideas into our concept of the Christian faith, some of which have no real foundation in the tradition, but are popular conceptions imposed on it. Bonhoeffer, on the other hand, engages modern culture, but does not want to relinquish the agenda to the world. He wants to keep it in the hands of God.

And so Bonhoeffer rejected both the claims of the German Christians and the Nazi leadership because they proclaimed a different Christ, the idea of a Christ who restores the fortunes and glory of the Reich; at the same time, he did not retreat into pietistic individualism, in which Christ is seen as the source of happiness and security. In their place, Bonhoeffer clung to and proclaimed only the biblical Christ, who came into the world in weakness and who was rejected, suffered and died for the sake of the world. This was not to leave the world as it was, but to call into question all human aspirations, which in our modern world are a part of our fallen humanity, to stand in the place of God.

The public square indeed is not naked, but it is not necessarily Christian either. There is a virtual smorgasbord of religious choices available to any discerning believer, so that one is bound to find a religion or God of one's own liking. As Christianity competes with other religions for people's faith, many of these beliefs are filtering into the Christian worldview; if this continues, the face of Christianity will be changed. In such a context, Bonhoeffer's argument proves helpful. Be it by Nazi ideology or secular religiosity, new elements can be inserted into the church's message that will eventually change the Gospel. By drawing a clear distinction between Christianity and religion, Bonhoeffer notes that real differences exist between religious claims and, therefore, we cannot simply pick-and-choose the elements we want. To do so creates a religion of our own liking, and one that is no longer Christian. In a context where nearly one quarter of American Christians believe in reincarnation, the Christian message is threatened today as much as it was by Nazi ideology yesterday.

Perhaps we get a glimpse of Bonhoeffer's theology addressing the American context in Eberhard Bethge's reflections on his own experience in America. Eberhard Bethge recalls a surprising

experience of visiting Jerry Falwell's Thomas Road Baptist Church in Lynchburg, VA, in the early 1980s. He says that Falwell, in his sermon, indicated that they were doing battle with secular humanism and all the other godless forces at work in America. This was what he had expected to hear, so that was not surprising. The surprise came as they were leaving; an usher approached him and handed him two badges for his lapel. One was a cross that had "Jesus First" emblazoned on it; the other was an American flag. In recalling this experience, Bethge said:

"I could not help but think of myself in Germany in 1933. That was exactly what we believed for some time in German terms: on the one hand our nation's proud renewal, to which we wanted to devote our energy and time, and to make sacrifices, if need be; on the other hand, to Jesus Christ at the same time. Why not that relation and that equation? Then I remembered that slow and bitter revelation how in the interpretation, even in that 'Jesus First,' the flag in fact became the guiding force. Of course, Christ, but a German Christ; of course 'Jesus First,' but an American Jesus! And so to the long history of faith and of its executors another chapter is being added of a mixed image of Christ... " (Eberhard Bethge, "A Visit to Thomas Road Church," *The Wild Goose* (1:2), July, 1990, 15-16).

For him, the message could not have been more clear. From his experience of Germany in the 1930s and '40s, whenever the cross and the flag are put together, the flag always wins. History has taught us that there is a real danger in wedding religious faith to any political ideology or cause. Inevitably religion will end up being used to validate one's political stance or somehow or other be placed in the service of the emperor rather than speaking God's word, which is both law and gospel. And

when that happens, the church easily sacrifices speaking God's word; it becomes difficult for the church to be a critical voice.

As I reflect on the use of Bonhoeffer's theology to address contemporary America, I cannot help but be drawn to Luther's own stating of the problem in the 16th century: "a theology of glory calls evil good and good evil. A theology of the cross calls the thing what it actually is." (LW 31, 53). If there is a theological statement that speaks directly to our context, this may surely be it.

While we cannot claim to know what Bonhoeffer would say today, as a student of Martin Luther, we know that he would be honest and "call the thing what it actually is." He would not refrain from speaking out when nationalism is portrayed as faith or wedded to religious beliefs. He would not compromise on "Christ alone" as the foundation and center of our faith—and would not shy away from pointing to those preaching some admixture of "Gospel and...." as proclaiming a different Gospel. He would do that because what we believe matters.

*H. Gaylon Barker
Ridgefield, CT*

Craig Nesson's Sermon: "Lazarus!"

Colleagues,

Three postings ago, on August 10 (ThTh #426), I reviewed the sermon I'd heard the previous Sunday on the weekend of the Schroeder clan reunion. As I weighed it, I found it wanting—and I said so. When the preacher, my good friend, Craig Nesson of Wartburg Seminary (Dubuque Iowa), read my review, he said I'd not given him a fair shake. Could be, I said, I've blundered before. So send me the text of what you preached and we'll post it as a ThTh offering as soon as you get it to me. Folks can see for themselves what's what. It just arrived. So here it is.

[My review of 3 weeks ago, what I thought I'd heard in Craig's "live" proclamation, is on the Crossings website at this URL: <https://crossings.org/thursday/2006/thur081006.shtml>]

Peace & Joy!
Ed Schroeder

Sermon

Luke 16:19-31 – "Lazarus!"

Preacher: Craig L. Nesson Wartburg Theological Seminary

Pentecost 9 – August 6, 2006 St. Paul Lutheran Church – Davenport, Iowa

What is God trying to say to us through this very disturbing text? What images do you focus on when you visualize this story of the rich man and Lazarus? What do you feel? With whom do you identify? Even more, what is the fundamental problem that is being described?

You would be right to focus on the plight of poor Lazarus. Here we see a man who is not only poor but sick (Is his illness itself a consequence of malnutrition?). To make his humiliation all the more graphic, dogs come to nourish themselves from his sores. Lazarus is hungry for food, longing for some crumbs-which he knows that the rich man has-hungry unto death.

The plight of Lazarus is not unique in our world. Let me tell you about Angela, a woman who lives in La Estacion, literally across the tracks, in Cuernavaca, Mexico. To get to Angela's home, you have to walk alongside an open sewer, where children are playing. Her house is very small, crudely constructed from available materials. Her husband is an invalid for whom she cares. Their income is from selling Coca Colas to the neighbors and the money they receive from children who work as migrant laborers in the U.S. She also watches over many children. At the end of our conversation, Angela mentions that she is worried because the rainy season is coming and she had borrowed her roof from someone else. Can you imagine living in such a situation with a borrowed roof?

Manuel is a campesino who lives in a small village in northern Nicaragua. When we were introduced, he was asked-as we do worldwide-to tell us about his family: "How many children do you have?" Manuel replied very matter-of-factly: "I have ten children; three of them died." We learn that they died of childhood diseases, easily preventable in our context, the diseases of malnutrition, lack of clean water, inadequate health care, and poverty. What was most shocking to me is how he said this in such a way as though it is normal to have three of your babies die in early childhood!

Each and every one of the people who will die this day of hunger-related causes has a name and a story. But to tell you even about the children would take an entire day. And I would

only have a few seconds for each introduction. The existence of Lazarus in our world is very real and you would be right to focus on his plight as you hear this text.

I, however, want you to focus most of your attention on the rich man, who also has a hunger-related illness that we can diagnose as an acute case of "affluenza." Some of the visible symptoms of this illness are obvious in the text:

1. He is dressed in fine linen, no doubt only in designer labels.
2. He lives behind a gate; he needs security to protect himself and keep at a distance from the Lazaruses of the world.
3. He feasts sumptuously, probably taking in far more calories each day than he is able to burn.

These, however, are just the outward signs of a more serious spiritual condition, a spiritual condition that will land him finally in Hades. This spiritual illness also has some very serious symptoms:

1. The rich man has no relationship with poor Lazarus, although he sits there day after day near the house.
2. It seems that the rich man has no eyes to see the poor man. In his affluenza, his lifestyle leaves him blind to the reality of the poor.
3. The rich man has no heart. He apparently does not feel compassion for Lazarus. Perhaps his emotions have been trained to disconnect from the problems of the greater world.
4. The rich man has no hands with which to act. He likely does not see that it is his responsibility to do anything. The problem is "too large" and after all he is "only one person." What difference could he make?
5. Then there is the most curious condition of all: the rich

man has no name. Could this be indicative of his spiritual malaise, that he desires to remain anonymous and thus without responsibility?

So who in this text has the most serious problem? In many ways you could argue that it is Lazarus. After all, he is the one facing physical hunger and death. Yet I think this text is finally a summons more to the rich of this world about their own spiritual condition, a condition that inextricably connects their wellness to the fate of the world's poor. This is a spiritual condition that apparently persists even beyond death, when the rich man still wants to order Lazarus around to do his bidding.

Hearken to the words of Abraham that cut to the heart: "They have Moses and the prophets, they should listen to them." "If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead!"

The witness of Scripture is overwhelming: we are to love our neighbor, feed the hungry, heal the sick, give water to the thirsty, and do justice to the poor. We have the books of Moses. We even have a Savior who is risen from the dead. Yet, in our condition of affluenza, we find ourselves suffering with many (if not all) of the same symptoms as the rich man.

This is a text that cries out for our attention; for our conversion. This is a text that warns us about our own spiritual state and declares that your own spiritual health is directly connected to how you relate and respond to the poor Lazaruses of this world.

It is urgent that our lives be about re-writing this story. So as a first step in re-writing this text, let's give the rich man a name. Let's give him your own name-in my case, it's Craig, but in your case it is your name. Say your name out

loud.

Second, to make this a different story: how you are going to develop a personal relationship with Lazarus? How can you get to know personally the poor people here in your city? Or, in Mississippi where your congregation is sending food as hurricane relief? Or, in another part of the world, perhaps through a global partnership? The treatment for the illness of the rich man begins with developing actual relationships with the poor of this world. How can you go about this?

Third, how can you obtain new eyes with which to see? How can you begin to see the disparity between our own plenty and the lack of basic necessities by so many in our world? How can you seek out sources of information that will keep the reality of the hungry constantly before your eyes? I think it is only by joining an organization, like Bread for the World, which holds you accountable that you will be able to sustain your seeing and keep yourself attuned day after day, month after month.

Fourth, how can you gain a new heart, a heart that feels deep compassion? Especially in a world where the images are so horrifying-from warfare as well as from chronic poverty-how can you keep open your heart? It is understandable that we want to distance ourselves from such suffering. Yet at the center of our Christian faith stands the image of the Crucified Jesus, with heart and arms wide open to invite in all the suffering ones into an embrace.

Fifth and last and most urgent of all, how do you, in direct opposition to the rich man in our text, live as people who have hands to act? How do you certainly become people who give generously to charitable causes, like the ELCA World Hunger Program that is so cost effective at fighting hunger and its causes? But even more, how do you become a people who

understand that it is essential to your vocation as Christians that you act with political responsibility? How do we gain the necessary understanding that it belongs to your Christian vocation to be active in the political sphere:

- *that when we vote, we vote not our own self-interest but in the interests of the Lazaruses of this world;*
- *that we write letters to our elected representatives to support things like the Millennium Goals for eradicating extreme poverty;*
- *that we join together to meet with our elected officials to insist that they make the needs of the poor their top priority;*
- *that we organize in our local communities in relationship and partnership with people in physical need.*

I often reflect on how we, from our historical perspective, judge the people who in their time tolerated slavery, or those who were bystanders while the Holocaust unfolded in Nazi Germany. 100 years from now, how will history judge us as people who were passive in the face of such glaring disparity?

We need a miracle. Only one thing can heal us from our spiritual illness. There is only one who can set us free from our spiritual bondage, the One crucified for you and risen from the dead, Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ died for you and for Lazarus. Jesus Christ loves you and Lazarus. Jesus Christ forgives you and claims you as his own. It is by the power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ that you receive your name, new eyes, a new heart, and new hands.

Live as God's children, filled with Christ's compassion, free to act! Lazarus sits at your door step.

Should We Go Down With the Ship?

Colleagues,

This week's ThTh comes from Robin Morgan. With her dissertation done, Robin's waiting for the next commencement ceremony at St. Louis University to get that doctor's hood draped over her shoulders. For now she's interim pastor at Peace Lutheran Church in Washington, Missouri. Robin's a theologian-pastor, as you have seen from her previous posts on this site. What comes today shows more of the same. Peace and Joy!

Ed Schroeder

I've been thinking about the malaise, the fear of loss and shallow in-fighting that seems to be the normal course of events these days in our congregations. Some people chastise me for being so negative. They insist that if I just "accentuated the positive" I could be part of the solution, rather than part of the problem. Maybe. But after they spend a few minutes highlighting all the great things the church does, they lapse back into the "don't rock the boat, Delores will leave the congregation if we move that planter" mentality that keeps us all frustrated and exhausted, but still unwilling to change. The people who confuse me the most are the leaders. When I go to conferences and workshops, I listen to their presentations,

hear them talking between sessions and these people know what the organizational problems are AND what direction we need to go to solve them. However, because we/they also know that "Delores will leave the congregation if we move that planter," we/they scale back what we/they know needs to be done until all we're doing is celebrating the fact that Delores' grandmother gave the planter to the congregation seventy years ago.

On one hand, I know these leaders genuinely care about the people they serve and choose to meet them where they are, loving them and walking with them as best they can. On the other hand, when I'm feeling less generous, I figure it's a matter of money. God forbid Delores pull her money and maybe even sabotage her grandparents' endowment, which the congregation is now using, bit by bit, for operational expenses.

Now I'm thinking that maybe there's a third alternative at work. Maybe it's deeper than either of these options. Maybe there's a deep sense of shame at work on our leaders. These huge organizations that our grandfathers and grandmothers built are crumbling in our hands. Immigrants, many of whom came to this country with nothing but the clothes on their backs and the will to give a better life to their children, built these organizations and now we, their wealthy, well-educated descendants, can't keep enough money in the coffers to get the roof fixed much less be in mission to the world.

The shame of this failure is not spoken of among us. We celebrate the past, we honor our forebears, because they deserve it, but also because we don't know what else to do. The leaders know that to be about mission in today's world the structures we hold so dear will be drastically changed. Not only the planter, but the building it has stood in for seventy years may have to go or be transformed as we meet the chaos of

the world where it is. In the process, we will be changed forever into a community we no longer recognize.

This shame (not just guilt that regrets some behavior or action, but shame that essentially in the core of our beings we are fatally flawed) has paralyzed us. As leaders, though we don't articulate it, we seem to have largely decided to go down with the ship of our denomination. We know that the baby steps we are taking with our people will not get us where we need to go before the doors have to be closed, the building sold and our name taken off the sign outside. We know that. But because of this shame, our unwillingness or inability to act as we know God is calling us to act, we sit and celebrate the past, knowing full well that there will be no future. But we are "faithful." We will go down with the ship.

Isn't that the ultimate negation of what we're supposedly about, speaking of not accentuating the positive? Is there really no hope in this picture at all?

First, we need to acknowledge that the fatal flaw that the leaders are ashamed of is, indeed, a fatal flaw. However, it's not just the fatal flaw of the leaders, it's the flaw of us all. We have turned our grandparents and our traditions into the gods we worship, no matter how many times we give lip service to Jesus. And we are reaping the consequences of our idolatry. The Creator will only endure such idolatry for so long, calling us to repent. Eventually, if we refuse and stay turned to our false gods, the Creator will leave us to them. That certainly seems to be the case today as congregation after congregation slowly slips into oblivion.

Second, there is something we can do even in the midst of the chaos that we assume will swamp our lives if we turn away from focusing on our inherited organizations and turn back to

focusing on God. We can get down on our knees and pray a simple prayer, "You're in control and I'm not." That's not easy for people who have been groomed from birth to be in charge of everything and everyone in their lives. For those of us who haven't had such illusions of control, our temptation is to manipulate worldly power to get "our fair share." Either way, the prayer is, "You're in control and I'm not."

The fatal flaw is still there, the chaos is coming, but even in the middle of this whirlwind of uncertainty, we are not alone. Jesus stands with us, has taken our fatal flaw onto Himself along with our shame and idolatry. He allowed Himself to be nailed to the cross with our sin, so that we could have new life with God through Him. We are no better than we were before, but we have been claimed by the Pilot of our Souls, the Anchor of Salvation, the Rock of Ages who is our True Tradition. The ship of the church is not going down because the head of the church is alive and well, sending His spirit into the world to blow us into new ports and into new shipping lanes for the old ports.

Listen to Columba who left Ireland and his home to sail across the ocean to Iona off the coast of Scotland. There he speaks as a believer who left his family and traditions to venture into the unknown to be in mission to the world:

*Alone with none but Thee, my God,
I journeyed on my way:
What need I fear, when Thou art near
O King of night and day?
More safe am I within Thy hand
Than if a host did round me stand. The child of God can fear
no ill,
His chosen dread no foe:
We leave our fate to Thee, and wait*

*Thy bidding when to go.
'Tis not from chance our comfort springs,
Thou art our trust, O King of kings.*

We wait and we go as God bids us. How will the organizations we have inherited fare in the storms ahead? Only God knows. Regardless of the circumstances of our lives, as chaotic and risky as they may be, our comfort is not lost as our traditions are re-made to again be in service to the world. Our Lord, our Jesus goes with us, wherever He may lead us.

Robin J. Morgan

Retiring from Doing Theology

Colleagues,

Back in the days when I was head-honcho of Crossings Community's operation (1983-93), it was a three-point parish: semester-long courses ["Crossings from Luke" or Matthew or Isaiah or Romans or Psalms or Acts, etc—finally 21 such titles in the curriculum], weekend workshops linking Sunday texts to Daily Work [in the high season every other weekend somewhere in the country, and occasionally overseas], and the print-medium newsletter.

After 1993 the first two faded away. It took a full-time staffer to make those happen. The board could find no one to take the job, if for no other reason than that the first line in the job-description—also when I started—was "Raise your own salary." But the newsletter continued (and still does as a quarterly) and

with cyberspace now on the scene, that's where the action was. That's where Crossings went.

Way back in that 83-93 decade I once cheekily asked one of our brightest and best: What do you want to do when you grow up? "I want your job," she said. Well, she was in no position to move in and do so when 1993 rolled around. With the internet becoming the prime turf for Crossings work, the board of directors worked out the current schema. Crossings alumni as volunteers—and no full-timer(s) at all—run the show.

But there is nostalgia. It surfaced at the Crossings board meeting this past week. [Although I'm long gone from the board, I'm always invited in as "consultant."] Why don't we do those weekend workshops again?

So they're scheduling one such in the "pre-conference" to the big get-together—to which all y'all are invited—at the end of next January. And you can guess which old nag is to be saddled up for the event. I've tried to dissuade them, but they won't listen. Not that I don't want to do it, but that I think something more important ought to be the pre-conference agenda. To wit, the show-and-tell debut of "Gospel 101" the first course in the Crossings Cyber space-Seminary that they are cooking up. "But that's for next year, Ed." OK. I'm a consultant, not a decision-maker. And as an old codger I'm prone to want stuff done today (even better, yesterday)—if for no other reason than that I may not see too many more tomorrows.

Back to that student who once said: "I want your [Crossings] job." After 1993 my "retirement job" took Marie and me to all the continents except Antarctica as Global Mission Volunteers for the ELCA, our last place being Singapore in 2004. Right from the outset, though, I kept a Crossings connection by dabbling on the internet, even when out of the country. Thursday Theology was

then posted from wherever in the world the Division of Global Mission sent us. Like topsey, it grew. Today's ThTh posting is number 427.

But something else came over the horizon as the ThTh numbers grew. Namely, attending to reader response, which itself has morphed into "calling" me to the work of one-on-one theological consultations. These past 2 weeks [my weeks go from Thursday to Thursday. The T.G.I.F. exclamation is more and more my doxology.] I got more such calls than ever.

1. A whole passel of responses to ThTh 426, last week's sifting (Gospel-sniffing) of the sermon many of us Schroeders heard at the family reunion. Some were funny, some adulation. Some called for "consultation." See below. And, no surprise, one came from the preacher of that sermon, a good friend of mine though unnamed in ThTh 426, who said I mis-heard his proclamation. He had indeed proclaimed the Gospel that I said I hadn't heard. As soon as he can get his [apparently hand-written] manuscript transcribed, he'll send it to me and I told him we'll post it untouched. One of the surprising responses came from a theology prof who told me she had "just googled three words together" and discovered who the preacher must have been. And did she guess right? She did. Are there no secrets at all now that cyberspace has come? Is anonymity now extinct?

Here's a funny one from a southern "lady-theologian" of "conservative Presbyterian" persuasion.

Dear Ed, You really don't have to be a heresy-hunter. You don't even have to look for it at all—we are covered up with it (as we say in Mississippi). The theological basis for the sermon you discussed (in armchair theologian terms) is "send 'em to hell with a full stomach, warm

clothes, and good shoes". The other Mississippi term for all this is putting lipstick on a pig, but I won't even go there

2. Emails from (hang on to your hats) Alexandria, Egypt, and Papua New Guinea about the Macedonian cry for law/promise educational materials to put into the extended hands of folks, lots of folks, in those places. That sounded like "Cyberspace Seminary" to me, so I forwarded the messages to the Crossings board—and they grabbed it. Might have to be tomorrow. The two guys sending these e-requests are LCMSers. Surprise? Not really. One guy got his theology at Valparaiso University, the other I'm not sure. But he's on the listserve and says that our take on things Christian is his take too. [Oh,yes, the PNG bloke sent along his own Law'Gospel primer – 44 pages, parallel columns of Pidgin English and English English. Would I please comment. I can't say no. But maybe next week.]
3. A response to #425, "Gnosticism and legalism" from Alex, a Russian "new" Christian living in Lithuania, whom we got to know on one of those mission volunteer stints. Good morning, Ed. Just finished reading "Gnosticism and Legalism." Surprise again. Answer comes before the question is asked.

But then again I have more questions. What's your diagnosis of what's wrong with us human beings? What does Jesus mean when he says: My kingdom is not of this world? Is there any definition of the Holy Spirit given somewhere?

One more. During my whole life, curiosity was a stimulator to self-development (here curiosity is those questions like "who am I, and what is the world around," and so on). Now I realize, that from some moment, which I missed, curiosity became an obstacle, a harmful addiction, leading

to a huge temptation. Could you comment on this please?

Please drop me a message when you have some time. Best regards and very best wishes to you and Marie."

[We once asked Alex where he learned such good English with a heartland American accent. "From watching CNN day in and day out," he said.]

We had witnessed his baptism, so I had to reply. Like this:

Dear Alex,

It's good to hear from you. But you do want me to go to work, heavy work. And I am such an old man!

You have given me four (4) questions to answer.

1. "What's your diagnosis of what's wrong with us human beings?"
2. "What does Jesus mean when he says: 'My Kingdom is not of this world?'"
3. "Is there any definition of the Holy Spirit given somewhere?"
4. "Curiosity . . . Now I realise, that from some moment, which I missed, curiosity became an obstacle, a harmful addiction leading to a huge temptation. Could you comment on this please?"

QUESTON #1 AND #2

I think I can bunch #1 & #2 together by asking you to read the attachment. It is an article that I wrote for a journal here in the USA. It was just published in the August issue of CURRENTS IN THEOLOGY AND MISSION. They have a web site, but they have not yet posted the August 2006 issue on the www. So I'll send it to you (my original

manuscript) as an attachment. It's about "The Kingdom of God in the Gospel of Mark."

You mentioned that you had just read my piece on "Gnosticism and Legalism." In the next posting of Thursday Theology (August 10, 2006) I critiqued a sermon I heard on August 6 that was defective because it did not take the "diagnosis of what's wrong" deep enough. So you can see there my answer to your diagnosis question. I use the code language of our Crossings community: D-1, D-2, D-3. That is: diagnosis first level, diagnosis deeper level, diagnosis deepest level.

In general words I'd say (and I'm just repeating the Bible's own perspective, I think)

Diagnosis of what's wrong.

D-1 is the level of our behavior: how we act and interact with others in our world. And the "wrong" is that we don't really love these "others," but use them for ourselves, or ignore them (don't give help when they need help and we could give it). It's "external," on the outside, something that others too can see us doing—or not doing.

D-2 Level 2 goes inside. What's the human sickness on the inside? What's in the "heart"? In place of "fear, love, and trust in God," there is NO fear, no love, no trust in God. In place of these "good" things is fear, or love, or trust in all sorts of other things. And it is "out of the heart" that our human actions, our human behaviors come. Out of God-DIStrusting hearts comes bad stuff in relations to other people and to our world. Out of God-trusting hearts come behaviors showing love and care for other people and for the world we live in.

You might think that is the deepest diagnosis, but not so.

It's deeper, but not deepest. According to the Bible there is an even DEEPER diagnosis.

D-3 The God-distruster is himself/herself forsaken by God. God abandons that distruster to his own self-chosen, self-centered, selfish "faith." The opening chapters of the Epistle to the Romans (in the New Testament) say several times "God gave them up (abandoned them)" to the consequences of their own faithless hearts and the faithless actions that come from such hearts. In other places the Bible calls this the "wrath of God," or "God's curse," or sometimes "hell." In the Thursday Theology posting for last week, the Bible text that the preacher used was the parable of the Rich Man and the beggar Lazarus. In that parable the D-3 diagnosis of the Rich man is that already in the time he was alive, there was a "chasm," a million-mile separation, between him and God. Nothing he could do, nor could Lazarus do, would bridge that God-gap. And if that were God's "last word," then "hell" (God-separation) is the Rich Man's fate forever and ever. Throughout all eternity. That's what it means to be "eternally damned." Never ever to have the gap closed between me and God.

And that's where the Good News of Christ comes in. Christ is the one who bridges the God-gap. Costly business. Costs his life. In his resurrection God the Father "confirms, verifies, ratifies" what Christ has done by raising him from the dead. His resurrection is the divine "OK" that Christ has really closed the God-gap for sinners. All who trust Christ have that God-gap closed for them. They can get on with a new life.

That's the Good News that crosses out D-3.

Sinners who trust Christ get a new situation at D-2. They are now Christ-trusters, instead of self-trusters, or America-trusters, or (in your past) classless-society trusters, or whatever alternate "god" they may have been hanging their hearts on.

And with their hearts trusting Christ as God's Good-Word for them, they live a different kind of life from the one diagnosed at D-1 where we began this conversation.

On the Crossings website every week there are "Text studies" posted. These studies always have the numbered sequence 1,2,3,4,5,6.

1 = the D-1 diagnosis proposed by this particular text. 2 = the D-2 diagnosis 3 = the D-3 diagnosis

4 is Healing (proposed by this specific text) for the D-3 "deep" sickness 5 is Healing for what was diagnosed at D-2 6 is Healing for what was diagnosed at D-1

I was following this 1,2,3,4,5,6 sequence in my critique of that sermon in Thursday Theology 426 last week.

BRIEF COMMENT ON THE "KINGDOM" QUESTION

My attached article speaks to the "Kingdom" question. Here's one thought.

Christ's kingdom is not "of this world;" this does NOT mean it is not IN this world. It simply means that Christ runs his kingdom in a way that no other king does in the world we live in. He says this only once, to the Roman ruler Pilate as he (Jesus) is on trial before Pilate. Pilate runs his kingdom in a worldly fashion. Pilate rules from the top. He has the power. Underlings obey or are killed. Jesus's kingdom is the upside-down of that kind of

ruling. He dies so the underlings (sinners also) can live. No world ruler—even the nice guys—rule that way. So Christ's kind of regime is not "of this world," even though it is solidly IN this world.

QUESTION #3 HOLY SPIRIT

Go to LCC library or any other place where you can find a "Concordance" of the Bible, especially of the New Testament. Concordance is a reference book that tells you every place in the Bible that a particular word appears. So check on "Holy Spirit" especially in the New Testament, and tell me what you found to answer your own question. After that we can continue the conversation.

QUESTION #4 CURIOSITY

Curiosity is by itself a "neutral" gift from God the creator. But, of course, WE ourselves are never "just neutral" when we pursue our curiosity. We have a personal interest, a "vested" interest—even if it is subtle—to get some answer to what we are curious about.

So curiosity, though "neutral" all by itself, never shows up "all by itself." My own self is always in the mix. Thus curiosity becomes "bad" when the human self pursuing curiosity has a heart that trusts some other god, other than God in Christ. It is "good" when it flows from a heart that IS trusting God-in-Christ.

Ok, so much for now.

Christ's peace and joy!

That might be enough for this week's ThTh posting.

Other "consultations"—some eliciting essays as long as Alex's were:

4. A dear missiological buddy from the RC persuasion. He greets me as his “favorite Gospel-sniffer” and wants to talk about the “forgiveness of sins,” and the banalization that has happened to both nouns in our churchly culture. He concludes: “Whaddya think? Can you do a quick exegesis of ‘forgiveness’ for a struggling Roman?” Well, I couldn’t say no to that one either. There went another couple hours. [That one might be worth passing on to the listserve some time up ahead.]
5. A pastor who told about his young son’s wrecking the family car. From his recital of what happened afterward, I was blown away by his absolutely apostolic job of law/promise God-talk with the son. But, now how should they proceed in the future? Never mention it? Pretend that with forgiveness—both from God and from dad—the memory is erased? How to avoid *lex semper accusat* now that forgiveness was spoken—and trusted. There went another chunk of time.
6. A Lutheran systematic theology prof in Canada. “Thanks so much for yesterday’s Thursday Theology. It is a very necessary reminder to get to the real point of the Law so that the real point of the Gospel can be heard. It is so easy to stop the diagnosis before it is finished – maybe because we so want to believe that we are capable of solving the problem. We really don’t want to hear that the problem may be beyond our ability to fix.

“For your reading pleasure (and critique, should you have time) I’ve attached a copy of an article I recently had published in our seminary journal.

“I’ve been co-teaching the senior homiletics class with our homiletician the last several years and the article was originally developed as a way to introduce students to Walther’s Proper Distinction of Law and Gospel. Now we are

using the course as the basis for a book on “situational preaching” – funerals, weddings, crises, etc. – so critique would be helpful.

“Unfortunately I’m spending most of my energy on administrative duties these days. Being “Assistant Dean” right now means spending a lot of time on other things. Lots of Law, not much Gospel!

Cheers!”

Well, it’s something like 40 pages long. He’s a Crossings junkie. I think I was a reader for his Ph.D. thesis way back when, but I’m not sure anymore. So I’ll have to do it. No. Not a “got to,” but a “get to.”

7. Last Sunday afternoon Marie and I were at the funeral for a fellow Lutheran big name in St. Louis, Arden Mead, a wingding of a celebration service. We very nearly danced in the aisles. At one point the elder son asked the congregation: If you’ve ever sung the Hallelujah Chorus, or wished that you could have, come up front here and let’s do it together with Dad singing along in the heavenly chorus. 150 folks walked up and sang. But one note struck a fellow attender wrong. She wrote and asked: “In the hand-puppet message for grandkids, “the puppet” explicitly stated that there was nothing in that casket, because their granddad was already in heaven. Now they had just seen granddad right there in the casket out in the narthex minutes before. How could they believe the puppet saying otherwise, and emphatically saying that was the truth? What could he base that on Biblically? You’ve told us that there’s more of Platonism in such a thought than Biblical truth. There are some N.T. passages that come close, I think, talking about body and spirit. But if the

Biblical teaching is that everyone after death, whether buried, burned, or never found here again, awaits the second coming of Jesus Christ to enter heaven (or otherwise), then blessed dead are no closer to heaven than I am. Conversely, if Christ dwells within us, as Paul and others say, then we are already in heaven. Wasn't it St. Augustine who said 'All the way to heaven is heaven, for Christ said I am the Way'?

"Anyway," she continued, "it seems to me it's terribly misleading to come right out and tell kids that there's nothing in the casket of their granddad. So what are they burying?"

Yup, I too thought Plato won and St. Paul lost. Other sources had been consulted.

Note to the one who said: "Ed, I want your job." Are you sure? It's a tar-baby. And I haven't mentioned the unanswered backlog in thhhe "Urgent" tray: a Hongkong seminary prof who wants to argue about Elert, a Minnesota law professor who "needs some theological help," and so it goes.

I don't want to be complaining—or bragging either. St. James' "right strawy epistle" (so Luther) still pertains. "Count it all joy." Nevertheless the plate stays full.

8. Finally this one in the week's in-basket.[Crossings tried to get an ad for the January conference placed in the LCMS newspaper THE REPORTER. Several on the program are LCMS folks. Everything seemed OK in initial negotiations with underlings. But then the boss got back from vacation.]

"My executive editor has returned from vacation and was able to review the proposed ad and related conference materials. Upon review, it was decided that Reporter would

not be able to accept the ad from Crossings Community as some conference items may be contrary to LCMS theological positions. Accepting ads that promote products/services contrary to LCMS theological positions is against our advertising policy.”

The more things change, the more they stay the same.

Peace and Joy!

Ed Schroeder